

from written, oftentimes scrawled, words and figures. Professor Baxter has shown that such a task can be done, not merely accurately, but with an imaginative accuracy, and in his hand the kaleidoscope of facts presents a vital picture.

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A Book Concerning a Country Store

A short volume has recently been published by the Texas State Historical Association on the history of a country store which is unique in style and content and unusual in its subject. The book is *Charles Schreiner, General Merchandise*, by J. Evetts Haley. Written largely from the records of the Charles Schreiner Company, of Kerrville, Texas, and the memories of old-timers of the community, the volume tells a story of business which began in the hill country of Texas on December 24, 1869, a story of success which is still continuing.

The second chapter of the book, Customers' Accounts, describes the store, inside and out, and tells of the business it did in terms of the goods sold and other functions performed, as found in store records. The fourth chapter, The Schreiners as Storekeepers, treats of the men and of their policies and management methods. To a subject for which we have far too little specific information, the general country store, the volume makes a real contribution, though a fuller and broader treatment is much to be desired.

Charles Schreiner, General Merchandise, is written in a striking style. It has a quality of verisimilitude which is more characteristic of fiction than of historical writing. The emphasis of the book is, first of all, on men — on character, personality, and motive — and it treats of them in a very individual and subjective way. The atmosphere of reality is enhanced by conversation and by pictures of men and places scattered throughout the volume. Such a style, while effective, must be used with care. There is a danger that it may result in fiction supplied by the imagination of the writer rather than in an effective statement of facts drawn from actual historical records. To be sure, the historian can draw on his own informed imagination, but he must guard against the pitfalls of fictionalized history by disciplining his imagination, by carefully documenting his facts, and by making clear at all times what he is

doing when he is writing into the story his own thoughts using extraneous materials. This volume gives the impression that it is based on a substantial research in historical records — written and remembered; explicit statements in the text or elsewhere would have taken away all uncertainty.

The author of *Charles Schreiner, General Merchandise*, accomplishes one thing to which the business historian could with profit pay close attention. He very skillfully integrates the business of those Texas storekeepers with the community which they serve. Here is no business operating, as it were, in a vacuum. Here, rather, is a whole nexus of relationships, centering in a general store, for the mutual service and benefit of different individuals and groups — the storekeepers, the widely scattered customers, and the community in general. For this effective picture of a business as a functional part of a society we are grateful to the author.

Concerning the Ancestry of the Dollar Sign

Among the numerous explanations offered for the origin of the American dollar sign,¹ no one seems to have raised the question of whether the dollar *sign* may have the same ancestry as the *word* "dollar." There is no doubt about the etymology of "dollar." It is derived from the German word *Thaler*, through the Dutch *daalder*. Furthermore, it is certain that *Thaler* is an abbreviation of *Joachimsthaler*.

Early in the sixteenth century the count who ruled over the Joachimsthal, a region in Bohemia containing rich silver mines, began the striking of heavy silver pieces. Because of its place of origin, the Germans soon gave the name *Joachimsthaler* to this coin. The obverse of the *Thaler* bore the Bohemian lion rampant; on the reverse there appeared St. Joachim between the letters *S* and *I*, evidently the initials of the saint's name in Latin. By the superposition of the letters *S* and *I* (or *J*), a symbol was apparently devised that was used first for the *Joachimsthaler* and later for all other *Thaler*.

The Bohemian heavy silver piece was such an acceptable innovation in coinage that it was soon imitated in Germany, in Scandinavia, and in the Low Countries. In Scandinavia the *Thaler* was called *daller*; in the Lowlands, *daalder*. The English gave the name

¹See "Note on Our Dollar Sign," BULLETIN OF THE BUSINESS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, vol. xiii, no. 4 (Oct., 1939), pp. 57-58.