Book Review: Texas Trilogy: Life in a Small Texas Town

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That music has the power to captivate the human imagination and propel individuals into new areas of research is beautifully illustrated by Craig D. Hillis’s Texas Trilogy: Life in a Small Texas Town. Inspired by the content of three songs composed by folksinger Steven Fromholz, Hillis first interviewed Fromholz, then visited the small Texas town Fromholz immortalized in his “Texas Trilogy.” What Hillis found in Kopperl, in Bosque County, Texas, was not some unique and special place, but rather the very bedrock of the American
people and their dreams. Kopperl and its residents exemplify the quintessential small-town American experience. Like thousands of other small Great Plains towns, Kopperl depended on farming and ranching; the town thrived during the great cattle drives of the 1870s, fairly burst with possibilities when the railroad arrived in the 1880s, barely survived the Great Depression, and finally slipped into decline when the train no longer stopped there. But Kopperl and Bosque County, Texas, were saved from oblivion by a budding poet-composer, Steven Frumholz, who spent his summers there with his grandmother, and by historian, Craig D. Hillis, who heard Frumholz's songs and recognized a compelling subject for a book.

As with all good song texts, Frumholz's "Texas Trilogy" merely suggests the place and its people, leaving much interesting detail for Hillis to add in his book, one of the assets of which is its sharp focus on Bosque County's inhabitants—their perceptions and recollections, their joys and sorrows, their strengths and weaknesses, their likes and dislikes. And as we read about these people, we can view them and their artifacts in beautiful photographs prepared by Bruce F. Jordan; some are old, others new, but all speak volumes about life in Bosque County, Texas.

The strengths of this book are many, including the accompanying CD that allows readers to hear Frumholz sing his "Texas Trilogy" and absorb the emotional feel of the place and its people even before entering Hillis's clear and absorbing text. One of the volume's few problems is its emphasis on specific immigrant groups, such as the Norwegians, at the expense of others, like Mexican-Americans, in the founding of Bosque County. A second flaw is the lack of attention to art, music, and entertainment in Bosque County. This is not a book intended for the professional historian, however, but the general reader seeking information about the roots of the American people. In this capacity it is admirably successful.

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