

of the organization, however, was hampered by the fact that he did not speak a foreign language. This seems to have been a problem for nearly all the agents and supervisors of the BI, despite the fact that they were focusing on foreign workers as the source of labor and radical agitation.

McCormick describes a cast of characters on both sides who all seem just as ill-suited to their roles as Wendell, and who turn the whole affair almost comic. In addition to Wendell, the primary character in the book is Jacob Margolis, a lawyer who regularly defended workers and agitators in deportation hearings and other legal matters, becoming the focus of government investigations, and who continually seemed disappointed that he was never mentioned in the same breath nationally as Goldman. There also is a very young J. Edgar Hoover who made his initial reputation in rooting out radicals; his efficiency in professionalizing the Bureau led to its eventual reorganization as the FBI and his being appointed its director. There is also Special Agent in Charge (SAC) of the BI "radical squad" in Pittsburgh, Robert Simms Judge, who, despite being the chief agent at the Pittsburgh bureau, had administrative experience which amounted to "managing his father's drugstore for a couple of years" (p. 19). It was agents like these, relying on "experts" and "informants," many of whom were receiving information second- and third-hand through translators, who formed the backbone of the government's investigations. Such was the expertise of the agents and their superiors that they saw no contradiction in the fact that the people they suspected as spies for the Kaiser during the war were the same people they suspected after the war as being Communist revolutionaries. McCormick cannot help hiding his amusement and at times disgust with the whole affair. At one point Wendell and another agent are ducking each other in an Erie train station, both believing the other to be trying to give the other up.

Almost forgotten by McCormick in the events of the time were the efforts of more mainstream labor organizations such as the AFL and the UMWA, which were successful at organizing in such places as Homestead and Westinghouse. McCormick indicates, almost unintentionally it seems, that while the Wobblies were seemingly pounding their head on the wall to get people to listen to their message of "One Big Union," it was the mainstream unions who were actually having success and winning the hearts and minds of the workers. McCormick seems sympathetic to the IWW, although he's frank in talking about its failure throughout the region.

While the (mostly) men who did the work were laughable, the work they were doing was not. McCormick cites numerous cases of civil rights violations by the government in its efforts to root out radicals and revolutionaries, especially during the Palmer raids of the UORW and IWW following the war. The raids on the UORW, an organization formed mostly as a meeting and ethnic society for Russian workers, were especially offensive. A number of examples show how cases were made for deportation of foreign workers based on evidence such as selling radical songbooks. The Palmer Raids (named for Attorney General A.

Mitchell Palmer) on the UORW essentially shut the organization down. The Raids on the IWW were not as successful, but mostly because the union was dying of its own accord.

The scariest parts of the book reveal the real significance of the events in and around the Pittsburgh steel district in those years. McCormick shows that Hoover's notorious pattern of surveillance of suspected enemies, which continued throughout his long career, started in the 1910s. The backlash in the 1920s against the government's actions laid the groundwork for a public mistrust of government which had not really existed before and would not truly manifest itself until Vietnam in the 1960s and the post-Watergate era. McCormick shows in his analysis of the "Red Scare" a foreshadowing of McCarthyism, but also reveals a great deal of why the American public to a large degree no longer trusts its own government. 🌟

Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature

by Linda Lear

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by Bradley R. Fisher

Pennsylvania has done much to remember Rachel Carson, the Springdale-born scientist and environmentalist whose writings and ideas helped found the modern environmental movement in the 1960s. Her name graces a 34-mile hiking trail that extends from North Park to Harrison Hills Park in Allegheny County, passing through her birthplace. In Harrisburg, the State Department of Environmental Protection is housed in the Rachel Carson Office Building, atop which nest a rare pair of peregrine falcons, a species saved from extinction by Carson's activism.

There are even two Pittsburgh educational organizations dedicated to furthering Carson's ideas and life work: the Rachel Carson Homestead Association, an indoor/outdoor museum and educational center based in her family's five-room farmhouse in Springdale; and the Rachel Carson Institute, an academic forum at Chatham College which sponsors public education and discussion on environmental issues. With the presence of these landmarks and the efforts of these organizations and our public schools, it's quite probable that our children are learning more about this famous native daughter than we ever did.

Now the rest of us can catch up. Linda Lear's comprehensive new book, *Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature*, makes the connection between Pittsburgh, Rachel Carson, her 1962 book *Silent Spring*, and the cleaner air and water we enjoy today. In this first complete biography of Carson, it appears at a key point in history — 34 years after Carson's death, Linda Lear has been able to draw both on first-hand accounts of Carson's life from still-living colleagues and friends, as well as on archival material not available until recently. Lear is Research Professor of Environmental History at George Washington University: she grew up near Springdale and had a biology teacher who was a college friend of

Bradley Fisher writes about Edward E. Rieck elsewhere in this issue.

Carson's. With Lear's wealth of detail and her scrupulous documentation, scholars will use this book as a definitive Carson source for years to come.

It's hard to imagine today, with an open and ongoing debate over the environment, the impact Carson had on the post-war industrial world. Carson's *Silent Spring* almost single-handedly, changed the way the public thought about the environment by convincingly documenting the lethal effects of DDT and other agricultural pesticides on animal and human life. *Silent Spring* delivered a loud and clear wakeup call to a world of post-war consumers who had blindly believed that industry was inherently safe, that technology was always in the consumer's best interest, and that industrial progress was an endless win-win for everybody and everything.

Before Carson, nature preservation in the public mind was the province of romantics who loved the woods for watching birds and writing poetry. After Carson, and after *Silent Spring*, conservation was seen as a matter of life and death that affected every human being on the planet. In the wake of *Silent Spring*, the public gained the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act and other legislation that aimed to save us from ourselves. This is why organizations like the Sierra Club and the National Audubon Society rank Rachel Carson as a patron saint.

Lear's biography gives us Carson's story, from her birth in Springdale in 1907 to her untimely death in 1964, with an astounding amount of detail. Lear documents which Sunday School Rachel attended as a child, what dress she wore to the prom, the names of her roommates and teachers at Chatham College, and what she named her cats. Lear tells us as well how Carson balanced a fierce will and determination to succeed with the crushing role of care-giver and sole breadwinner for her extended family. Writers of nearly all disciplines will appreciate this story of a writer who did it the hard way, taking jobs to support a family, stealing time to find publishing opportunities, facing the loneliness of a writing career, and finally succeeding through desire, determination, and hard work. Much of the new material Lear has researched gives us a rich picture of Carson as a single professional woman under intense pressures, and of the intense friendships and relationships which sustained her.

Environmentalists will find the book an essential document on a pivotal point in environmental history. Lear skillfully brings to life the tense conflict between industry and the public created by *Silent Spring*'s persuasive case against the massive application of pesticides to crops, forests, and residential areas. In proving that pesticides were killing wildlife outright and causing poison to accumulate at dangerous levels in the human population, *Silent Spring* touched off an explosive public debate and triggered a vicious backlash from the petrochemical industry. Television, just beginning to flex its muscles as a forum for public debate, showed the public the "live" spectacle of wild-eyed corporate scientists attacking the ideas, the research, the background, and the gender of a brilliant and courageous middle-aged woman. The overwhelming failure of this effort to sway the nation demonstrated the ability of the new medium to connect the public with the power of one person's convictions. It also represented a turning

point in environmental policy for many companies in America.

Perhaps most rewarding to Western Pennsylvanians is Lear's account of Rachel Carson's childhood in Springdale, just a few miles up the Allegheny from Pittsburgh. It is a subject that might have been overlooked by a less dedicated author. Carson, who moved with her entire family to Baltimore early in her career, seldom referred to the place of her childhood or its influence on her thinking. But Lear, an environmental historian, believes strongly in the importance of place in shaping personality and ideas. Furthermore, Lear was born in Glenshaw and was taught biology at Winchester-Thurston Academy by Dorothy Seif, a college classmate and lifelong friend of Carson's. The connection gave Lear extraordinary access to the facts of Carson's life in Western Pennsylvania as well as a commitment to bear witness to the region's role in shaping Carson's ideas. Lear demonstrates clearly how life along the banks, woods, and fields of the pre-industrial Allegheny molded young Rachel Carson into a lover of nature; and how the rapid development and pollution of the region she witnessed while growing up informed the activism she was to adopt years later.

Could the book have gone further in giving us the complete Carson? For the general reader, perhaps. It lacks a thorough and formal critique of Carson's body of work, which includes four books on marine ecology and the environment in addition to *Silent Spring*. By the time she wrote *Silent Spring*, Carson had made a name for herself with *The Sea Around Us*, a book that set new standards in science writing and captured the public imagination. Lear's focus on the publishing history of this and Carson's other works is full and complete, but her overviews of their content lack organization and analysis that would have helped readers gain a better appreciation of Carson's overall contribution to science writing. Neither does Lear include a subjective evaluation of Carson's contribution to environmentalism or a historical positioning of Carson in the environmental movement. This is another surprising omission in an otherwise exhaustive book. Lear gives readers more than enough data to form their own view of how Carson fits into history, but doesn't give them an opinion to agree or disagree with while they're at it. In a narrative of this length and scholarly depth, some editorializing would have been welcome.

Nevertheless, readers will complete this work with a full understanding of Rachel Carson's love of nature and her dedication to science. Today, when every development project from strip mines to strip malls triggers a public environmental discussion, passion and science still drive the position to preserve the environment. They frame the current debate over clear-cut logging in the Allegheny National Forest. They affect how we choose to locate waste incinerators, regulate auto emissions, and operate coal mines. And they add urgency to our desire to clean the air and bring our rivers back to life. In *Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature*, Linda Lear has ably and completely documented how these two powerful forces united 40 years ago in the soul of a shy girl from Springdale to affect the course of one of the world's most important debates for decades thereafter. ●