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From the Reference Desk-Reference Reviews

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From the Reference Desk

Reference Reviews

Column Editor: **Tom Gilson** (College of Charleston) <gilson@cofc.edu>

Recently, my editor (known hereabouts as the "Divine Miss K") approached me about devoting this space to a column that would deal strictly with reviews of reference materials. Originally, our plan called for *From the Reference Desk* to include a smattering of interviews, reviews and general tidbits of interest to reference librarians and publishers. Well, through a mixture of sensible argument and outrageous flattery, she has convinced me to focus on reviews. (Oh! She also promised to publish almost anything else I wrote, provided it met the high standards the editorial board has set for *ATG* and she really liked it.) So here we go. Full tilt reference reviewing!!

As usual, a number of multi-volume sets have gotten my attention over the last month or so. With their keen sense of the market, Gale Research has filled a niche unmet in other quarters with their *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America* (1995, 0-8103-9163-5, \$129). The great value of this two-volume set is that it puts in one place, information on almost ninety ethnic American groups, including both immigrant and Native Americans. The articles range from 5000-20,000 words in length and cover groups as diverse as the Amish, Irish Americans, Thai Americans and the Yupiat. They are clearly written and informative, discussing the history, language, family and community dynamics, economic traditions, education, religion, politics and contributions of each group. Each article ends with a listing of related media outlets, organizations and associations, museums and research centers and a bibliography of additional sources. This encyclopedia is a good place to get background information on the various groups that make up the American fabric. My main complaint about the set is that its statistical information is buried in the text of

each article. It would have been very helpful to have

an appendix of statistical tables and charts for quick reference, especially for comparison purposes. Also, the bibliographies could have been more extensive and included selected journal articles.

Once again Oxford University Press makes its presence felt in the world of scholarly reference publishing. The *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (1996, 0-19506512-3, \$575) is a five-volume set fashioned around an inclusive definition of Near Eastern archaeology. Coverage comprises archeological sites from "the eastern Mediterranean to Iran, from Anatolia to the Arabian Peninsula," as well as "Egypt, Cyprus and parts of North and East Africa." Archaeological discoveries which date from before the Bronze Age up through the Crusades are included. Over forty percent of the articles deal with specific sites while the rest of the entries cover individual countries and cultures, significant people, major archaeological institutes, specific artifacts and issues related to theory and practice. The set is illustrated in black and white with photos, drawings and maps, but it is obvious that the text is this set's major strength. The articles are signed and often followed by a strong bibliography containing references to both books and journal articles. The encyclopedia is alphabetically arranged with a solid index and useful appendices including chronologies, more maps, a synoptic outline of contents and a list of contributors with their credentials. Any academic library with an interest in archaeology, biblical studies or the history of this fascinating part of the world would want to consider investing in this set.

The *Encyclopedia of Energy, Technology and the Environment* published by John Wiley and Sons (1996, 0-471-54458-2, \$900) is a substantial contribution in an area of ever-increasing interest and concern. The stated goal of this reference work is to provide "information on the technology involved in energy production and use as well as information on how these technologies affect the environment and quality of life on this planet." It is a tall order, but this set succeeds nicely. A great deal of the emphasis is on the technical aspects of energy production and use whether it is an article on solar thermal electric power, the recovery of oil from tar sand or the efficiency of automobile engines. However, there are also articles on recycling, the ethics of sustainable resources and the health ef-

fects of air pollution. Throughout the four volumes, there are charts, diagrams, graphs and tables which lend a great deal to the text. Each article is written by an expert in the field and many have substantial bibliographies. As you would expect, much of the content is technical and requires knowledge in energy or environmental science. While a conversion table for energy units is provided, no glossary or other aids are included. The educated lay person will need to use appropriate handbooks or dictionaries to help decipher many of the technical formulas and much of the jargon. The *Encyclopedia of Energy, Technology and the Environment* is a fine science reference meant for students, faculty and professionals in the field.

For the lay reader, Consumer Reports has published the *Complete Drug Reference* (1995, 0-89043-849-8, \$39.95). Actually, the book itself was prepared by the United States Pharmacopeia, the non-profit organization that sets "the official standards of strength, quality, purity, packaging and labeling for medical products used in the United States." The *Complete Drug Reference* covers both nonprescription and prescription drugs available in the United States and Canada. Each entry provides brief descriptions, things to consider before using the drug, advice on proper use and dosing, precautions to be aware of while using the drug and the possible side effects. The writing is straightforward and not overly clinical. The arrangement is alphabetical, but an index of generic and brand names leads the reader to specific pages. This reference along with the *PDR (Physicians Desk Reference)* should get most libraries through the flu season.

Garland Publishing continues their commitment to one-volume subject encyclopedias. The *History of Astronomy: An Encyclopedia* (1997, 8-8153-0322-X, \$95) is a solid treatment of the history of astronomy, particularly from the beginning of the Scientific Revolution up through the present. The encyclopedia is alphabetically arranged but also contains a separate index. The articles include historical overviews like ones on medieval and modern cosmology, biographical sketches, articles on individual observatories, different national contributions to the field and articles on the social history of astronomy. The length of articles varies from a half page up to six or seven pages. They are clearly written, accessible to both lay person and student, and contain fairly good bibliographies for a one-volume encyclopedia. The *History of Astronomy:*

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Profiles Encouraged:

Tom Gilson

Born: Brooklyn, NY, December 21. I was just over 5 pounds, but you'd never know it now.

Educated: I got my BA in general history from St. John Fisher College, Rochester, NY. My library

degree came from SUNY Buffalo. I have a second masters in Public Administration which was a joint degree from the College of Charleston and the University of South Carolina.

Jobs: My first professional job was as a reference librarian at Greenville (SC) Public Library. Later I became Head of the Arts and AV department there and, still later, Director of Oconee County Public Library in the northern part of SC. When I moved to Charleston to get my MPA, I was lucky enough to become a reference librarian and then Head of Reference Services at the College of Charleston Libraries.

After many years (23!) as a reference librarian: I am struck by the dramatic increase in the required knowledge base to do an effective job. What we do is getting more and more complex and we are becoming more essential and valuable. But we still seem to be making the same salaries!

Family: A daughter (21) who is now in nursing school. Recently married to Carol, an accomplished artist who teaches language arts in middle school. Also a dog Sally and a cat Revis.

Hobbies: Back-packing and attempting to play the guitar. Also I get a dose of cross-country skiing every year when I visit my sister, husband and two kids in Denver, Colorado.

Pet peeve: The increasingly common notion that everything is on the Internet. People are forgetting the value of print and other electronic resources. When students say, "my professor told me to look on the Internet," that's not always the place I would start. The Internet is the "fast food" version of information retrieval.

People would be surprised to know: That I'm not as anal retentive as my staff thinks.

New Year's resolution: To exercise and eat right just like everybody. I'll have the same resolution next year.

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An *Encyclopedia* is volume one of a projected series of encyclopedias dealing with the history of science and offers a promising start.

An area of increasing interest in the field of literary criticism deals with feminist theory. The *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*, also published by Garland (1997, 0-8153-0824-8, \$75) gives students a convenient overview of this growing field of scholarship. The articles deal with important terms and concepts, individual feminist critics, and specific literary periods. Arrangement is alphabetical with an index at the end of the volume. Article content is scholarly but accessible. There are useful bibliographies with each article, and in fact many of

the articles are informed by a sense of bibliography. In many cases the authors highlight the significant literature in the field within the text of the article. In general, Garland should be complimented on the attention to bibliography in their one-volume encyclopedias. However, it would also be helpful to have a table of contents to assist readers in getting a better idea of the scope of the volume and a better developed "see also" cross referencing arrangement. The *History of Astronomy: An Encyclopedia* did not seem to have any "see also" references and the *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory* had some but they were in the index rather than conveniently placed with the articles themselves. Overall, however, both sources are worthwhile contributions which deserve consideration by reference librarians collecting in these areas.

Letters from Oklahoma from page 36

in order to perform miracles to store away against beatification in the future. But a look at the titles in their lists and I am reassured that there are publishers in business who personally care about their authors and their books. I suspect that the same applies to the next two publishers, even though Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill is a division of Workman Publishing in New York, and the Historical Publications Section of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History is part of the Department of Cultural Resources. The lists of these two houses speaks well of Workman and the Tarheel State, sometimes known as the Old North State.

The North Carolina catalog is 1/2 inch narrower than Parkway's but standing up they are head to toe the same height. It contains sections on the Civil War (the War Between the States), rosters of North Carolina troops from 1861-1865 (both of my families are represented on those rolls), Coastal North Carolina (*Triumph at Kitty Hawk: The Wright Brothers and Powered Flight* by Thomas C. Parramore), North Carolina's African American Heritage (*The Black Experience in North Carolina* by Jeffrey J. Crow), and Life and Culture in North Carolina (*A History of Sports in North Carolina* by Jim L. Sumner and *The Textile Industry in North Carolina: A History* by Brent D. Glass) to name but a few.

In addition to its regularly catalog of publications, Algonquin Books also issues a wonderful series called *The Algonkian*. If you have never seen it, write to Algonquin Books at P.O. Box 2225, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-2225. "The Algonkian is a small periodical about books, authors, and publishing, prepared from time to time for the friends of Algonquin and any others who might take joy in it. ... The Algonkian is distributed gratis to such as care to receive it by Workman Publishing, 708 Broadway, New York,

NY 10003." Thank you, Workman Publishing. More about *The Algonkian* at another time.

The Algonquin catalog is 8 1/2" x 11" and features a cover illustration by Pat Scheible — an overflowing bowl of fruit with two trumpet blowing angels above and to either side. It looks like fall to me. You might expect to find books about North Carolina or by North Carolinians in this catalog and sure enough, the first book listed is Jill McCorkle's *Carolina Moon*. "Its geographical setting is the part of eastern North Carolina I grew up in, a town that is near both the ocean and a river." This is how Jill McCorkle describes her fifth (and latest) novel. For the full story and a picture of Ms. McCorkle, see pages 17-19 in the June 1996 issue of *The Algonkian*, the one with a picture of Blind Lemon Jefferson on the cover.

Algonquin also publishes the fiction of Chapel Hill resident Lee Smith and features her *The Christmas Letters: A Novella*, also described in the Blind Lemon Jefferson issue of *The Algonkian* and there is a picture of Ms. Smith there, too. In this same issue of the Algonquin fall catalog is another Christmas book, *Let Us Now Praise Christmas Cooking: A Reminiscence and a Recipe* by Camille Glenn. The catalog entry lists a few of the recipes by name only: Oyster and Clam Chowder, Easy Bread Sticks, Colonial Gingerbread, Tangerine Sherbet and Winter Crystal Cookies, Creole Shrimp with Rice, and New Orleans Madeleines. On page 31 of the June 1996 *Algonkian* there is a full recipe from the book, for "Four Star Cornmeal Butterflake Biscuits."

Algonquin's fall 1996 list also includes *Yak Butter and Black Tea: A Journey into Forbidden China* by Wade Brackenbury, *100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names*, by Diana Wells, Illustrations by Ippy Patterson, *Good Bugs For Your Garden*, written and illustrated by Allison Mia Starcher, and *The Emperor's Virtual Clothes*:

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