Schlereth points out that "area studies (national and regional) are usually done best not in a historical or geographical vacuum, but in a cross-cultural and comparative perspective" (p. 168). Some of the essays in the collection would have benefited from a comparative perspective by first acknowledging similarities in folk cultures before enumerating regional differences, but on the whole this book is an important contribution to the study of regional cultures. Any collection of essays by eleven different writers will suffer some of the same problems of inconsistency in orientation as well as in style, but these are minor problems in this useful anthology.


This book stems from two summer institutes funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities at the Newberry Library in Chicago to help history professors learn how to use maps as documents rather than as mere illustrations in their teaching and research. Nine contributors have written twelve substantive chapters. Each chapter has an essay describing a particular type of map and a set of selected maps with commentaries; but the maps are segregated at the end of each chapter, and the necessity of constantly flipping back and forth between text and maps becomes tiresome.

The idea of matching old and more recent maps has intriguing possibilities that some authors exploit nicely. Because some of the matches require careful study, however, comparison is not facilitated when identifying letters on the maps do not correlate with those in the text (p. 151) or when they have been left off the map completely (p. 253).

Some authors understood the necessity of using only excerpts of large maps, of zooming in for close-ups so to speak. Far too many of the maps, however, have been reduced so much that they are virtually illegible even under magnification, and half-tone printing does not permit as much magnification as many of the maps require.
The first half of the book is disappointing, except for Louis DeVorsey's chapter, because it merely talks about maps instead of showing what one can do with them. Few teachers, for example, will find much value in discussions of early mapmakers and the maps they made or in descriptions of rare maps they will never be able to see. A chapter on landscape paintings seems out of place in a book about maps, and it is not clear why the editor elected to include two colored plates of Hull House maps when one would have been quite adequate and both are virtually ignored in the text. One wonders also about using a precious color plate in a book about maps to reproduce only the cover, however colorful, of a state highway map.

The book begins to come to life in the second half, perhaps because during the last part of the nineteenth century there are far more maps to choose from but mainly because the authors seem to have understood their assignment better. Here they include examples that show how scholars and teachers have actually used maps as documents rather than as mere illustrations.

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The in-depth study of American communities has been in vogue for professional historians for many years as part of the new social history, but, according to W. B. Stephens, "local history" has largely continued to be based too heavily on anecdote and tradition and not enough on fact. Stephens has provided an essential guide for both academic and lay historians who wish to explore nineteenth-century community history. While the book deals specifically with sources for the previous century, many of the works mentioned have equivalents for other periods, and the methodologies are applicable regardless.

The book begins with a lengthy overview of primary and secondary, published and unpublished sources. Subsequent chapters deal with specific sources available for exploring broad subject areas: demography; ethnicity and race; the land, settlement, and farming; religion; local government, politics, and organized labor; manufacturing, mining, and business activity; maritime activity, communications, and the fur trade; education; and poverty, health, and crime. Areas specifically excluded by the author are: military history; parts of America before they became states; technical subjects such as archaeology and geology; cultural life; oral history; and artifactual evidence.