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Review of *By His Own Hand?: The Mysterious Death of Meriwether Lewis* Edited by John D. W. Guice

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By His Own Hand?: The Mysterious Death of Meriwether Lewis. Edited by John D. W. Guice. Foreword by Elliott West. Introduction by Clay S. Jenkinson. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007. xxi + 178 pp. Map, photographs, illustrations, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

It was at the 1994 Western History Association (WHA) meeting that Dr. John Guice, then teaching at the University of Southern Mississippi, launched his campaign to clear Meriwether Lewis of the stigma of suicide and prove that a terrible murder had taken place at Grinder's Stand in the early morning hours of October 11, 1809. Guice titled his session "A Reconsideration," and he came armed with more complex evidence than had been earlier gathered by Vardis Fisher in 1962 or by Richard Dillon in 1965. But the testimony was all one sided. Copresenting with Guice was James E. Starrs, a law school professor famous for having achieved the exhumation of Jesse James. Fortunately, the audience in Albuquerque heard two opposing viewpoints, those of the session chair, Gary Moulton, and this reviewer, who served as commentator. "Case not proved" was the conclusion of the session moderators. Guice, nevertheless, read a revised paper for the WHA in 1999 and later took his cause to the 2003 meeting of the Southern Historical Association. Sometime in 2005 Charles Rankin of the University of Oklahoma Press decided to publish this book because he thought a larger audience might benefit.

Much like any session at a history conference, *By His Own Hand?* employs a distinguished historian to make introductions, Elliott West in this instance. It also has a wise commentator, Jay H. Buckley, formerly of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. And two presentations: James Holmberg argues the case for suicide, and John Guice asks why not homicide? Both scholars lay out the evidence and both explain the path they used to reach their contrasting conclusions. For most Americans, deciding between murder or suicide will forever

be a personal preference. So to help readers come to their own conclusion this book offers an appendix with nine primary source documents plus a year-by-year listing of both suicide and homicide advocates that stretches from 1809 to 2005. A bibliography of manuscripts, books, articles, and newspapers is provided courtesy of Professor Buckley.

With the retrospect of thirteen years behind this reviewer, two ideas have become clear. First of all, I am pleased to say, "Congratulations, John Guice, you were right to stay with the subject, to exhaust all the sources, and to challenge us." And second, it is only fair to add, "Chuck Rankin, you were right to give this project the go-ahead."

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