

Books of the Old Pueblo: A Love Letter to Tucson

I've always had an odd connection with Tucson Arizona. It is the city of my birth, in which I have lived occasionally, and visited frequently, over my two short decades of life, and home to much of my extended family. Despite these connections, it is also a city that has occupied the odd liminal space between familiarity and foreignness: for much of my childhood Tucson was Nana's house, a place that ought to be home but was never quite that, it was the circle of family friends who remembered me far better than I remembered them, and, most importantly, Tucson was the desert.

The desert was different; wild, teeming with flora well-armed against drought and children's soft hands and fauna with venom and captivating names like "javelina" or "coati." It imprinted itself on my brain, trapped me in that hereditary desert-sickness my mother bequeathed to me, and led me to start this book collection. As I grew older, the stories of the desert, and the people who shaped it and were shaped by it became almost an obsession: from the ancient Hohokam to romantic soldados to rugged cowboys, they lived in my mind's Tucson as vividly as the cactus wrens or the road runners, images fueled by the few books I could find on their legacies.

In high school, as I began to approach my IB Extended Essay, a major paper all IB students write their senior year, one topic stood out to me as the obvious choice. I simply had to write about Tucson, and the ways the physical space of Tucson had been shifted from the Mexican to Anglo era. There was just one problem: sources. Local history is always a niche subject, and reliable books on local history are always in short supply. With the help of some good friends at the Presidio de San Agustin in Tucson, I managed to scavenge up practically every reputable (and some very irreputable) source there was about this period of Tucson's history, and about the legacy of Tucson's Hispanic past in general. As any lover of books knows, however I couldn't stop here: soon I needed to read about the Arizona Sonora border, and lo, more books. I wanted to read about Tucson folklore, and even more books! Before I knew it, I had a modest collection.

Of particular interest in this collection are Lydia Otero's brilliantly written *La Calle*, a detailed history of the scars urban renewal left on Tucson as well as a celebration of the city's vitality, and Thomas Sheridan's *Los Tucsonenses*, which is an incredibly detailed social history of Tucson's citizens of Hispanic descent, and alternately feels like a wild west adventure, a victorian drama of etiquette and intrigue, and a 20th century realist depiction of urban poverty. I would be remiss if I didn't mention "Big Jim" Griffith, the legendary Tucson anthropologist, folklorist, banjo-player and cowboy poet, and his book on the list, *A Border Runs Through It*, which manages to be an incredibly informative account of local legends and folklore while also being the funniest thing I've read in a while.

This collection may not be significant to most people, there are no very rare books, nor are there very expensive ones. However, this collection means everything to me, as a reminder of Tucson, its stories and legacies and my family. It serves as a constant reminder, a testimony in ink and wood pulp, to my ties to Tucson, and to my love of every inch of its desert.

Bibliography:

Chanin, Abraham S. *Cholent and Chorizo: Great Adventures of Pioneer Jews on the Arizona Frontier, Sometimes Kosher, Sometimes Not, But Always Fascinating!* Tucson: Midbar Press, 1995.

An amusing and informative book on the history of Jews in territorial Arizona, mostly focused on Tucson and its environs. Tucson's Jewish community is old and well established (the city boasts the oldest synagogue in the Southwest), and so Chanin has plenty of material to pull from, and tells the stories of our community in an entertaining manner.

Dilworth, Rankin. *The March to Monterrey: the Diary of Lt. Rankin Dilworth*. Edited by Lawrence R. Clayton and Joseph E. Chance. El Paso, Texas: Texas Western Press, 1996.

This diary of a young officer during the war with Mexico in 1846, this book provides first hand accounts of the conditions on the shaky US-Mexico frontier at the time, and descriptions of Mexican cities he passed through during his overland campaign towards Monterrey.

Griffith, Jim. *A Border Runs Through It: Journeys in Regional History and Folklore*. Tucson: Rio Nuevo Publishers, 2011.

Griffith spent decades collecting folklore on both sides of the Arizona-Sonora border, and in this book, he presents it along with a comprehensive history of the region in his typically witty, irreverent and occasionally profound style. It features local legends, like that of Tucson's El Tiradito shrine, as well as lessons in Sonoran cooking and O'odham musical traditions.

Gordon, Lina. *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999.

An account of a lesser known episode of Arizona history, which highlights the formation of racial boundaries and prejudices in early Arizona, as well as the complicated role gender and religion had in their origin. It describes the abduction of hundreds of catholic orphans from New York who were placed with local catholic families by Anglo vigilantes who objected to white children being raised by Mexicans.

McCarty, Kiernan, Ed. *A Frontier Documentary: Sonora and Tucson 1821-1848*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997.

A collection of primary sources from officials and citizens of Tucson during the Mexican period, describing the day to day life of the Presidio's residents, as well as relations with indigenous people, the Mexican government and encroaching Anglo-Americans.

Morgan, Richard J. *A Guide to Historic Missions and Churches of the Arizona Sonora Borderlands*. Tucson: Arizona Lithographers, 1995.

An illustrated guide to the beautiful architecture of the Spanish missions in Sonora and Arizona, with detailed descriptions and color photos, as well as a detailed history of Franciscan and Jesuit presence in the Pimeria Alta.

Officer, James E. *Hispanic Arizona, 1536-1856*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987.

The definitive history of Arizona before the Gadsden Purchase, spanning three centuries. It describes in detail the earliest Spanish explorers, the founding of missions and forts and the remarkably complex relationships between Spanish settlers and different indigenous groups.

Officer, James E., Mardith Schuetz-Miller and Bernard L. Fontana, Ed. *The Pimería Alta: Missions and More*. Tucson: Southwestern Mission Research Center, 1996.

A collection of essays which covers every aspect of the history of Pímeria Alta, the region that now makes up Sonora and Arizona. It features a general history, explorations of geography and ecology, music and architecture, folklore and religion.

Otero, Lydia R. *La Calle: Spatial Conflicts and Urban Renewal in a Southwest City*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010.

A detailed history of a period that is too often forgotten: the destruction of the thriving historic center of its Latino/a community. Otero brings deeply personal ties to the destroyed areas and to the still thriving communities together with comprehensive research that makes this book both intellectually fascinating and emotionally impactful.

Otero, Lydia R. *In the Shadow of the Freeway: Growing Up Brown and Queer*. Tucson: Planet Earth Press, 2019.

Otero's autobiography is beautifully written and provides a glimpse of a period of Tucson's history and the complicated intersection of race, class and identity. They examine the impacts

of environmental racism and social homophobia on their own life, while also telling their own story in beautiful, clear prose.

Probasco, Opha R. *Keeping Our History Alive: The Old and the New of Tucsona and Arizona*. Tucson: Probasco Press, 2005.

This self published little gem is Probasco's autobiography, and provides a rambling recollection of Probasco's youth in midcentury Tucson. It is charmingly written and provides an excellent first hand account of this period of its history.

Schrantz, Ward. *Guarding the Border: the Military Memoirs of Ward Schrantz, 1912-1917*. Edited by Jeff Patrick. College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2009.

The diary of Schrantz, a soldier stationed on the US-Mexico border during the first years of the border's militarization at the time of the Mexican revolution and World War I. He provides descriptions of several border towns and the relations between the United States and Mexico.

Sheridan, Thomas E. *Los Tucsonenses: The Mexican Community in Tucson 1854-1941*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986.

A well written history of Tucson's Mexican-American history that provides both a social history of the evolution of Tucson's Mexican society from that of a poor, remote frontier town, to a wealthy trading and farming community, to an Anglo majority railway city, as well as a political history of the area's land and water ownership.

Woosley, Anne I. *Images of America: Early Tucson*. Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2008

A popularly produced tourist book featuring old photos of Tucson from throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It provides an interesting window into Tucson's past.