
Book Reviews

Always a River: The Ohio River and the American Experience.
Edited by Robert L. Reid. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. Pp. xvi, 250. Notes, illustrations, figures. Cloth-bound, \$35.00; paperbound, \$12.95.)

Recently I stopped in Cairo, Illinois, to picnic at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. Seeing these two mighty waterways merge was a powerful moment. That special point on the map—the mouth of the Ohio River—is part of a long and distinguished heritage that reaches from Cairo to Pittsburgh that is the subject of the seven essays collected for *Always a River: The Ohio River and the American Experience*. This compendium grew out of a major project of the same name that included public programs, televised news stories, and a floating museum exhibit on a barge.

Scott Russell Sanders's essay winds and rambles like the river itself through a series of thoughts on history, pollution, commerce, recreation, and Native Americans. Yet his style is also part of the appeal, in that it is the only essay which places people at the center. John Jakle's work compares two travelers on the river, English fortune seeker Nicholas Cresswell and historian Reuben Gold Thwaites. One writing in the 1770s and the other in the 1890s saw the river in the process of fundamental change—Cresswell on the verge of peopling, Thwaites in the midst of industrialization.

Hubert Wilhelm and Michael Allen deal with the impact of outside forces on the river. Wilhelm tracks settlement patterns based on early town arrangements, barn styles, and log cabins. Allen's work on the river as an "artery of movement" links boats and people, fact and mythology. The remaining three essays are impersonal and abstract in their tone and subject. Boyd Keenan discusses the ecopolitical system, Leland Johnson describes the efforts of the Army Corps of Engineers to change the river for public service uses, and Darrel Bigham writes on economics and commerce. These three works lack a sense that actual people were involved in the processes.

It is easy to imagine different essays or approaches. Reid's introduction suggests a stronger social history approach, for example. The imagery of the Ohio River is only superficially examined, and the place of the Ohio River as a symbol of freedom for slaves is an important topic barely mentioned. Nonetheless, this collection of essays attempts to grapple with a difficult and complex sub-



A PRINT OF KARL BODMER'S "CAVE-IN-ROCK, ON THE OHIO" (1832)

Courtesy Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis.

ject and suggests some new ways of thinking about the relationships between waterways and their surroundings over time.

JEFFREY SMITH is executive director of the St. Louis Mercantile Library, which operates the Herman T. Pott National Inland Waterways Library. He is completing a book linking industrial league baseball, welfare work, and progressivism.

Letters from New France: The Upper Country, 1686–1783. Translated and edited by Joseph L. Peyser. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992. Pp. xv, 248. Maps, tables, figures, notes, illustrations, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.)

Joseph L. Peyser has collected and translated French manuscripts, mostly official, dealing with affairs in the *pays d'en haut*, the region surrounding the Great Lakes and upper Mississippi Valley. His twelve-year project began as a historical celebration of Fort St. Joseph (Niles, Mich.) but expanded into "a sequential picture of the struggles, growth and ultimate defeat of the French empire in North America" (p. xi). The book's contents have been selected from about two thousand manuscript pages relating to