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Book Comments

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BOOK COMMENTS

Dear Editors:

We, the authors of *The Seekers: Pioneer Families of Nokomis and Laurel* received a copy of a book review by Gregory L. Ferris this past week. We do not recall asking for a review but we did send a copy of our book to one of your history professors who had helped us with our research. I suppose from him, you obtained a copy of our book.

I'm afraid Mr. Ferris overstepped his authority by not checking his facts as he accused us of doing. To begin with, we are not amateurs in the field of writing. We have excellent writing credits both locally and nationally.

He says it is difficult to accept the contention of the Turners that fourteen families living in Laurel and Nokomis are truly representative of a fifty year period. We must remind Mr. Ferris that these early families intermarried extensively, so basically the families remained the same. This area was a wilderness. It took a long time to clear the lands and homestead. We did not include land speculators and migrant families with the real pioneer families.

Three families that were limited to a half page each were so done that way because they did not want to cooperate with compiling the area history. We wrote little about them because that was the way they wanted it.

Mr. Ferris must realize that up to the point of us trying to preserve the history of this area, THERE WAS NO WRITTEN HISTORY AND NO RESEARCH HAD BEEN DONE EITHER.

Because, at the writing of our book, we did not know if there would be a follow-up book or not, we included the discussion of the McKeithen family who provided financial solidarity to the Laurel community and people did make several references to the McKeithens and we included the family for clarity so readers not familiar with this family would understand the references.

Mr. Ferris's review is two years too late. The book is the most checked out book on the Florida shelf in our public library. The first printing sold out in less than three weeks. The second printing is doing well - a steady seller in bookstores from Sarasota to Englewood.

Mr. Ferris's review is the only disparaging one the book has received. Of course, he doesn't live in this area and doesn't realize how glad most people were to have our effort (we know was not perfect and said so) published since nothing had been done before. We are continuing our research and this book we are working on will be designed as the last one was - FOR THE PEOPLE OF THIS AREA AND BY THE PEOPLE OF THIS AREA. It was never intended to be subjected to someone who does not live in or understand our area.

Sincerely,
Paul H. Turner & Joan Berry Turner

P.S. It would be a matter of interest to us to know Mr. Ferris's qualifications for doing a local-history review & how many local histories he has researched and written. We feel Mr. Ferris's real problem is that our book was not written in a flowery literary style and not academic which it was not supposed to be.

Gregory L. Ferris replies:

British historian and political analyst for *The New Republic*, Henry Fairlie, argues that, ". . . oral history is only, for all its fancy name, a refusal to do the hard work of sifting." Although Fairlie's comment merits attention, it is evident that oral history has prevailed in gaining credibility within the field of historical research. Historians and, indeed, the general public have accepted the oral tradition as a method for studying non-elite, community-based history. Therefore, if the oral tradition is to continue as a successful methodology, certain historical standards must be present.

Oral historians must be aware of the differences and conflicts between "presenting historical information and providing entertainment." It is important for the oral historian to interview and edit to get the best possible story - not to compile all of the information available.

The oral historian should consider a cross-section of the population in order to explain the interaction of members of a community regarding social, political and economic growth. The completion of this task requires the oral historian to research newspapers, town reports, tax records, etc. Upon accomplishing this exercise, then perhaps the oral historian can increasingly assure the general public that the results of the research indicate the inclusion of those participants who established a community of culture and moral ideologies.

The oral historian must also be aware of appropriate documentation and editing procedures. Critics often look for consistent footnoting and editing as a means of evaluating thorough research. Published research ought to serve as a springboard for further research of the given community or act as an active model for those desiring to pursue community-based oral history.

The Turners' comment that they have . . . "writing credits both locally and nationally", remains questionable. To suggest that their book was written, "FOR THE PEOPLE OF THIS AREA AND BY THE PEOPLE OF THIS AREA", certainly does not imply that they were prepared for constructive criticism or to be ". . . subjected to someone who does not live in or understand our area". Hopefully the book they "design" next will increasingly adhere to necessary oral history standards.