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Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

Debbie Vaughn
College of Charleston, vauhnnd@cofc.edu

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From the Reference Desk
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herence that will appeal to interested readers as well as serious scholars. Written by David Garrett Izzo and published by McFarland this book offers easy access to details about Auden’s life, his influences, his ideas and his literary accomplishments.

Perhaps best known for his poetry, the Encyclopedia makes it clear that Auden was also an accomplished librettist, playwright and essayist. At the forefront of the so-called “Auden Generation” he was identified with writers like Christopher Isherwood and Stephen Spender, writers whose impact on 20th century letters is also chronicled in this volume. Of course, there are biographical sketches of other contemporary writers and thinkers who occupied Auden’s world. Entries range from Joyce and Eliot to Maugham and Housman and from Freud and Jung to Kierkegaard and Gerald Heard. There is also coverage of influences like William Blake, Goethe and Voltaire, as well as people who figured prominently in Auden’s personal life like Chester Kallman. In addition, there are essays that discuss Auden’s ideas regarding Christianity, mysticism, history and Old Norse and Old English literature, as well as numerous entries covering Auden’s individual works.

Additional features include black and white photos illustrating the text, a chronology of Auden’s life and a bibliography of Auden’s works, as well as one of selected biographies and criticisms. Although the entries are arranged alphabetically there is also a useful general index. Unfortunately there is no thematic index and a surprising lack of “see also” references.

Author David Garrett Izzo has accomplished his mission. Students will find the W.H. Auden Encyclopedia a thorough introduction to his life and work while scholars and admirers will find it a resource well deserving of repeated visits. It is one of those books that should find its way into circulating collections as easily as reference collections.

From evidence in prehistoric settlements to the latest in cookware and modern appliances, the kitchen has been an essential part of domestic life. With the Encyclopedia of Kitchen History (2004, 1579583806, $175), Fitzroy Dearborn and veteran reference book writer Mary Ellen Snodgrass offer a work that provides interesting historical perspectives on one of the most popular parts of anyone’s home.

In a straightforward alphabetical arrangement of more that 300 articles this book covers a variety of topics from the development of kitchen storage devices like cabinets, cupboards and canisters to various cooking styles from barbecue to frying to stone boiling. There are also articles on the history of staple foods like honey, rice, bananas, coconut, breads, nuts, spices, oil and wine. Various cookware innovations like mixers and blenders, pyrex, and Teflon coating are also included as are biographical sketches of famous cooks like Julia Child and Charles Beard and food processing innovators like Clarence Birdseye and the Kellogg brothers.

Snodgrass seems to concentrate on the history of the European and American kitchen. Although they are referenced in a number of entries, one wishes that there was more direct coverage of other cultures. While there are articles on American Colonial Kitchens and Victorian Kitchens there are no articles on African or Mideast kitchens. On the plus side, the book is attractive and uses black and white photos and images to complement the text and each article has a brief list of further reading. There is also a serviceable general index and useful “see also” references. However, there is no topical index or guide.

Despite the reservations noted above, Encyclopedia of Kitchen History should have appeal, especially to public libraries. For larger reference collections it would supplement Scribner’s recent Dartmouth Medal winner, Encyclopedia of Food and Culture (2004, 0684085685, $400) as well as other standard sources like the O (1999 0192115790, $65) and the Co Ho (0521402166, $210). (These last two titles can be purchased together from Amazon at significant savings.)

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Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

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

Column Editor’s Note: The natural environment and a library’s online environment are in different spheres; however reviewer Burton Callcott and I take a look at books detailing these separate fields in this month’s column. Happy reading, everyone! — DV


Reviewed by Burton Callcott (Reference Librarian, College of Charleston) <callcottb@cofc.edu>

Being rather masochistic when it comes to environmental issues, my eyes naturally settled on Michael William’s Deforesting the Earth: From Prehistory to Global Crisis in the pile of ATG review books in my editor’s office. Though I have long since accepted the idea of an impending environmental apocalypse, I continue to embellish my fragile psyche with more and more information in support of a doomsday scenario. With substantial evidence of increased global warming and ever increasing species extinction, it is not hard to find such support. Expecting to sink into a heaping helping of galling and depressing facts relating to our quickly deteriorating forests, mixed with a good diatribe on the coming end of the world as we know it, I was surprised to uncover a more complicated and sober account of human interaction with the forest beginning with the retreat of the last ice age to the 1990s. Rather than simply outline the ways that white Western men have destroyed the earth’s fragile ecosystem in increasingly industrious and insidious ways, this book takes a more protracted and encompassing approach. Using pollen counts, soil samples, and loads of documentation, Williams outlines the ways that humans have had a profound effect on forests since “the dawn of time.” Being a white Western man myself, I was somehow relieved and took strange comfort when I read that in AD 900 Mahor destroyed almost half of the forests in New Zealand in an effort to hunt the Moa, “a large, ostrichlike, flightless bird.” “The mixed broadleaf-conifer forests [of New Zealand] (dominant species, Nothofagus and Podocarpus varieties) were completely destroyed,” Williams writes. “By the mid-thirteenth century a mere 8,000-12,000 people in South Island had destroyed not less than 8 million acres of forest and driven the Moa to the verge of extinction.” Though providing no hope in terms of the Earth’s future, knowing that our current crisis is not solely the fault of my tribe assuages my inherited guilt to some degree.

Like most people, I grew up with the myth propagated by Thoreau and others that when Europeans landed in “The New World” they confronted a “virgin” landscape untouched by human hands and that the people that were inhabiting the country were living in perfect harmony with nature. This book deftly shatters this myth. Though Native Americans did not have chain saws or even metal axes, they did have a profound impact on the land and the size, shape, and type of forests in the Americas as did native peoples in every continent: “When the Europeans came to North America, the forest had already been changed radically. Their coming did not alter the processes at work [clearing forests for farmland]; it was merely their superior numbers and advanced technology that accomplished that.”

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A geographer by training and profession, Williams teaches at Oxford, where he has focused his recent scholarship on the environment and forests in particular. He is the author of Americans and Their Forests and he is the editor of Wetlands: A Threatened Landscape. From the vantage point of a geographer, Williams is able to knit together insights from various disciplines in order to present a very convincing and profound account of human interaction with Earth’s forests. As equally well-versed in ecological and biological material as he is in social history and anthropology, Williams displays his breadth of knowledge and keen insight on every page: “The net ecological effect [of repeated man-made fires] was to replace the high, mixed deciduous forest with a mosaic of open-canopy woodland with grassy clearings near water sources, the ideal hunting ground.”

Though it is filled with technical terms as well as many maps, charts, and tables, that for a lay reader such as myself, are sometimes oblique, this is still an extremely readable and captivating book. The research that went into this book is dizzying: there are over 150 pages of notes as well as an extensive index, yet Williams wields this secondary material deftly and fluidly. The book is suitable, and in my opinion recommended, for an academic library, public library, and even a personal library in some cases. With its subject being the world’s forests, and its time frame spanning the Ice Age to the modern age, one could easily assume that Williams has bitten off more than he can chew. However, as the reader follows Williams around the world and through time, he is able to grow and state larger thematic points that realize the ambitious scope of the monograph.

Deforestation is associated with four kinds of motives or forces, though in reality the forces of change are more varied and less cut-and-dried than this, and they tend to operate in varying combinations to produce clearing:

1. Agricultural expansion, associated with population increase/ resettlement resulting in either planned or spontaneous colonization schemes...in Amazonia, Indonesia, and Malaysia.
2. Ranching and pasture development are significant in Central and Latin America.
3. Fuelwood gathering is most important in Africa and to a lesser extent in India.
4. Logging is noteworthy in South and Southeast Asia, and of declining importance in West Africa.

There is plenty in this book to scare the pants off anyone at all concerned about the environment and the ecological health of the planet. Yet, a reader will find a truly fair and balanced, not to mention fascinating, “account of how humans have related to their forests over the last seven millennia.”


and


Reviewed by Debbie Vaughn (College of Charleston)

The American Library Association has recently published two books regarding the creation and design of library Websites. As the head of our own library Web team, I was naturally interested in both books for their potential professional enlightenment qualities. Our team has implemented three site overhauls since the inception of our library Website; with each edition we have tried to move closer to the “perfect design” — one that is user-friendly with educational properties (we do not want to promote the “dumbing” of our students). We recently conducted a Web site usability study and are in the process of organizing a focus group to help us learn the strengths and weaknesses of our current site’s aesthetics and architecture. All of this is being done in preparation for our fourth site overhaul, which we hope to complete by August. As I read Susanna Davidson and Everyl Yankee’s Web Site Design with the Patron in Mind, I was awe-struck by its helpfulness to my work endeavors; I did not think it possible that any other book could match its value. When I opened A. Paula Wilson’s Library Web Sites: Creating Online Collections and Services, I found the match: another thought-provoking guide for improving your library Website.

Web Site Design focuses on the process of creating (or recreating) your library’s Web site. Karen G. Schneider, coordinator of Librarians’ Index to the Internet and American Libraries columnist, provides the book’s forward dripping with complements about Davidson and Yankee. Such praises are certainly warranted; Davidson has been instrumental in online library services for over a decade, and Yankee has been an interface designer and usability consultant for more than twenty years. Web Site Design is divided into ten chapters, each of which has elements that build on information presented in the previous chapter. All facets of Web design—from the site mission to evaluation—are touched upon. Each chapter begins by outlining the purpose of the chapter and ends with a checklist of questions to consider. This style of preview-and-review allows the book’s content to sink in and encourages readers to connect the authors’ advice with their own design processes.

Davidson and Yankee’s book is not specific to academic, public, or special libraries. The bulk of the information in the book is broad enough to be adapted by any library type; however, helpful examples of redesign issues are presented from each library type. Vision statements, checklists, and even screen shots are offered to give readers concrete models of others’ processes. Davidson and Yankee bestow hand-holding without smothering; they give readers just the right amount of information to get them through the design process without stifling creativity or undermining an individual library’s unique online presence.

While Web Site Design centers on (re)design strategies and procedures, Wilson’s Library Web Sites: Creating Online Collections and Services surveys library Web sites and how they can provide patron access to a multitude of resources. Two introductory chapters cover site planning, architecture, and navigation. The next chapter explores the library brand of information and how an online presence ties in with library marketing. Each of the subsequent five chapters focus on online library resources and services: digital reference collections, the catalog, databases and eBooks, RA and discussion groups, and content and programs for specific audiences. Wilson closes her work with a thought-provoking chapter that raises the question “Where do we go from here?” Library Web Sites provides a detailed overview—an annotated checklist, if you will—of everything we can do to meet patrons’ online needs. Though your library Website might not offer each service covered in Wilson’s book, it provides an unparalleled overview of online possibilities and the steps to take to make them realities.

Both books are valuable assets for library Web teams. Library Web Sites have become the primary point of contact for most library patrons, making it imperative that we offer a clear gateway to our collections and to the services we provide. As the price of computers and Internet service continues to decrease, an increasing number of people are demanding that library services such as materials renewal, periodical research (and full-text article access), and even reference assistance be available online. Web Site Design and Library Web Sites are first-rate handbooks to aid in your library’s online endeavors.

Future Dates for Charleston Conferences

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