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Compiled by PAUL A. CARNAHAN

BOOK REVIEWS



Reed Brown's 1841 Journey: America through the Eyes of a Vermont Yankee

By Richard H. Allen (Burlington, VT: The Onion River Press, 2019, pp. 141, paper, \$20.00)

Richard Allen has brought to life a fascinating look into Antebellum America through the travel diary of Reed Brown. Rich in detail and meticulous in his research, Allen's commentary and analysis neatly explores the major themes of the era while remaining true to Brown's account of his journey. A farmer and blacksmith who spent most of his life in Chittenden County, Vermont, Brown oscillated between Williston and Essex except for several journeys beyond Vermont, the most extraordinary being his 1841 sojourn through the major cities of the East, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and then on to Akron, Ohio. His travel diary recounting the sights, events, and costs of his journey, has survived to the present and now resides in the archive of the Williston Historical Society.

Allen's detailed consideration of the diary offers us an ordinary person's account of travel in a period when such diaries were commonly kept by wealthier travelers. Indeed this is especially true for voyagers who eventually thought to publish their observations. Frances Milton Trollope and Charles Dickens, both English tourists, and American Nathaniel Hawthorne, are a few of Brown's contemporaries who eventually published their observations. Reed Brown did not and instead seems to have intended his journal as a means of keeping track of expenses as well as capture his experiences to share later on with his family. His practice of purchasing newspapers and sending them home to his family implies that they all had an interest that went beyond the

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bounds of their Vermont farm. He may well have created the diary more for their enjoyment than his own. And his journey was a fascinating story.

Brown's trip not only traversed the American landscape, but also explored new modes of travel. An inventor himself, securing a patent was one of the two main reasons for his trip, he closely observed the new technologies he encountered. Indeed, Brown experienced every method of transportation possible in the period: stagecoach, canal boat, lake steamer, train, and just plain walking. In addition to the types of conveyances, he also experienced most of the kinds of misadventures and accidents that could occur in this period: a spectacular steam engine failure, a train wreck, failed horses, and blistered feet. Along the way he also experienced the cultural developments of the period, including the new temperance movement.

Once in Washington, D.C., Brown pursued his patent, but also became a tourist. He visited the various institutions of Washington including the new Patent Office, the early museum that became the Smithsonian, the Capitol, and the President's house. Disappointed in his hope to see President John Tyler, he found the White House to be less impressive than he'd expected. He also experienced the social milieu of the city, including the presence of African Americans, slave and free, who lived in the capital. He may have been a temperance man, but it seems that his sentiments did not stretch to abolition. Instead, his comments seemed only to reflect their presence, and unlike Frances Milton Trollope and Charles Dickens, he did not comment on slavery as an institution.

Finally successful in submitting his patent application, Brown left Washington and set off for Ohio where the second task of his trip awaited him. His brother Nathaniel, jailed for suspected theft, awaited his assistance. The trip across Pennsylvania continued to be a revelation and included the only federally supported public works project of the many suggested by Alexander Hamilton: the National Road. Again, Brown's observations of the road, farmers and their crops, Pittsburgh, and finally the area of Ohio where his brother and family waited his assistance, dominated his diary. As Brown worked to prove his brother's innocence, he visited with fellow Vermonters who now lived in Ohio, and looked after his sister-in-law and her children. When Nathaniel was finally released, the return journey began, this time over Lake Erie and across New York on the Erie Canal. All told, Brown's travels took him away from home for a total of almost three months and covered more than 2,100 miles.

For those who enjoy local history embedded in the larger narrative of national events, this is a worthy read.

SUSAN M. OUELLETTE

Susan M. Ouellette is a Professor of History and American Studies at Saint Michael's College. She is the author of An Extraordinary Ordinary Woman: The Journal of Phebe Orvis (2017).

Fairbanks: The Family that Created an Industry, Built a Thriving Town, Endowed It with Cultural Institutions, and Led the State of Vermont

By Dan Swainbank (St. Johnsbury, VT: St. Johnsbury History & Heritage Center, 2019, pp. xiii, 210, paper, \$19.95).

When visiting St. Johnsbury I've wanted to know more about the E. & T. Fairbanks Company, the town, and the family that made it. I found many answers in Dan Swainbank's *Fairbanks: The Family that Created an Industry, Built and Thriving Town, Endowed It with Cultural Institutions, and Led the State of Vermont*. It's an old-fashioned long title that tells you exactly what the book is about and in my case, made me want to dive in.

The family's early history is impressive. The first member of the Fairbanks family in St. Johnsbury was Erastus, who was there to study law with an uncle. Erastus was followed in 1815 by his parents Joseph and Phebe and their other two other sons, Thaddeus and Joseph P. Though they arrived having already bought land, the family was "warned" away from the tiny, scattered village. "Warning" was the practice of not allowing new residents to settle in case they became a burden on the community. The family stayed and built a town.

During their first year the Fairbankses built a dam, a sawmill, a grist mill, and a wagon shop. Within the first ten years they started a number of other enterprises essential to rural life: wagon making, several types of milling, an iron works, and finally a hemp mill.

It was the hemp industry that led to the invention of the famous Fairbanks scale. The family business of buying hemp and other crops required an awkward and time-consuming weighing process, which led Thaddeus to develop the idea of an in-ground platform scale. Wagons could simply drive onto the scale for weighing.

Swainbank tells the story of the company's impressive growth through building the best scales in the country and then the world. Many American companies grew during this period, but few emerged from such a re-

mote location. The growing market for scales required a better transportation system into and out of northeastern Vermont, so the company joined in a canal project in the 1850s. That was followed by the family's key role in building Vermont railroads.

The story of the scale company that circled the globe is fascinating, but so is the story of the family itself. The Fairbanks family did more than build an industrial empire; by sharing their success, they also built an important Vermont town and contributed to the entire state. Thaddeus was a life-long inventor, Erastus was the leader and business mind, and Joseph was the intellectual of the family. Erastus ran the business, served in the state legislature and later as governor; Thaddeus kept inventing; and Joseph served on Vermont college boards of directors, started schools, was active in progressive politics and more.

The remoteness of St. Johnsbury, the company's rapid growth, and the philanthropic nature of the family make this an important story even in the context of the remarkable growth of nineteenth-century American industry. The family has been characterized by historians as practicing Christian capitalism, that is, using their wealth for philanthropy. One feature of the family's history that I am especially impressed with is that they did not put their name on everything they built. The school they built is the St. Johnsbury Academy, not the Fairbanks Academy. Likewise the Atheneum and the churches. The museum is the only institution that bears their name. Other industrial empire builders put their name on their philanthropic gifts, e.g. the Carnegie Libraries, Rockefeller Center, Ford Museum, and many more.

Swainbank provides an interesting and fairly brief history of the industrial works. He spends more time on the family itself, its business practices, professional successes and failures. The first generation (Erastus, Thaddeus, and Joseph) built the company, the second generation eventually lost it through poor management and scandal. Not all members of the family joined the firm. From the beginning education was important and every member of the family received excellent educations, the girls as well as the boys. Those not involved with the firm entered professions including law, science, medicine, and teaching.

Fairbanks scales are still built in a small building in St. Johnsbury, thanks in part to state intervention in the 1960s when the parent company threatened to close the plant. I highly recommend this book and a visit to the town, which will be even more interesting after you've read the book.

LINDY BIGGS

Lindy Biggs is Associate Professor of History Emerita of Auburn University and lives in East Montpelier, Vermont.

The Land of Milk and Honey: A History of Beekeeping in Vermont

By Bill Mares and Ross Conrad (West Brattleboro, VT: The Green Writers Press, 2019, pp. 264, hard cover, \$30.00).

The average person, in my experience of over forty years of beekeeping, has no real idea what beekeepers are doing, how bees get honey, or how this honey somehow appears in a jar on the shelf of their favorite grocery store. And the aim of this book is not, it seems to me, to explain these details to this “average person.”

I say this mainly to alert those who know absolutely nothing about beekeeping that they may want to do a web search for “beekeeping” and watch one of the many entertaining “how to begin beekeeping” videos before tackling this book. (I recommend “Beekeeping for Beginners” with Mr. Wade Stiltner, the West Virginia State Apiarist, who explains and shows all on YouTube.) After that, you can consult this book’s excellent glossary with more confidence.

All of the above is to say that the real audience for this book by beekeepers Bill Mares, Ross Conrad, and a host of colleagues is the Vermont beekeeper him or herself, who will certainly enjoy this well-illustrated history of beekeeping in our own little state of Vermont. It is full of wonderful old photos and engaging anecdotes drawn from the lives of Vermont’s bee enthusiasts past and present, many of whom the reader may surely already know as friends, acquaintances, and guiding mentors to the art of beekeeping. And that is the great theme of this book: how many generations of Vermont beekeepers have improved upon their practices and helped others to do the same. In that sense you could say that this book is less a “scholarly tome,” as exemplified by, let us say, Howard S. Russell’s *A Long Deep Furrow: Three Centuries of Agriculture in New England* (1976; 672 pages!), than a delightful (to anyone who loves bees) tour through a succession of our notable Green Mountain State beekeepers—many of whom are nationally known and respected innovators or dedicated state “bee inspectors” trying their best to help us all do a better job of it. They were aided in this by our own communal efforts over the years, as exemplified by the Vermont Beekeepers’ Association, founded in 1886.

Yes, there are statistics on numbers of hives, yearly production of pounds of honey in this or that county, and so on; but the real focus of the book is on the fascinating cavalcade of Vermont beekeepers and

their stories, all of them gloriously “bitten by the beekeeping bug,” as we beekeepers sometimes put it. Just ask them; you’ll find out all about it.

Early fossilized bees date back around 40 million years ago, preserved in Baltic amber, so bees have been here on earth, sharpening up their skills, for a pretty long time now. They know how to do what they do, and they do it pretty well. For a human being to arrive at any appreciable understanding of some portion of all this and become a reasonably good beekeeper is not a self-evident proposition.

So, how do they do it? “Two beekeepers, three opinions,” as the old adage has it. And early on in this book we are introduced to some of the great “patron saints” of Vermont beekeeping: Charles Mraz, Robert Mead, Enoch Tompkins, Kermit Mayo, and Ed Hazen, to name but a few who were with us until recently, and who remain so in spirit and by the examples that they set.

Generally, the book follows a chronological course through the development of beekeeping in Vermont. Each successive chapter considers the challenges of its particular time through the lens of several notable individuals. Early chapters, for example, concentrate on attempts by inventive Vermonters to replace the old-fashioned “skep” hives (use the glossary!) with more sophisticated and practical designs. A later chapter traces the beginnings of a more modern “commercial beekeeping,” as exemplified by J. E. Crane, born 1840, and his Crane Honey Company. This story continues with Charles Mraz who, after arriving in Middlebury in 1928, bought and expanded the Crane operation. Mraz became Vermont’s largest beekeeper, a prolific inventor of new types of beekeeping equipment, and the “god-father” of apitherapy, the use of bee-stings to treat arthritis and other diseases.

As time passes, new issues and problems arise: the arrival of various bee diseases and parasites, changes in agricultural practices, and the effects of pesticide use, to name but a few. We follow all this, often through the words the beekeepers themselves. The book’s last chapter presents a delightful series of interviews with a wide variety of Vermont beekeepers, who talk about how they became interested in bees, how they learned about them, and what have been their greatest challenges and successes. This, I think, is the soul of the book.

There is another old saw of apiculture: “A poor beekeeper can make a living in a good location, but a good beekeeper cannot make a living in a poor location.” A great deal of success in beekeeping is due to “location,” which term encompasses everything from geologic history and our resulting soil types, rainfall and weather patterns, and our agricultural history and practices as well. And when the cold blasts of November (or maybe even October, or...well, let’s not go there) arrive to herald another long winter, we may be excused for thinking that Vermont is a dif-

ficult place for successful beekeeping. In fact, our complex geology, northern climate, and changing agricultural history turn out to be the key elements in making Vermont perhaps one of the best places in the United States to keep bees and produce beautiful honey.

To adequately cover Vermont's geological past, its meteorological peculiarities, and complex agricultural history would be an encyclopedic task. This book sketches in that background but concentrates on the personalities who have made Vermont beekeeping what it is today, and gives us a good look at how it will continue. As such, it is an inspirational and loving tribute to an old and ongoing effort: this fascinating enterprise that is Vermont beekeeping.

FRANKLIN HEYBURN

Franklin Heyburn has been a beekeeper in northwestern Vermont for more than forty years, and he appreciates all of the hard-working Highgate dairy farmers, our strong network of food co-ops, and the good advice of other beekeepers, which made his business possible.

Say We Won and Get Out: George D. Aiken and the Vietnam War

By Stephen C. Terry, with Student Researcher Louis D. Augeri
(Amherst, MA: White River Press, 2020, pp. 286, \$21.00).

Say We Won and Get Out is an unconventional, yet timely, book. It focuses on Senator George D. Aiken and the Vietnam War, but it is not tied tightly to that topic as it features Aiken as a model public servant who embraced an approach to politics that Stephen C. Terry believes would be salutary for our democracy today.

The first and longest part of this book flows directly from its title. It explores in depth Aiken's relationship with arguably America's most controversial war. Terry frames that exploration by highlighting Aiken's famous address on the Vietnam conflict in October 1966. "The United States," the senator said, "could well declare unilaterally that this stage of the Vietnam War is over [and] that we have 'won' in the sense that our Armed Forces are in control of most of the field and no potential enemy is in position to establish its authority over South Vietnam" (p. 27). Aiken's recommendation became known as "the Aiken formula," which was popularized as "declare victory and get out."

Terry acknowledges that Aiken never actually used the phrase that was attributed to him, but he contends that the shorthand both reflected a wise policy recommendation to President Lyndon Johnson and Aik-

en's overall pragmatic approach to foreign policy (and politics in general). Aiken had entered the U.S. Senate in 1941, but he became a close observer of Vietnam when he was appointed to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1954. Terry argues that Aiken long remembered President Dwight Eisenhower's decision not to commit the American military to aid French forces under siege by the Viet Minh. Eisenhower worried that there was no exit strategy. Moreover, even though a life-long Republican, Aiken was on good terms with Lyndon Johnson during his presidency, having established a strong working relationship with the Texas Democrat when both were in the Senate. Yet he was among the first wave of influential senators to question publicly Johnson's escalation of American involvement in Vietnam.

Johnson did not heed Aiken's advice on cutting American losses, and Aiken long felt that this was a tragic mistake. Terry, a Vermont reporter who joined Aiken's staff from 1969 to 1975, holds his former boss in high regard because of his wisdom on Vietnam and on so many other issues. This book, which is clearly and confidently written, benefits from Terry's firsthand recollections of Aiken's demeanor and outlook.

It becomes more of a struggle for Terry to show that Aiken was a "wise owl" in the penultimate chapter of the first part of the book, "Aiken during the Nixon Presidency" (p. 19). Aiken had high hopes for Richard Nixon, who promised to end the Vietnam War during his campaign for the White House in 1968. Nixon did begin to reduce American troop levels in Vietnam, but he also expanded the war in the spring of 1970 by ordering the invasion of Cambodia. This move appalled Aiken, and he became a sponsor of a Senate amendment to halt funding on American troop involvement in Cambodia or Laos. Yet Aiken did not fundamentally break with President Nixon, and he stood by him through the middle of 1974 even as the misdeeds and cover-up of the Nixon administration became increasingly evident.

Terry then embarks on a deep-dive into Aiken's background, covering his upbringing in the small, tight-knit community of Putney and his entrance into Vermont politics. Elected as a state legislator in 1930, the well-respected Aiken soon became speaker of the Vermont House. A rising figure in state politics, he was first elected lieutenant governor and then won the gubernatorial election in the fall of 1936. Aiken was no fan of Franklin Roosevelt, but he represented a more progressive wing of the state Republican Party than the business-oriented Old Guard. Though he warned against extensive federal control of state matters, he believed in using government to help Vermonters in the hard times of the Great Depression.

This section of the book brings Aiken the man and his public career to life, though it delves into topics like Aiken's support for the Saint Law-

rence Seaway that do not immediately shed light onto his thinking on the Vietnam conflict. *Say We Won and Get Out* also includes a helpful collection of Aiken's most important public statements (only a couple of which relate directly to developments in Southeast Asia), a timeline of the Vietnam War, a chronology of the long-lived senator's life, and a short tribute by the political cartoonist (with Vermont ties) Jeff Danziger.

A key to understanding the broader purpose of the book is found in the brief chapter, "What Would George Aiken Do Today?" The chapter does not focus on foreign policy challenges as much as domestic disarray. Aiken, Terry argues, would be alarmed by the boorish behavior of the current president and by the deep political division in the country. Aiken exemplified the importance of character and decency in public life and the willingness to work with politicians across the aisle. "If Aiken were in the Senate today," Terry states, "I believe he would surely be among the few Republicans challenging President Trump" (p. 184). And Aiken would be doing so based on a deeply ingrained set of convictions. As Terry writes earlier, "the public, not the private, interest was his guiding principle, and that it was government's role to represent the public will and put people first" (p. 31).

Say We Won and Get Out, supported by the Center for Research on Vermont at the University of Vermont, nicely complements the existing scholarship on Aiken, including the more analytical and wide-ranging *The Political Legacy of George D. Aiken: Wise Old Owl of the U.S. Senate*, a collection of essays from the 1991 George D. Aiken Lectures Series at the University of Vermont, edited by Michael Sherman, which was published in 1995. Terry's book reintroduces one of Vermont's most influential politicians to readers living in a most tumultuous time.

JAMES RALPH

James Ralph teaches modern American history at Middlebury College. He is the co-editor of The Chicago Freedom Movement: Martin Luther King Jr. and Civil Rights Activism in the North (2016).

Tom C. Davis: A Life in Vermont

By Tom C. Davis and Mark Greenberg (<https://oldlaborhall.org/thomas-c-davis-a-life-in-vermont/>) (Barre, VT: n.p., 2020, open access).

Tom Davis (1931-2017), the son of Governor Deane C. Davis, had deep, generational roots in Vermont. Like his father, Tom Davis had a long and distinguished career as a public servant; unlike his father he

identified as a Democrat. He served as counselor for the Vermont Alcoholic Rehabilitation Board; first director of the Vermont Office of Economic Opportunity; Secretary of the Agency of Human Services; Regional Representative to the U.S. Department of Labor; and U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy's State Director.

The web presentation is based on twenty-five hours of interviews with Mark Greenberg, done for the Old Labor Hall in Barre. Greenberg confessed that "little interviewing was necessary" since Davis would launch into his recollections and stories with little prodding. Greenberg edited the recordings and transcripts to create a single narrative. The recordings and transcripts are presented in five sections: Barre Life; Family; Politicians and Public Service; Sports; and UVM Days. Some of the sections are further subdivided along specific topics. There is a brief concluding bibliography and credits.

The interviews will interest a broad spectrum of readers. The sections "Barre Life" and "Sports" offer glimpses of what it was like growing up in Barre City and Town in the 1930s and '40s. Davis celebrates an ethnically diverse but homogenous community. His recollections embrace everything from Barre as a melting pot to the creation of the Barre Auditorium.

Where the recollections are most engaging is when Davis talks of local businesses and characters. One such was Mr. Marr and his smoke shop where workers and business leaders gathered after work and exchanged their perspectives. Marr's also had pinball machines and comic books, items of interest to local youth.

While these interviews about Barre as melting pot are particularly engaging, one might look askance at assertions such as: there were few class distinctions, no poor in neighborhoods, no crimes of violence. Davis does indirectly suggest more complex realities. He notes that Barre was a melting pot, "absent, of course, Black people," and then describes Mr. Lundy, a Black tailor who was well respected but rarely mingled with his white neighbors.

Davis's career encompasses Vermont's transition from the most Republican state in the nation to a competitive two-party system. In the discussion of the offices of alcoholic rehabilitation, economic opportunity, and human services, one senses the State's growing interest in various support services, as well as Davis's maturation as a compassionate liberal. He frequently expresses his belief that social service and education administrators should have more than professional resumes; they must have experience working directly with those they serve.

Davis recounts Franklin D. Roosevelt's visit to Vermont, his admiration for John F. Kennedy and Sargent Shriver, and locally for governors

Phil Hoff and Tom Salmon. He discusses local notables from Bernie Sanders to former State Treasurer Emory Hebard to Congressman/state legislator Dick Mallary. Hebard, a conservative Davis worked well with, helps illustrate another of Davis's themes: how in the 1970s Vermont politicians worked across party lines.

As is common with recorded memory, there is an absence of detailed analysis of people and programs. Indeed, on occasion one wishes that Greenberg was a more visible interviewer, using questions to elicit and elucidate more context and detail into Tom's narrative. Still, the interviews offer personal insights into notable politicians and officials. His story on how Kathy Hoyt came to Vermont and started an admirable career of public service, for example, provides information that would not necessarily be apparent from more traditional written records.

So, how should the interviews and transcripts be used and evaluated? They are a primary source. I suspect those who knew Tom will enjoy hearing once again the warmth and cadence of his voice. Primary sources, however, require the reader to understand these as the personal memories of an engaged citizen and weigh those memories against other sources. In the section "Politicians and Public Service," the subsection "The Beginning of Change," Tom recounts President Franklin Roosevelt's visit to Vermont and notes that the "big thing that the New Deal brought to Vermont was water conservation." Others might note that FDR, as part of his support of rural electrification, supported the building of hydroelectric dams across Vermont. This led to a protracted fight with Governor George Aiken over who should control Vermont's natural resources—the federal government, utility companies, or the State.

There is a wealth of material in the interviews, inviting the reader to participate on many levels from sheer enjoyment to critical analysis. I say 'reader,' but each interview comes with recording and transcript. It is wonderful to listen to Tom and then pause to read the transcripts for clarification and research. The interviews are well worth a visit to the Old Labor Hall's website to spend some time with Tom.

Oral histories with Vermont political figures are not as common as they once were. So let us take a moment and celebrate Tom Davis and Mark Greenberg for once again confirming that we, as individuals and participants in life, have something to say.

D. GREGORY SANFORD

Gregory Sanford lives in Marshfield and was Vermont State Archivist from 1982 to 2012.

On Whitcomb Hill

By E. J. Myers (Montpelier, VT: Montemayor Press, 2019, pp. xxv, 251, paperback, \$16.95).

E. J. Myers's *On Whitcomb Hill* is less a tale of personal transformation than a curriculum on newly experienced rural life.

The author and his wife, Edith, buy an 1840s farmhouse in Strafford, leaving their suburban Maplewood, New Jersey, home of twenty-five years. Their experiences in the house and on the land form a table of contents for a number of digressions about the couple's learning experiences as they explore their house, its history, its prior occupants, their neighbors, as well as their tools and the surrounding woods, waters, and fauna.

The author's journey through his research and discoveries are, however, more a process of digressive intellection than spiritual discovery. We are treated to deep dives into their house's provenance and, to the extent that local records allow, the lives of its prior owners, while the physical description of the balloon-construction house is limited to three paragraphs on pages 19 and 20.

After engaging a neighbor to brushhog their meadow, they discover a scythe in the shed and we are treated to a lengthy and literate discourse on its genesis, use, and place in art and literature. On page 40, Myers quotes from *Anna Karenina*:

The old man, holding himself erect, moved in front with his feet turned out, taking long regular strides, and with a precise and regular action which seemed to cost him no more effort than swinging one's arms in walking, as though it were in play he laid down the high even row of grass.

One of the more engaging and personal digressions is the influence of Buddhism in Myers's life and his decision to build a meditation shed of his own, as he references Virginia Woolf's, *A Room of One's Own*. The shed becomes both a place of meditation and a writer's shack. This section is perhaps the highlight of the book as it explores the intersection of a writer's mental and emotional processes, sanity and madness, the quotidian and the sublime. After what feels to him almost like a mental breakdown that yields a plethora of connected and disconnected epiphanies, the author delves further into himself and writes his most important work, *The Mountain Trilogy*. About this sequence of events, he writes: "How would I have benefited [if] I'd ignored the voices and im-

ages, the metaphors and notions, and then sat down to meditate, perchance to stop the flow of white-water thinking?" (p. 141).

This reflection on place, writing, sanity, and chaos is richly wrought and one of the more interesting digressions in the book. The others—on sugaring, scythes, pond health, pollywogs, wood heat from a fireplace as opposed to wood heat from an iron or pellet stove, winnowing wheat with a flail, fusarium wilt—less so.

Integral to the broader storyline is the couple's pursuit of a rumored stone foundation buried in the woods. It propels the narrative and engages the reader, even as it stands alone as a short story within the overall tale.

Myers is an accomplished and experienced writer with a scholar's knowledge of classic literature and over forty books to his credit. My interest in the book ebbed and flowed with my interest in the various digressions. I was hard-pressed to retain all the genealogy of the house on Whitcomb Hill and was helped by a generous addendum of notes at the end. But it felt like work.

The book's strength is its author's writing skill, its weakness the discursive and occasionally disconnected nature of the narrative. I had expected an arc in which the author and his wife are transformed as their sense of place emerges and begins to affect their own lives. Whatever personal evolution does occur is fragmented, however, by the digressions.

Even with this architectural flaw, I recommend the book and have turned back to it several times, although more as a reference work than as the story of a house and place.

BILL SCHUBART

Bill Schubart is a writer of literary fiction and a regular columnist for VT Digger. His work includes five novels and three short-story collections.

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