

gests an attempt to build from the top down. Still, finally we have a start, a book on midwestern religion. If this relatively slim volume contrasts with the mountain of books on religion in the South, including an encyclopedia and a brand new book of essays, it ought to serve as a spur to more efforts. Yet somehow, the book seems less than the sum of its parts; perhaps the same could be said of the region.

Public History and the Environment, edited by Martin V. Melosi and Philip Scarpino. Public History Series. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing, 2004. xiv, 291 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$38.50 cloth.

Reviewer Tom Woods is president of Making Sense of Place, Inc., a public history consulting firm. He is the author of a book on the Grange, and his articles include "Nature within History: Using Environmental History to Interpret Historic Sites" (*History News*, 1997).

Public History and the Environment is a valuable orientation to the broad field of environmental history and its intersections with public history. Fifteen essays explore public historians' role in understanding the history of environmental policy, in ferreting out the influence of class and race in environmental policy making, in understanding changing attitudes toward landscapes, as expert witnesses in environmental litigation, as researchers untangling the history of endangered species, as advocates in grassroots environmentalism, and as specialists who help museums develop environmental history exhibits. Some essays are provocative, encouraging new perspectives or providing useful approaches to old problems.

The introduction sets the stage for the articles that follow. It defines the academic field of environmental history as a field of study that treats "the relationship between humans and their physical environment over time" (viii). Unlike environmental history, public history is not a field of study. Instead, it is a method of practicing history that combines the research, analysis, interpretation, and communication techniques common to all good history. Unlike traditional academic history, its products are generally directed to public audiences or for public impact, rather than to a small group of academic peers or to fulfill a professor's individual research interests. Good public history is history done with the public, for the public, and in public. Public historians hope to illuminate environmental history by involving people in "a conversation about the creation of place over time, the meaning of place in the present, and interaction with place in the future" (ix).

Coeditor Philip Scarpino's essay, "The Creation of Place over Time: Interpreting Environmental Themes in Exhibit Format," is one of the

most interesting essays. Using as an example his experience at DuBuque's National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, where he served as an environmental history consultant, Scarpino proposes that the analysis and interpretation of people's interaction with the environment be based on a series of simple questions when preparing museum exhibits: (1) What did people think that nature was? (2) How did they understand their relationship with nature? (3) How did they act on their definitions of nature and their understanding of their relationship with nature? (4) What was the outcome of their actions? (5) How did the unintended or unanticipated results of their actions reshape their definitions of nature and their understanding of their relationship with nature? (146-47). These questions are clearly evident in the exhibits at the Mississippi River Museum, particularly in the interactive computer exhibits.

Among the book's many informative and provocative essays, Iowans may especially appreciate the book's first essay, "Spading Common Ground: Reconciling the Built and Natural Environments," because author Rebecca Conard grounds her larger argument in examples from Iowa. Conard traces the evolution of American attitudes toward landscapes and our tendency to separate them into "natural" and "built" landscapes. The National Park Service has used this separation as an unofficial approach since its founding in 1916. As the frontier disappeared, the American public became nostalgic for wilderness, unspoiled landscapes presumably unaltered by human artifice. The National Park Service tried to fulfill this yearning by removing evidence of human activity within parks: destroying homesteaders' cabins and miners' shacks and generally erasing from the land as much of the built environment as it could. During the New Deal, national, state, and municipal park administrators used CCC workers to construct facilities that blended in with the "natural" landscape and provided greater tourist access to park resources. The ecology movement of the 1960s and 1970s gave a new twist to park management by providing a scientific justification for the removal of the built environment to allow the land to return to its "natural" state. All of these movements missed the degree to which parklands had been shaped by human use prior to and after European settlement. The very concepts of nature and wilderness are cultural concepts, not actual places. In places where the new ecologically justified separation of culture and nature has been used, human management, not a truly natural process at all, ironically imposes "ecological balance."

Conard advocates viewing landscapes as places where nature and culture have historically coexisted. If we understand and value the

ways nature and culture have interacted through history, the places where we live will become more meaningful. Conard uses two examples from Iowa to show where and how these goals can be achieved. According to Conard, Black Hawk Lake State Park, with its lakeside grounds constructed by CCC workers, is an example of how local places reflect ways that Americans have viewed and tried to conserve and manipulate landscape over time. Conard also discusses the relatively short history of northeastern Iowa's Silos and Smokestacks National Agricultural Heritage Area, an organization engaged in combining environmental and public history by attempting to preserve and interpret both the natural and cultural landscape. Conard believes that Silos and Smokestacks has great potential "for telling a history that weaves in the value laden themes of resource protection, agricultural sustainability, cultural diversity, and community identity" (17). But Conard is concerned that tension inherent in the mission of Silos and Smokestacks may lead the organization to become a "northeastern Iowa convention and visitors bureau," emphasizing the economics of "heritage tourism," rather than an organization devoted to documenting, designating, and interpreting significant historic places in northeastern Iowa. Conard does not seem to believe that these goals are necessarily mutually exclusive, but she is eager to see how Silos and Smokestacks merges the goals in future achievements.

As I was reading this book for review, I visited the engaging National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium in Dubuque and attended an informative Silos and Smokestacks National Heritage Area Conference in Waterloo. Both were richer experiences for the confluence of activities, and each activity helped me appreciate the potential for applying environmental history in a public history format in the Midwest. If all of us thought about Phil Scarpino's questions in our everyday life, each of us could become an active participant in an ongoing public history conversation about our environment—and just maybe we could each discover a deeper understanding and appreciation of the places we cherish and lead richer lives as a result.

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