

» *The Geysers of Yellowstone* (University of Colorado Press, 5th edition, 2018) by T. Scott Bryan. First published in 1979, *The Geysers of Yellowstone* has become something of a classic. Now in its fifth edition, the latest iteration features a brief introduction by Lee Whittey, the well-known and respected Yellowstone Park historian, as well as a plethora of information revealed by technical innovations such as Google Earth that have dramatically added to the world's cartographic libraries. Bryan himself, a self-described "geyser gazer," writes with vibrant, engaging prose, which is an asset in a guidebook, especially one relying on often dry scientific data. His explanations are straightforward and interesting. For example, even the casual reader will be amazed to learn how scientists dropped probes into Old Faithful after an eruption to explore the complicated chambers and "plumbing" (Bryan's term) below ground, where streams of water of different temperatures (often far above boiling) create "an intermittent discharge of water ejected turbulently." His own descriptions of the more than 500 geysers in the park are more artful and designed to help the tourist as well as the geologist locate and appreciate Yellowstone's collection.

» *James A. Murray: Butte's Radical Irish Millionaire* (Mountain Press, 2018) by Bill Farley. Perhaps my favorite story about James A. Murray is that, though he was an inveterate capitalist, he bought the communist Bill Dunne a printing press so that he could put out his radical weekly newspaper as a daily, *The Butte Daily Bulletin*. Unpredictable and eccentric, Murray's contempt for capitalism (at which he so inimitably succeeded) can be perhaps understood in light of his inauspicious beginnings: after escaping the Great Famine in Ireland, the Murray family immigrated to Canada, and James eventually made his way to what was soon to become Montana Territory. He amassed a surprising poke of wealth in various ways, though his special talent seemed to be for gambling propositions. Farley has great affection for his principal subject, which makes for enjoyable, effortless reading. David Emmons's introduction deserves honorable mention here as perhaps the most delightful introduction to appear in 2018. In addition to lauding Farley's book as "historical detective work of the first order," he manages a few words of his own subtle commentary in these times that try human

souls. One wonders why Murray has not already been the subject of a Hollywood blockbuster, since so many of his exploits and shenanigans seem ready-made for the digital screen.

» *A Cycle of the West* (a Bison Classic Annotated Edition, 2018) by John G. Neihardt. This volume contains all five installments of Neihardt's elaborate poem cycle of the West. His magnum opus, having been overshadowed by *Black Elk Speaks*, means most Americans, even in the West, are unaware that Neihardt was once called "The American Homer," and was Nebraska's first poet laureate. Though it seems hardly anyone commemorates history by way of the poetic muse anymore, the nineteenth century teemed with poems of American history. Neihardt wrote all 700 pages of these five volumes gathered here in heroic couplets (rhymed iambic pentameter), which does lend these lyrics a classical, regal air somehow appropriate to their subject. The *Aeneid*, after all, was itself a poem of the frontier and of the "taming" of a wilderness. Neihardt's Rome is the great West itself, and its mountain man heroes: Hugh Glass (recently adulated in Michael Punke's *The Revenant*) and Jedediah Smith. Interestingly, the last volume in the series is *The Song of the Messiah*, reminiscent of Vergil's 4th *Eclogue*. *The Song of the Indian Wars* features some of Neihardt's most skillful verse.

As I was wrapping this column up, another worthy read fell into my lap with the afternoon mail. While I have not finished reading it, I want to recommend for your winter reading list Ken Robison's *World War I Montana: The Treasure State Prepares* (The History Press, 2018), which once again showcases Robison's encyclopedic command of Montana military history and is illustrated profusely with archival photographs. As in his previous books (*Yankees and Rebels on the Upper Missouri* and *Confederates in Montana Territory*), Robison writes authoritatively and succinctly, and I look forward to finishing this one as the snow begins to fly.

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