
Book Reviews

Shade of the Raintree: The Life and Death of Ross Lockridge, Jr., Author of Raintree County. By Larry Lockridge. (New York: Viking Penguin, 1994. Pp. xi, 499. Illustrations, notes, index. \$27.95.)

This book is a recipe for disaster. Who wants to read a book about the writing of a novel (*Raintree County*) written by the son of the novelist with lots of first person interjection weaving through? If that is not enough to turn away a reader, the suicide of the novelist runs through the biography and through the life of the son and biographer. And yet miraculously, Larry Lockridge's work deserves consideration as one of the very best biographies ever written of a twentieth-century Hoosier.

Not everyone likes *Raintree County*, and Larry Lockridge may claim more for the novel than would most critics. But the book was a national best seller in 1948, and it is still worthy of reading. For readers interested in Indiana, *Raintree County* stands fully in the tradition (modernized to be sure) of Indiana literature. Set in Henry County and based loosely on some of Lockridge's Hoosier forebears, the novel weaves heroic visions of nineteenth-century Indiana, vital and alive, lyrical and beautiful, with a sense of loss. There is an interesting parallel with a similar sense of time passing and of loss in John Bartlow Martin's *Indiana: An Interpretation* (1947). And for readers in the late 1940s and 1950s there were even connections to the other Hoosier best seller of 1948, Alfred C. Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. The sex and eroticism of *Raintree County*, including the naked female figure merging with the Hoosier landscape on the dust jacket, was outrageous to some at the time (a dirty book) but now seems tame and may even help to make Lockridge's Indiana as real and interesting as Booth Tarkington's.

Those with no interest in *Raintree County* will find delight and learning in Larry Lockridge's biography. His father was a Hoosier, born in Bloomington in 1914. Larry Lockridge provides a detailed account of his father's growing up in Indiana, perhaps the best account in print of daily life in the 1920s and 1930s; of Boy Scout camping, Epworth League meetings, courtship rituals, potluck dinners (to which in the midst of the Depression everyone brought beans), student life on the Bloomington campus. Ross Lockridge, Jr., left Indiana for a year in France and Italy while a student at Indiana University and later for school and work in Boston; but he always took Indiana with him and he always came back. The night he went to sit in his new Kaiser to kill himself, folks assumed he was going to listen to the basketball regionals on the car radio. His

tragic end does not negate the fact that he was a serious writer who thought seriously about his home state and its history.

An auxiliary benefit of this biography is the figure of Ross Lockridge, Sr. More Hoosier even than his son, the senior Lockridge made a large mark on the state's history. His grandson describes him as an "evangelical preacher and travelling salesman" for Indiana history (p. 48). Ross Lockridge, Sr., wrote several books, including biographies for young adults of George Rogers Clark and Abraham Lincoln, books that celebrate Indiana's past. He worked hard to establish roadside markers and to protect historic sites. But above all Ross Lockridge, Sr., was a storyteller. He led historical tours and spoke all over the state at the sites he loved (shrines to him)—New Harmony, the Mississinewa battlefield, Corydon—to hundreds and sometimes thousands of avid listeners. Around a bonfire he reenacted great speeches and told the story of that particular place in most vivid and heroic terms. Some more scholarly historians doubted the accuracy of his stories and the legitimacy of his heroic interpretations of Indians and pioneers, but the people of Indiana loved him. There are still some today who think that Ross Lockridge, Sr., was a better writer and storyteller than his nationally famous son. It is surely the case that the more famous son developed his sense of Indiana from helping his father write the books and organize the historical tours.

Larry Lockridge has written a book of immense pleasure and learning, built on a research foundation of impressive depth, written with love and intelligence, and crafted in a way to make even the reader not interested in *Raintree County* find *Shade of the Raintree* a page turner.

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The Hudnut Years in Indianapolis, 1976–1991. By William H. Hudnut III with contributions by Mark S. Rosentraub and others. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. Pp. xxxiv, 296. Illustrations, tables, figures, notes. \$24.95.)

When politicians, and Bill Hudnut is still a politician, write a book, there is a tendency to expect a self-serving tome highlighting the candidate's successes and minimizing failures. Hudnut's book alters that standard format. *The Hudnut Years* is divided into three sections. The first is written by Hudnut and chronicles philosophies, decisions, and programs promoted during the mayor's four-term reign. In the second section eight academic critics evaluate the mayor from a more objective position. Citizen critics comprise the third section, and they mirror the academics in offering comments about the mayor from their perspective. To his credit Hud-