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The Mentelles: Mary Todd Lincoln, Henry Clay, and the Immigrant Family Who Educated Antebellum Kentucky

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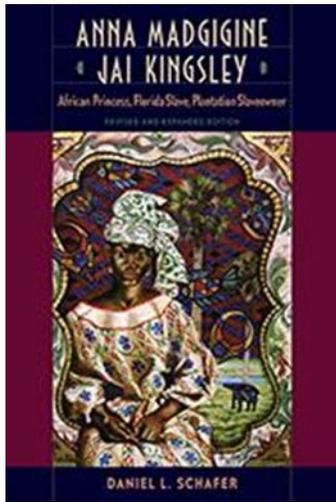
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Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation Slave-owner. Daniel L. Schafer. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2018. ISBN 978-0-8130-5653-1. 240 p. \$19.95.



As those who have submitted reviews to the University of Florida Press said, “A fascinating look at an extraordinary woman and the complexities of slavery beyond the common image of slavery in the South” (Book List), “An excellent biography....The book is also a chronicle of the transatlantic slave trade and its impact in both Africa and the New World, a history of slavery in Florida, a story of free blacks and a free black community and one part of the story of southern race relations prior to the Civil War”(Florida Historical Quarterly).

My reaction and reflection upon Dr. Schafer’s book centers upon his fascinating description of the slave traders between African and Caribbean countries and the provinces and shores of the American south (particularly the plantation owners who needed and bought and sold slaves to maintain strong and capable workforces). Vivid descriptions of how human beings were bought and sold, beaten and killed, drowned and taken miles from their homes in the holds of gruesome traders’ ships were recounted by Dr. Schafer.

In the book’s centerpiece is an amazing Cinderella story of a thirteen year old girl, Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley. Anna survived a trip by boat from Senegal to the Florida shore, became the wife to slave owner/trader, Zephaniah Kingsley Jr, who bought her in Senegal, who fathered her children and gave her land and eventually set her above all his slaves to be their protector and manager.

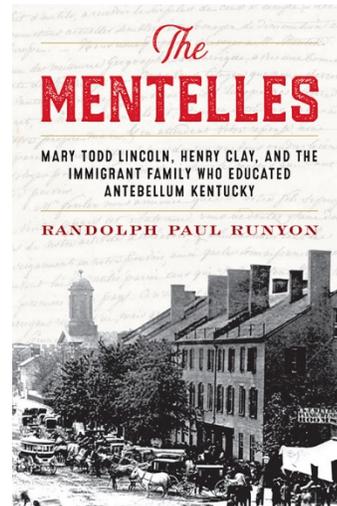
An excellent piece of research which Dr. Schafer claims covers great portions of his life’s work. It is truly a contribution that Florida can be delighted to add to its archives of women in Florida history.

The book has a rich set of Notes, a Bibliography of resources, and a good number of Illustrations to highlight

the historical sites and people of the times. Recommended for women’s studies scholars, academic libraries, and public libraries.

Carol Walker Jordan, Ph.D., MLIS
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The Mentelles: Mary Todd Lincoln, Henry Clay, and the Immigrant Family Who Educated Antebellum Kentucky. Randolph Paul Runyon. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2018. ISBN 978-0-8131-7538-6 (cloth); 978-0-8131-7540-9 (epub); 978-0-8131-7539-3 (web pdf). 280 p. All eds. \$40.00.



Many thanks to Randolph Paul Runyon for his vivid and engaging research on the European family history and American experiences of the Mentelles! He gives us a poignant insight when he begins the Prologue (p. 224), “the French “emigrate reluctantly, and expatriate themselves less easily, probably, than any other Europeans. Following the stories of Charlotte and Waldemar Mentelles’ lives from France to the United States, one can see that they came with little riches (basically their fine educations) but with no financial means to jump into American society and rise. It was said that if they had been afforded riches, they might well have returned to France.

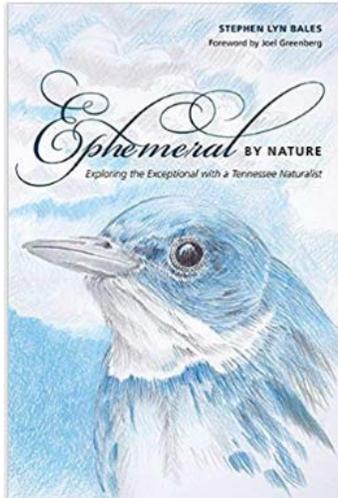
Neither of the Mentelles was trained in a specific trade or profession but relied upon their clever and steadfast determination to engage society and citizens whom they met and befriended to establish themselves and make a living. From New York to Ohio to Kentucky the Mentelles found ways to make friends, and finally establish themselves as active members of society in antebellum Kentucky. Through their talents in art, music, and social graces they survived the challenges of a Kentucky society that valued Christianity, traditional mores, and historically social conservative precedents.

The found correspondence revealed the Mentelles family life in France and their life in Kentucky is rich with emotion and purpose. Runyon helps us to see how a family learned to survive in a culture so different from their own. From the founding of a school to becoming valued citizens in Lexington, Kentucky, the Mentelles rose to being highly valued.

Highly recommended.

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Ephemeral by Nature: Exploring the Exceptional with a Tennessee Naturalist. Stephen Lyn Bales. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2017. ISBN 978-1-6219-0354-3 (pbk). 219 p. \$24.95.



Naturalist, artist and photographer, Stephen Lyn Bales, takes us on an exploratory ramble in this collection of essays highlighting 12 unique outdoor wonders. A senior naturalist at the Ijams Nature Center, in Knoxville, Tennessee, Bales draws on his field and research experience to relate the behavior and oddities of an array of plants, insects, fish, mammals and birds. Injecting a popular generality to his subjects, his use of anecdotes, timely quotes, and allusions to current events whets the appetite of readers to explore further.

Author of two previous natural histories - *Ghost Birds: Jim Tanner and the Quest for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, 1935-1941* and *Natural Histories: Stories from the Tennessee Valley* - Bales focuses on natural phenomenon in East Tennessee. Using an informal, conversational writing style leavened with humor, he profiles these natural marvels and illustrates their beauty with pen and ink drawings.

Each essay probes the significance and peculiarities of his subjects, including plants such as the elusive wildflower, jack-in-the-pulpit, and the evanescent ghost plant, colloquially known as corpse or ice plant. The insects - the southern pine beetle and the monarch butterfly - are respectively acknowledged for their voraciousness and beauty. Lessons learned about the decimation of pine forests leading to land renewal and the decline of a butterfly species due to a common pesticide inform our understanding of a complex ecosystem.

Two aquatic creatures, the freshwater jellyfish and the lake sturgeon, are spotlighted; the first, for its virtual transparency, except when it “blooms” en masse and the other, imperiled, but reintroduced into the Tennessee River Basin thanks to the efforts of aquatic conservationists in the state. Serious birders, as well as amateur bird-watchers, will appreciate the enlightening essays on the short-eared owl, the cerulean warbler, the ruby-throated hummingbird, and the whooping crane.

In an intriguing essay on the Appalachian panda, Bales writes that there are no pandas currently living in the wild in the U.S., but a tooth discovered at the Gray Fossil Site in East Tennessee, dating from the late Miocene period, links it to the smaller red pandas of Asia. Though Bristol’s Appalachian Panda was larger with a broader diet, visitors to the Knoxville Zoo will note it’s lineage in the Red Panda Village, where they are conducting a successful breeding program for this near extinct species.

The other mammal profiled is the coy-wolf-dog, representing the emergence of a hybrid canid, the outcome of three separate species: western coyotes, eastern wolves and dogs. Bales’ description of how this transpired is writing about evolutionary history in the making and is absolutely riveting.

Observing that life itself is ephemeral, and as the dramatist, Eugene Ionesco, wrote, “only the ephemeral is of lasting value,” Bales encourages us to discover and appreciate the fleeting natural wonders all around us. His enthusiasm for his subjects and free-ranging forays into related topics such as climate change and preservation of species, make this a book to sample and dip into at leisure.

Recommended for both public and academic libraries.

Melanie J. Dunn
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