

## Joe Bertram Frantz (1917-1993)



Seventeenth President of the Western History Association (1978-1979), Joe Bertram Frantz was a historian of both Texas and the American West. Born on January 16, 1917, Frantz grew up in Weatherford, Texas. He received both his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Texas before enlisting in the United States Navy in 1943. After World War II, he returned to the University of Texas for additional graduate studies, receiving his Ph.D. in 1948. Walter Prescott Webb directed Frantz's UT dissertation on dairyman Gail Borden, a work subsequently published by University of Oklahoma Press in 1951. The Texas Institute of Letters awarded the book, *Gail Borden: Dairyman to a Nation*, its annual prize.

Frantz was the best-known graduate student and protégé of Webb and the two enjoyed a long friendship, one akin to that of father and son. In 1949, Webb helped secure Frantz an assistant professor position at the University of Texas. In 1953, Frantz became an associate professor in UT's history department and full professor in 1959. He served as department chair for six years, from 1959 to 1965.

From 1966 to 1977, Frantz was both director of the Texas State Historical Association and editor of its journal, the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*. In addition, from 1967 to 1974, he oversaw the Lyndon B. Johnson Oral History Project, an endeavor that eventually yielded 1,000 interviews. In 1977, the University of Texas honored him as the first Walter Prescott Webb Chair of History and Letters, a position he held until 1980. In 1986, Frantz retired from the University of Texas as professor emeritus.

While at UT, Frantz wrote several works that earned him recognition as a western historian. In 1955, he co-authored *The American Cowboy: The Myth & The Reality* with Julian Ernest Choate, Jr. He followed this in 1976 with *Aspects of the American West*, in which he described the West as a "child of federal subsidy," a theme amplified a decade later by New West historians. Frantz also produced numerous books on Texas, including *Lure of the Land: Texas County Maps and the History of Settlement*, co-authored with Mike Cox in 1988, which won awards from the Texas Historical Commission and Sons of the Republic of Texas. Interestingly, in 1977, the year prior to Frantz's term at the Western History Association, he served as president of the Southern Historical Association, emblematic perhaps, of his many years as a historian of Texas, a state both western and southern in nature. Frantz died on November 13, 1993, in Houston, Texas.

### Sources:

David G. McComb, *Travels with Joe: The Life Story of a Historian from Texas, 1917-1993* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2001); Joe B. Frantz, *Aspects of the American West: Three Essays* by Joe B. Frantz (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1976).

### Authored by:

Glen Sample Ely, [www.texashistory.com](http://www.texashistory.com)