

BOOK REVIEW SECTION

Ralph Marsh in collaboration with Gene Stipe., *State Senator Gene Stipe's A Gathering of Heroes*. (Heavener, Oklahoma: Spring Mountain, 2000) pp.351.\$25.00 ISBN: 0970430906

First the disclaimers: I am an employee of the Oklahoma State Senate Staff and as such work for all 48 Oklahoma State Senators, including Gene Stipe. I do have an autographed copy of his volume personally signed for me by Senator Stipe. I paid for the volume but not the autograph. Finally, I am not a native Oklahoman and was not in the state during much of the period covered. While I have heard of many of the people Senator Stipe mentions and have actually met a few, I don't know any of them on a close, personal basis.

I first learned of this book while attending the Oklahoma Political Science Association annual meeting at Oklahoma City University in the fall of 2000. Dr. Danney Goble was on a panel on Oklahoma politics and was also the luncheon speaker. He was supposed to talk about the late Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Carl Albert and the book *Little Giant: The Life and Times of Speaker Carl Albert*, which he wrote with the late Speaker Albert. Dr. Goble did so but he also talked profusely about a forthcoming book by Oklahoma State Senator

Gene Stipe, which was written in a manner similar to the way Speaker Albert and Dr. Goble had collaborated on their edition. Dr. Goble described Senator Stipe's book as though not an academic work, one that every academician should read if they really want to know about Oklahoma politics.

The volume is really a written version of an oral history. It is a compilation of stories that Senator Gene Stipe told while traveling and reporter Ralph Marsh was there to take notes and weave them together. There is an index and table of contents, some pictures and photos, but no bibliography or footnotes. Senator Gene Stipe plays a role in his book. Like Julius Caesar he refers to himself in the third person but Julius Caesar never referred to himself as "J. I. Stipe's black-haired boy" or "Injin Joe."

The book focuses on the Oklahomans who are the heroes of the title: Lloyd Radar, E. T. Dunlap, Dr. Hayden Donahue, Reverend Wade Watts, and J. I. Stipe. When I first went to work for the Oklahoma Legislative Council I learned the most politically powerful people in the state were Lloyd Rader, E. T. Dunlap, and Hayden Donahue, followed by state legislative leaders with the governor somewhere towards the bottom of the list. Lloyd Rader was Director of what was then known as the Welfare Department, although the official name changed every few years. E. T. Dunlap was chancellor for Higher Education for the State of Oklahoma while Hayden Donahue was Director of the Mental Health Department. No governor dared dismiss them or try to issue orders and the State Legislature was equally respectful.

As for Reverend Wade Watts and J. I. Stipe, if you know anything about Oklahoma politics, you know about their sons. Wade Watts' son J. C. Watts is now the fourth ranking Republican in the U.S. House of Representatives while J. I. Stipe's sons Gene became a legend in his own time as the longest serving state legislator in the world. Rader, Dunlap, and Donahue were heroes for courageously waging a statewide war against poverty and ignorance while Watts and Stipe successfully overcame bigotry and distribution in their personal lives. That was what made them heroes.

There are other politicians mentioned. Some famous, some infamous, depending on your point on view. And some folks you never heard of before but will now never forget. These are stories about Oklahomans who made this state what it is today and are now part of

its history. One of them, State Senator Gene Stipe, was honored in SCR 6 (page 2, lines 9-10) of the 1st Session of the 48th Oklahoma Legislature as "a premier storyteller and a cultural state treasure." You might not find this volume in your average mass-market bookstore but you can write to the publisher at HC 64 Box 4650, Heavener, Oklahoma 74937 or telephone 918/653-7931

Dr. Thomas H. Clapper
Oklahoma State Senate
Committee Staff

