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Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

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Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

Column Editor: Debbie Vaughn (Reference Librarian, College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

Column Editor's Note: Black History and Women's History are both celebrated in February; but I, along with many others, have always wondered why we cannot celebrate all people's history every month of the year. This month, consider a few titles which celebrate human history. The Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History lays the groundwork for learning about people's separate and combined pasts and expertly illustrates the integral roles that men and women of all ethnicities have played in creating the world as we know it. Guest reviewer Leonard J. Greenspoon examines Orthodoxy in Charleston: Brith Sholom Beth Israel & American Jewish History. Of course, many people would not have access to either of the aforementioned titles if it were not for libraries and librarians! In that spirit, guest reviewer Beth Bell offers her insight on The Branch Librarians' Handbook. Happy reading, everyone! — DV


Reviewed by Debbie Vaughn (College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

From the Reference Desk reviewer Tom Gilson has come news that he is one of 350 contributors to the five-volume set that spans the foraging era to modern times and examines people, places, inventions, and ideas from Abraham to Zoroastrianism. Senior Editor William H. McNeill has coordinated timelines, diagrams, images, excerpts of primary documents, and signed entries from 350 scholars. McNeill, who is responsible for such standards as History of Western Civilization, The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community and Plagues and Peoples, and who has edited and/or contributed to countless other works, has done an excellent job of leading his editorial team to a victorious publication.

The encyclopedia’s layout is superb. Each continuously-paginated volume begins with a broad table of contents followed by alphabetical and categorical lists of entries, all cumulative. Each volume also includes a pronunciation guide entitled “How to Spell It and How to Say It: 100 Important People, Places, and Terms in World History.” This tool lists the preferred names or words for people, places, and religious, political, and cultural terms; offers phonetic pronunciation when necessary; and gives alternative names and spellings. For example, the preferred name “Siddhartha Gautama” is partnered with the alternative name “The Buddha.” Berkshire claims that updated versions of the spelling and pronunciation guide that incorporate reader suggestions for additional people, places, and terms will be available online at www.berkshirerepub.com.

The first volume in the Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History commences with a “book-within-a-book” survey of the different eras of time (foraging, agrarian, and modern) dubbed “This Fleeting World,” which is also repeated at the conclusion of volume five. The encyclopedia entries that lie between each printing of “This Fleeting World” are nothing short of fascinating. This reference set covers people from “Lucy” to Tony Blair; places from Ancient Egypt to Utopia; and events from the fall of Ancient Greece to the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001. Research and communication methods, migration patterns, social movements, belief systems, and a wealth of other themes are explored. Each article is signed and provides readers with additional research sources. Stringing throughout the volumes—even in the explanation of “How to Spell It and How to Say It”—are notable quotations from philosophers, political leaders, historians, authors, scientists, and world travelers that pertain to the entry in which they are presented.

Close attention was paid to seemingly minute details that have a great impact on the encyclopedia’s ease of use. The first alphabetical entry for each letter is framed by a list of all entries beginning with that letter. The cumulative index in the last volume of the set includes how-to-use-this-index notes on every other page, rather than simply at the start of the index. “See also” references are offered not only at the end of appropriate entries, but also in the index. The first volume provides a list of maps included in the set and provides the “headword” (entry title) for each. All of these fine points enhance readers’ access to the information contained in the encyclopedia.

Graphics in the Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History are particularly noteworthy. Inspired by McNeill, cover artist Lisa Clark created a cave drawing-esque illustration depicting humans and our world from pre-history to the modern age. Whimsical representations of people hunting, gathering, skateboarding, and commuting to work are scattered on various pages throughout the encyclopedia set.

The Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History is, truly, a fun reference tool for students of all ages. McNeill and his editorial team, along with the gifted contributors, have created a reference set packed with information, but reading and absorbing its contents hardly seems like work. When I decided to study history in college, my mother gave me a book in the D.K. Eyewitness Guides series about medieval castles. That book made me fall in love with learning about people’s pasts and discovering the rich stories that, combined, lead us to a better understanding of our place in the world. The Berkshire Encyclopedia of World History evokes in me the same excitement and fulfillment but on a much grander scale. High School, public, and academic libraries will benefit from adding it to their collections and promoting its use at the reference desk.


Reviewed by Leonard J. Greenspoon (Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization, Creighton University) <lgm@creighton.edu>

In the fall of 1975 I was beginning my first full year as a professor of religious studies at Clemson University. My wife and I decided to visit cousins, also newly arrived South Carolinians, in Charleston, for Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. We arrived for services at Brith Sholom Beth Israel, the city’s Orthodox synagogue, without knowing any members and without tickets (often a prerequisite for synagogue attendance on the High Holidays). No sooner had we entered the lobby than we were warmly welcomed as newcomers (no strangers); by the end of the service, we had received offers for dinner and numerous expressions of concern to make sure we lacked nothing we might need.

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<http://www.against-the-grain.com>
If there is a weakness to the volume, it is that by beginning his story in 1852, Gurock passes over the first 160 years of the Jewish presence in Charleston. Fortunately, there are other books to provide this background, including James W. Hagg's This Happy Land: The Jews of Colonial and Antebellum Charleston (published in 1993); Theodore and Dale Rosengarten's A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life (2002); Robert N. Rosen's The Jewish Confederates (2002); Barnett A. Elzas' now-dated The Jews of South Carolina From the Earliest Time to the Present Day (originally published in 1905 and reprinted in 1983); Charles Reznikoff and Uriah Z. Engelmann's The Jews of Charleston: A History of an American Jewish Community (1950); Arthur V. Williams' Tales of Charleston, 1920s (1999); Louis D. Rubin, Jr.'s The Golden Weather (1961; reprinted in 1981); and My Family's People: A Family of Southern Jews (2002); and my own modest contribution, "Judaism in South Carolina" in Religion in South Carolina (1993).

Thus, Gurock's seeming omission, while primarily due to the need to focus on the congregation itself, may turn out to be a blessing in disguise, if it leads readers to explore the sources listed above. Congratulations to the College of Charleston Library for publishing Orthodoxy in Charleston and making this splendid resource available to researchers and general readers alike. May it attract a broad and enthusiastic audience.

Dr. Greenspoon is the Klutznick Chair in Jewish Civilization at Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska. Previously, he was Professor of Religious Studies at Clemson University and an active member of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina.


Reviewed by Beth Bell (Branch Manager, West Ashley Public Library, Charleston, SC)

This book is an excellent resource for a new or experienced branch manager. Using an organized layout, the book offers managers both encouragement and answers to questions about branch management.

Vickie Rivers offers a commonsense approach to management based on her years of library experience. Upon becoming a branch manager, Rivers didn't know what to expect and searched unsuccessfully for a book which outlined the duties of a branch manager. The Branch Librarians' Handbook resulted from this search.

The organization of the book is user-friendly. It begins with an explanation of the library system as a whole and the importance of having a mission statement and goals. The last chapter touches on the branch manager's career plans. The majority of the book discusses managing yourself, the stuff, and the branch. A useful appendix includes many basic ALA position statements and other policies such as the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993.

The book is well written and accomplishes the main objectives of outlining the duties of a branch manager, offering approaches that may be applied at once, and reassuring a new branch manager. It is encouraging for a new branch manager to know that it takes time to become comfortable with the new position of manager. Reading and applying suggestions from this book is a good start to becoming the best manager possible. It also will help an experienced manager become an even better manager.

Four dozen illustrations, carefully chosen and captioned, were taken in large part from the Gibert & Sullivan opera, HMS Pinafore. I believe, and the second line goes something like "skin milk masquerades as cream." Anyway, this seemed to sort of describe what we are dealing with right now? Comments are always welcome. <kstrau@comcast.net>

And, have you been to the Charleston Conference Website lately? <http://www.katina.info/conference/2004%20Presentations.htm>. A lot of the powerpoints from the 2004 conference are loaded there while we wait for the Proceedings which will be published before we know it by Greenwood Press/Libraries Unlimited! <http://www.katina.info/conference/2004%20Presentations.htm>