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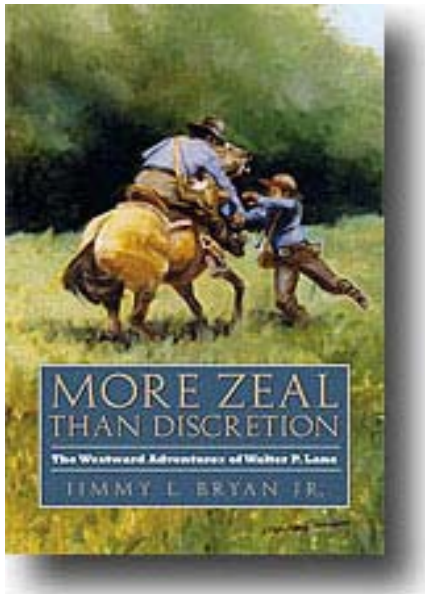
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## Book Reviews



## More Zeal than Discretion

### *The Westward Adventures of Walter P. Lane*

**Jimmy L. Bryan Jr.**

College Station: Texas A&M University Press. 256 pp.,  
11 b&w photos, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

**Review by Stephen L. Moore**

The Battle of San Jacinto, in which Texas wrestled its independence from Mexico, was the defining moment of the military careers of many immigrants who had moved to Texas to make a name for themselves. For Walter Paye Lane, a youth who had immigrated to the United States from Ireland at age four, San Jacinto was but the start of his westward adventures. Author Jimmy L. Bryan Jr., an assistant professor of history at Lamar University in Beaumont, previously edited for publication the 1887 memoirs of Walter Lane. In *More Zeal than Discretion*, he makes a more thorough examination of the lifestyle of this Texas Ranger leader.

The involvement of Lane through three wars is tracked as he rises from a young cavalry private in the Texas Revolution to the commander of a brigade of Confederate soldiers during the Civil War. This new Lane biography offers a view of Texas in transition from Mexican colonial area to independent republic to statehood. Lane fought at San Jacinto as a buck private, and he narrowly escaped death in the cavalry while riding a horse that possessed “more zeal than integrity.” (p. 19)

Two days after the battle of San Jacinto, Lane was elected second lieutenant of his cavalry company. This young man’s sense of adventure compelled him to join the crew of an armed schooner, on which he had a rank of lieutenant. He served aboard this privateer until October 1837, his ship sailing the Gulf of Mexico against Mexican intruders. Lane next traveled to San Augustine and served in the Texas Militia during the summer of 1838 to help quell a Mexican and Indian rebellion.

After this brief tour, Lane joined an East Texas surveying expedition that endured a largely one-sided battle with Kickapoo Indians in October 1838. He was severely wounded in the leg, and sixteen others were killed. Lane spent some time in recovery before July 1839, when he joined another mounted company that served during the Cherokee War.

Driven by a spirit of adventure that defined his career, Walter Lane chose the life of a bachelor in order to be forever free to pursue his latest endeavor. He set out west in 1849 during the California Gold Rush and again in 1856 on a prospecting expedition into Arizona. In between his military stints, he operated various merchant operations in California and Texas, but he was always free-



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spirited enough to leave his endeavors behind when duty called. The author suggests that aggressive adventurers such as Lane helped with U.S. expansionism.

Lane's next call to duty came with the U.S. and Texas during the Mexican War. He joined Major Jack Hays's Texas Ranger battalion in May 1846 and was elected first lieutenant of Captain Christopher "Kit" Acklin's company. When his captain soon fell ill, Lane took acting command for six weeks.

After General Zachary Taylor agreed to an armistice, Lane returned to Texas in October 1846 and immediately began raising his own company of Texas Rangers. In 1847, he returned to the Mexican War, where his bravery was noted during the storming of Monterrey. During November of that year, Lane also received attention for his zeal in fighting a band of Comanches in the Sierra Madre foothills.

Bryan shows Lane to be a tough leader who was always at the head of a charge. He does not, however, try to conceal Lane's attitude toward Mexicans during the Mexican War, when he did little to restrain his Rangers from stealing from or killing non-combatants. Lane clashed with superiors such as General Taylor when he defended one of his Rangers for killing an armed Mexican who would not halt when ordered to do so. He defied Taylor's orders to have the Ranger arrested and instead encouraged his man to flee back to Texas. Prior to departing on one special scouting mission within Mexico, Lane was cautioned by General John E. Wool (p. 68), "Be careful not to confound the innocent with the guilty."

Lane had some involvement with the men who exhumed the remains of the Mier Expedition victims who had been executed after the "black bean" drawing while in prison. He would later claim to have personally led this effort, a fact that the author shows to be false. Bryan, however, asserts that Lane used the Mier exaggeration to give validation to his own efforts to serve Texas: "The exhumation of the Mier prisoners offered Lane the renown that could validate his adventurous career." (p. 178)

Lane settled in the Harrison County town of Marshall, where he joined the Civil War movement in 1861. On July 2, he was elected lieutenant colonel of the South Kansas Texas Regiment. He and his men fought valiantly, and his performance while making a stand at Farmington was commended. During the early Civil War years, he served as a colonel while fighting in Missouri, Arkansas, and Louisiana. His companions declared that there was none braver in combat. Of particular interest is the detail that Bryan uncovers on the politicking that took place to earn commissions during the Civil War. Lane finally rose to the rank of brigadier general, but only in the war's closing months of 1865.

Lane penned his memoirs in 1887 with the aid of his niece Mary Jane Lane. The title: *The Adventures and Recollections of General Walter P. Lane, a San Jacinto Veteran, Containing Sketches of the Texian, Mexican and Late Wars with Several Indian Fights Thrown In*. More than one hundred and twenty years would pass before the first biography of this leader would be published to tell the whole story. Every significant Texas Ranger leader should have a biographer whose sleuthing is as able as that of Jimmy Bryan. His primary sources are extensive, and his well-detailed notes will certainly benefit future Rangers researchers. This long-overdue volume on the contributions of an early Ranger who helped define the American West is a worthy addition to any historian's library.