

*The Nation Builders: A Sesquicentennial History of the Corps of Topographical Engineers, 1838-1863*, edited by Frank N. Schubert. Fort Belvoir, VA: Office of History, United States Army Corps of Engineers, 1988. ix, 80 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography. \$2.75 paper.

REVIEWED BY JOSEPH C. PORTER, CENTER FOR WESTERN STUDIES, JOSLYN ART MUSEUM

*The Nation Builders* is a concise introduction to the significant history of the United States Army's Corps of Topographical Engineers. The corps had its roots in the revolutionary war when the army realized that it required officers trained in cartography and topography. This need increased after 1800 as the United States moved into the Great Lakes region and the Louisiana Purchase. Although Schubert does not emphasize the point, the accomplishments of William Clark, Meriwether Lewis, and Zebulon Pike should be regarded as part of the corp's tradition.

After the War of 1812 the need for such specialized engineers grew. Schubert notes the events that led to the creation of the Corps of Topographical Engineers in 1838. The "topogs" became instrumental in surveying and mapping rivers, lakes, and great expanses of land. In this brief book Schubert highlights the importance of the "topogs." It is impossible to write a full history of the Corps of Topographical Engineers in so few pages, but *The Nation Builders* should spur readers to learn more about this interesting group of nineteenth-century army officers.

*The Rural Vision: France and America in the Late Nineteenth Century*, edited by Hollister Sturges. Omaha: Joslyn Art Museum, 1987. 94 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$16.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY SARAH BURNS, INDIANA UNIVERSITY, BLOOMINGTON

*The Rural Vision* contains the proceedings of a symposium held at Omaha's Joslyn Art Museum in conjunction with the 1982 exhibition, *Jules Breton and the French Rural Tradition*. In the later nineteenth century, Breton's idealized paintings of French peasant life won him fervent acclaim and high prices on both sides of the Atlantic, but his reputation withered in the twentieth. The Joslyn show and symposium were intended to repair his tattered fame, reevaluate his work, and examine the universal appeal of his romantic, noble vision of rural life.

Three of the symposium papers deal with various issues relating to Breton's peasant paintings, while the remaining three take up the subject of rural life in nineteenth-century American art, literature, and photography. Social historian Robert J. Bezucha's "The Urban Vision of the Countryside" mercilessly exposes the prevarications in Breton's images

and demonstrates how these very falsehoods were the key to Breton's popular success. Hollister Sturges's paper on Breton is, by contrast, a largely uncritical song of praise, while Gabriel Weisberg's is a standard exercise in art-historical source hunting. On the American side, Patricia Hills's survey of American rustic genre painting, focusing on the work of Eastman Johnson and Winslow Homer, pairs naturally with Bezucha's essay in demonstrating how American farm paintings, less documentary than didactic, preached ideals of community along with entrepreneurial values to an urban audience. Susan J. Rosowski examines the impact of Jules Breton and his revered contemporary Jean-François Millet on the midwestern pastoral vision of Willa Cather, and John E. Carter discusses Solomon Butcher's photographs of Nebraska settlement in the period 1870-1910.

These symposium proceedings offer some important suggestions about how we continue to idealize farm life in America, and in so doing, they validate the claim advanced for Breton's universality. With the exception of Bezucha and Hills, the participants, consciously or not, seem to share certain assumptions about rural life, uncritically subscribing to the romantic agrarian values embodied in the work under review. Ultimately, what we learn in reading these papers is that whatever the region — the French countryside or the agricultural Midwest — artistic and literary conventions have imposed on rural life such an immense burden of grandeur and sentiment that it remains virtually impossible to see it plain.

*Field Man: The Chronicle of a Bank Farm Manager in the 1940s*, by Harold Bennett Clingerman. Foreword by H. Roger Grant. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989. xii, 183 pp. Reading list. \$19.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DONIVER A. LUND, GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE

Harold Bennett Clingerman has left an unusual and valuable account of Nebraska farms from 1941 to 1948, when he served as a "field man" for the United States National Bank of Omaha, supervising about 135 farms in central Nebraska. In an earlier and more prosperous era the bank had made conservative loans to owner-operators with good credit ratings based on 50 percent of realistic appraisals. At the time, the bank regarded such mortgages and encumbrances as "the best security in the world for the loans we made" (13). But the drought, the dust bowl, and the depressed prices of the 1930s drastically changed the picture for farmers, banks, insurance companies, and investors.

In spite of all of the difficulties of the 1930s, Nebraska owner-operators staged an impressive comeback. With the end of the drought

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