H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Ed Lentz. *As It Were: Stories of Old Columbus.* Dublin: Red Mountain Press, 1998. 189 pp. $12.20 (paper), ISBN 978-0-9667950-0-4.

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As It Were: Stories of Old Columbus

This intriguing volume offers valuable insights into Columbus' past, from the founding of the city in the early 1800s through its rapid growth after World War II. Composed of forty-six short sketches first published in *This Week*, a Columbus newspaper focusing on the city's downtown, this book brings to vivid life important developments in Columbus' past. The author has intimately worked on Columbus' history for several decades as a staff member of the Ohio Historical Society, a leading light of the Columbus Landmarks Foundation, and as a faculty member at area colleges.

Arranged in chronological order, the sketches examine both general and specific developments in Columbus' history, with attention paid to people of particular importance to the city's evolution. Broad-ranging essays delineate what life in Columbus was like in the early 1800s, the 1850s, 1870, and around 1912. More specific essays examine such topics as Columbus' underground railroad, the Ohio State Fair, streetcars and interurbans, the flood of 1913, and the Park of Roses. Readers will learn about individual buildings: Comstock's Opera House, the Old State Penitentiary, Union Station, the Great Southern Hotel, and the AIU Citadel, among others. People receiving particular notice include Lucas Sullivant, William Neil, James Thurber, Eddie Rickenbacker, and James Poindexter (an African American leader). While many essays look at Columbus' political, economic, and spatial growth, others examine the daily lives of the city's inhabitants, including discussions of everyday amusements. *As It Were* is a well-rounded volume, with appropriately chosen illustrations accompanying each sketch.

Lentz tells Columbus' stories with verve, humor, and a sense of the ironic, making his book a joy to read. *As It Were* should appeal to informed general readers interested in Columbus' past. There is very little in the way of worthwhile publications dealing with Columbus' history; Lentz's volume helps fill that void. The essays dealing with twentieth-century developments, including a valuable one on the evolution of shopping centers, are especially welcome. This book is also suitable for use in courses in Ohio history. Its graceful, informal style should hold the interest of its readers while informing them of events central to Central Ohio's past. Throughout, Lentz is careful to place Columbus' history fully in the context of state and national developments. While certainly not the last word on the history of Columbus, *As It Were* is a very welcome addition to the field of Ohio history. Scholars may lament the lack of footnotes and index, and the inclusion of an only very limited bibliography.

_As It Were- may be found in some Columbus-area bookstores. Or it may be ordered directly by contacting Lentz at 104 Montrose Street, Delaware, Ohio 43015 (phone: 740-363-4926).

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