

From the Editor

Space, Place, Change: Re-Imagining Palo Duro Canyon

As I write these sentences on a January morning, Palo Duro Canyon does not seem beyond the curve of the Earth from where I sit a few miles outside Santa Fe. Because I have been freshly reading the essays in this issue of the *Panhandle-Plains Historical Review*, the big, multi-colored canyon seems bold and bright, nearby, familiar as ever. But this morning it also strikes me as a new world, or at least as a place I think I know, yet am somehow seeing in brighter sunlight. Intriguing new information has that effect on us. It allows us to re-conceptualize reality, to re-arrange the mental furniture in our heads. If you're like me and love geographic places because of the way they distill human experience so uniquely, seeing a place like Palo Duro Canyon in brighter sun is exciting.

This issue of *PPHR* is a thematic one, and I am lucky that Editor Alex Hunt asked me to serve as guest editor of it. However distant from West Texas I have been for the past quarter century, in my imagination Palo Duro and the canyons of the Llano Estacado have always been close by. I conjure them in my mind often, and I crave the kind of new information that's carried in every essay in this issue the way a water-less man in a desert fantasizes about oases.

We have tried here to create a holistic, environmental issue of the *PPHR* centered on the big canyon that stands at the center of Southern Plains history and ecology. Versions of a kind of Palo Duro story already exist, of course, in forms like the play *Texas*, or in volumes such as Duane Guy's 1979 anthology, *The Story of Palo Duro Canyon*. But the truth is that we—and the space (and place) of Palo Duro—exist in a changing world. In the twenty-first century our concerns are different. And we know far more now than we've ever known before both about the nature of the past and the nature of the present.

In this issue you will discover, for example, a far richer, more varied, and more multi-ethnic human history of Palo Duro than has existed before thanks to Joel Zapata's meticulous mining of the historical record. Michael Grauer excavates another kind of historical record with his case study art history of what are likely the earliest paintings ever done of Palo Duro, by a student of the great nineteenth century Romantic painter Albert Bierstadt, no less. Lisa Jackson's essay on the largest Civilian Conservation Corps camp in America, the one that built the infrastructure of the brand-new Palo Duro Canyon State Park in the 1930s, offers us one of those uncom-

fortable historical accounts that are so critical to our progress as Americans, the story of an early experiment with workforce de-segregation that in the conservative Panhandle went far less well than we'd hope it would have. It even has an ultimate irony, since not until the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 forced the issue were the African Americans who helped build the park allowed into it.

Finally, consider these two last examples of the sun shining brighter on the canyon. Read Kenneth Seyffert here to reflect on why thirteen new southern and southwestern bird species have joined the aviary of the canyon in the past quarter-century. Why bird migrations are happening up to two weeks earlier now. Why Mississippi kites are declining, or ravens are replacing crows in the canyon. And read Pamela Allison and Joseph Cepeda on the impact of the exotic grass Old World bluestem in Palo Duro, or how mesquite may have been a Pleistocene analogue of modern acacias in Africa, both shrubs released to spreading abundance with the decline of mammoths in the one instance and elephants in the other.

Palo Duro Canyon is acquiring a new story, and these are some of the people who are writing the chapters.

Sincerely,
Dan Flores