printing the facts. For my money, probably more has been said about the Parker story than necessary, by me or anyone else, and so maybe people should just leave the poor woman alone.

— Clay Reynolds
University of Texas at Dallas

The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas
by Bryan Edward Stone.
312 pp. $50 hardback, $30 paperback.

Should the Jewish people who live in Texas be termed “Jewish Texans” or “Texan Jews”? Brian Stone poses this question, which has a Talmudic ring, as he introduces his recently published history in *The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas*.

Stone is skeptical about the enthusiasm for finding pointers to identify a growing number of people as the descendants of Marranos, Jews who converted to Christianity to survive the Inquisition and then fled to the Americas. The movement focuses on symbols, some on grave markers, which are also symbolic to gentiles.

Stone sees the starting point as early in the 19th century when a handful of Jews came to the state, not long after Texas achieved statehood. As political disturbances in the late 1840s shifted Europe’s national boundaries, U.S. immigration intensified, and Jews, anticipating another round of discrimination, packed their bags. Most stayed in the northeast, but by 1850 small communities had gathered, especially in cities such as Houston and Galveston. Unlike today’s image of humble shtetl dwellers, these were often ambitious German Jews accustomed to an urban environment and ready to tackle the new country and make good. They confronted a challenge: should they foresee Texas as their country in the manner promoted by Jacob de Haas, secretary of the Federation of American Zionists? Or should they take the path advocated by the preeminent Reform rabbi, Isaac Meyer Wise, who favored a more modern, less traditional practice of Judaism and considered that the Zionist route would “emphasize their [Jewish] distinctiveness rather than [their] Americanism”?

In Europe, most Jews were prohibited from owning land, and the newcomers reveled in the opportunity to do so in Texas. Tracts of land sold
for 25 cents to a dollar an acre and while a small number of the immigrant Jews claimed a wish to colonize and lead an agrarian life, far more were tempted by the prospect of economic bounty. Although not every land deal was large or successful, the Halff family purchased almost a million acres in West Texas, and Harris Kempner and Mitchell Westheimer set their sights on the Houston area in locations that now sit in central Houston and Sugarland. This chapter describes the settlers’ ability to assimilate while holding on to their traditional religious beliefs and lifestyle. The book advances from early settler days to the Galveston Movement when ten thousand immigrants entered through the port between 1907 and 1914. Prompted by rising anti-Semitism, New Yorker Jacob Schiff feared for Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and Russia as they scrambled to get to America.

Subsequent chapters address a less than admirable early involvement with the Ku Klux Klan; the political, economic, and civic responsibilities undertaken by men and women; the impact of both World Wars; and efforts in Texas and beyond to sustain the memory of the Holocaust.

*The Chosen Folks* started as Brian Stone’s Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Texas in Austin. An academic treatise rarely translates so fluently and enjoyably, written with a sense of humor as well as with readily apparent affection.

— Jane Manaster
Austin, Texas

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*Always for the Underdog: Leather Britches Smith and the Grabow War* by Keagan LeJeune.
304 pp. $29.95 hardback.

Perhaps no one in the United States values its folklore or retelling of tales more than Southerners, particularly those who live in the area bordering the Gulf Coast. Southerners value the old ways on which their communities were built. Just sit in a small town courthouse or barbershop for more than fifteen minutes and you will hear at least a few interesting yarns about the local community and the legendary folk who once roamed or still roam their streets.

Possibly nobody understands the importance of folklore and local Southern history better than Keagan LeJeune. As a teacher at McNeese State University and member of the Louisiana Folklore Society, LeJeune takes a teaching and research interest in Louisiana folklore, American folklore, outlaw legends, and Louisiana’s Neutral Strip (No Man’s Land). He has displayed his research and in-depth knowledge of these interests in