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Clarion Review

General

Reno's Funmakers
George Moon
Trafford Publishing
978-1-4269-6566-1
Three Stars (out of Five)

Reno's Funmakers, a "biographical novel" by George Moon, gives praise to his family and especially to his grandfather. In his first novel, Mr. Moon tells a fictional version of his family's experience during the Great Depression traveling throughout the rural southern United States in an entertainment troupe known as "Reno's Funmakers." The traveling tent show featured magic, singing, dancing, and short plays usually ending with a moral lesson. Moon's great-grandfather was a notable magician before World War I who performed in traveling shows under the stage name Reno the Great. His grandfather, Ed Reno, Jr., began his career as a catcher for an aerial act with the Hagenbeck and Wallace circus and later went on to run Reno's Funmakers.

The novel also tells readers about a slave family escaping the South on the Underground Railroad in mid-nineteenth-century America. That portion of the novel is, in places, written with greater passion and interest than the main plot and adds an intense dramatic backdrop to an otherwise placid tale.

Moon arranges his novel chronologically. Interspersed with the story are short descriptions of major events of the year in which the action is taking place. These background pieces serve much like the black-and-white newsreels that were shown in movie theatres during the 1930s and 1940s before the featured attraction and give depth to the novel.

However, the author mentions in the Introduction that his grandfather "took his big top theater along the Circuit Chautauqua and the rural Redpath route." After that reference, there is only a brief mention of the Chautauqua lyceums and the development of the Redpath Agency that organized and booked the shows throughout the eastern, midwestern, and southern states starting well before World War I. There is no reference to famous people like Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Steffens, and William Jennings Bryan who had significant experiences on the Chautauqua circuit. Interweaving details of the history of the Chautauqua lyceums with the

travels of Reno's Funmakers would have enriched the story.

Much of the Reno family history, including documents and photographs, were lost in a flood in Kankakee, Illinois, in 1957. The flood was a tragedy for the family as well as for the full story of Reno's Funmakers; those washed-away photographs and other documents would have made for a more vibrant and compelling history.

John Michael Senger