

ceivable, are difficult to read occasionally mar the text. On balance, however, this is a good book with well-researched descriptions of the placing-out system and thoughtful analyses of the origins, modifications, and demise of this intriguing part of the American welfare system.

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*Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880–1940.* By David E. Nye. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990. Pp. xv, 479. Illustrations, tables, map, notes, bibliography, index. Clothbound, \$32.50; paperbound, \$15.95.)

One of the transforming developments of the past century has been the widespread adoption of electricity as a source of power and a means of lighting. In *Electrifying America* David E. Nye deals with this change, focusing not on the technological or business history of the electrical industry but on the impact electricity had on society and the way of life of the average American. Dealing with the period 1880 to 1940, Nye demonstrates the powerful consequences of the new technology in the United States.

This book is of special interest to Hoosier readers because Nye's first chapter focuses on the impact of electricity on America's Middletown, Muncie. Throughout the book he relies on examples from the Muncie area, giving Indiana disproportionate attention in this national study. After surveying the electrification of Muncie, Nye devotes chapters to the development of electric streetcar systems, the application of the new source of power to manufacturing, the promotion of electrical appliances for the home, and the movement for rural electrification. With an admirable breadth of vision, Nye examines such diverse sources as paintings, popular literature, General Electric advertisements, and world's fair promotional material, presenting what they have to say about electricity and its impact on American life. His work is at times imaginative and always ambitious.

Nye's ambitions, however, exceed his achievement. His individual chapters on transportation, manufacturing, and the home are too brief to satisfy the specialist who would expect a volume on each of these topics. Yet as a general summary the work also seems incomplete. Limiting the book's effectiveness is a definite proelectricity bias. For example, Nye neglects the early fears of the new technology that delayed its adoption. Hoosier President Benjamin Harrison and his wife refused to turn on the new electric lights in the White House for fear of being shocked, and they were not alone in their misgivings. Electricity not only excited the American love of progress, it also represented a frightening force

that in the movies would bring Frankenstein's monster to life. In the American imagination electricity was not all light; it was darkness as well. Nye only occasionally touches on such perceptions in his account of the blessings that electricity wrought.

On the whole, Nye has offered a stimulating and expansive account that may not prove definitive but might well stir further interest in his topic. It deserves to be read by all serious students of American culture.

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*Jens Jensen: Maker of Natural Parks and Gardens.* By Robert E. Grese. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992. Pp. xiv, 304. Illustrations, maps, figures, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.)

It is a pity that landscape design has to be such a self-destructive work of art. As soon as it is in place in its perfect form, it begins to grow, erode, require trimming, go to seed, succumb to pollution and vermin, and otherwise change its form. Even the work of such famous landscape creators as Frederick Law Olmsted survives as only a small sample of the original output. Such is also the fate of Jens Jensen, and that is too bad. Not too many know the work of the Danish-born designer outside his role as the landscape specialist for the "Prairie School," the group of architects who accepted the principles of design best articulated by Frank Lloyd Wright. Jensen eagerly accepted the notion that the Midwest could produce an architecture—both building and landscape—that incorporated the native building materials, natural colors, and horizontal flatness of the region.

But Jensen's importance transcends the role as a mere supplement to the Prairie School. As Robert E. Grese points out in this fascinating and important book, Jensen also became a major American interpreter of the function of city parks, designing thirty-four of them in Chicago alone during the first part of his career. The relative newness of that city and its parks during the first part of the century gave him the opportunity to shape the basic design and purpose of the public sylvan retreats and playgrounds. That task, however, was made difficult by low budgets and interference from politicians. Midway through his career Jensen shifted his attention from public to more private urban, suburban, and wilderness spaces. A substantial practice of estate landscaping included such wealthy clients as Henry Ford but thrived primarily among Chicago's North Shore suburban elite. This income supported both Jensen's untiring efforts to educate the public about the importance of the natural landscape that surrounded them and his ef-