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Review - *Hang Onto The Willows*

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REVIEWS...REVIEWS...REVIEWS...

HANG ONTO THE WILLOWS

— Reviewed by Doyle Miles

HANG ONTO THE WILLOWS by Ernestine Gravley is, first of all, a well-written biography of Dr. O. C. Newman, a dedicated man who, in a harsh and unfamiliar environment of his own choosing, accomplished what he set out to do. Without preachment or hokum, Ernestine Gravley's text brings this frontier Schweitzer alive to us. With him we experience fulfillment of the American Dream in its purest expression, not because Dr. Newman achieves success and acquires riches, although he does both, but because we are involved with him in human values, are drawn on into his journey to know him for what he is rather than for what he has.

Even with a wealth of corroborating evidence in archives and in the personal testimony of living witnesses, except for one detail this chronicle might easily have picked up the taint of legend. But — Glory be! — by avoiding sentimentality, the breeding-bed of legend, the author's presentation runs true to the lean and purposeful course of Dr. Newman's life.

By the bonus of Augusta I. C. Metcalfe's classic pen drawings we are, as Dr. Arrell M. Gibson phrased it, "...blessed to have a book illustrated in this unique and original manner." In bare montage, the drawings characterize inclemencies existent in that time and place, particularly those to be encountered on a frontier of medicine. Three drawings — jacket, front cover, and page 48 — depict the basic spirit of the book: a solitary horseman moving with steady purpose into the weather.

Beyond the enjoyment of reading a good story well told, through passages

descriptive of the sparse population in almost daily stare-down of disaster, this reviewer is left with something more: loneliness for a place he has never been, bereavement by the death of a man he never saw, and persistent memories of an era that ended before he was born.

In years to come, this book will be a collector's item. Every Oklahoman, of whatever vintage, native or transplant, will want to read it — and slip it into that cache of goodies which time and time again he turns to when all the latest seems glop.

* * *

Many readers of WESTVIEW have met the author, Ernestine Gravley, through earlier printings of HANG ONTO THE WILLOWS, or through her other full-length works: A HISTORY OF POTTAWATOMIE COUNTY (1952) and JUDGES OF THE PLACE OF FIRE (1980) — or perhaps through shorter pieces appearing regularly over the years in more than sixty national and regional publications.

She nominally resides at 1225 Sherry Lane in Shawnee, Oklahoma; but, being a teacher and compulsive foster-mother to all who yearn for authorship, it might be just as true to say she lives in Oklahoma and Arkansas, on the road to or from places where aspiring writers gather.

The book is available for \$9.95 at the above address. ■