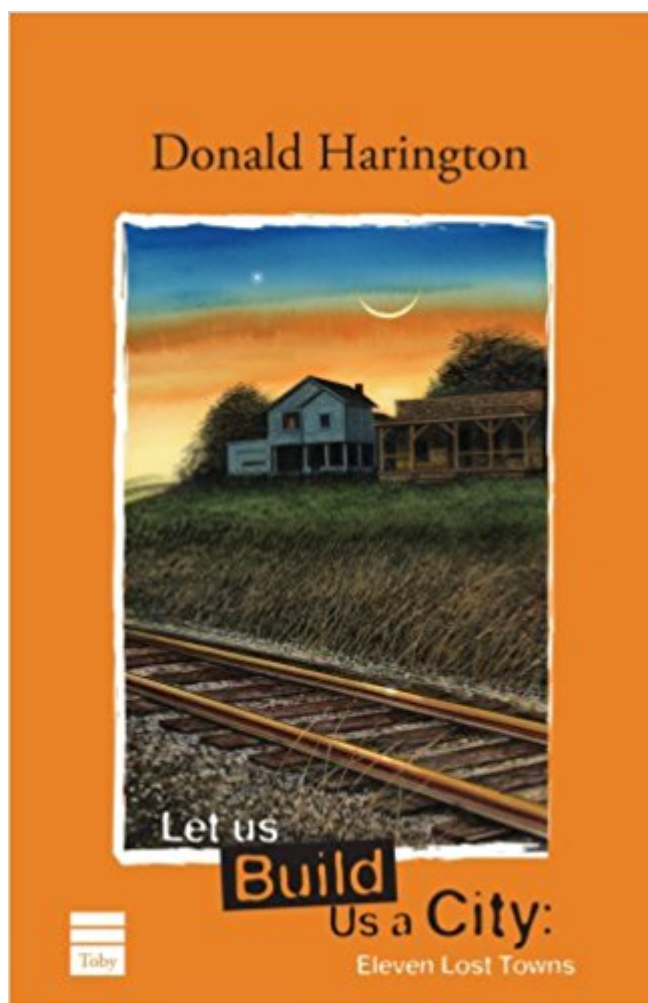


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Let Us Build Us A City: Eleven Lost Towns



Synopsis

This work brilliantly fuses travel narrative with history and cultural studies—yet reads like a novel. It's also a love story that is in no way fictional. A fan letter to the author from a woman named Kim starts a correspondence which details research she's conducting in one-horse towns throughout Arkansas. In the years of rural decline many of these towns dwindled to church, post office, general store, gas station, and a few rundown houses—but every house has a porch, every porch a rocker, and every rocker an old man or woman with a story. Kim and Don agree to collaborate on a book—this one—creating a unique and enchanting work about towns that will never again be their old selves and towns that never fulfilled the brave dreams of their founders. And at the end of the adventure the author and Kim meet, having learned something of expectation and hope—and love. With photos and maps. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Let Us Build Us a City is a group portrait of 11 "lost towns" in Donald Harington's native Arkansas. Yet this is no mere backwoods travelogue. His book, the author tells us, is "the story of communities that aspired to dignity and achieved serenity." These are towns, in other words, whose ambitious founders never quite managed to merge imagination with reality. "How does a once-flourishing town aspiring to call itself 'City' endure the long days of its decline?" asks Harington. The answer, in most cases, is quite well--though not perhaps in the way its inhabitants intended. One need not be familiar with Arkansas to appreciate this tour of lonely highways; there are lost towns everywhere.

But seldom are they explored with such joy and wonder as in this gem of a book. For all its brilliance, *Let Us Build Us a City* is nearly impossible to classify. It fuses the travel narrative with history and cultural studies--yet it reads like a novel. It's also a love story that is in no way fictional. Harington begins with a letter from a woman named Kim, who writes to praise his earlier book, *Some Other Place, the Right Place*. (Since the latter work is itself about a young couple's exploration of ghost towns and their subsequent romance, things immediately get off to a metafictional start.) Kim's letter leads to regular correspondence, in which she details the research she's conducting in one-horse towns throughout Arkansas. The author encourages her, she inspires him, and they agree to collaborate on a book--this one. By the time they meet, they too have learned something of expectation and hope. (Yes, they do get married, although you'll have to read the acknowledgments for details of the ceremony.) Ultimately, Harington's book is a search for the spirit of each individual place--which is to say, the people. These lost towns are populated by dreamers, outcasts, prevaricators, drunks, madmen, and hermits. There are tales of floods, fires, gold rushes, gunshots, feuds, booms and (mostly) busts, along with other tidbits so strange they could only be true. By themselves, these would be deeply entertaining yarns. In Harington's hands, however, they amount to eloquent requiems for all his stunted cities. And perhaps these Arkansans traded in their dashed dreams for something better. After all, serenity is an admirable quality in a town, even if it happens to be an accidental one. --Shawn Carkonen --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Writer Harington enlisted the aid of a high school teacher, a fan of his, to tape record her way around these small Arkansas towns whose common theme is simply that their current situations do not meet former expectations. The natives, including many mayors and law enforcement officials, relate the histories and local lore about the founders, settlers, and Indians of the past and the peculiar and not so peculiar characters of today. Murders, moonshining, race relations, entrepreneurial successes and failures, and Civil War stories loom large. Some of the individual stories and several brief asides (bluegrass music, cyclones, leaving home, etc.) are riveting, but generally the interest is regional. Also, Harington too frequently repeats verbatim his partner's questions, a boring technique. Photographs and maps not seen. Roger W. Fromm, Bloomsburg Univ. of Pennsylvania Lib. Copyright 1986 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Wrote a separate review of Volume 3 of *The Nearly Complete Works of Donald Harington*, about

Harington in general. Won't repeat it here. This is a wondrous book, which, having read the Kindle version, I purchased in hard-cover, both because I liked it so much that I wanted to physically own it, and because it is filled with photographs which one periodically wants to refer back to while reading the text, and which is nearly impossible to do in digital format. The book is about places in America where someone had a dream to build a city--based on the gold rush, or one or another fantasy--and called it thus: ***** City. But the City never happened; there was no gold, no secret hot spring with healing powers, and so on. The book meanders through the Ozarks, as do all of Harington's books, meeting up with, and interviewing, the characters who remained behind. Reading it, I kept wondering whether it was fiction or not. It appears to be factual, and indeed the photos make it pretty clear that the places are real, but it has the quality of a novel. In the end, I think I would call it a non-fiction novel, though I'm not altogether clear as to why. It's part history, part autobiography (although that's not apparent until the Acknowledgments, which are an integral part of the book), part love story, and I found it altogether enchanting. Some folks hated it. So it goes.

I was always confounded by my parents love for the Ozarks. When they retired and built their dream home in Bull Shoals, Arkansas, it seemed the most unlikely place to live out the end of their lives. It was impossible to get to without a 3 leg journey by commercial airline, puddle jumper and car. I was only able to visit them about 4 times in their 15 years there. This novel explores the same territory through the eyes of two history lovers, and reveals the reasons why my parents loved the area so much they were both willing to die there. The writing is as unique and beautiful as the folk-lore found in the bluffs and valleys around the White and Arkansas Rivers.

The writing itself is excellent. The book isn't sure what kind of book it wants to be, and takes too long to figure it out. I got this as an e-book. It includes photos, which were not clear on the Kindle, and that was disappointing as the pictures were referenced in the story. I was glad to get to the end.

I loved reading about these lost towns of Arkansas. They're the story of little depopulated, abandoned towns all over the country. The author tells the stories of the ambitious characters who built the towns and of their hopes, the boomdays and the slow abandonment as the movers and shakers continued to move west, leaving decaying buildings and a handful of old timers who remained and remembered the glory days of their youth. This book is so good, you can almost hear the sounds of hatchets felling timber and boats lumbering up and down the rivers.

Harrington does his research and creates an extremely interesting look back at some Arkansas cities. Many no longer exist and would be lost in time without books such as this. The author makes reading enjoyable with his sometimes humorous style and presentation. I can recommend the book to anyone with a desire for looking back into early Arkansas times.

Must read for superb narrative and descriptive settings and hitting the nail on the head for the way Arkansas folk live. You will be pleased to know how many books are available because you will be addicted once you start the journey back in time and place to Stay More, Arkansas.

Very redundant.

Ah, this book was a delight. A couple of relatives of mine are in the 'Cherokee City' section. They are no longer with us, so it was good to see their stories in print. I've read this book twice. During my second pass through it, I actually re-created the trip around Arkansas, and was able to find most of the buildings that were pictured in the book. They have aged a lot in the last 20+ years, as have we all. Please, reader, pick this book up and read it. You will not regret it.

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