

BOOK REVIEWS

California's Channel Islands: A History. By Frederic Caire Chiles. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015. Bibliography, illustrations, maps, index, and notes. xiv + 282 pp. \$19.95 paper.

Reviewed by David Miller, Adjunct Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of San Diego.

Sitting just off the coast of Southern California, oftentimes within view of the mainland, the Channel Islands are nonetheless an overlooked subject of historical study. What coverage do they get in most California history classes? The half dozen or so extant books about the Islands are guide books, providing tourist information as well as offering insight into the Islands' geologic beauty, flora and fauna, and natural history. Frederic Caire Chiles has changed that by providing a refreshing new look at the Islands in this insightful new history, arguing that while overlooked and understudied, the Channel Islands are nonetheless an important and interesting part of California history.

Chiles organizes the book in a clear and accessible way. Its ten chapters include an introduction explaining the geology of the Islands, a chapter on indigenous history, and eight more chapters each devoted to a particular island, beginning with San Miguel in the northwest and working in order down to San Clemente at the southern end of the chain. Each chapter then follows the same organization beginning with a map, brief geological history, and a chronological accounting of each of the four phases of human habitation. Chiles identifies these as the prehistoric indigenous phase (which includes initial contact with the Spanish), the Spanish occupation of California following the Portolá expedition, the brief Mexican era, and finally the American phase. With this organization each chapter, while connected, is discrete and could be read or referenced in any order. Chiles includes an extensive index and table of contents showing maps, photos, and illustrations again adding to the clarity of organization and ease of accessibility. Although organized identically, each chapter varies in length and coverage. And the majority of information in each chapter covers the American period. This should not be surprising given that each island and phase varies in terms of materials available and actual history of human occupation. One minor complaint is that the book lacks a comprehensive map of the entire chain and their relation to the coast. Given the abundance of maps and images of each individual island, one wonders about the omission of a basic reference map. Nonetheless, Chiles

has assembled a well-organized, clear, and accessible history.

Perhaps Chiles's most important contribution is his history of the native peoples of the Islands. He has compiled oral traditions, archeological studies, and Spanish accounts to reveal the richness and importance of indigenous life on the Islands. Some of the first inhabitants of what is now California lived on the Islands as far back as 9-13,000 years ago. In fact, Chiles notes, "Santa Rosa and San Miguel Islands have the highest concentration of prehistoric sites in all of North America" (p. 13). The Chumash and Tongva people inhabited all the Islands by 5,000 years ago, and archeological records show sophisticated societies who adapted to climate change, technological development, and food availability. Chiles's discussion of the plank canoe provides a case in point. Developed between 1,500-3,000 years ago and called a "tomol," these vessels were 15 feet long and could carry up to one ton of cargo (pp. 15-16). This invention made deep sea travel possible, opening up new trade links, new fishing opportunities, and a new layer of social hierarchy as only the powerful tribe members controlled the boats. This history of the tomol provides insight into indigenous diet, trade, concepts of ownership, tools, and divisions of labor. In short, it is important cultural, economic, and social history. The chapter follows the history of the Chumash and Tongva people to Spanish contact when disease decimated the native population. Finally, during the colonial period, the presence of Europeans signaled the end of over 10,000 years of civilization when the last natives left the Islands in 1829.

Readers will also be interested in the colorful history of the Channel Islands since the arrival of the Spanish. Chiles's great grandfather once owned Santa Cruz Island, and the author devotes a substantial amount of space to the details and intrigue of his family history. In it the reader sees not only a fascinating local history but broader connections to important themes in California history, including immigration and the gold rush. In the chapter on Santa Catalina Island Chiles writes an enjoyable section on the history of the Wrigley family and their efforts to bring the first tourists to the islands. This is a colorful history of Avalon and the now famous day-trip to Catalina. Readers will also find plenty of material relating to the other important aspects of Channel Island history, from Mexican land grants and sheep farming to the presence of the U.S. military and 20th century efforts to preserve and protect the Islands.

While this book does not answer any larger scholarly questions about the history and development of California since the Spanish period, it does fill a gap in our collective understanding of the history of the Channel Islands and their connection to California. And it does that well. Historians of California as well as anyone interested in learning more about this often neglected part of California history will find it useful. So too will locals interested in a trip to the

Islands benefit from the book. This reviewer for one has a new curiosity about the Channel Islands and I will take it along as a useful guide and resource on my first visit.

The Immigrant and the University: Peder Sather and Gold Rush California. By Karin Sveen. Translated by Barbara J. Haveland. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014. Bibliography, illustrations, and index. xvi + 288 pp. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Stephen Cox, Professor, Department of Literature, University of California, San Diego.

Everyone who has visited the University of California, Berkeley has seen Sather Gate and Sather Tower – elegant monuments to the name of Peder Sather. Who was this person, and what was his connection to the university?

That is the question Karin Sveen sets out to answer. In a way, she answers it. Sather (1810-1886) was an immigrant born in rural Norway. He landed in New York in 1832 and became a small-time banker. In 1851 he went to San Francisco, where he became a banker of much more impressive means. When he died he left an estate worth more than a hundred million dollars in today's money, the result of wise investments in a California economy that he had helped to achieve maturity. In 1860 he joined a committee attempting to create a University of California. He served on the committee for three years. Like many other wealthy people of the time, he joined a variety of civic groups: organizations for aid to soldiers in the Civil War, for aid to destitute sailors, for the support of former slaves, for the study of natural sciences, and so on. One would like to know what all this meant to the once-impooverished Norwegian immigrant, but neither he nor any of his acquaintances provided a substantial account of his life.

Sveen, herself a Norwegian, has searched for evidence of that life, and she has found enough to reconstruct significant parts of it. She presents many basic facts, and sometimes she is able to evoke the atmosphere of daily existence in the commercial New York and San Francisco of Sather's time. Her descriptions of Sather's homes and offices and relations with his friends and employees are interesting in themselves, and useful correctives to often misunderstood aspects of the American West.

Yet Sather remains a distant figure, his specific actions, motives, feelings, and priorities largely unknown. Even his relationship with the University of California remains hazy. Those beautiful memorials on the Berkeley campus were

the gifts of his second wife, Jane K. Sather. Whether he himself actually did much of anything for the university is a question that Sveen leaves unanswered. She thinks he donated land, but she isn't sure. One wonders: Are there no surviving title deeds? No relevant minutes of university meetings? And if such records are missing for some reason, shouldn't his biographer tell us how that happened? But she doesn't.

There are other things absent from her work. Sather was a religious man, a convert to the Baptist church and apparently a pillar of the church in San Francisco, but the book reveals nothing definite about the character of that church, or of Sather's involvement with it. Are there no records bearing on these things? Sveen refers to William Kip, an important figure in Sather's circle, as "the bishop of California," without specifying his denomination (Episcopal). Neither does she mention his autobiography, an important source of information on early California. It's all rather hazy.

The fundamental problem is that Sveen's book shows no evidence of effective editorial attention. On the contrary: the narrative is rambling and repetitious, and the treatment of history abounds with errors of fact, many of them obvious. Abraham Lincoln did not conduct his presidential campaign by insisting that slavery be abolished throughout the country (p. 149). The Franco-Prussian War was not "raging" when Sather traveled in Europe; he returned to America three months before it started (p. 213). The "Know Nothing" Party was not prominent in New York when Sather arrived; its moment came two decades later (p. 23). The "attempt . . . to form an Anti-Masonic Party" was not "doomed to failure"; it succeeded, with damaging effects on Freemasonry (p. 99). The Erie Canal (opened in 1825) was not financed (in the 1830s) by sales of "vast tracts of public land to private individuals," nor did "speculators" make "fabulous profits" on such deals (p. 40). Donations of land were made to the Erie Canal but proved almost worthless. Few speculators got rich on the period's sales of government land; many, such as Daniel Webster, went broke on them. "The entire American financial sector" did not "gr[i]nd to a halt" during the Panic of 1857 (p. 133). When inflation happens, prices do not go down – if that is Sveen's meaning when she says that "with so much gold in circulation" in California, "prices plummeted, inflation rose, and it was only a matter of time before the market would collapse" (p. 124).

Even more remarkable than these confusions is the scarcity of useful references to the extensive research that Sveen has done and that future scholars will want to build upon. Sources are mentioned, often vaguely, but one looks in vain for footnotes. The back of the book contains a thirty-seven page bibliography, but a list of titles does little to indicate whether particular passages of Sveen's text are reproductions of documentary evidence, deductions from evidence, or more or

less plausible speculations.

The result—which might, again, have been prevented by effective editorial advice—is a promising but disappointing book.

San Diego in the 1930s: The WPA Guide to America's Finest City. By the Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration. Introduction by David Kipen. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013. Bibliography, illustrations, maps, and photographs. xviii + 138 pp. \$21.95 paper.

Reviewed by Theodore A. Strathman, Lecturer, Department of History, California State University San Marcos.

In the past several years, the University of California Press has reprinted the Works Progress Administration's guides to Los Angeles (reviewed in this journal in 2011), San Francisco, and California. San Diego's WPA guidebook was released in 1937, two years before the statewide guide and four years before the Los Angeles book. As such, *San Diego: A California City* (the title under which the book was first released) captures the region immediately before the "blitz-boom" of the war years wrought profound changes. This timing is part of what makes the guide so valuable to those interested in San Diego history: it paints a portrait of a city still struggling to cast off its identity as a regional backwater and develop an economic foundation.

The guide consists of several sections, the first of which, "General Information," offers helpful information to the 1937 visitor, explaining transportation options to and around the city, local accommodations, and relevant regulations. The following sections describe San Diego's "Contemporary Scene," geography, and natural setting. That the fifth section, "Historical," is the longest of the book (apart from that describing driving tours in the area) is no real surprise, since the San Diego Historical Society sponsored and published the original guide. Chapters on the region's economy and social and cultural characteristics, together with a chronology and descriptions of nine tours in and around the city, complete the book.

This organizational scheme means that the book is guilty of some repetition. For instance, the sections on the local economy and on culture and society contain information also found in the guide's chapter on history. This flaw is remedied in part by a thorough index that allows the reader to find passages relevant to a given subject in multiple chapters.

Students and scholars of San Diego's past will naturally be drawn to the chapter on history, and as David Kipen's excellent introduction points out, the value here is both in the events recorded and the "attitudes [the book] embodies" (p. xv). For example, modern readers may cringe at some of the dismissive descriptions of Native American culture – "Tribal organization was almost unknown," the guide tells us, and their religious "beliefs did not follow logical sequence" (p. 23) – and assessments such as that claiming the American legal system was "beyond the comprehension" of Californios (p. 55). In places, though, the writers of the guide reveal more sympathy towards the residents of "Old California" who found themselves displaced by the American conquest. The guide does not hesitate, for example, to acknowledge the deceit and fraud some Anglo Americans employed to acquire Californios' rancho lands. Apart from issues of cultural bias, the guide's history has some additional shortcomings. For instance, its discussion of the secularization of the missions is quite brief and seems to level undue criticism at Governor José Figueroa, who apparently was sincere in his desire to protect neophytes, even if his policies failed to do so. In addition, the guide does not provide a very satisfactory discussion on the system of Indian peonage that developed on the ranchos. Finally, the section on the period after 1900 is quite brief and does not provide much analysis and contextualization.

As a primary source, though, the guide offers innumerable rewards, and readers interested in history should not dismiss the sections on contemporary (1937) San Diego. The opening sentence of the guide, for example, describes railroad travel to San Diego: "four trains daily for Los Angeles and points E., connecting at Los Angeles with the Southern Pacific Lines for points N.; San Diego and Eastern Ry... one train daily for Calexico, Calif., and Yuma, Ariz., where it connects with trains E." The guide, in short, begins with a tacit acknowledgement of San Diego's relative isolation and subservience to Los Angeles. The driving tours that close the book will delight the reader with an evocative picture of the city and its backcountry. Here too may be found colorful tidbits, from a note about a mulberry grove and silk factory in San Marcos to an aside about Carlsbad changing its name to the less Germanic "Carl" during the First World War. Meanwhile, the section on the region's economy does well to suggest issues that would be at the heart of local development in the coming years. The writers noted the resistance of some locals to industrial development, the necessity for continued development of water supplies, and the growing importance of the aviation industry and the San Diego-naval partnership.

While *San Diego in the 1930s* will not in itself correct the lack of academic scholarship on the history of this region (and those who bemoan this lack will surely note the slender nature of this volume compared to its counterparts dealing

with Los Angeles and San Francisco), it should provide a new generation of scholars some useful raw materials in an easily accessible format. General readers will also find much to enjoy and much to ponder in this welcome reprint.

Celebrate
SAN DIEGO!



**Join today to gain free
unlimited admission to our
exciting exhibitions
through 2015**

Already a member? Thank you for your
continued support!

Share your love of history with others by
purchasing a membership as a gift.

CONTACT US *today!*

SANDIEGOHISTORY.ORG/JOIN
MEMBERSHIP@SANDIEGOHISTORY.ORG
619.232.6203 X 102

SAN DIEGO HISTORY CENTER

BOOK NOTES

Death of a Suburban Dream: Race and Schools in Compton, California. Politics and Culture in Modern America series. By Emily E. Straus. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014. Illustrations, maps, notes, and index. viii + 313 pp. \$55.00 cloth. Historian Emily Straus of the State University of New York at Fredonia explores the intersection of race and schooling in the Los Angeles suburb of Compton. The monograph traces demographic change – as African Americans succeeded whites in Compton before substantial numbers of Latinos arrived – and examines how these groups struggled to shape educational policy in the face of profound economic change.

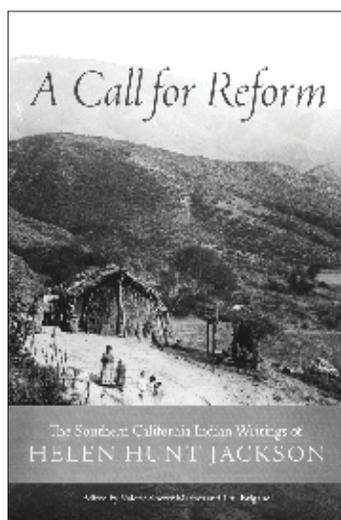
Empress San Francisco: The Pacific Rim, the Great West, and California at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. By Abigail M. Markwyn. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2014. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, and index. xi + 335 pp. \$35.00 cloth. *Empress San Francisco* is one of several recent books interpreting San Francisco's exposition in celebration of the completion of the Panama Canal. This study pays particular attention to how a diverse range of groups attempted to shape the content of the fair, thus revealing the complexity of a city and a nation presenting a notion of American identity to visitors from around the world.

A Great Aridness: Climate Change and the Future of the American Southwest. By William deBuys. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, and index. xii + 369 pp. \$27.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper. In an introduction and eleven chapters set in twelve places, William deBuys offers a sobering look into the future of the Southwest, as climate change and increasing human populations set the stage for various environmental catastrophes.

Jon Lewis: Photographs of the California Grape Strike. By Richard Steven Street. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013. Illustrations, notes, and index. xx + 439 pp. \$49.95 cloth. This book explores the work of Jon Lewis, a former marine and photography student who came to Delano in 1966 and spent the next two years documenting the United Farm Workers' strike against grape growers. Richard Steven Street, himself a photographer, tells the story of Lewis's work and his professional relationship with César Chávez while simultaneously chronicling the plight of California's migrant farmworkers.

Mono Lake: From Dead Sea to Environmental Treasure. By Abraham Hoffman. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014. Illustrations, maps, bibliography, and index. xvi + 168 pp. \$34.95 cloth. Abraham Hoffman, an authority on the history of the Los Angeles Aqueduct, has now published this monograph on the history of Mono Lake. The book explores how various groups, from Paiutes to gold miners to tourists, have used and abused the lake, and Hoffman examines how environmentalists succeeded in slowing the city of Los Angeles's diversions from the streams that feed Mono Lake.

Russian California, 1806–1860: A History in Documents. Vol. 1 and 2. Hakluyt Society Series 3. Edited by James R. Gibson and Alexei A. Istomin with Valery A. Tishkov. Translated by James R. Gibson. London: Hakluyt Society, 2014. Illustrations, maps, tables, and notes. lxii + 1200 pp. \$225.00 (2 vols.) cloth. This two-volume set brings together nearly 500 primary source documents (including letters, official reports, and travel narratives) pertaining to Russian exploration and settlement in California. The editors have provided extensive annotation and an introduction that offer critical context for understanding the documents.



A CALL FOR REFORM
The Southern California Indian
Writings of Helen Hunt Jackson
 Edited by Valerie Sherer Mathes
 and Phil Brigandi

\$29.95 HARDCOVER · 248 PAGES · 39 B&W ILLUS.

Journalist, novelist, and scholar Helen Hunt Jackson remains one of the most influential and popular writers on the struggles of American Indians. This volume collects for the first time seven of her most important articles. Valuable as eyewitness accounts of Mission Indian life in Southern California in the 1880s, the articles also offer insight into Jackson's career.



UNIVERSITY OF
 OKLAHOMA PRESS

2800 VENTURE DRIVE · NORMAN, OK 73069

TEL 800 627 7377 · OUPRESS.COM



THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY INSTITUTION. WWW.OU.EDU/EOO