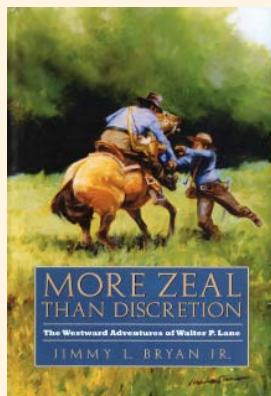


Former Center Research Assistant Publishes New Book on Walter P. Lane

More Zeal Than Discretion: The Westward Adventures of Walter P. Lane

Jimmy L. Bryan Jr.



From 1997 to 1999, while completing his master's degree in history at UT Arlington, Jimmy Bryan was the Sandra Myres' graduate research assistant at the Center for Greater Southwestern Studies. Applying his research skills to his own work, Bryan wrote his master's thesis on Walter P. Lane, a Texas soldier/adventurer who participated in the Texas Revolution, the Mexican War, the Civil War and in sev-

eral Indian campaigns as a member of the Texas Rangers. Never abandoning his interest in the long-neglected Texan, Bryan continued his research into Lane's eventful life while pursuing a Ph.D. at Southern Methodist University. His dissertation, "The American Elsewhere: Adventurism and Manliness in the Age of Expansion, 1814-1848," enabled him to understand Lane's pursuits as part of a much broader cultural phenomenon: the thirst for adventure and recognition among American males of the Jacksonian period. In 2000 Bryan edited and annotated a new edition of Lane's *Adventures and Recollections*, first published in 1887. Now, a decade after he began researching Lane's life, Bryan has written the first full-length biography of the Texas soldier, *More Zeal than Discretion: the Westward Adventures of Walter P. Lane* (Texas A&M University Press, 2008).

Although Lane could not be considered one of the better known Anglo-Texan military figures of the period, his adult life was certainly an eventful one. A native of Ireland, Lane lived in Ohio and Kentucky before moving to Texas to take part in the revolution against Mexico, participating in the Battle of San Jacinto. When the United States declared war against Mexico a decade later, Lane joined the Texas Mounted Riflemen. He fought as a first lieutenant in the Battle of Monterey, and later claimed to have led a party to recover the remains of the executed members of the Mier Expedition, which were subsequently interred in LaGrange, Texas. In his thirties, Lane participated in the California Gold Rush of 1849, and prospected for gold in southern Arizona a few years later. The outbreak of the Civil War found Lane in Marshall, Texas, operating a mercantile business. An ardent secessionist, Lane joined the Third Texas Cavalry

as a lieutenant colonel, fighting in the battles of Pea Ridge and Franklin. Severely wounded at the battle of Mansfield in 1864, Lane was promoted to the rank of brigadier general in the closing months of the war. Returning to his mercantile business in Marshall after 1865, Lane dabbled in local politics as a prominent "redeemer" Democrat, working to restore white supremacy to San Augustine County following Reconstruction. He died in Marshall in 1892.

In *More Zeal than Discretion*, Bryan is not content to offer a straightforward narrative of Lane's career. Rather, he seeks to shed light on the culture of American masculinity in which Lane operated. To that end, the author dwells on topics that might not garner much attention in a less ambitious study, such as Lane's psychological need for recognition, his views on race, his attitude toward women (he remained a lifelong and committed bachelor), as well as how he dealt with the absence of adventure in his declining years. Whereas historians have traditionally sought to explain the behavior of westward-moving white males as a peculiarly American spirit of "rugged individualism," Bryan links Lane's wanderlust and desire for a life of action to the broader intellectual and cultural trends of the early decades of the nineteenth century. He draws particular attention to the ideas commonly associated with Romanticism, arguing that it informed the thinking of Americans as much as it did Europeans. He writes: "the 'crucial elements of romanticism—emotion, imagination, and the elsewhere—were present at the core of the expansionist movement.'" (p. 5)

In addition, and no less important, Bryan seeks to use Walter Lane's life as a prism through which to view the process of American westward expansion. He argues persuasively that a thorough understanding of why the United States pushed westward so quickly should not be limited to politics, economics, and diplomacy, but must take into account the ambitions and motivations of those on the ground who made "Manifest Destiny" possible. Addressing the thesis of Thomas Hietala, who has argued that expansion was the product of American anxieties (over slavery, industrialization, the British, and the like), Bryan argues that a more granular approach uncovers the "confident, arrogant and aggressive" impulses that drove men like Lane to seek lives of adventure in the West. In the final analysis, these impulses "revealed as much about their nation as it did about themselves." (pp. 5-6).

Elegantly written and thoroughly-researched, *More Zeal than Discretion* will no doubt stand as the definitive biography of this long-neglected Texan. Perhaps even more importantly, the author has helped scholars gain greater insight into the masculine ethos that drove thousands of young American males to find adventure in the West.

-Sam W. Haynes