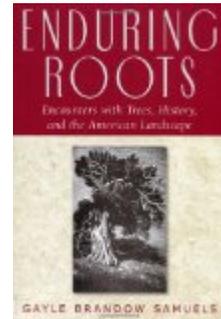


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Gayle Brandow Samuels. *Enduring Roots: Encounters with Trees, History, and the American Landscape*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999. 195 pp. \$25.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8135-2721-5.

Reviewed by Boria Sax (Mercy College)
Published on H-Net (March, 2000)



Reading *Enduring Roots* is a bit like spending the evening with a fascinating raconteur whose interminable talking is tolerated by all and welcomed by many, even when she seems oblivious to social expectations. Samuels has compressed a vast amount of fascinating information about trees in America into under 200 pages, with little organization and even less in the way of linear argument. The chapters are loosely centered about themes such as the apples or family trees, yet they are held together mostly by associations. The book skips back and forth between horticulture, geography, history, gardening and many other topics, sometimes changing the subject abruptly in the middle of a sentence or paragraph.

Nevertheless, Samuels has a knack for finding odd and intriguing bits of information. One chapter, for example, takes its title from a sycamore that was bought and deeded to itself as a means of preserving it. Having told the story of that tree, another author might have used to occasion for an extended political discourse about the nature of property or a philosophical meditation about the difference between nature and civilization.

Samuels, however, simply moves on.

One section of the book tells the story of the charter oak, in which the constitution of Connecticut was hidden from the British. Another tells of the efforts of people over many decades to introduce trees in a Midwestern town that was only hospitable to prairie. The pace is so brisk and the material so colorful that the reader is not likely to feel bored.

By conventional standards of literary craftsmanship, it is easy to find fault with this book. I am, however, reminded of a botanical metaphor used by another author, the poet Theodore Roethke: The stony garden of the spirit grows Things never harvested in ordered rows.

Though not very suitable either as a reference or as a contribution to scholarship, this book has an organic unity, and it would make good reading beside a campfire on a summer night.

Copyright (c) 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-nilas>

Citation: Boria Sax. Review of Samuels, Gayle Brandow, *Enduring Roots: Encounters with Trees, History, and the American Landscape*. H-Net, H-Net Reviews. March, 2000.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=3955>

Copyright © 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for

nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.