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Book Review: Kentucky Hauntings: Homespun Ghost Stories & Unexplained History

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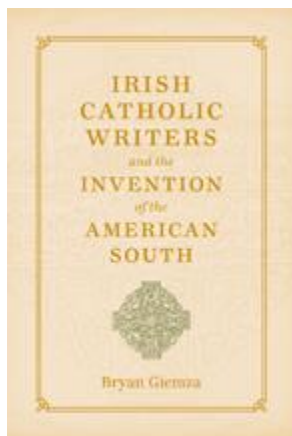
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BOOK REVIEWS

Irish Catholic Writers and the Invention of the American South. Giemza, Bryan. Baton Rouge, Louisiana : LSU Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-8071-5090-0. 384 pages. \$49.95.



How does being Irish and Catholic affect writers living in the south in the 19th century? And how did their ethnic identity affect their work? Randolph-Macon College professor Bryan Giemza spends almost 400 pages trying to answer those questions.

Giemza writes about dozens of Irish Catholic southern writers who struggled with their own Irish identity; their beliefs about their religion; and their views on the south. Some joined the Confederate side as many others perceived themselves as outsiders in the South.

The author's premise is that Irish Catholic writers had an especially unique experience living in the South. Furthermore, Giemza asserts that being Irish or Catholic in the south was, in some points of view, living a life that was "un- Southern."

He scrutinizes the works and lives of Flannery O'Connor; Kate Chopin; and Joel Chandler; Margaret Mitchell, among many others.

And how Irish, Southern or Catholic did Giemza's subjects need they be to be included in his study? "Not very," Giemza admitted.

Giemza bases his book on letters the authors wrote to other acquaintances; their literary works; and his own correspondence with some writers, namely Valerie Sayers and Anne Rice.

The author's premise of writers who were Irish, Catholic, and living in the South as having a strong common denominator wasn't always well demonstrated. Nor does he ever explain what connection these writers have to the "invention of the American South."

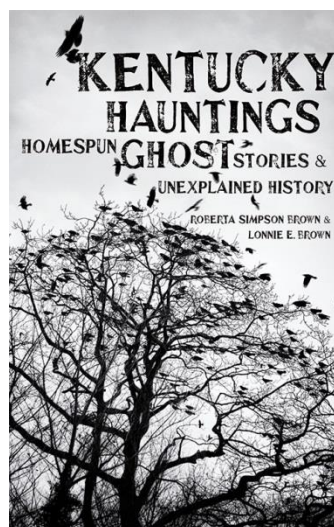
But Giemza's study is a strong beginning point for researchers of Irish Catholic writers of the South, as it has a very detailed bibliography. This book could very well complete certain research sections in library collections, including studies of Irish writers; Irish Catholics; of Southern Catholics.

This book is clearly written for scholars. Readers with a casual interest in this topic may find this book hard to delve into.

This book would make a good addition to academic libraries.

Peter R. Dean
University of Southern Mississippi

Kentucky Hauntings: Homespun Ghost Stories & Unexplained History. Brown, Roberta Simpson & Lonnie E. Brown. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2013. 174 pages. ISBN 978-0-8131-4320-0.



I'm not sure how many children these days have the experience of sitting back and listening to an "old-timer" tell the tales of our past. All ghost stories by nature have at least a bit of the past involved. They have to. Somewhere, sometime there was always a sad tragedy, a murder, or an unexplained event that benefited the listener by a retelling. Not only were these tales entertaining but often a learning experience for the kids and adults who heard them even if it was only, as the authors of *Kentucky Hauntings* point out, learning how to handle fear.

While visiting my mother's relatives in West Virginia one summer when I was a child, I had the pleasure of listening to a great uncle tell the tales he could remember from his boyhood about local ghosts, family experiences, and strange events. It was late in the evening after sundown. No TV in the house. Only the sounds of the creek and the

woods could be heard outside the window. I still remember those tales and that evening as if it were yesterday. I especially remember the ones in which family were involved even though several of them were family members I had not met or who were long gone.

One of my great disappointments at the time was that my mother, who had also had that experience, could not remember a single tale her great uncle told them when she was a small girl. Apparently they were so scary she blocked them out completely! This is one of the reasons *Kentucky Hauntings* is a special book. It has recorded tales and traditions that are local to Kentuckians, (one story was from my own hometown), and helps to insure they will not be lost when the great story tellers are no longer with us and the details begin to fade.

Kentucky Hauntings is divided into sections of stories including “*Stories from History*,” “*Stories from Headlines*,” and “*Stories from Homefolks*.” The last section, “*Stories from Homefolks*,” is easily the longest section of the book and probably my favorite as it does the very things discussed above. The tales reveal customs and traditions that many from outside the area are not familiar with or are too young to remember. They are tales told by people who have experienced the tale themselves or are in some way connected to the story.

Each section and each story has an introduction about the times or traditions in which the action is set. A nice addition at the end of the book is a section where the authors have included their website and contact information in case readers want to share a tale of their own. They have also listed some places to visit and contacts for information and ghost tours of several of the locations in which the tales were set.

This is a fun read whether you are into ghost stories or just enjoy learning about things in the past. Not all of the tales are scary. Some are about loving, caring acts by those who have crossed over but who are still looking out for friends, family, and loved ones. However, there are definitely enough hair-raisers here to satisfy anyone who wants to be scared out of his wits or wants to scare someone else out of theirs on some dark and stormy night. I’ll say no more...spoilers, you know.

*Paris E. Webb, Librarian
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Ghost Stories of Old New Orleans. deLavigne, Jean. Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2013. 374 pages. ISBN 978-0807152911 \$17.50 paperback.



Ghost Stories of Old New Orleans is a collection of stories based on eye witness accounts, old newspaper articles and local lore of the apparitions that appeared in houses, buildings or locations around New Orleans. Each chapter presents a different account of ghostly encounters throughout New Orleans, which occurred over several centuries. New Orleans evidently has a long history of ghostly hauntings, partly due to its richly diverse culture and some of its unsavory activities and the people who flocked to populate the area.

A reprint of her original work, deLavigne has intertwined the oral accounts and articles with her own story telling. She tries to keep the language of the time and the teller, taking you back into southern slave speak or a foreign language from someone not long off the boat. Her style helps you feel more connected to the story and its people; however, it can be difficult to understand in parts where there are several phrases in a foreign language. It is also hard to tell where eye witness accounts and deLavigne’s embellishments occur. The stories are so interesting, though, that it does not alter the thrills and chills of the narrative. She has a gift of drawing the reader in and creating an interest in the paranormal and in the haunted history of New Orleans.

Each story describes incidents of ghost sightings and gives details about who they were when they were alive, what their life was like and what events led up to their death. Each seemed to have an unnatural death, which left them drawn to that area to haunt. Whether they died from a tragic illness, or were an executed prisoner, murdered, or were a scorned lover, each ghost has a story to tell. Most would tell or show anyone who came across their haunts, sometimes violently.

While it may not be easy to tell if a story is mostly true or mostly fiction, each account is very interesting and entertaining, creating an interest in exploring New Orleans’ dark and haunted past. This book would be of interest to