Review of Life in Laredo: A Documentary History of the Laredo Archives

Brian D. Behnken, *University of California Davis*

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/brian_behnken/7/
and an inability to grasp the New Mexican aesthetic. Another possibility is that the original Portfolio was never published because its images were found to be lackluster copies and the quality of illustration, both within each book and from book to book, was found to be uneven.

Although some of the images appear to be meticulous attempts to copy the design motifs, decorative art, and the religious paintings and drawings of New Mexican santeros, none of the images captures the original vitality of the art object it sets out to portray—as, indeed, no copy really can. And because the final results are the product of a three-part process by different hands, it is not surprising that few, if any, images are inspired.

Devotees of northern New Mexican art will want to acquire this small, nicely proportioned glimpse of a little-known WPA art project and will find the black and white photos of original subjects, plates, and woodblocks in the foreword of special interest. Admirers of E. Boyd Hall who must have everything she wrote will certainly want to add Portfolio to their libraries as well.

Gloria Fraser Giffords
Art Historian


In Life in Laredo, Robert Wood presents a topical overview of life in this Texas town during Laredo's early years. He concentrates particular attention on the Spanish period from 1746-1821 and the Mexican period from 1821-1848. Rather than offering a definitive history of Laredo, Wood takes us through the Laredo archives, a fantastic set of documents with their own unique history. Indeed, the Spanish carefully maintained the city's municipal records, but the records were lost in the late 1800s after the Americans assumed control. A court reporter and a janitor rediscovered the archives in 1934, but archivists have only recently catalogued them. What emerges from Wood's discussion, then, is a preliminary examination of these records and this Spanish, American, and Borderlands town.

Laredo began as both a mission and a fort in 1747. The Spanish government, Wood writes, "felt that the unpopulated northeastern part of the country [New Spain] was in imminent danger" (p. 16). Therefore, the Spanish
sent an official to establish a new town. Laredo was founded with only a handful of White settlers and a few dozen Native American inhabitants. The town grew so slowly, Wood notes, that cattle proliferated more rapidly than people did. As a result of its location, Laredo remained for most of its early history a poor and underpopulated way station for travelers en route to other destinations.

Most of the chapters in this book follow a topical theme. For instance, chapter 2 focuses on Laredo's leaders, while chapter 3 traces the political ramifications of Laredo's involvement in the Mexican War of Independence. The documents detailed in each chapter make for interesting reading. For example, in chapter 5, which focuses on sociological issues affecting local people, Wood reproduces this vignette from an 1842 criminal case: “Citizen Muñoz said that his brother-in-law ... had threatened him with a gun while insulting him with the most vile words telling him he was a sodomite” (p. 125). The judge in the matter simply ordered the brother-in-law to stop insulting Muñoz. This chapter alone contains approximately twenty-five criminal incidents like this one, and the book is filled with similar firsthand accounts.

*Life in Laredo* is a first step toward a more thorough history of Laredo. Wood does not offer in-depth analysis or a sustained narrative of Laredo's early days. Rather, his point is to provide an assessment of the documents with the hope that others will write a more detailed account. Scholars interested in the Spanish colonies, the U.S. West, and Borderlands history will find this book of value.

Brian D. Behnken

*University of California, Davis*


Fifteen million Americans migrated to urban communities during World War II in pursuit of high-paying employment at defense factories. Whether they relocated to Los Angeles, California, Charleston, South Carolina, or any of the other centers of defense work, they forever altered the cities and towns they touched. Flagstaff, Arizona, was no different.