

remain merely an abstract ideal, not a measure of reality, and that the unorganized and disadvantaged would have little or no stake in political outcomes. "In their optimistic pursuit of the public interest," Pegram concludes, "progressives miscalculated the willingness of people to forfeit their personal interest for the sake of community progress, exaggerated the probity and effectiveness of government institutions, and overlooked the extent to which progressive nonpartisanship was itself an expression of a discrete agenda" (222-23).

Whether Pegram has produced an analysis with anything like universal explanatory power will, of course, require intensive studies of other states along the lines that he has prescribed for Illinois, with due allowance for the unique political culture of each entity. In neighboring Wisconsin, for example, the forces of reform were much more powerful and better organized, dominated state politics for a decade and a half, faced far less formidable opposition, and achieved far more in the direction of making state government, in conjunction with the university, the arbiter and defender of the public interest. In the longer run, however, the outcome of the Wisconsin idea was not nearly as different from that in Illinois as its exponents and celebrants like to believe. Ominously, even McCarthy was forced to acknowledge that the only effective democratic checks on administrative reform were "a fearless, honest and capable legislature" and "a half-dozen concrete vital elements—the accountant, the statistician, the actuary, the chemist, red blood and a big stick" (*The Wisconsin Idea* [1912], 193). As Pegram observes of Illinois progressives, these "did not succeed" (xi).

Gender on the Line: Women, the Telephone, and Community Life, by Lana F. Rakow. Illinois Studies in Communications. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992. xiii, 165 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY MARJORIE LEVINE, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Of the few scholarly studies that explore the intersection of gender, the telephone, and small towns, most have focused on manual switchboard operators—overwhelmingly female—and their important role in the information networks of communities. As telephone users women have traditionally been represented as gossips. In *Gender on the Line*, Lana F. Rakow undermines the notions that women's productive telephone work ended with the era of manual operators, and that women's talk on the telephone is nonproductive and

trivial. She also argues that the telephone is not a solely beneficent or neutral technology that equalizes social relations. Rather, the telephone is a "gendered technology," and its use is constrained by such factors as age, sex, mobility, and class.

Gender on the Line, a detailed ethnographic study of a small midwestern town, is an important work both methodologically and substantively for understanding the ways gender is historically constructed and negotiated in the context of community life. Rakow spent six weeks in 1985 in the town she calls Prospect conducting an ethnographic field study, which included forty-three interviews with women. She became as much a part of the community as possible, entering the "women's sphere," although her feminist identity marked her as always somewhat outside its boundaries. Rakow's theoretical framework locates the telephone as an instrument of socialization, in the way it both creates and maintains gender roles. According to Rakow, "The telephone is a site at which the meanings of gender are expressed and practiced. Use of the telephone by women is both gendered work—work delegated to women—and gender work—work that confirms the community's beliefs about what are women's natural tendencies and abilities" (33). *Gender on the Line* is an effort to demonstrate this dual function of the telephone.

The body of the book is divided into two parts. In the first section, "Prospect's Story," Rakow explores the history of Prospect and the ways changes in the community—in economic opportunity and in transportation and communications networks, for example—altered perceptions of proper spheres for men and women, thus destabilizing traditional understandings of gender relations. Rakow carefully contextualizes women's use of the telephone within the wider relationships in the community, and explores how women's telephone talk both challenges and reaffirms community assumptions about women. This analysis distinguishes between women's telephone use that is considered productive—planning community events, maintaining family relationships, care-giving, and work within the private sphere—and that which is thought unproductive "idle" talk, or gossip. Whereas women's talk both on the telephone and in public is monitored—by husbands, family, and other women—men's talk is not.

Along with women's talk, another central feature in Rakow's analysis is the issue of space: the ways space is gendered and shapes assumptions about women's proper place, the effects of constraints on female mobility, concerns about distance between family members, and notions of public and private spheres.

Although "the telephone is being used creatively by women to transcend both the barriers of space that once dissolved family ties and the distinction between family and work" (79), there are still clear community expectations as to what is appropriate talk/space for women. Rakow demonstrates, however, that "even in a rural and conservative town like Prospect" (1), these parameters are in constant contention, and the telephone serves as a primary site of this negotiation.

The second part of the book, "Women's Voices," contains transcriptions of interviews conducted with six Prospect women of various ages and socioeconomic positions. These illustrate in the women's own words the themes of Rakow's analysis of women's relationships to the telephone. The interviews personalize Rakow's analysis and ground her theory in the context of everyday life.

Gender on the Line offers important insights for historians of gender, the Midwest, and technology. Although Rakow focuses exclusively on the telephone's role in the active gendering of one community, her approach opens up possibilities for exploring and challenging the supposedly neutral roles other technologies play and have played in other small towns. This type of intensive study is certainly pertinent for students of local history interested in exploring how relationships and social practices are shaped and shift as underlying structures of community change. Although most historians do not have the luxury of conversing with their subjects, they can employ ethnographic tools which allow one to examine particular social practices as implicated in a complex web of other community structures and relationships. Rakow convincingly demonstrates the utility of such an approach to the study of gender as a social construction.

Cultural History and Material Culture: Everyday Life, Landscapes, Museums, by Thomas J. Schlereth. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992. xxx, 440 pp. Illustrations, tables, maps, index. \$19.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY WAYNE FRANKLIN, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Thomas J. Schlereth, professor of American studies at the University of Notre Dame, is widely known for his publications and addresses concerning the emergent field of "material culture." The present book, first published in 1990 in Simon J. Bronner's UMI Research Press series, *American Material Culture and Folklife*, gathers sixteen of Schlereth's (mostly) previously published pieces

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