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Book Review: 6666: Portrait of a Texas Ranch

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6666: *Portrait of a Texas Ranch*. By Wyman Meinzer and Henry Chappell. Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2004. xiv + 157 pp. Photographs, map, photo credits. \$45.00.

This is a coffee-table book about a two-parcel ranch in the Plains of the Texas Panhandle owned by businesswoman and philanthropist Anne Marion. The 6666 ranch occupies 290,000 acres of Texas prairie. The informative text, which includes a foreword by Red Steagall and an afterword by Mike Gibson, the ranch foreman, contains a brief history of the ranch from its purchase in pieces in 1898 by legendary pioneer, businessman, and rancher Burk Burnett to its current stewardship by his great-granddaughter Anne Marion.

The text introduces the ranch issues of brush, cattle management, ranch culture, and

horse breeding. Brush came to the Great Plains with cattle and with the control of grass fires. Before cattle were introduced, wild grass fires burned both the brush and the grass. The grass came back the next spring. It took several years without fires for the mesquite and juniper to become established. Without the grass fires the brush control team of the 6666 ranch works year round to eliminate brush, which sucks up water and nutrients and creates havoc for cowboys working cattle. Cowboys on horseback work the cattle and truck them from pasture to pasture and to market. The ranch also breeds racing and ranch horses through artificial insemination.

Most of the book, however, consists of color photographs by Wyman Meinzer, who photographed on the ranch for a year. Yet the images lend little to our understanding of

the 6666 ranch or the Great Plains. They are mostly stylized, clichéd representations with too many silhouettes at sunset, lacking the intricacies of beauty and color of the Great Plains landscape. Meinzer chose an overused and outdated “calendar art” photographic style rather than taking the opportunity to educate readers on the complexity of the people and the landscape.

Photographs that show the character and subtleties of the people and land would go a long way toward improving our understanding of the Great Plains landscape and its significance to the people who work it and to those of us who benefit from it.

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