Throughout the book Rutherford reminds us that, even though education and professional opportunities opened to women in the early decades of the twentieth century, the ideology of domesticity that Catherine Beecher promoted in the nineteenth century maintained its appeal. Radical feminists such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman challenged the ideology of separate spheres that naturalized women’s domestic duties and suggested cooperative housekeeping arrangements that would do away with the private sphere altogether. As Rutherford points out, however, Frederick remained loyal to Beecher’s ideology, except—like Beecher—in the case of her own life. Frederick recognized and capitalized on the fact that Americans were not interested in giving up their private homes or the gendered division of labor that kept them running. Throughout her career she sought to stabilize and preserve the traditional American home by bringing scientific management principles to housekeeping and turning women into expert consumers.

Frederick had two audiences for her expertise: homemakers hungry for advice and manufacturers and advertisers eager to learn from “Mrs. Consumer” herself how best to entice them. She sold modern housekeeping to women and female consumers to modern advertisers. Rutherford maintains her keen observation of contradiction as she reveals that as “a broker” between advertisers and Mrs. Consumer, Frederick simultaneously empowered and belittled American women. She sought ways of making housekeeping less of a burden but refused to allow that freed-up time might be spent pursuing a career—either by choice or by necessity. Rutherford exposes the fact that, although Frederick promoted women’s power as consumers, she assigned them power in the marketplace they did not have while belittling them to male advertisers and ignoring opportunities to acknowledge women’s unpaid labor and economic dependence. All the while she refused to acknowledge the contradiction between the domestic ideals she so vigorously promoted and the satisfying public life she led.

Rutherford is clearly both fascinated by and disappointed in Frederick, and as a historian she has turned her research and analytical skills to understanding Frederick’s choices as well as the circumstances that shaped and limited them. Rutherford considers Frederick a “barometer” of her times, but she also shows that Frederick played a part in shaping and advancing those very qualities of her culture that she reflected. This is a delicate and difficult balance to trace, and at times I wanted Rutherford to take a stronger stand on Frederick’s choices and their implications for the history of gender and domesticity. A question that hangs over the text, for example, is why Frederick refused to acknowledge the “absurd” contradictions she embodied. Rutherford’s answer, that Frederick was “deceiving herself,” is more psychological than historical; it leaves the significance of the silence unaccounted for (p.105).

In a final bit of criticism, I would have liked Rutherford to do a better job than Frederick herself in recognizing that domestic ideals do not merely “leave out” women who are not white and middle class. Rather, these exclusions are central to the construction of domestic ideals and have real effects on the lives of women who are defined outside of gender norms because of their race, class, ethnicity, or sexual preference. Readers familiar with more theoretical approaches to the history of domesticity (such as Kathleen Anne McHugh’s American Domesticy and Nicole Tonkovich’s Domesticity with a Difference), which seek to make race and class visible aspects of the gendered identity of the American housewife, will recognize that Rutherford’s approach leaves these relationships unconsidered.

Despite these criticisms, Rutherford has made a useful contribution to the history of women, domesticity, and consumer culture. She has portrayed the constraints, accomplishments, and shortcomings of Frederick’s life in a historically meaningful way that has profound and unsettling contemporary relevance.

—Charlotte Biltekoff, Brown University

The Contented Poacher: Tales and Recipes from an Epicure in the Wilderness
Elantu V. Vevode
Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2003
271 pp. $24.95 (cloth)

Although the subject of hunting has been known to inspire a wide variety of opinions, few are apt to be as bizarre or troubling as some of those espoused by Elantu Vevode in her book The Contented Poacher. If Gastronomica describes the intersection of food and culture, The Contented Poacher might be said to describe the intersection of food and a lack of culture.

Poaching is most frequently defined as hunting a protected animal without a license, but Vevode’s definition of a poacher is someone who “presumes to hunt without a gun, even if he or she is possessed of the regulation license and does not presume to exceed the number of animals listed on that license” (p.9). In other words, she sees herself as a legitimate hunter, though one who chooses not to use a gun. Yet this definition is soon called into question when
she admits that she pays no attention to defined hunting seasons and in fact employs means of fishing that are well apt to result in killing legally undersized fish.

Veovode’s stated purpose in writing The Contented Poacher is to bring a smile to the reader’s lips, and she occasionally succeeds. In describing the madness that often accompanies deer-hunting season, she notes that as each day goes by “the deer get smarter and the hunters get stupider” (p.99), and the book contains a number of humorous anecdotes involving the foibles of gun hunters. Yet, far more often Veovode manages to bring a painful grimace to the reader’s lips with implausible hunting tales and techniques, overly folksy prose, factual errors, and stunningly inhumane descriptions of animal killing.

For example, no one would dispute the fact that moose are profoundly dimwitted, but Veovode’s purported technique for moose killing calls into question both the animal’s ability to survive in the wild as well as the reader’s gullibility. The technique involves rolling a large boulder into the usual path of a bull moose. The moose will construe the obstacle as a territorial foe, whereupon he will repeatedly ram his antlers into the boulder until he dies. Or so she says. Anyone foolish enough to attempt this maneuver at home is going to be disappointed.

Some of the book’s tales are related in an endearingly rustic manner, but all too often the author’s style becomes annoying, such as when she notes that “There’s a guy just outside Bayfield Colorado who raised him up a dog what’s legendary in those parts” (p.59). Factual errors also plague The Contented Poacher, including the description of a “Moose versus Car” scoreboard maintained in Montpelier, Vermont (there is no such thing, though something vaguely similar can be found in northern New Hampshire), and painfully inaccurate descriptions of typical weights of certain fish species.

Veovode includes dozens of recipes for cooking game, and many of them are useful, including Pheasant and New Potatoes Marinated in Bordeaux and Sesame Venison. But numerous others seem to have been included merely for shock value. The recipe for Thrice Cooked Javelina Brain will have limited appeal (calf brains can be used as a substitute, if that helps), and the nation’s economy may have to decline precipitously before the Field Mouse Tempura and Hot Hunan Stir-Fried Mouse recipes find many proponents.

But the most objectionable aspect of this book involves some of the techniques described for killing game. Veovode expresses a belief that animals should be killed humanely, and some of her hunting techniques accomplish that goal. For example, pheasant can be attracted by placing corn in a cardboard tube, whereupon the bird can be grabbed by the neck and quickly dispatched. In other instances, however, she describes the means of capture without specifying how the animal is to be subsequently killed. Wild turkeys can be lured into nets and prairie dogs smoked out of their holes, but in neither case does the author describe how the hunter is to administer a fatal blow. Wild turkeys can be both sizeable and cantankerous, so this is not a trivial matter.

Then again, having read her description for killing squirrels and chipmunks, the reader might not want to be privy to all of Veovode’s executorial recommendations. Squirrels are to be stunned by ball bearings fired from a slingshot and then whacked over the head by a hammer. Chipmunks do not require the ball bearing step and can simply be hammered. The reader who hopes to find subsequent passages that describe these techniques as grisly jokes will be found wanting. The irony, of course, is that Veovode ably lampoons the exploits of some foolish gun hunters only to offer up alternatives that are at times considerably more distasteful.

—Roy Towlen, Burlington, VT

Dining at the Lineman’s Shack
John Weston
225 pp. $17.95 (paper)

Writing a memoir is bittersweet. Ghosts and scenes from the past emerge to inflict pain as well as pleasure. When food is the lens for examining one’s own life, the task is no less complex. Food is about relationships—often with mothers, intimacy or the lack of it, and social conditions like poverty. These subjects are the focus of novelist and poet John Weston’s Dining at the Lineman’s Shack. He evokes the culture of the Southwest (Arizona) from the Great Depression to just after World War II. Quirky, witty, and literary, this is no ordinary memoir, as the first sentence signals: “When The Palace reopened on Montezuma Street, the new owner served mountain lion barbacoa” (p.3). (This was a lion shot with a government bounty on its head.) After Weston downs his lion sandwich, slathered with barbecue sauce, at a saloon in Prescott, he writes that he “swaggered into a life of experimental gastronomy” (p.3).

The roots of that life trace back to his poignant experiences as the youngest of five siblings living in poverty in an abandoned lineman’s shack—formerly occupied by ranch workers who maintained the “lines,” or fences—in tiny