

BOOK REVIEWS

Bluegrass Paradise: Royal Spring and the Birth of Georgetown, Kentucky.
By Gary A. O'Dell. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2023.
Pp. xv, 375. \$40.00 cloth)

The Bluegrass region of Kentucky has an abundance of springs that are sources for seemingly unlimited supplies of water. This geologic feature was the critical factor for early settlers of Kentucky when choosing the location of their communities. Fort Harrod (present-day Harrodsburg), McConnell's Spring (present-day Lexington), and McClelland's Station (present-day Georgetown), for example, were all originally established beside an underground spring rather than a river or a major creek.

O'Dell's interest in the water systems of the Bluegrass started as a teenager exploring creeks and streams in the Cardinal Valley area of west Lexington and developed into a career as a geographer. He teaches geography at Morehead State University, and in 2014 he was appointed Kentucky State Geographer by Governor Steve Beshear.

Of all the springs in the Bluegrass, O'Dell became fascinated with Royal Spring in Georgetown, Kentucky. This interest came from decades of research. He initially intended to write a book based on the region's karst systems, which include sinking streams, sinkholes, caves, and springs. He sought to understand the nature of the water flows in each system. Initially, his study excluded Royal Spring and Scott County. O'Dell envisioned a chapter on Royal Spring. However, as his research progressed, O'Dell's material grew to the extent that he realized that one chapter would not cover Royal Spring's significance in the story of Georgetown and the history of the Bluegrass region since the Royal Spring watershed includes Fayette County.

Georgetown has been geographically a top tier city in the Inner Bluegrass since the settlement period because of its transportation nexus with Lexington, Cincinnati, and Louisville and the plentiful supply of water. O'Dell's theme is that Royal Spring has not been shown the proper appreciation. His narrative advances from the pristine, clear water that surveyors found in 1774 to creating a water and sewage treatment system in the late 1800s to distribute clean water to the whole city to efforts to bring permanent, sustained attention to Royal Spring's importance in the lives of people in the past and today. Georgetown is the only city in the Inner Bluegrass that the spring for which it was founded is still its primary source of water. Despite Georgetown's rapid growth since 1986, when Toyota Manufacturing arrived, the spring continues to be the principal water source for the city's residential and industrial needs.

Bluegrass Paradise is a history of "human interaction" with the spring (p. xii). While the geological distinction of the spring is the principal focus of the story, O'Dell places the story within the relational context that people had with caves, springs, and other karst features. He interviewed property owners, read local histories and newspapers, and traced property titles from pioneer days to the present. O'Dell's intellectual tools are as varied as his sources, using history, economics, sociology, anthropology, cartography, and archaeology to explain Royal Spring's significance in the ecology of this fertile area of Kentucky.

Bluegrass Paradise is thoroughly researched, using a broad variety of primary and academic sources. Despite the mundaneness of the topic, the narrative does flow well. O'Dell is especially good in explaining specialized terms he uses in understandable language, integrating them into his broader narrative. *Bluegrass Paradise* is local history at its finest, and he relates his subject to broader themes of social history.

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The Fall of Kentucky's Rock: Western Kentucky Democratic Politics since the New Deal. By George G. Humphreys. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2022. Pp. xiii, 352. \$45.00 cloth)

Beginning in the late twentieth century, historians, including those whose interest was politics, turned their attention toward broader issues such as the politics of class, race, and gender. Current concerns centered on LGBTQ+ rights, “critical race theory” and “proper library resources” reflect this trend in modern political historical scholarship. Indeed, today education itself is as much, if not more so, a political issue than an academic one. Consequently, however, politicians themselves have receded from the primary place in the narrative. George Humphreys’ *The Fall of Kentucky's Rock: Western Kentucky Democratic Politics since the New Deal* reverses this trend and in his narrative the politician regains center stage. Focusing on western Kentucky Democrats—the “rock” upon which the state party built its successes throughout the mid-to-late twentieth century—Humphreys seeks to trace the “erosion” of this Democratic stronghold into the bastion of conservatism that it is today. Further, given the attention that the national media paid to eastern Kentucky, what many commentators labeled “Trump Country,” in the wake of the 2016 presidential election, Humphrey’s insistence that historians pay attention to western Kentucky is most welcome.

Governors from Ruby Laffoon of Madisonville, Edward Breathitt of Hopkinsville, McCracken County’s Julian Carroll, and Steve Beshear from Dawson Springs, naturally feature prominently. Still others, such as A. B. “Happy” Chandler—originally from Corydon but