

writes of "the United States in the late 1750s" (p. 36)! No historian worth his salt would make that error.

MARTIN RIDGE is professor of history at the California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, and Senior Research Associate in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California. He is past president of the Western History Association and author of *Atlas of American Frontiers* (1993).

*The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art: Culture Comes to Kansas City.*

By Kristie C. Wolferman. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993. Pp. viii, 225. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

The history of American art museums is, in many respects, the history of American civic pride, of American grand tourists gaining awareness of and emulating European culture, and of American private patronage. No such history is more fascinating or impressive than that of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. That history is admirably recounted by Kristie C. Wolferman in her recently published book, written for the sixtieth anniversary of the museum. Wolferman relates how, between 1911 and 1933, the aspirations of Mary Atkins and William Rockhill Nelson produced one of the finest civic art museums in the country. It was an astonishing accomplishment: the trustees of the Atkins and Nelson estates planned, designed, and built the museum even before a real collection had been created.

The trustees began a serious collection just a few years before the museum was due to open in 1933. A combination of common sense, good taste, ambition, and intelligence enabled this remarkable group of men and women to assemble important works by great masters and equally important great works by then lesser known figures. When the museum did open, the collections included masterpieces of European and Eastern cultures set in a grand, neoclassically designed structure embellished with particularly fine landscaping of the kind that had long been the hallmark of Kansas City's urban design.

Wolferman recounts the story of the museum clearly and concisely. Her introduction places the development of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art within the context of American museums in general. Her first chapter is devoted to Atkins, whose bequest of one million dollars started the project. A rather more lengthy chapter is devoted to the fascinating character of Nelson, who should be of interest to Hoosiers since his roots lie in Indiana: he received his degree at Notre Dame, and he lived and practiced law in Fort Wayne.

Anyone interested in midwestern history cannot fail to enjoy this book, which focuses on one of the Midwest's major institutions.

Those who love art and art museums will find Wolferman's account especially interesting. One could only wish for a few color illustrations to embellish this worthwhile text.

ADELHEID M. GEALT has served as director of the Indiana University Art Museum for the past five years. Prior to that, she was curator of western art at the same institution.