

Narrating the Landscape: Print Culture and American Expansion in the Nineteenth Century

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catur County. Over the subsequent decade, Street worked as a buffalo hunter, a cowboy, and a messenger for the army. He describes those experiences in a memoir of meticulous detail. His account of the hide trade is a treatise, informative and thorough, and although he laments the diminishing herds, he recalls being “puffed up” (140) over his first buffalo kill. Relating his busy life, Street name-drops the famous people he knew or saw from afar. In doing so, he places himself within the West’s mythic narrative.

Street intended to share his story with interested readers, but final preparations for publishing the manuscript were left to his great-grandson Warren R. Street, a professor emeritus of psychology at Central Washington University. This edition includes a foreword and notes, and an introduction by historian Richard W. Etulain places Street’s memories within a broader context, rightly concluding that “his is a Huckleberry Finn story of a boy becoming a man” (xxvii).

Narrating the Landscape: Print Culture and American Expansion in the Nineteenth Century, by Matthew N. Johnston. The Charles M. Russell Center Series on Art and Photography of the American West. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016. 242 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Joni Kinsey is professor of American art history in the University of Iowa’s School of Art and Art History. Her books include *Thomas Moran’s West: Chromolithography, High Art, and Popular Taste* (2005) and *Plain Pictures: Images of the American Prairie* (1996).

In contrast to the sweep suggested by its title, *Narrating the Landscape* does not offer a broad treatment of printed landscape portrayals within the larger framework of national expansion but rather considers aspects of “the narrative structuring of spectatorship . . . by which landscape images conveyed concepts of history, consumption, and identity” in nineteenth-century America (87). A revision of the author’s 2004 dissertation, the book asserts that printed images established “new temporal frameworks” for understanding terrain in ways that were substantially different from paintings of the same period. Readers looking for discussions of the origins, production, and dissemination of published imagery, or even a sustained analysis of the differences between landscape paintings and prints, should look elsewhere; Johnston is more interested in how structuralist theory explains how printed images functioned in a culture where relationships with land were rapidly changing.

Comprising four chapters plus an introduction and conclusion as well as 90 illustrations, *Narrating the Landscape* begins by examining a handful of images in a few railroad and steamboat guidebooks before proceeding to others in tourist literature about Newport, Rhode Island, George Catlin and Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's ethnographic publications, and assorted U.S. geological survey reports from 1860 to 1880. Each chapter explores aspects of how those works embody temporal constructs within landscape narration, with the transportation guidebooks, for example, modeling a form of episodic sequential viewing and the ethnographic publications grappling with uneasy representations of the Native American past, present, and future. The Newport chapter emphasizes the historical perspectives of different social classes; the geological publications, unsurprisingly, are framed in the context of the images' portrayal of emerging understandings of geologic time.

Travel guides, tourist literature, and federal expedition reports were certainly important vehicles for presenting printed images of landscape in the nineteenth century, but no less so were a host of other publications, such as magazines and journals, maps, advertisements, bird's eye views, gift books, fine art prints and portfolios, and engraved, lithographic, and chromolithographic reproductions, all of which are unfortunately ignored in this study. This notable shortcoming is exacerbated by the narrow and sometimes idiosyncratic array of publications and images that Johnston does consider. Although he claims that his choice of publications is "not arbitrary" (87), he does not fully explain his criteria or justify his selections. (To discuss only the tourist literature of *Newport* in light of the wealth of possible options seems very odd, for example.) This diminishes the credibility of the sweeping claims he makes about the pictures he does examine: "I have sought to retrieve an entire mode of expression spanning both tourism and science, based on the narrative structuring of landscape views, one that underlies and enables the very association of land and history" (188).

Just as problematic is the labored rhetorical style of *Narrating the Landscape*. Instead of presenting engaging thesis statements that use active subjects and verbs, for example, Johnston persistently relies on the pedantic first person ("I want to claim/argue/explain/suggest," "What interests me . . .", etc.), and he too often resorts to convoluted, self-conscious phrasing that strives more to impress than to clarify, as in: "At this point I want to address some of the wider historical reasons for regarding syncretic textual and pictorial practices in illustrated books as especially compelling important rhetoric in its own right as something more than an uncomplicated juxtaposition of words and pictures, and then foreground some aspects of that methodology em-

ployed here to analyze that rhetoric" (12). Such passages, and much of this book overall, would have benefited greatly from a good editor who could have helped the author distill his sometimes illuminating understanding of the spectacle of nineteenth-century printed landscape images into the fascinating read that his subjects deserve. For this the publisher should bear as much responsibility as the author.

Fostering on the Farm: Child Placement in the Rural Midwest, by Megan Birk. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2015. viii, 234 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Anne Effland is senior economist for domestic policy at the Office of the Chief Economist, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Much of her broad-ranging research and writing has focused on agricultural labor, including that of migrants, women, and children.

In *Fostering on the Farm*, Megan Birk offers an intertwined history of agrarian ideals and child welfare policy that is both sweeping and steeped in detail. Moving us beyond the oft-told stories of the orphan trains and the naive beliefs in the inherent virtue of farmers and outdoor living, Birk digs deep into the harsh realities of both farming and farm placements of needy children at the turn of the twentieth century. She takes us through a half-century of changing views of American farm life and care of indigent children, explaining the rise and fall of the farm placement system and the eventual adoption of paid foster care and family preservation, with a preference for keeping children in town and urban settings.

Birk centers her study on the rural Midwest, the focus of the late nineteenth-century glorification of rural homes for orphan children. Birk, however, is most interested in the local manifestations of that ideal rather than the more familiar national story. She grounds her analytical narrative at the county level, tracing the growing and changing administrative structures and the actual care experiences of children and families involved in farm placements. Birk presents the philosophies, practical politics, and daily administration of county programs as the movement in favor of farm placements grew, then follows their transformation as state institutions took progressively greater control and often moved children farther from their original homes. Interspersed throughout are the stories of individual children's and families' experiences, deftly lifted from the same local institutional sources that support the rest of the study. Birk has meticulously combed county and state government records, records of private institutions, annual reports of state and county governing boards, other government reports,