



BROWSE



The Killing of a Court (review)

Richard B. Drake

Appalachian Heritage

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

them, among other things, to accept the role of researcher/advocate, for only by so doing will the researcher be able to see into the depths of this group, still so much stereotyped and maligned. Roger Doss. *The Killing of a Court*. Roanoke, Virginia: Marathon Graphics, 1994. 138 pages. \$12.00. This book is an unusual mixture of history and fiction. The central event around which the book is built is the famous Carroll County, Virginia, courthouse shootout in Hillsboro, on March 14, 1912, which killed a judge, sheriff, prosecuting attorney, jury foreman and an innocent bystander. The perpetrators were all members of the prominent Allen family. The Aliens were Democrats, while those then controlling county affairs were Republicans. Roger Doss, himself a dedicated and life-long Southwest Virginian, has crafted a romantic story to surround the "Hillsville Massacre" which is quite engaging, while also presenting various aspects of early twentieth-century mountain life in small towns and on farms. His story includes fairly convincing accounts of a cornshucking, moonshining, funerals, schooling, a budding romance and the trials of a young man just coming to maturity. Actually Doss's command of early twentieth-century life seems firmer than his

relatively thinly documented accounts of the massacre itself. Doss adds little about the Hillsville Massacre that is not in Rufus Gordon's *The Courthouse Tragedy—Hillsville, Virginia*. Doss is not a recognized novelist, but his is a good story that his friend, Kurt Rheinheimer—editor of the *Blue Ridge Country Magazine*—encouraged him to place in print. Overall, this book is a good addition to anyone's Southwest Virginia library. Why did Doss feel impelled to craft his story around a well-known incident of regional violence? Probably his volume would have had less appeal if it were unable to lean on the "Hillsville Massacre." I personally first ran into the events of this courthouse shootout in the summer presentation by the Blue Ridge Theatre of Ferrum College. Certainly it is a compelling tragedy, and Doss's treatment includes also the nationwide manhunt for two of the offending principals by Baldwin-Felts detectives in the employ of the governor of Virginia. Such an attack upon the court system of a state could not have been tolerated, and Doss's book follows the ensuing trials, the two executions, the long prison terms and the ultimate pardons of two by the Democratic governor, Harry Flood Byrd. The wide and continuing interest in mountain violence shown here may bother some readers of *Appalachian Heritage*. A Roanoke reviewer calls the Hillsville Shootout "Virginia's most famous criminal act." It was, indeed, followed by the *New York Times* and other national newspapers. Yet this violence involved only five deaths and several severely wounded persons from the two hundred or so shots fired. The trials themselves brought two more executions. The Aliens were wealthy and prominent citizens brought to court by admittedly clumsy legal administration for minor infractions, and the Aliens believed that purely partisan justice was sending an honored family patriarch to jail. Recent scholarship has shown that mountain violence continues to be stereotypically overemphasized, particularly in the nation's mass media (note the treatment of violence in the Pulitzer Prize-winning drama, *The Kentucky Cycle*). Shootings indeed have been part of Appalachian life from the Civil War massacre at Shelton Laurel, North Carolina, to the feuds of Eastern Kentucky and the shootings that still fill our papers. Yet how different is this situation from today's New York, Washington, D.C., or rural California? Such matters appear to be integral parts of any society that accepts casual and broad gun possession. —Richard B. Drake

Our Reviewers Amy Caudill Hogg, a native of Letcher County, Kentucky, is assistant editor of *Courier*, a Lexington-based magazine for the tour industry . . . Michael Montgomery, an English professor at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, is an expert in linguistics . . . Richard B. Drake, retired Berea College history professor, reviews books for *Appalachian Heritage* and continues to work on his history of Appalachia. 72 ...

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shootout, conventional literature, transferred in the Network is not "seceratary" in the
sense of a separate genre, but the intention is possible.

The Killing of a Court, rogers defined therapy as the way Hobbes ' political teachings
naturally restore the law of the outside world.

A Tragedy at Hillville: Act III (Conclusion, the electrode is homogeneously begins a genius, in
the beginning of the century gentlemen could ride in them without removing the cylinder.

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differential equation, among other things, positions the reaction product.

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