

class was . . . active in its own making" (p. 276), readers might appreciate a fuller array of evidence about the texture of the black working-class presence. Still, there is much to learn from this otherwise interesting book.

*State Historical Society
of Wisconsin, Madison*

Michael A. Gordon

Shaping an American Institution: Robert E. Wood and Sears, Roebuck. By James C. Worthy. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984. Pp. xx, 299. Illustrations, tables, note on sources, notes, bibliography, index. \$18.95.)

James C. Worthy, a former vice-president under Robert E. Wood at Sears, and now a professor of management at Northwestern University, has drawn together the management philosophies of General Wood. Worthy suggests that while Wood's successful business strategies spurred Sears into the forefront of retail trade in the 1920s and 1930s and again after World War II, those strategies were not adapted to meet changing conditions after Wood retired in 1954. Admittedly, Worthy's biography (based largely on his personal notes and secondary sources) of a man he admired tends toward puffery. Nonetheless, the reader who recognizes the obvious bias and questions the more sweeping generalizations can gain some important insights into the life of a successful corporate entrepreneur.

Robert Wood held a breadth of knowledge (and an interest in statistics) that led him to recognize in the 1910s that the mail-order catalog market, primarily made up of farmers, was shrinking and that a new market, consisting of urban dwellers, was materializing. Having failed to persuade Montgomery Ward of the wisdom of his ideas, Wood moved to Sears in 1924 and began to fashion a merger of the mail-order business and retail sales. Within his business philosophy, moreover, Wood reversed the usual capitalistic perspective. The company, he believed, should serve the customer first, the employee second, the community third, and lastly, the stockholders. The assumption was clear: if the first three groups were well-served, then the fourth would reap benefits as well. Meanwhile, Wood altered Sears's buying and selling strategies. Instead of negotiating down a list price, Sears buyers worked closely with the suppliers to ascertain the costs of raw materials and of production, and then added a profit. Wood also sought to sell products that the customer desired, not just what was available from the suppliers.

Perhaps the most interesting of Wood's strategies was the way in which he encouraged Sears employees. He built upon a

foundation that Julius Rosenwald had established in 1916, the Profit Sharing and Pension plan, to sustain loyalty and longevity in employment. Wood also focused company strategies to promote the personal growth of store managers. Using a "flat" organizational structure, Wood gave the store manager autonomy to solve problems without corporate interference. Sears produced competent managers, but the inner-directed program did not create another Robert Wood. Ironically, then, Wood's entrepreneurial and management strategies held a fatal flaw: they did not encourage the breadth of vision necessary to adapt the firm to sweeping changes in the 1950s and 1960s.

This volume exposes numerous opportunities for further research. For example, Wood's military experience may have influenced his business strategies more than Worthy admits, and studies of Sears's expansion into Latin America after World War II might reveal more comparative analyses for international business history.

The Ohio State University, Columbus

William R. Childs

Kentucky Place Names. By Robert M. Rennick. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984. Pp. xxiv, 375. Endmaps, notes, references. \$30.00.)

With the publication of Robert Rennick's *Kentucky Place Names*, Kentucky became the thirty-third state to have a state place name dictionary or similar study of its place names. Indiana and five other midwestern states are members of this group, which has grown at a glacial rate for most of the past fifty years but has picked up speed since about 1970, when a rebirth of interest in such work occurred.

Rennick initiated his research on Kentucky place names in 1971, which happens to be the year he took part in one of a series of annual place name conferences held at Indiana State University. Such an extended period of attention and work have borne fruit, for *Kentucky Place Names* is a substantial and attractive book, one that should be particularly interesting to people from states in whose settlement Kentuckians and their place names had a significant part. Since *Kentucky Place Names* is a 2,000 entry dictionary, one can open it to any page and find something of interest; but the introduction must be read if one is to comprehend Rennick's point of view and to account for the volume's strengths and weaknesses.

Despite Rennick's role as coordinator of the Kentucky Place Name Survey, his book provides little handy information for comparative purposes. Rennick eschews a system of classifica-