

New Books

from sooners and the university of oklahoma press

THE LIVES AND LEGENDS OF BUFFALO BILL by Don Russell University of Oklahoma Press

The colorful William F. Cody has provided the inspiration for a library full of legends, tales and yarns of the early west. Now, in a monumental volume, Don Russell has explored every side of the life of "Buffalo Bill"—debunking the fictitious stories about the man and retelling the true ones in a manner that will make even the most casual reader a Buffalo Bill fan.

Cody's life is a perfect example of that old cliché "truth is stranger than fiction." Even subtracting the thousands of false stories about him, the facts remaining make a fantastic tale: Civil War service as a teenager, a long and exciting career as an Army scout, noted big game hunter and guide, and finally the head of the famed Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show—the man had many "lives."

Many of the facts about Cody have become legends, such as winning the Medal of Honor for Indian fighting (later to be declared ineligible because he was not official Army personnel); taking the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia on a wild and woolly buffalo hunt; standing off an Indian charge by using buffalo meat for a barricade—the list could go on and on.

But the vast amount of research which Author Russell has compiled is actually as amazing as the subject itself. *Buffalo Bill* is an authoritative study in a most interesting, critical, but impartial manner. Certainly few readers will finish this book without being a little awed by Cody's life—and Russell's work.

—SRP

THE GILA TRAIL by Benjamin Butler Harris, edited by Richard H. Dillon University of Oklahoma Press

The 52-man Duval party was one of the earliest emigrant parties to head for California from Texas in the famous gold rush

of 1849. In the group was one Benjamin Butler Harris, who many years later chronicled his journey and the adventures he experienced.

The book is actually rather dull reading, especially if the reader happens to be one who hates to have his thoughts broken by the urge to check footnotes—for nearly every page is at least one-fourth footnotes. Richard H. Dillon has proved his standing as an expert on this era in western history, but his footnotes mainly serve to repudiate the details of Harris' tale.

Bright spots in the book help to relieve the general monotony, such as the "sound" advice that Harris was given at the trip's beginning to "Shoot at every Indian you see and save them a life of misery in subsisting on snakes, lizards, skunks, and other disgusting objects." But even gems of wisdom such as this can't save *The Gila Trail* from becoming a wearisome journey for all but the dedicated student of history.

—SRP

CANADIAN RIVER HUNT by General William E. Strong, introduction by Fred P. Schonwald University of Oklahoma Press

However illogical, it is only natural to expect more of a book that comes in a slipcase. Yet, it's what's inside that counts, and *Canadian River Hunt* is no disappointment. From start to finish, including the fold-out map of the river country, this small (68 pages) volume lives up to the University of Oklahoma Press reputation for fine craftsmanship.

The subject matter may seem somewhat insignificant at first glance. There is nothing too stimulating about hunting turkeys, even if the hunting is being done by such military notables as the Generals Philip Sheridan and George Crook. But when told by their diary-keeping companion, William Strong, the hunt takes on an excitement familiar to any avid sportsman.

Strong had his journal produced in man-

uscript form to be presented to his host on the trip, Philip Sheridan, on Christmas Day, 1878. Apparently another copy was made at the same time for Strong's wife, and it was this volume that Oklahoman Fred P. Schonwald, '30ba, '34Law, purchased from a San Francisco dealer in 1956.

This beautifully bound account of the generals' pursuit of their game through a wild, abundant Oklahoma that today's hunters can only dream about should be a welcome addition to anyone's library.

—CJR

CONSTANTINOPLE IN THE AGE OF JUSTINIAN by Glanville Downey University of Oklahoma Press

Constantinople is the third of the world's great cities to be surveyed by the O.U. Press in its Centers of Civilization Series. The first volume, *Athens in the Age of Pericles*, was a creditable beginning. *Shiraz: Persian City of Saints and Poets* was somewhat of a disappointment, but this new entry is perhaps the best of the lot in achieving the Series' objective—to present capsule views of these cities for the interested layman rather than the historian.

Author Downey has succeeded in capturing the undercurrent of excitement that must have accompanied life in Constantinople 500 years after Christ. The Emperor Justinian was putting the finishing touches on the work begun by Constantine the Great. Constantinople was the hub of the Byzantine Empire, the new Rome, the seat of Christianity, foundation for a new society, a new culture.

The few hours spent with Downey's book comes close to being a visit to this bygone civilization. It is not difficult for the reader to imagine himself strolling through the oriental bazaars, standing in the shadow of the bronze equestrian statues of the emperors or cheering the chariot drivers in the Hippodrome. The book is not long, and the trip is worth taking.

—CJR