

property ownership ensures control over and monetary rewards from possessing nature.

Steinberg's stories illustrate that our individual and societal penchant to possess property has yielded some laughable outcomes. As the author warns, however, the joke may be on all of us if we persist in believing that property ownership can unfailingly bring order to a chaotic, often uncooperative nature. Steinberg contends that "a culture so single-minded in its pursuit of property, especially private property, may sacrifice . . . its 'evolutionary flexibility' and thereby foreclose on other ways . . . of relating to the earth" (10).

Anyone who owns or has contemplated owning a piece of nature as well as historians of the Midwest (and the other places described) and of law and the environment will find that *Slide Mountain* is not only entertaining and informative but also instructive. Additionally, Steinberg's skill at showing how culture, modern technology, and law inform Americans' attitudes toward and dealings with nature in this solidly researched book makes it a fresh contribution to the expanding field of environmental history.

Getting By: Women Homeworkers and Rural Economic Development, by Christina E. Gringeri. Rural America Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994. viii, 200 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$27.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY BONNIE LINDEMANN, ST. AMBROSE UNIVERSITY

In *Getting By*, Christina Gringeri offers a picture of rural homework by assembling interviews, town council minutes, and company contracts as deliberately and skillfully as the homeworkers who are her subjects assemble kits of auto parts. She compares the results of her fieldwork in rural Iowa and Wisconsin to studies of women homeworkers in developing and developed nations and concludes that rural economic development is being subsidized by the underpaid workers it claims to benefit.

Gringeri's description of her struggle to win and keep the approval of company officials as she conducted her interviews is illuminating, as is her reconstruction of the political process that brought the company referred to as TMC to two economically depressed midwestern regions. Although the homeworkers are classified for tax purposes as independent contractors, it becomes clear to the reader as it did to the investigator that the women have neither autonomy nor control of the working situation.

Gringeri presents the story through extensive excerpts from her interviews with homeworkers, organized into common themes. To

her credit, she presents the homeworkers' often contradictory viewpoints without simplification. For example, the women often express a preference for homework because of the freedom and flexibility it offers, yet they feel pressured to work at the pace the company suggests; thus piecework has replaced virtually all of their free time.

Getting By will appeal to three different groups of readers. Those interested in women's work roles will appreciate the author's description of how the homeworkers' invisibility and isolation in a rural setting prevents community awareness of their situation. Unlike those who applaud telecommuting as a solution for working mothers, Gringeri's homemakers describe days of monotonous work without the helpful banter of coworkers and evenings alone with the children "catching up" on piecework while husbands work the night shift.

Organizational historians will appreciate Gringeri's treatment of the impact of industrial restructuring on a rural community. TMC, like many industrial organizations, reorganized its workforce to respond more easily to external uncertainties, substituting "casual" employees for those with job security and benefits. Against the backdrop of this widespread restructuring, Gringeri's suggestion that rural homeworkers band together at the community level to win benefits seems implausible. Despite this, her book is a rare and valuable treatment of the impact of "casualization" on employees.

The major contribution of the book is its application to developing strategies for rural economic development. In a powerful, but almost hidden chapter, Gringeri suggests alternatives to the rural economic development strategies that led to TMC's entry into these communities. She proposes the opening of nontraditional trades to women to provide much-needed local services, suggests homeworker cooperatives be organized to recruit and control homework jobs, and assigns responsibility for agreement-monitoring to community development groups. Her book should be a warning to community groups that contracting with outside industry may just substitute the kitchen table for the assembly line at a subminimum wage.

Invisible Networks: Exploring the History of Local Utilities and Public Works, by Ann Durkin Keating. Exploring Community History Series. Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing, 1994. xi, 168 pp. Illustrations, index. \$24.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY PATRICIA BURGESS, CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY

Ann Durkin Keating's *Invisible Networks* is not a history of public works and utilities. Rather, it is a guide for conducting such a history. It is the inaugural volume in a new series edited by David Kyvig and

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