

This volume is likely to appeal to readers curious about rural women's lives, as well as instructors teaching the history of women and education. The folksy informality of the letters will likely draw some readers in; others may find the tone and diction from another era difficult to penetrate at times. Enhancing readers' understanding of Corey's world is a generous selection of archival photographs, maps, and images. Finally, a valuable foreword by Paul Theobald contextualizes the letters in the history of rural education and offers well-selected reading recommendations to guide further research. While the volume stands alone, it could also be used as a revealing contrast to the historical literature on urban women teachers, calling attention to the wide range of schools and women who taught them at the turn of the twentieth century.

Proving Up: Domesticating Land in U.S. History, by Lisi Krall. Albany: SUNY Press, 2010. xx, 132 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$65.00 cloth.

Reviewer James W. Oberly is professor of history at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire. He is the author of *Sixty Million Acres: American Veterans and Public Lands before the Civil War* (1990).

Economist Lisi Krall has written a slim volume that starts with a bang – a murder, actually – and ends with a digression. In short, this is a frustrating book to read and review. In the preface, Krall tells the story of her grandfather, William Krall, who homesteaded a parcel of land in Wyoming. Krall filed his claim to the homestead in 1918 and had three years to “prove up” that claim, that is, to show improvements, such as crops planted and acreage fenced, to the local Land Office staff in order to obtain title to the homestead. To make improvements, Krall needed access to water. In that pursuit, he soon quarreled with his neighbor, Steve Lasich, over water rights. The dispute escalated in the summer of 1920, culminating when Lasich shot and killed Krall. When finally brought to trial, the defendant managed to convince a jury that the victim had it coming. The author wonders what type of land system could place her grandfather in the position where he was able to stake a claim yet unable to gain access to water and thereby improve his homestead as required by law in order to receive fee simple title. The author muses that she originally intended to write a book on this family tragedy but instead decided to write an institutional economic history of the anomalies and peculiarities of the U.S. public land system. The author pays tribute to Karl Polyani, Douglass North, and other institutional economists in trying to understand why a dysfunctional land system served William Krall and others so badly.

The book proper begins with an essay on Thomas Jefferson and the creation of what the author calls an “agrarian ethos” of the individual landowning farm proprietor. In this first chapter, the author maintains that because of Jefferson’s influence, the United States pursued a public land policy in support of sales and grants to individual landowning farmers. Chapters two through four recite, entirely from secondary sources, the history of U.S. public land policy, or, more precisely, the history of public land legislation passed by Congress. There is no treatment of how the General Land Office operated to implement, or not, congressional policy. These chapters depend largely on the work of Paul W. Gates; indeed, Krall almost never cites anything written after 1968. The dated histories she consulted are all treated in the present tense, as if Fred Shannon or Roy Robbins were alive and writing today. Krall is on surer ground when she brings in her economics expertise, notably in chapter two in discussing a subject of considerable scholarly research in Iowa history: land speculation. She writes that the speculator was a “rent-seeker,” or, as the type is known in financial markets, an arbitrager, trying to make money on inefficiencies in the market. This reader wished the author had expanded on this insight into why market inefficiencies arose and how, if at all, markets worked or did not work to correct economic rents.

A fifth chapter on an American “wilderness ethos” covers congressional legislation, notably the Wilderness Act of 1964. It is unclear why the author included this chapter. Perhaps it was to suggest that the Wyoming in which William Krall attempted to start a ranch in 1918 should never have been open to homesteading or other private ownership of the land. However, the book never does return to Wyoming. The verdict of the Wyoming jury in the 1921 murder trial of Steve Lasich was surely unjust to William Krall; I have my own Scotch verdict on Lisi Krall’s thesis that her grandfather was a victim of the dysfunctional American public land system: not proven.

Ben Shahn’s American Scene: Photographs 1938, by John Raeburn. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010. xiii, 190 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$75.00 cloth; \$30.00 paper.

Reviewer Constance B. Schulz is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of South Carolina. She has edited collections of documentary photographs from the 1930s and 1940s for South Carolina and Kansas.

The Farm Security Administration (FSA) was an agency created to deal with problems of the nation’s poorest farmers during the Great Depression, first in 1935 as the Resettlement Administration, then re-