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## ***Harold Newton: The Original Highwayman* by Gary Monroe**

Kristin G. Congdon  
*University of Central Florida*

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*Harold Newton: The Original Highwayman*. By Gary Monroe. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007. 160 pp. Preface, acknowledgments, photographs, color plates. \$34.95).

Gary Monroe's book on Highwayman Harold Newton (1934–1994) comes six years after the publication of his book *The Highwaymen: Florida's African-American Landscape Painters*. Monroe's first book was successful partly because it came at a time when the Highwaymen were just beginning to be collected seriously and there was little in print about the artists.

The Highwaymen story is compelling. A group of young African American artists, centered in Ft. Pierce and more or less associated with the white painter Albert Ernest Backus, created brightly colored Florida landscapes that were originally sold along the Florida roadways. The "Highwaymen" name was bestowed on the artists by an early collector. Monroe's 2001 book about these artists helped define this group of young men and one woman, most of whom began painting in the 1950s and 1960s.

Monroe's book on Harold Newton has been created in the same format as his book on the Highwaymen, probably in an effort to replicate his earlier success. There are twenty-six pages of text and about the same number of color plates (fifty-nine in the first book, sixty-two in the Newton book).

*The Highwaymen* provided readers with a foundational story of determination, inventiveness, talent, and camaraderie, all in the context of the segregated South. Since its publication in 2001, other books, articles, and even a few films about the group have appeared. In 2004, Alfred Hair (who is often identified as the leader of the group) and the Highwaymen were placed in the Florida Artist Hall of Fame. *Harold Newton* is less satisfying than *The Highwaymen*. The twenty-six pages of text provide little insight into the man, offering instead only tidbits of information: The artist didn't learn that Harold was his first name until he was in his fifties. He drew when he was young and was already an artist before meeting Backus and working with Hair. He sold paintings on the road during his pre-Backus days, although not very successfully. He was a drinker. In his early years, he painted Christian themes on velvet. He loved to fish. He was basically a loner except when he drank. He liked the comics.

Perhaps the most appealing part of the story has to do with Dorothy, Newton's early love interest, whom he married late in life. Her description of Newton, however, portrays him as an irresponsible womanizer who finally settles down in his later years. He had maybe eleven children out of wedlock.

We learn little about what drove Newton to paint and how he thought about the landscape. Monroe plays down issues of segregation, poverty, and Newton's relationships with other Highwaymen. In fact, Monroe goes so far as to dismiss racial issues when he writes, enigmatically, "The Highwayman's story transcends race" (18), a comment that he leaves largely unexplained. Is this because there is a moral to the

story? Can this story be told without talking about race? Does it matter that there were no African American artists in any of the art history books at the time the Highwaymen began painting with Backus? Monroe seems to think not.

The twenty-six pages of text are not well organized and are sometimes vague and uninformed. The author could have given us far more insight into the man and his artwork by drawing more carefully on his own earlier work and the scholarship, exhibitions, and films on the Highwaymen that have been completed in the last several years. The book has no bibliography, and there does not seem to be any attempt on the author's part to curate the paintings in the book in chronological order or in any other manner that would have given us a new perspective on the artist. Still, many of the paintings are delicious. In fact, the best insight we get about Newton in this book is from looking at the reproductions of his work, which are superbly photographed and presented. Newton did portray light beautifully.

In spite of some stunning images of Newton's paintings, Monroe is not convincing when he says that this artist's "paintings provided the measure of excellence that the other artists could only dream of achieving" (3). And Monroe's claim that the story of the Highwaymen is "the last great untold tale of modern Florida" (preface) is simply mind-boggling—try convincing Carl Hiaasen of that! Comments like this make it hard to take the author seriously.

Nonetheless, *Harold Newton: The Original Highwayman* is useful because it presents a Florida artist who painted Florida as longtime Floridians understand it. And for serious collectors and historians of Florida art, the paintings make it a book worthy of a place on the bookshelf.

KRISTIN G. CONGDON  
University of Central Florida

*Floridian of His Century: The Courage of Governor LeRoy Collins*. By Martin A. Dyckman. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. xii, 332 pp. Series foreword, acknowledgments, photographs, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth).

Martin Dyckman's *Floridian of His Century* provides a journalist's reflections on LeRoy Collins, Florida's most important governor of the twentieth century. Dyckman briefly chronicles Governor Collins's formative years and initial foray into politics during the Great Depression and Second World War, before turning to his main subject, Collins's gubernatorial career. Highlighted as a matter of course are Collins's battles with the Florida legislature over reapportionment and his management of crises brought on in Florida--and, consequently, in his own political career--by the struggle for racial equality in the United States. The story of Collins's