

Book Notes

George Graham Vest: The Life and Times of Dog's Best Friend. By Stephen M. Vest (Morley, MO: Acclaim Press, 2024). 248 pp. Resources. Index. \$26.00, cloth.

George Graham Vest, like many sons of pioneer Kentucky, headed west to seek his fortune. He did not have to travel far, however, as his kinsman recounts in this biography. A graduate of Centre College and Transylvania University, Vest found his calling in the courtrooms of Missouri. The young attorney had been on his way to California in the summer of 1853 when he paused long enough in Pettis County to defend a Black man accused of murder and rape. Vest challenged the competency of the sole surviving witness, a five-year-old boy, and then moved to dismiss the charges against his client. This enraged several courtroom spectators, who promptly seized and lynched the defendant. Although threats circulated against Vest, he settled in the area and practiced law before returning to Kentucky to marry Sarah "Sallie" Sneed. Vest's bride insisted they relocate to Boonville, Missouri, where he embarked on a political career. When the Civil War broke out, Vest sided with the Confederacy and served in the Confederate legislature. Following the war, he moved to Sedalia. It was there in 1870 that he became involved in one of the most famous legal cases in Missouri, *Burden v. Hornsby*. Vest represented farmer Charles Burden, whose foxhound Old Drum had been killed by sheep farmer Leonidas Hornsby. During his closing argument, Vest famously gave what became known as his "Eulogy of a Dog" speech. Vest and his client won. Seven years later, he moved to Kansas City, where he was eventually elected to the US Senate. By his death in 1904, Vest had

become an outspoken defender of Yellowstone National Park on the Senate floor. The author is the first to delve deeply into Vest's career, reminding contemporary readers of one of Missouri's most quotable politicians.

Sharing the Love of Gardening: The History of the Westport Garden Club. By Kristie C. Wolferman (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2025). xix + 237 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. \$46.00, cloth.

In 1950, fifty Kansas City women with a mutual love of gardening came together to form the Westport Garden Club. The club's formation was prompted by Elizabeth Abernathy Hull, a devout gardener and former Kansas Citian living in Connecticut, who urged her friend Helen Hayes Thompson to start an affiliate of the Garden Club of America back home. It would not be easy; Kansas City already had forty-two garden groups, but none had undertaken the arduous five-year task of qualifying to become a GCA member. On July 6, 1950, the Westport Garden Club met for the first time. The upper-class women who made up its ranks quickly implemented several successful civic projects that led the GCA to approve the Westport club's application to join its national organization in 1956. Wolferman, a member of the club since 2019, documents the group's activities over the past seventy-five years, including projects that its members have carried out across the state and region, such as prairie restoration in Missouri and Kansas. Color photographs and illustrations celebrate the club's accomplishments and horticultural interests, while an awards section demonstrates its many achievements.

Union Guerrillas of Civil War Kansas: Jayhawkers and Red Legs. By Paul A. Thomas and Matt M. Matthews (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2025). 160 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. \$24.95, paper.

Today the term “Jayhawk” may immediately call to mind the brightly colored avian mascot of the University of Kansas, but its origins began decades earlier during the violent struggles of the 1850s between anti- and proslavery factions in Bleeding Kansas and, soon thereafter, in the Civil War. Although the term “jayhawk” was used to refer to a thief prior to 1849, “jayhawker” rose in popularity during the 1850s to describe militant abolitionists. By the early 1860s it was used to refer to Union irregulars who carried out violent raids along the Missouri-Kansas border. Some wore red leggings, leading their enemies to pejoratively call them “Red Legs.” Matthews and Thomas seek to break away from the “tendency” of historians “to view [Jayhawkers and Redlegs] as a monolith” by examining the lives of six prominent Jayhawkers: James Henry Lane, William S. Tough, George H. Hoyt, Charles “Doc” Jennison, James Montgomery, and Marshall L. Cleveland (p. 11). The authors, using illustrated capsule biographies, explore the “diverse and often complex reasons” that motivated these six men during the war (p. 18).

Mapping St. Louis: A History of the Gateway City in 40 Rare Maps. By Andrew W. Hahn (St. Louis: Reedy Press, 2024). 164 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. \$39.95, cloth.

Hahn, a seventh-generation St. Louisian and director of the Campbell House Museum, states that his love for maps and local history led him to write this unique history of St. Louis. After selecting forty maps out of hundreds from archival institutions across the city and state, he interweaves them with essays and illustrations to scrutinize St. Louis’s rich past. Readers will find a variety of cartography—atlas maps, exploration maps, fantasy maps, navigation maps, planning maps, and pictorial maps—that demonstrates purposes far beyond mere navigational tools. As Hahn notes, “we think of maps as a means to show you where you are or where you want to go.

But maps also provide an opportunity to reflect on where you have been” (p. xi). He begins with Guy Dufossat’s 1767 map of St. Louis. Dufossat documented the still small village; as Hahn notes, its street grid “remained intact until the 1930s,” when it was destroyed to make room for what would become the Gateway Arch and the park surrounding it (p. 2). The maps that follow Dufossat’s chronicle the city’s growth before the Great Fire of 1849 reshaped its cityscape. Hahn then touches upon other elements of nineteenth-century St. Louis’s evolution into a significant American metropolis before transitioning into the twentieth century and the beginning of the central city’s decline. While its cultural landscape benefited from the rise of the St. Louis Zoo and St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis’s aging infrastructure, decrease in population, and racial segregation took a toll. Still, as seen in a 2020 fantasy map of an expanded St. Louis metro rail system, residents remain hopeful for the city’s future.

Belle Starr: The Truth Behind the Wild West Legend. By Michael Wallis (New York: Liveright, 2025). xv + 446 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$32.99, cloth; \$16.00, ebook.

While Jesse James may be Missouri’s most famous outlaw, Belle Starr stands close behind him in the state’s criminal pantheon. Starr’s life, like that of many Western desperadoes who received the dime-store novel treatment, remains obscured by myth. Wallis, who has previously written about Billy the Kid and Route 66, argues that she was “the most famous female outlaw of the nineteenth century” (p. xiii). Relying on previously published material and newspaper accounts, he traces the life of Starr, who was born Myra M. Shirley in 1848 in Jasper County, Missouri. Her father, John Shirley, was a Carthage hotel owner and slaveholder. Unlike many young women in the region, Shirley received a classical education at the local academy. But then the Civil War brought brutality and uncertainty for many southwest Missourians. Myra’s beloved brother Bud, a Confederate bushwhacker, was killed. Shortly thereafter, the Shirleys watched as Confederate guerrillas torched almost all of Carthage.

Gathering his family and those he enslaved, John Shirley moved to Texas, putting his daughter on a path to meeting and marrying Jim Reed, a former member of William Quantrill's guerrilla band turned outlaw. The couple had two children before Reed was killed. Shirley then embarked on a series of relationships and marriages with men, including Native American outlaw Sam Starr, who was involved in various criminal activities. While popular legend has labeled her "a bandit queen," Wallace asserts that Belle Starr's criminal record has been wildly exaggerated. Instead, he contends that "Starr chose not to live her life by the Victorian ideal that women were limited in their abilities to survive in a man's world and expected to focus only on their domestic duties" (p. xv).

Runnin' Redbirds: The World Champion 1982 St. Louis Cardinals. By Eric Vickrey (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2024). 233 pp. Chapter Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$29.95, paper.

Vickrey, a lifelong Cardinals fan, recounts the achievements of the 1982 team. He credits Whitey Herzog, who served as both general

manager and field manager, with tailoring the roster to fit the parameters of Busch Stadium II. Herzog realized the ballpark's large dimensions and fast-playing artificial turf meant that the team needed to be speedy. He filled his roster with fleet-footed players like Ozzie Smith, Willie McGee, and Lonnie Smith, and assembled a staff of solid pitchers who could take advantage of the good fielders behind them. Vickrey recounts the Redbirds' journey to the Fall Classic and St. Louis's excitement about witnessing its first World Series since 1968. After defeating the Atlanta Braves in the National League championship series, they faced a Milwaukee Brewers team stacked with heavy hitters, a complete contrast in style with the Cardinals. This was ironic because, as Vickrey notes, "All championship seasons are special in their own way, but the manner in which the 1982 St. Louis Cardinals won is unique in the game's history. The Redbirds hit a mere 67 home runs—the fewest in the major leagues" (p. 4). He recounts the seven games between the two teams in intimate detail, concluding, "For Cardinals and their fans . . . the series was a thing of beauty, and the season was one they will never forget" (p. 202).