

across space and time—provide a much needed push to incorporate a more humanistic, unifying, and integrative approach to society’s treatment of the historic built environment.

Caroline Cheong, University of Central Florida

Mastering the Inland Seas: How Lighthouses, Navigational Aids, and Harbors

Transformed the Great Lakes and America by Theodore J. Karamanski. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020. 384 pp.; illustrations; clothbound \$36.95.

Standing among the skyscrapers of downtown Chicago, it is hard to imagine that just a few hundred feet away from the concrete jungle of America’s self-proclaimed Second City lies a vast “wilderness” of ninety-thousand square miles. Historian Theodore J. Karamanski has not uncovered some unknown forest or mountain range in northern Illinois; rather, his interesting new book *Mastering the Inland Seas* asks its readers to imagine the Great Lakes as a “watery wilderness.” *Mastering the Inland Seas* is the story of how technological innovations and key administrators colonized the Great Lakes for the purpose of commerce, communication, and recreation.

Although Karamanski does offer a brief discussion of Indigenous navigation on the Great Lakes, and occasionally discusses developments north of the border in Canada, his book largely focuses on state formation and political economy in the nineteenth and twentieth-century United States. *Mastering the Inland Seas* broadens our understanding of American empire by explaining how the construction of lighthouses, navigational aids, and harbors was part of state formation in the “Old Northwest,” alongside more familiar forms of infrastructure and expressions of state power, like military garrisons, Indigenous removals, and land surveying. The transformation of the Great Lakes from a “dangerous frontier” to an American (and Canadian) “heartland,” is not just a story of state expansion: it is also about how state power promoted the economic development of the Great Lakes as part of the growth of a “national market and a dynamic capitalist economy” (7).

Mastering the Inland Seas weaves the story of maritime improvement through a fairly conventional political narrative of nineteenth-century US history. The Great Lakes would eventually play a central role in the commercial development of the United States, but sectional tensions over whether or not the US government should promote internal improvements hampered maritime projects in the region in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Great Lakes states became a stronghold of the pro-improvement Whig Party in the 1830s and the Republican Party in the 1850s because both these parties supported an energetic national government. Karamanski reminds us that political conflict over internal improvements was second only to the fight over the expansion of slavery in the sectional tensions that eventually led to civil war in 1861. The Great Lakes states proved their

commitment to an active government by enthusiastically supplying soldiers to the Union Army at a higher rate of enlistment than any other region of the United States.

The Civil War created political conditions favorable for the expansion of American empire. In the same way that the conflict had resolved the question of the expansion of slavery in the western territories, the war also removed the political barriers that had slowed maritime improvements on the Great Lakes. While the Lighthouse Board, founded in 1854, had already begun the expansion of light houses on the Great Lakes, the decades after the war witnessed a broad array of government projects, including harbor and channel improvements. This new infrastructure complemented the industrialization of Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland that had taken place during the war to fulfill the logistical demands of the Union Army.

The close of the nineteenth century witnessed the rise of what Karamanski terms the “Maritime-Industrial Complex.” By the 1890s, the Lighthouse Board had created a system of maritime improvements that was the envy of the world. At the Chicago World’s Fair, the Board celebrated its three thousand major lighthouses and ten thousand other navigational aids, as well as innumerable charts, harbors, and channel improvements, as part of a celebratory narrative of the triumph of civilization and technology over wilderness and nature. Maritime improvements aided in the creation of an economic powerhouse in the American heartland. New steam-powered behemoths ploughed the waters of the Great Lakes during the 1880s, connecting the raw material exporting ports of the northern shores with factories in places to the south such as Chicago and Detroit. Nowhere exemplifies the power of the Maritime-Industrial Complex more clearly than Gary, Indiana. The city rose almost overnight when the U.S. Steel Company built the world’s largest integrated steel plant on Lake Michigan in 1906 because of its proximity to ore deposits on Lake Superior.

The Maritime-Industrial Complex reached its zenith in the twentieth century, as the growth of steel and other connected industries in the American heartland transformed the region into a major player in the global marketplace. This was not to last. The story of deindustrialization in the American rustbelt is a familiar one but its impact on maritime shipping has often been overlooked. Shipping tonnage declined precipitously during the 1980s, leaving the Great Lakes region to face the ecological hangover of industrialization and the unintended deleterious consequences of too many maritime improvements.

Mastering the Inland Seas is a useful addition to scholarship on American empire and US economic development. In considering the role that internal improvements played in expanding western territories and the integration of a national economy, it can often be hard to escape the teleology of technology. Turnpikes replace rivers. Canals replace turnpikes. Railroads replace canals. Karamanski helps to remind us that maritime technology did not end with the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, and that Great Lakes shipping worked in concert with the development of railroads

to create an industrial juggernaut in the American heartland. Indeed, the continued importance of merchant shipping and maritime improvements to global trade was only recently demonstrated by the panic that followed the recent grounding of the *Ever Given* container ship in the Suez Canal.

Lawrence B. A. Hatter, Washington State University

Stamping American Memory: Collectors, Citizens, and the Post by Sheila A. Brennan.

Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018. x + 223 pp.; illustrations, appendix, notes, references, index; clothbound, \$50.00; paperback, \$24.95; online, open access at <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/dj52w5765>.

The creation of the prepaid postage stamp in the 1840s revolutionized communications worldwide. Previously, the addressee paid the cost of delivery, which resulted in some potential recipients refusing to accept their letters. The new system required senders to prepay the postage—generally based on size and weight, rather than distance traveled—by purchasing and affixing stamps to the mailed object. Sheila A. Brennan explores several fascinating aspects for public historians of this “stamping,” primarily between 1880 and 1940: what inspired some Americans to not only mail, but also collect, these small pieces of colored paper; what motivated federal government officials to produce commemorative postage stamps to remember selected individuals and moments in US history; and what symbolic and cultural meanings reside in the stamps themselves.

Brennan’s analysis of our instinct to collect stamps is one of the book’s highlights—and a topic that previous cultural historians have not explored in much depth. In 1900, psychologist Caroline Burk determined that “90 percent of the children [she] surveyed collected something and most kept between three and four collections at a given time” (50). Taking advantage of this childhood instinct, educators “encouraged their students to collect stamps, . . . because, as teachers remarked, their students learned facts about foreign countries as easily as they learned the rules of marbles” (51).

Stamp collecting was also the *raison d’être* for many of the philatelic communities that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These included membership clubs—albeit ones “comprised predominantly of white male members of financial means” (13)—as well as plentiful articles in newspapers and magazines that promoted the hobby and even radio programs that highlighted “the drama of the postage stamp” (17). Brennan investigates the membership rolls of these clubs to document the relative absence of women, even as the American Philatelic Association’s symbol was an allegorical female, the goddess Philatelia. Similarly, “these clubs were not welcoming for people of color,” even when a leading African American such as Cyrus Fields Adams was a devoted collector of stamps (24).