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## Review of *Empire Builder in the Texas Panhandle: William Henry Bush* By Paul H. Carlson

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*Fort Clark-Brackettville, Texas*

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*Empire Builder in the Texas Panhandle: William Henry Bush.* By Paul H. Carlson. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996. Map, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. xv + 186 pp. \$29.95.

William Henry Bush was a manufacturer, rancher, businessman, real estate developer, and philanthropist who rose to prominence and wealth during the last half of the nineteenth century. Born in the state of New York in 1849, Bush tried twice after turning thirteen to run away and join the Union Army as a drummer boy. His mother apprenticed him instead to a store owner in Lowville, New York, which marked the start of his career as a

general merchant. At age twenty, he moved to Chicago to work for a wholesale clothing business, King Brothers and Company, at a salary of ten dollars a week. During the great Chicago fire in 1871, Bush ran from his boarding house to the firm's office, secured a cash box and the company ledger book, and carried them to safety. His actions not only saved the firm from financial ruin but soon elevated him from clerk to salesman and then to junior partner.

Bush invested his earnings in downtown Chicago real estate; by the time he was twenty-eight, he had accumulated \$28,000, a sizable sum for that day. During this time he met and married Elva Frances Glidden, whose father was barbed wire manufacturer Joseph F. Glidden of DeKalb, Illinois. In 1881, Glidden, along with a partner, purchased an enormous amount of land in the Texas Panhandle that the state had set aside to support its schools. Glidden's initial interest was to test the practicality of his barbed wire; by 1882 the ranch known as the Frying Pan, encompassing about 250,000 acres, had been completely fenced. Bush began visiting the Panhandle ranch as Glidden's agent and later was made a partner.

Having formed his own clothing firm with his brother-in-law in 1885, Bush continued to make Chicago his home base but began to exercise greater control over the Frying Pan Ranch. In 1898 Glidden transferred his interest in the ranch to his son-in-law for \$68,000. The arrival of the Fort Worth and Denver City Railroad in 1887 cut the ranch into east and west pastures, with the town of Amarillo founded on the ranch's eastern boundary. Bush became a leading booster of Amarillo and remained to the end of his life in 1931 one of its leading benefactors.

Carlson's biography of William H. Bush, written in a pleasing narrative style, is more than an entrepreneurial history. It is an important study tracing the economic growth of the Texas Panhandle over a fifty year period surrounding the turn of the century, a time of dramatic and radical change in a region of the West then still regarded as virgin territory—a raw land where visions could be realized and fortunes made.

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