

1960

## Book Reviews

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*Cora Crane: A Biography of Mrs. Stephen Crane.* By Lillian Gilkes. (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1960. 416 pp. Illustrations, appendices, notes on sources, index. \$6.75.)

In *Cora Crane* Lillian Gilkes has done a laborious job of working up the materials in Columbia University's Crane Collection and other sources to form a ponderous account of the career of Cora Howorth, or "Taylor" as she called herself, from the time when, at the age of thirty-one, she first met Stephen Crane, until her death in 1910. Of Cora's youth the biographer has been able to discover little except that she was born in Boston, lived with an aunt in New York, married and divorced a dry goods exporter named Murphy, and married and left a British officer named Stewart, who refused to give her a divorce.

Neither these facts nor her biographer explain how Cora came to Jacksonville, Florida, and attained the elevated social status of mistress at the plush Hotel de Dream (the author explains that she ". . . technically at any rate, was not a madam.") But the author of the *Red Badge of Courage* came to the famous sporting house and fell in love with her, and there is a detailed account of the three years she spent with him as "Mrs. Stephen Crane." She followed him to Greece and shared the dangers and hardships involved in reporting the Greco-Turkish War. After the war was over, they went to England and set up an establishment at Ravenscroft Villa in Oxted, Surrey. There Cora managed to keep Crane happy as she helped him with his manuscripts, fought off his creditors, and entertained friends, of whom the Cranes soon acquired a great many, for they entertained lavishly, far beyond their means in fact.

The pleasant, if somewhat hectic, stream of events at Ravenscroft was broken, however, when Stephen pulled out to go to Cuba and report the Spanish-American War there. Cora, left without adequate means of support, had a frantic time of it when her man managed to lose himself in Havana; it began to look as if he were not going to come back, but return he did and spent the rest of his brief life with Cora at Brede Place, a medieval country house in Sussex, far enough from London to give Stephen some relief from the hosts of free loading visitors who had cluttered up their life at Ravenscroft, but a pleasant place to entertain such literary friends as Henry James and H. C. Wells.

Here they gave a notable Christmas party, the highlight of which was a play written by Stephen, with the collaboration of each guest; Henry James, George Gissing, Joseph Conrad, and H. G. Wells were among the collaborators in the *Ghost*.

Such extravagant entertainment would have put an end to their life at Brede Place eventually, but the tuberculosis and other ailments ravaging Crane's slight body beat penury to it. As a last resort Cora took him off to Germany to the Black Forest, where he expired almost upon arrival. Cora made desperate efforts to live on in London as a respectable widow, but, failing to salvage enough from Stephen's literary remains, she returned to America, to Kentucky, where there is another hiatus in the record before she reappeared in Jacksonville, this time a full-fledged madam running two houses, the Court on Ward Street and Palmetto Lodge at the beach. It is a sordid tale of passion for men young enough to be her sons, and runs the whole gamut from farce to tragic melodrama. There is comedy in the little gifts her "girls" give her, her entertainment of the Tampa Shriners, the visit of Carry Nation, and the part her girls played in political campaigns; but there is nothing amusing about her marriage to the young alcoholic, Hammond McNeil, and the murder of Harry Parker.

Unfortunately the story is so poorly told that, despite the intrinsic interest of the materials, the book is hard reading; it is, however, valuable for the insight it gives into the gayer side of life in Jacksonville at the turn of the century, for the sidelights about British writers who befriended the Cranes, and for the help it will afford future biographers of Stephen Crane.

ROBERT S. WARD

*University of Miami*

*Opening the Case Against the U. S. De Soto Commission's Report, and other DeSoto Papers. Being a "Thoroughgoing Examination" of the Part in re Present Florida of the FINAL REPORT OF THE U. S. DESOTO EXPEDITION COMMISSION Vicariously Sponsored by the 75th Congress, 1st Session.* By Warren Hager Wilkinson. (Jacksonville Beach, Florida, Alliance for the Preservation of Florida Antiquities, 1960. 93 pp. Maps. \$3.00.)

This is a very controversial study. It is something that a reviewer does not like to touch. But I am completely removed from the controversy and have no feeling for the whole matter. I consider myself a bonafide historian of Spanish Florida, and therefore I have no qualms in reviewing this booklet. And in order to avoid meaningless cliches or cover-up phrases I am going to be brutally frank. Anyhow, whatever I say will make some interested parties take issue.

Unfortunately, early Florida history has been used by regional and divers commercial interests for their own benefit. This has given origin to wild claims and ridiculous rivalries. These special interests, often unacquainted with correct historical procedures, try to resurrect from the past the impossible. Any trained historian knows that you can never totally reconstruct any past event. You can hope for the best but never for everything. Consequently the interests often resort to outright historical fraud. And unfortunately more than one trained scholar has succumbed to their bribes.

Mr. Wilkinson, the author of the booklet, strongly implies that the well-known Dr. John R. Swanton was corrupted when he inspired, or wrote, the famous *Final Report of the United States De Soto Expedition Commission* in 1939. This report made De Soto land in the Tampa Bay area. Mr. Wilkinson, apparently dedicated to Fort Myers (see pp. 37 and 75), strongly-if not violently-believes that De Soto and his men went ashore in the vicinity of Fort Myers.

A careful reading - which indeed requires effort and will power - of the Wilkinson study creates in me a rather detached feeling. Author Wilkinson unquestionably has some sharp points in his favor. This is because Swanton had been rather hasty and dogmatic in his findings, which is certainly a most unwelcome combination for a scholar. But by Mr. Wilkinson's violence toward Mr. Swanton and everyone who has disagreed with him, Wilkinson, certainly weakens those constructive points he has to make. The author emerges as an author radically devoted to the Fort Myers theory. He throws undirected punches at everyone who takes an issue with him or fails to rally to his view. It is quite possible that a good lawyer could find in this publication grounds for libel proceedings. But Swanton is dead today.

The constructive points of the Wilkinson study, such as better

navigational deduction, improved translations of crucial words, and the like, are lost to the reader because of erratic organization. To this must be added interposition of trivial matters, and a style that lacks fundamental elements of clarity. The Wilkinson study is not only a difficult challenge to the reader, but what a challenge to an experienced editor! In sum, the merits of this study, and it has merits, are buried. I would recommend that anyone interested in this subject read this book.

Neither authors Wilkinson nor Swanton have convinced me that De Soto and his expedition landed near Tampa or Fort Myers. But then I am a historian interested in the whole sweep rather than in local historical minutiae. I fail to find it important whether De Soto landed around the Tampa-Bradenton area or about ninety miles farther south at the mouth of the Caloosahatchee. It certainly will not discredit Tampa, St. Petersburg, Palmetto, Bradenton, Sarasota, Punta Gorda, and Fort Myers if Sr. De Soto did not land in one or another of their respective neighborhoods in 1539. It suffices to say that De Soto - as a leader of an important expedition which is a glorious chapter in American history - landed in today's Florida on its populous West Coast, somewhere between Estero Bay and the old Tampa Bay. Naturally this does not preclude that eventually we might be able to narrow down the area of landing. Professors John Goggin and Ripley Bullen, well qualified archaeologists of the University of Florida, and Mr. David True of Miami have all studied this problem in a far more tolerant atmosphere, possessing no commercial or geographical interest or bias. I believe I am justified in saying that all three are aware of weaknesses in the Swanton thesis. Academic corrections take time and require a studious attitude, plus moderation. In the meanwhile Florida history will not be at all disreputed if we cannot pinpoint exactly the 1539 landing spot of Hernando de Soto.

CHARLES W. ARNADE

*State University of Iowa*

*Herbs, Hoecakes and Husbandry! The Daybook of a Planter of the Old South.* Edited by Weymouth T. Jordan. *Florida State Universities Studies* No. 34, (Tallahassee, The Florida State University, 1960, 137 pp. Index. \$3.00.)

This interesting document of the old South has contents as miscellaneous as its title. An introductory chapter gives something of the life of Martin Marshall, the author of the daybook which makes up the main part of the volume. This chapter notes Marshall's birth in South Carolina and his move to Fort Claiborne, Alabama, in 1815. Marshall was a mechanic, a blacksmith, a weaver, and a small planter—hardly “aristocracy” in any sense of the word. He was a poor business man who hoped to do better in a new area, Alabama, where he became a planter of the “middling” sort. The biographical information is rather skimpy, but a few editorial comments on Southern society will be helpful to the general reader.

This reviewer agrees with the editor that the book is “significant because of the informative, interesting, and thought-provoking light that it throws on the every-day practicabilities of human existence.” Editing is minimal, though usually adequate. A usable index adds to the book's value. The order of the entries in the original daybook has been rearranged generally by subjects.

There is a chapter on helpful household hints such as how to make artificial mahogany, an ant trap, to clean cloth and paper, to mend broken china, and methods “for Preventing the Flea Infesting Persons” and “To Prevent Bed Bugs” that were very practical in Marshall's society. The concern with making, cleaning, and dyeing cloth doubtless reflects Marshall's background as a weaver.

In the receipts for food and drink are several that could still be used today. Certainly “Cheap and Agreeable Beer” made of fifteen gallons of water, one gallon of molasses, and “a little Yeast” (p. 51) is cheaper than most commercial brew today. A “Diet Drink or Beer” made of “Pine tops of the Short Straw, China brier root, Red root, Sassafras root, Holly root or leaves, Molasses or Sugar, Yeast of Corn Meal” (p. 51) should be interesting when “fermented sufficiently.” But the brandy recipe which begins “To a barrel containing 30 gallons of Whiskey. . . .” (p. 46) is hardly practical today.

After the food and drink comes, as so often it does in real life, home remedies and “medical cures.” One wonders if Marshall suffered from rheumatism, as he includes sixteen cures for that disease which still baffles modern science. Such a beginning as “Be assured it is Cancer, or try some other measure” with no in-

structions as to how one could "be assured" indicates the trouble of the diagnostician then as now. Or to "Cure a Sore Leg," with no indication as to the type of soreness, one is advised to use a jelly made of "Cows urine" and "If the bone is affected, cut it off, if necessary." Simple and direct, but not very reassuring! Modern science has destroyed our faith in such items as "To Cure Baldness, Rub the part morning and evening with onions until it is red, and rub it afterwards with honey." Sometimes Marshall indicates lack of complete faith in the efficiency of the cures he records. Many similar cures are still used today with as much faith as in ante-bellum Alabama.

The chief value of this volume lies in its preserving and documenting customs and practices known in a general way to the historian. It will make interesting reading to the professional and lay historian alike.

KENNETH COLEMAN

*University of Georgia*

*Searching for Your Ancestors; The How and Why of Genealogy.*  
By Gilbert H. Doane. Third edition. (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1960. Appendices, index. 198 pp. \$3.95.)

Gilbert H. Doane has enlarged upon his former works designed to assist others in searching for their ancestors. The matter is most easily read and contains much of gentle humor.

The quotation from Pierre Erendell on his title page deserves particular attention. "Think not that the nobilitie of your Ancesters doth free you to doe all that you list, contrarywise, it bindeth you more to follow vertue." And, one is reminded throughout in semiseriousness of what Anthony Trollope says about Miss Thorne. "Genealogy was her favorite insanity."

Difficulty in maintaining a continuity of a name is aptly related. In the Piedmont region of the Carolinas and Georgia one finds the French name Bouchet spelled Busha. The people bearing the name gave up the struggle with their English neighbors to have their name correctly pronounced. And, then in that same area, one always finds Jonah pronounced Joney and similarly, Agatha, Gaithey.

Another of his thirteen chapters, entitled "How to Search among the Relatives," describes the futility many have experienced in this effort. Recently the writer obtained a printed genealogy of one of his ascendant lines and found in the book a letter written to Tennessee from California, pleading with a Tennessee cousin to have the graveyard at Shelbyville inspected for tombstone inscriptions. He had discovered a discrepancy in the printed genealogy. The letter is dated April 3, 1927, and I have grave doubts if the distant cousin in California ever received a reply.

Mr. Doane reminds his reader again and again to rely only on the written record. My great grandfather told his son, a meticulous investigator, that he had been graduated from a certain school in Virginia. Upon investigation, it was found that he had attended that school only a few months. The old man, who was a Baptist preacher, was just elaborating a little on his youthful experiences of forty or fifty years before.

No one but a person who has spent time and has experienced the handling of old records could give such a graphic description of what is involved in "blowing the dust off the town records."

Genealogists and historical organizations should find some practical and effectual means of reviving inscriptions on cemetery markers. We recently visited the pre-revolutionary cemetery at Midway, Georgia, and it was distressing to see how the lettering has been worn away by the centuries. One is constantly hoping that the young people attending churches near old graveyards will notice an old gravestone toppled over and take enough interest to spend an hour in properly replacing it.

The author's repetition of the old adage "Where there is a Will, there's a Way," is well used but he has also indicated that a person must be "thoroughly inoculated with the genealogical virus," or his efforts will flag. If, however, a person is "tetched with the virus he's a goner."

What may be found in the church records, and the opportunities for help from the United States Government, particularly the census, from the several state and county governments, is well presented.

It will be surprising to many that 200,000 lineages have been filed and preserved in the D.A.R. archives in Memorial Continental Hall in Washington. Mr. Doane says that "Since 1890 when the Daughters of the American Revolution was organized



more digging for ancestors has probably resulted from the desire to belong to this organization than has come about through any other impetus.”

The arranging of a genealogy is of prime importance. The several methods of arrangement are ably presented. To begin with a living individual and spread upwards and backwards for ancestors seems the best plan, since few individuals are so connected that they are pre-eminently interested in only one ancestor many generations removed.

Mr. Doane also includes a discussion of the change in the calendar to the Gregorian, and the very difficult question of what terms of relationship have meant at various times and at different places. For instance, “ ‘Brother’ is a trick term. Sometimes it meant blood brother, sometimes stepbrother, sometimes brother-in-law, and frequently ‘brother in the church’, as it is still used in some evangelical sects.” The discussion of coat of arms, bound boys, and orphans is most informative.

A short discussion of crossing the Atlantic to find ancestors is the last chapter.

Altogether, this book is one which those interested in their ancestors would do well to study.

ADAM G. ADAMS

*Coral Gables*