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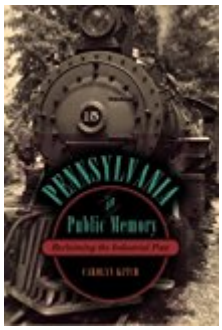

Carolyn L. Kitch. *Pennsylvania in Public Memory: Reclaiming the Industrial Past.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012. xi + 260 pp. $59.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-271-05220-5.

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Commissioned by Allen J. Dieterich-Ward (Shippensburg University)

In her 1996 song "Southern California Wants to be Western New York," singer-songwriter Dar Williams sings of postmodern hipsters on the West Coast nostalgically longing to experience a deindustrialized past that exists thousands of miles away in the nation's Rust Belt. She sings that Southern California "wants to find the glory of a town they say has hit the skids," and concludes by reporting that there will be a new theme park on the West Coast "designed to make you gasp, 'Oh, I bet that crumbling mill town was a booming mill town in its day.'"[1]The lyrics that Williams recorded nearly two decades ago are still funny today. Maybe it is because nostalgia for a seemingly more authentic era of an industrial past is not necessarily something that one can project upon Southern California alone. Whether Williams recognized this or not, the ironic humor of her lyrics actually addresses serious themes in public history about how to reconcile a deindustrialized landscape that exists today with the incongruous history of industry that formed the social bedrock in places like western New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan. Carolyn Kitch addresses these themes, and the dilemmas that they pose for public historians seeking to provide useful interpretation, in her survey of historic industrial sites in Pennsylvania.

Kitch is a professor of journalism at Temple University in Philadelphia whose past work has focused mostly upon the critical analysis of American magazines. A former magazine editor and writer herself, she has drawn from her experiences to explore gender stereotypes in mass media, survey the history of magazine journalism, and study the role of journalism in constructing popular memory. This book, therefore, is somewhat of a departure for her. Rather than exploring print media, Kitch instead focuses upon historic sites relating to Pennsylvania's industrial past. Her interest in this topic began with media coverage of the 2002 Quecreek mine accident in western Pennsylvania (in which several miners were rescued after being trapped in an underground mine) and the 2006 Sago mine disaster in West Virginia in which twelve miners died. She

noticed that journalistic coverage of both events often included nostalgic tributes to coal miners as "figures from the past rather than the present" (p. 17). Her work in this book, however, is not largely about media representation. Instead, she draws from observations that she made over a three-year period of time in which she visited 104 museums and five coal mines in addition to touring twenty-eight factories, attending eighteen heritage festivals, finding twenty-eight worker memorials and sixteen iron furnace remains, and enjoying rides on eighteen tourist trains and trollies (p. 19). In the end, she identifies core narratives that run through interpretations at all of these sites, which, she writes, "tell a bigger American story of pioneers and immigrants whose courage in the face of dangerous but glorious labor built the nation, whose fidelity to cultural tradition left a rich legacy ripe for reclaiming, and whose sacrifice gave us our modern world" (p. 19).

Importantly, she does not understand these narrative themes uncritically. In fact, her work is in direct dialogue with recent public history scholarship from Richard Archibald, Michael Frisch, David Glassberg, Ron Grele, Dolores Hayden, Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, Roy Rosenzweig, and David Thelen that explores the meaning of public historical narratives and the ways that they reflect the politics of public memory. She also draws from a range of cultural theorists and folklorists, including Raymond Williams, Herbert Gans, Simon Bronner, and Angus Gillespie, in her critical exploration of interpretive narrative within Pennsylvania industrial heritage settings.

She divides her book into eight core chapters sandwiched between an introduction and epilogue. Each chapter addresses an industrial heritage theme, starting with the history of industrial heritage in Pennsylvania. Subsequent chapters explore public representations of railroad history (drawing from her month-long Scholars in Residence fellowship at the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania), rural heritage (in which she provides a fascinating history of Pennsylvania's marketing of the Amish), ethnicity and cultural tourism, heroic narratives in representations of coal mining, factory tourism, the steel industry, and industrial heritage. Throughout, Kitch has an eye for incongruities and cultural complexities. For example, in her discussion of the fields in Titusville where the American oil industry began, she notes the disconnect between the bucolic, lush fields of the present, and the environmentally corrosive practices of oil drilling that would have marked the landscape one hundred years earlier. Kitch cogently observes that a narrative of progress seems to give the oil industry credit for the recovery from the environmental problems that it created. She notes the irony that, today, nature is as much of an enemy for companies currently engaging in hydraulic fracturing for natural gas not far from Titusville.

Throughout the book, Kitch is sensitive to the way that narratives about the past often tell us more about present. Narratives about ethnic traditions and heritage, for example, tend to whitewash divisions that marked ethnic identity in the past. Yet, in our own time, in places like Hazelton and Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, anti-immigrant politicians and violent racist thugs have attacked recent arrivals from Mexico. Kitch notes that such events "repoliticize the notions of ethnic heritage that are so blithely celebrated during the many small-town festivals that take place nearly every summer and fall weekend across the state" (p. 89).

Kitch pays particular attention to the ways that historical narratives presented at Pennsylvania industrial history sites tend to iron over political conflicts. Coal mine tours often focus upon technological aspects of the industry, and even in their heroic portraits of miners tend to neglect the very real dangers of mine work. Pretzel, potato chip, and chocolate factory tours present heroic founders narratives that depict historical figures like Milton Hershey or Bill Utz in remarkably sim-

ilar fashion. Tourists experiencing interpretation of the steel industry's decline in western Pennsylvania hear narratives of progress and industrial spirit. While inspiring, Kitch writes that "we learn little about the political and economic circumstances that hastened [the steel industry's] demise" (p. 139).

In her last chapter, Kitch poses a number of provocative questions about industrial heritage in Pennsylvania. Perhaps the most intriguing is, "Where are the women in industrial heritage?" (p. 159). Here, the author draws upon her own research on advertising for the Lackawanna Railroad that featured a female character, Miss Phoebe Snow. Advertisers hoped to use the Snow character to illustrate that they used anthracite, a relatively clean burning coal, to operate their trains, and that this clean experience made train travel on the "Road of Anthracite" a pleasant, even glamorous, experience. Many other Pennsylvania industrial companies used female characters in this manner (the "Utz Girl" for Utz potato chips, for example). Yet for the most part, a focus upon industrial production sites tends to either erase women from the past, or present them in marginal and domestic roles supportive of men.

The case of Ida Tarbell serves as perhaps the most ironic example of how industrial sites have represented women. The Drake Well historic site presents Tarbell as a "noted oil historian." One would never know from such an exhibit that Tarbell wrote scathing articles about the abuses and excesses of the oil industry for magazines such as ***McClure's***. The Venango Museum in Oil City more appropriately associates Tarbell with other public crusaders, like Ralph Nader and Woodward and Bernstein. Textiles, one of the few industries where women comprised a majority of the workforce, still awaits a museum devoted to its workers in Pennsylvania.

Kitch might have gone into a little more detail when she discusses the Johnstown Flood National Memorial. She rightly states that the story of the flood could provide a "somber footnote to the celebratory story of American industrial progress," and that the memorial tends to rely upon narratives that highlight "tragedy and melodrama" (p. 147). Yet her own characterization of the flood diminishes the stories of inequality and class that define this tragedy. Kitch writes that the 1889 flood killed over 2,200 people when, "due to soil erosion caused by industrialization, a dam north of the city broke and the town was inundated during several days of heavy rain." More accurately, the dam eroded because of neglect. Inspectors repeatedly had warned the dam's owners, the South Fork Fishing and Hunting Club, that it was dangerously unstable. Club members, a body comprised of the most powerful industrialists of the era, including Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick, even acquiesced to having the dam's spillways obstructed so as to improve trout fishing in their lake. Public history sources, such as David McCullough in ***The Johnstown Flood***, and Charles Guggenheim in his Academy Award winning-documentary by the same title, have explored this tragedy's connections to the inequalities of the Gilded Age much more effectively than at the memorial.

As Kitch concludes, decreased funding for public history has meant that historical sites need to strive harder for private sources of funding. This has meant that public history needs to be increasingly entertaining in order to attract larger audiences and bigger corporate sponsors. Kitch does not condemn all public history interpretations that she witnesses, but she seeks to put the priority upon historical learning over popularity. In many ways, she tells the public history world of Pennsylvania news that many might not want to hear. Nevertheless, public historians would benefit greatly from listening to her observations and insights.

Kitch offers up a fascinating survey of industrial historic sites and interpretation in this volume. Pennsylvania, deeply embedded in the histo-

ry of industry and energy extraction, provides an excellent case study for her analysis. Given the vast array of sites that she visited, Kitch weaves together a discussion that is logically organized and clearly argued. My only problem with this book is deciding whether to assign it to students in my public history course or to those who take my class on Pennsylvania history. Given her valuable critical insights, it would be worth it to assign *Pennsylvania in Public Memory* in both.

Note

[1]. Dar Williams, "Southern California Wants to Be Western New York," on *Mortal City,* Razor & Tie, CD, 1996.