

time. As America became more urban and more science-minded, so did its indoor plumbing technology.

With her keen historical insights, Ogle has given historians of technology and urban historians a valuable resource. Clearly, her work reflects the maturing of technological history as it goes far beyond a hardware history of technology. Additional statistical data on deaths due to unscientific sanitation along with short-term and long-term costs of a high-flow water sanitation system would have enhanced her analysis. But by linking this rather mundane subject matter to the larger context of American cultural and social history, Ogle has given us a worthy case study emphasizing many factors that shaped American technological development.

Holding the Line: The Telephone in Old Order Mennonite and Amish Life, by Diane Zimmerman Umble. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. xix, 192 pp. Illustrations, graphs, tables, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY ROY ALDEN ATWOOD, UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO

The power of technology to improve the human condition and to save society from its ills has been a cardinal creed of progressivism. Nowhere has this creed been more clearly embodied than in the electric mediator of the human voice, the telephone. From the Bell Company's earliest national advertisement campaigns to the testimonials of those toeing the party line of the first rural telephone co-operatives, the phone was almost universally touted as an unalloyed instrument of social and economic redemption. Over the years, the telephone has been hailed as a technological messiah, complete with religious rhetoric and evangelical zeal, by almost all except, most notably, the Amish and Mennonite communities.

The uneasy intersection of the culture of the telephone with traditional Amish perspectives and practices is the story recounted in *Holding the Line*. Diane Zimmerman Umble provides an engaging examination of the role and meaning of the telephone among the Old Order Amish and Mennonites in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, from the turn of the century to the present day. She offers a sensitive analysis of how the coming of the telephone constituted both a promise of social and economic benefit and a direct threat to the religious community's traditions of work, worship, and fellowship.

Umble uses historical and ethnographic methods to study how Pennsylvania's Amish and Mennonite families and churches grap-

pled with telephone ownership and use. She shows, for example, how the Lancaster Amish avoided schism in 1907 by allowing telephones among the laity, but prohibiting phone ownership among the clergy. By 1909, however, they had banished phones from their homes and spawned an ongoing and occasionally bitter debate about the cultural meaning of telephone use, and the appropriate boundaries between the religious community and the world beyond.

Similar conflicts existed at about the same time among Iowa's "Plain People" near Kalona and Wellman. The first major tensions among Iowa's Amish Mennonites over the telephone began in 1906 in the Deer Creek churches. Amish members of the Green Center phone line were forced by church leaders to dissociate themselves from the non-Amish affiliated with the Wellman Mutual Telephone Exchange by becoming "donors" to the system rather than legal members of the telephone cooperative. In 1912 two Amish Mennonites were dismissed from church membership by the minister of the Lower Deer Creek congregation. Their dismissal caused such an uproar that schism resulted in the Lower Deer Creek fellowship and in the Upper Deer Creek and East Union congregations in 1914 (an uproar that still echoes occasionally among members of the Amish Mennonite fellowships to this day). Most of the members interested in maintaining their phone connections went to the West Union church, which had been the most tolerant of the Amish Mennonite congregations. By 1917, the Lower Deer Creek congregation had not only installed a phone in its building, but also held stock in the non-Amish Kalona Switchboard Company.

The author notes that in all these conflicts among the Amish over the telephone, the problems stemmed principally from recognition of the device as an electric and symbolic link to the non- and anti-Amish world beyond the borders of the community and therefore posed a direct threat to its religious identity. At first, the phone disrupted the social harmony of the Old Order communities and precipitated church and family splits. But over time, most Amish relaxed many of their prohibitions and restrictions on phone ownership, and compromised on its use. Today, they are gradually shifting their view of the telephone toward accommodation, and increasingly they see it as an important tool for maintaining community and family ties over vast distances, and for promoting business and commerce. The continued practice of banning telephones from the home, however, has sustained a degree of separation from the unbelieving world and avoided compromising its most sacred institutions and traditions. As wireless and cell technology continues to mobilize

phone technology, the boundaries separating Amish homes from the world beyond will be more difficult to find. As Umble observes, "For a minority, it [the phone] remains a symbol of dangerous compromise" (153).

Holding the Line offers an insightful blend of scholarly theory, uncompromising qualitative research methodologies, and a captivating historical narrative. The book's only notable weakness is that the author never fully explicates the biblical and theological foundations for the Amish way of life that are central to understanding their views of community, change, and technology. Nevertheless, the author is sufficiently sensitive, even sympathetic, to the Amish worldview to prevent this omission from undermining an otherwise superb work.

Holding the Line shows that the Amish struggle with the telephone and the cultural meanings it embodies was and is no mindless, Luddite, knee-jerk reaction against progressivism's technological idolatry. Rather, it was and is the soul-felt struggle of a thoughtful people to preserve its religious identity, its way of life, and its cultural values in its encounter with a communication technology that still has more potential to undermine community—Amish or otherwise—than to improve the human condition or save us from our sins.

A New Significance: Re-envisioning the History of the American West, edited by Clyde A. Milner II. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. xiii, 318 pp. Illustration, notes, index. \$49.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY CARROLL VAN WEST, MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

A New Significance is a challenging, thought-provoking volume of essays that emerged from two related sources in the early 1990s. First was a national symposium, held at Utah State University, in recognition of the centennial of Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." The second was a series of articles, based on selected symposium papers, that subsequently appeared in the *Western Historical Quarterly*. This book, however, does more than compile this earlier scholarship into a convenient volume. Authors had the opportunity to revise their lectures and their articles; other scholars provided commentaries on the lead essays; Quintard Taylor prepared a new essay on African-American history in the West; and editor Clyde A. Milner II added an introduction.

The lecturers at the symposium and the authors of the published articles aimed to do more than merely revisit the significance of

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