I wasn't quite sure what to expect from the second volume of a local history series, but *Crossroads of the New South* turned out to be far more interesting than its narrow geographical focus might suggest. Following *Land Between the Rivers*, Hart Mizell's second installment picks up in the aftermath of Reconstruction and carries the story into the political upheavals of the 1940s. Mizell has clearly spent an extraordinary amount of time digging through ground-level historical sources, and that work shows on nearly every page. I especially enjoyed the way he traces Telfair County's transformation from a place on the edges of Georgia's map into one increasingly connected by the transportation and political machinery of the state. There is something fascinating about seeing small institutions and towns take shape through the mundane, but consequential, decisions and conflicts of people who have largely disappeared from memory (if they ever had a presence beyond Telfair's county lines in the first place).

What interested me most, though, was Mizell's treatment of Eugene Talmadge. Rather than simply retelling the same old story of Georgia's controversial governor, he makes a compelling case that Talmadge's political success owed much to a network of influential Telfair figures who preceded him. His description of three Progressive Era figures—Tom Eason, Max McRae, and Eschol Graham—as a joint political force is particularly revealing. I'm not entirely convinced that every connection Mizell draws proves the existence of the organized political machine he describes, but I appreciated his argument and his willingness to advance his interpretation of events. The later chapters of the book could've easily devolved into boosterism for the rise of a local folk hero, but his choices avoid that trap. By the end, I found myself reconsidering how much political power in Georgia depends on relationships formed in small county circles before it ever makes it to Atlanta.

My main criticism is that Mizell sometimes gets lost in his own research. There are stretches where the sheer number of local details becomes overwhelming, and I occasionally wished he would move the story along. At the same time, I get it. The breadth of his research is evident, and I won't fault him for including the mountains of specifics that he has. I imagine those details are precisely what will make the book valuable to local historians and future researchers.

This may be one of the most unusual local histories I've encountered. Most county histories are serviceable and, for the most part, self-congratulatory in how they promote the past, but Mizell makes a serious effort to give Telfair's history regional and national context. I would hesitate to call it unmatched, but I suspect there are few county histories in Georgia, or elsewhere, that approach the level of detail and ambition that Mizell has put into print with *Crossroads*. I won't fault him for the excesses of it.

I appreciated that Mizell doesn't romanticize the New South era, particularly regarding segregation, racial violence, and the corruptible aspects of political power. *Crossroads of the New South* isn't always an easy read, but I found it consistently informative and often genuinely fascinating. What stayed with me most was the premise that small towns, small people, and small events can have enormous influence on decisions far beyond their borders. The distance between a small-town courthouse and the governor's office is sometimes much shorter than we imagine. *Crossroads* makes that point convincingly, and it left me thinking differently about how the most colorful era of Georgia's political history was made.

—James Whitley

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