

Little Big Girl

Book Review by Xiomara Antonia Roma

Title: *Scouting for the Texians: Manuela Ballardo's Recollections of her Exploits and Adventures*

Author: M W Ashe

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Like Thomas Berger's beloved character Jack Crabb (AKA *Little Big Man*), Manuela Ballardo is equally at home in two worlds: that of her father's people, the Lipan Apaches, and that of her mother's Tejano relatives. During the summer of 1830, fifteen-year-old Manuela is kidnapped by marauding Karankawas and subsequently rescued by a posse that includes James Bowie and Empresario Martín De León. Wounded, Manuela recuperates at the De Leóns' Rancho Chiltipiquin and there becomes fast friends with don Martín's daughter Agustina, through whom she meets Plácido Benavides, José Carbajal, and Úrsula de Veramendi. Eventually, Manuela also gets to know Juan Seguín, Stephen F Austin, William Barret Travis, John Coffee Hays, Jesse Chisholm, and many others whose names today are steeped in glory.

Dressed as a boy and calling herself *Charley Kóshkeya*, Manuela participates in the San Sabá Indian Fight, the Battle of Nacogdoches, the Siege of Béxar, the Runaway Scrape, and the Battle of San Jacinto. Nor is the reader's credulity ever taxed as Manuela scouts first for the Texian Army and later, during the Comanche War, for the Texas Rangers. This author has an amazing way of making it seem not the least improbable that a young girl of mixed race might actually have experienced so many remarkable adventures and been intimately acquainted with so many heroic figures.

Incidentally, as I was reading this novel, I double-checked the historical facts as presented in this story, and I was never once disappointed to discover that liberties had been taken. To my thinking, historical fiction should always be true to established historical facts. This book certainly seems to comply with that requirement. I cannot recall when I have enjoyed a book more. I give it my highest recommendation.

ROMA LOCUTA EST.