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## Book Review: "We're The Light Crust Doughboys from Burrus Mill": An Oral History

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"We're The Light Crust Doughboys from Burrus Mill": An Oral History. By Jean Boyd. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003. x + 164 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$40.00 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

As the millennium turned, Texas's Light Crust Doughboys approached seventy years of (almost) continuous existence. A '90s rejuvenation that culminated with the first of several Grammy nominations rescued them from museum-piece status, though celebrations were tempered by the death of the band's linchpin, banjo virtuoso Smokey Montgomery, a member from 1935, who lost a long battle with leukemia in 2001.

Given their recent resurgence, their importance as pioneers of the Southwestern musical hybrid western swing—the music's two most important shapers, Bob Wills and Milton Brown, were bandmembers—and the fact that they served as a springboard to fame for the legendary politician W. Lee O'Daniel, it was no surprise when two histories of the Doughboys appeared almost simultaneously in 2002-3: John Mark Dempsey's *The Light Crust Doughboys Are on the Air* and Jean Boyd's "We're The Light Crust Doughboys."

Dempsey's background is in broadcasting history, and he approaches the Doughboys as a media phenomenon as much as a musical one, while Boyd previously tackled western swing in *The Jazz of the Southwest* (1998). Although both authors benefited immeasurably from the assistance of the band's long-time leader and *de facto* historian, Smokey Montgomery, Dempsey's

is the more substantial and successful of the two new books. Boyd's is far narrower in scope—its main text weighs in at only 121 pages—as well as less accurate and less colorfully told.

*The Jazz of the Southwest* was characterized by an alarming lack of scholarly vigor, and that same defect pervades the newer work. Problems arise from the start. The opening chapter on various strains of Texas music is perfunctory, distilled from a few extremely general texts (or Web sites); it offers little insight into the musical and social milieu from which the Doughboys and their music sprang. Once Boyd delves into the band's history proper, errors—some small, some glaring—pepper almost every page. Beyond interviews with Montgomery—an accurate and perceptive historian, though not always as infallible a source as Boyd perhaps assumed—she relies on a surprisingly short list of printed, oral, and aural sources. She betrays little knowledge of the band's recorded legacy, and her discussion of important 1930s-early '40s recordings misleadingly lifts its minute detail not from Boyd's own listening to the material—troublingly, she appears not to have sought out more than a handful of the band's seminal, classic recordings—but from an assessment that Montgomery patched together in 1989, which has been published in full elsewhere (including in Dempsey's volume). A reworking of Montgomery's text, robbed of much of its relevance and condensed to the point of serving essentially as padding, is offered by Boyd as an appendix.

Boyd's factual errors, both her own and those of others that she repeats, range from small to quite nagging. For example, she refers to Paul Blunt, a key Doughboy for two decades despite being mentioned only a couple of times in passing, throughout as "Blount"—including photo captions which ironically serve, despite Boyd, to underscore his important tenure. In an unnecessary qualifying detail added to one photo caption, she incorrectly suggests that banjoist Doc Eastwood was holding a banjo for the photo only and actually played guitar with the band. She lists musicians as "unknown" in several photos despite their being identified in

other shots a page or two away. Boyd also garbles details of the 1948 American Federation of Musicians' recording strike to a degree that should embarrass any historian writing about the era's popular music. Elsewhere, she cites pioneering country music historian Bill Malone when she erroneously claims that the band's trailblazing electric guitarist Zeke Campbell had probably been influenced by black electric guitarists T-Bone Walker and Charlie Christian. Both of these musicians followed Campbell chronologically and neither influenced his playing. While Malone could be forgiven for making such a claim in 1968, Boyd's uninformed parroting of it thirty-five years later should not. These and other errors and omissions point to the author's apparent reluctance to research her topic in the depth demanded by even so short a study.

There are a few useful quotes and anecdotes that do not appear elsewhere. Were there no other literature pertaining to the history of the Light Crust Doughboys, Boyd's book would perhaps have greater value, despite its serious problems. The Doughboys' early history, however, has been covered in depth by Charles Townsend and Cary Ginell in their Bob Wills and Milton Brown biographies, and other historians have written effectively about the band in journals, sleeve notes, and other media. These and Dempsey's far better full-length study unfortunately serve to render Boyd far from essential reading.

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