Review of Appalachia: A History, by John Williams Alexander

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Of the crashes covered in the book, 127 people are involved and 56 survive. The authors are careful to be respectful while telling the stories of those who died, without softening their message. Of equal impact are the stories of those who survived. A number of victims endured days with little or no food or protection from the elements. The authors also include narratives about those who launch efforts to rescue crash victims. Some of the rescue missions cross agencies and even state lines in the hopes of finding survivors.

The book also includes a number of special features that add to its importance. First, the authors provide photos of wrecks and rescue attempts. Two tables entitled “Probable Causes or Major Events Leading to an Incident,” and “How Did They Survive?” both provide a quick reference list and summary for readers. The book also includes endnotes, a bibliography, and a concluding chapter. Finally, the authors warn against hikers trying to find crash sites. Author Jeff Wadley became dangerously lost trying to find a crash site to take photographs.

Overall, this is a highly recommended book for its uniqueness, its authority, and its form. The authors spent a great deal of time and effort documenting and researching the crashes. Furthermore, the style and form of the book will appeal to a variety of audiences.

Lisa A. Ennis
Russell Library
Georgia College & State University


Williams, a history professor at Appalachian State University, has written a remarkable history of a region that historians have “often ended by doubting that the place even exists as a definable entity.” They have concluded instead that it is “a territory only of the mind, an idée des savants, a place that has been invented, not discovered, an ‘alternative America’ projected onto mountains and mountain people by reformers whose real purpose is to critique or change things in the nation at large.”

The book is arranged chronologically, the five chapters cover roughly 500 years, from 1540 to 2000. It draws from excellent scholarship generated within the field of Appalachian Studies, as well as primary and secondary source materials. Williams examines events and social issues from different locales, blending them into a seamless vision of the region from which we gain an almost comprehensive perspective. While not completely inclusive due only to the historical dearth of research in the region, the author analyzes the roles that people, other than upper class white men, have played in shaping the character of Appalachia.

Carefully removing any manifestations of ponderous, academic style, Williams crafts a fine narrative that pleasure readers will devour, and students will not labor to muddle through. The depth and scope of the book guarantees that it will appear in syllabi of history curricula at regional colleges and universities.
This serious, well-documented book aims to entertain as well as educate. It’s exceptionally well written and documented. The notes, arranged at the end of the book, and the bibliography are both extensive. The index is serviceable as well. Maps, tables and illustrations complete the volume.

This is an essential book for all academic libraries in Tennessee, all public libraries east of Knoxville, and obligatory for metropolitan public libraries in the other two grand divisions of Tennessee. Besides adding this book to your library’s collection, I highly recommend it for your personal collection. In fact, every welcome wagon within the region should present a copy to recent Appalachian transplants, especially those who do not know the proper pronunciation of Appalachia, a subject that Williams delicately covers in the introduction.

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Webliography: Tennessee Library Organizations

Marie F. Jones, Web Editor

I'm relatively new to the state of Tennessee, and when I came here in 2000, it took me a bit of work to navigate through the alphabet soup of Tennessee Library acronyms. For those who might be in a similar quandary, this list of state organizations should be fairly comprehensive. I've also included notes about each organization's website for those of you who know the organization but might not be aware of all the resources available from them.

If I missed someone's organization, or I've inadvertently included some misinformation, let me know! One of the wonderful things about this Web format is that anything can be added or changed fairly easily.

Tennessee Library Association (TLA)