Four other essays shift the emphasis to European highways.

Massimo Moraglio’s study (‘Landscapes and Highways in Twentieth-Century Italy’) documents how speed and efficiency trumped aesthetics when it came to building modern highways in Italy. Moraglio argues that for Italian engineers, getting there fast was a mark of modernity and that the surrounding landscape was something not to be savored, but quickly conquered. Thomas Zeller’s sojourn down the German autobahn (‘Building and Rebuilding the Landscape of the Autobahn, 1930–1970’) and Axel Dossmann’s gritty encounter with East German highways (‘Socialist Highways? Appropriating the Autobahn in the German Democratic Republic’) are a fascinating pair of essays that together offer multiple examples of how highway-building and nation building can be so closely intertwined. Finally, the belated British experience with high-speed road building (the construction of the M1 motorway after World War II) is reviewed by Peter Merriman (‘Beautiful Is a Vile Phrase: The Politics and Aesthetics of Landscaping Roads in Pre- and Postwar Britain’). Merriman examines the early years of the Roads Beautifying Association before the war, noting that its fussy fascination for intricate native roadside plantings gave way to a simpler, streamlined landscape design that favored uncomplicated greenery and speed alongside the M1.

The editors have done an admirable job. They have produced a set of essays that, while eclectic and regionally diverse, all manage to work well together and tell a broader story of why highways matter as an important component of the landscape and as an integral part of larger narratives involving technological change, cultural identity, and nation building. Getting there is half the fun and readers will find that the journeys in this attractive volume are thought-provoking opportunities to rethink ‘the world beyond the windshield.’

William Wyckoff
Montana State University, USA
doi:10.1016/j.jhge.2009.11.010


There are not many places in the United States where the long histories of pre-American indigenous and colonial settlement remain as evident in the modern urban and cultural landscape as in New Mexico. In this fractious tricultural state, the past vies continually with the present for control of the state’s identity, creating a situation in which historians of even the most straightforward topics must acknowledge the modern political implications of their work. In his microhistory of New Mexico’s Atrisco land grant, Joseph Sánchez does not shy away from the political nature of New Mexico history. In fact, he embraces it, using the volume primarily to re-assert the Spanish heritage of a former agricultural area that has largely been overwhelmed by the metropolitan growth of Albuquerque.

Sánchez’s stated goal with this work is twofold. First, his history of the Atrisco land grant aims to explain how its residents were unusually successful in defending land ownership claims under three different sovereign nations. Second, in narrating several historical defenses of Atrisco’s cultural heritage, Sánchez means to inspire revived activism among other land grant heirs whose cultural heritage is ‘under siege’ (p. 10). With these goals in mind, Sánchez sets out in thirteen chapters a detailed examination of various legal records related to the establishment of Spanish Atrisco in 1692 and its subsequent functioning—as part of the Spanish Empire, the Mexican nation, and finally the American nation—until its incorporation in 1968. In the process, he tries to reclaim for Atrisco some historical importance in the settling of the middle Rio Grande Valley, despite the fact that Albuquerque became the dominant city. The subtitle of the book is a bit misleading, in fact, for Sánchez does not focus on the role of Atrisco in ‘Albuquerque history’ but rather on the evolution of Atrisco despite Albuquerque’s history.

The first three chapters provide a general chronology of Spanish activity in the Atrisco area, from Coronado’s 1540–1542 expedition to the founding of Albuquerque in 1706. Sánchez describes a fairly tenuous existence for the first partially settled estancias in the middle Rio Grande Valley, in contrast with well established indigenous pueblos in the same area (and with the more vigorous Spanish presence further north around Santa Fe). The Atrisco Grant—which included a large stretch of cottonwood bottomland extending from the banks of the Rio Grande to a mesa along its western horizon—was made during the land rush of 1692, which saw numerous Spanish settlers return to New Mexico after the 1680 Pueblo Revolt had driven them into exile in El Paso. By the time the Villa de Albuquerque grant was established in 1706 to create a buffer against Apache raids from the east, Atrisco and several other grants along the river’s west bank had already re-established farming and ranching operations. As Albuquerque rose to political prominence on the east bank, however, the western communities were absorbed into its orbit and became somewhat dependent on its commercial and military Strengths.

Chapters Four through Nine examine various aspects of rural life in eighteenth-century life in Atrisco. Sánchez focuses on a few different topics in these chapters but is particularly concerned with property boundary disputes and with property conveyances, in which he reads a history of communal land ownership. Although the original Atrisco land grant was supposedly made to a single individual, Sánchez argues that the settlers always treated the grant as if the Spanish crown had instead granted the lands in common to the community as a whole, which was a typical form of grant throughout the period of Spanish sovereignty. This argument proceeds tenuously from a few specific legal cases: one involving a dispute over sheep grazing, one over a boundary dispute on individual property, and one over the boundary of the grant itself. In describing these disputes, Sánchez often goes into extensive detail and includes lengthy translations directly from the case records. In the process, unfortunately, he often relinquishes any narrative thread that would tie the chapters (and the book) together. It is only in Chapter Nine that Sánchez makes any analytical attempt to tie the disputes together, returning to the issue of communal land use and arguing that ‘[r]ecords of the continuous occupation of the land reveal the tradition and practice of private land ownership, while the conveyances also imply joint uses of the land, such as common lands, acequias, pasturage, and wooded areas, that point to a communal tradition’ (p. 93).

The importance of this distinction—between private and communal land ownership—becomes clearer in Chapters 10 through 13, in which Sánchez describes the legal challenges Atrisco faced because of New Mexico’s changing sovereignty. With Mexican independence from Spain in 1821, New Mexico’s communities and land grants became subject to a new bureaucracy but enjoyed a fairly similar legal system. Under American sovereignty after 1848, however, the new legal system proved rather more challenging. As New Mexico’s Hispanic population tried to certify their citizenship and validate their land ownership within the new bureaucracy, it suffered numerous civil rights infringements, most problematically with respect to the Spanish and
Mexican land grants. Excessive corruption ensured that many New Mexicans lost their land to Anglo speculators in the early territorial period, eventually spurring the U.S. Congress to create an independent Court of Private Land Claims (CPLC) in 1891. This body validated the Atrisco grant in 1894, based mainly on the long record of property conveyances and disputes that Sánchez presented earlier in the book. Evidence of communal land use apparently swayed the CPLC’s decision to treat Atrisco as a community grant, rather than as an individual grant, which had the effect of preserving the entire grant intact, despite challenges regarding its borders. In what should be the major analytical contribution of the book, Sánchez attributes Atrisco’s success (which he contrasts with other communities that lost their grants entirely) to ‘their legal internship during the Spanish colonial period [which] had trained them well to conserve their documents… In the end, history vindicated their claim and saved them from oblivion’ (p. 153).

If this sounds like an overly simplistic conclusion to be drawn from such a detailed history, it is. While providing an exceptional level of detail from the colonial and territorial legal records on land use and conveyance, Sánchez never rises above description to provide a satisfying level of critical analysis. He repeatedly attributes special characteristics to Atrisco’s residents without explaining how or why they would have been different from other Spanish settlers in New Mexico. The book too often reads as a whiggish and politically calculated explanation of Atrisco’s success that does not seem to support any broader understanding of why other land grant communities in New Mexico were not successful with their land claims despite also having a long history of land conveyances and disputes.

For those historical and cultural geographers familiar with the many historical treatments of New Mexico’s Spanish land grants and their role in the state’s ongoing cultural politics, it is nice to see a book focused outside the northern third of the state, where descendant Hispano communities are most numerous and most activist. The volume’s strong focus on microhistorical details and on their modern political implications, however, comes at the expense of scholarly critique and may turn many potential readers away.

Maria Lane
University of New Mexico, USA

do:10.1016/j.jhg.2009.11.011


The Scots-Irish figure prominently in any historical geography of the United States, as intrepid frontiersmen and forbears of the Upland South, yet their old world source region is not so well known. What Vann calls Ulster-Scots Land emerged in the seventeenth century on both side of the North Channel of the Irish Sea, in Ulster, Galloway, and Ayrshire. Population pressure necessitated emigration from Galloway and Ayrshire, but many in these districts were barred from attractive destinations in Scotland because of their heterodox presbyterian ecclesiology, and so crossed the North Channel to colonized Irish lands depopulated by the Tudor wars of the sixteenth century. Their original aversion to episcopal control waxed strong in Scotland or Ireland. In 1636 a shipload of these people attempted to join congregationalist Puritans in New England, but were driven back by a storm. When a second Atlantic crossing was attempted in the eighteenth century, the Scots Irish were channeled through Philadelphia and Charleston to the backcountry of Pennsylvania and the Carolinas. One consequence of the storm, which was seen as providential, is that descendants of the Ulster Puritans are today more often Southern Baptists than Unitarians.

The Scots Irish took theology seriously, consulting it before making even mundane decisions. Trying to understand these Calvinists without understanding their Calvinism is, consequently, as futile as trying to understand modern consumers without understanding the ecstasies and terrors of consumerism. Vann thus rightly devotes many illuminating pages to discussion of seventeenth-century theology and ecclesiology. Unlike many human geographers, he understands that religion is not always, or perhaps even very often, a mere proxy for politics or a functionalist instrument of social cohesion and esprit. Some key terms do, however, remain regrettabley obscure. Although Calvinism should not be reduced, as it often is, to the doctrines of unconditional election and the perseverance of saints, I wonder if the title can be meaningfully applied to persons who accept a ‘bilateral’ or contractual covenant of works. I also doubt that seventeenth-century Puritanism is in any sense equivalent to, or even a logical or historic precursor of, twentieth-century fundamentalism. Puritanism was a reaction to seventeenth-century fears of an Erastian church and recusant Roman Catholic practices. Although linked in the popular imagination to moral, and more particularly sexual, purity, Puritans also sought to purify theology, ecclesiology, liturgy, and architecture. Because Puritans sought to purge religion of what they saw as superfluous superstition, ritual, and corruption by political influence, unchecked Puritanism leads to Unitarianism or demythologized theological modernism, as it did in New England. Fundamentalism was a twentieth-century reaction against this theological modernism, and so arguably against Puritanism. A fundamentalist is not, as is often claimed, that mythical beast the Biblical literalist. A fundamentalist simply asserts that some miracles, supernatural beings, and rites are not exclusences and corruptions to be purified out in pursuit of a Feuerbachian ‘essence’ of Christianity, but rather fundamentals without which Christianity is not Christianity.

Vann attempts to revive J. K. Wright’s concepts of geoeccleiology, geopiety, and geoeschatology, arguing that the Scots Irish viewed their territory, whether on the shores of the Irish Sea or on the uplands of Appalachia, as both a refuge from, and an example to, the world. This may be so, but it should be noted that all Christian peoples have been subject to the delusion that their ethos was (or is) a new Israel, embarked for, or possessed of, a new Jerusalem. This is, of course, a theological error, since the new covenant is with Christ’s church, not with any ethnus; but it is an error to which Christian peoples have been prone. Much more illuminating is Vann’s discussion of the effect that Calvinist theology and congregational-presbyterian ecclesiology had on migration. Puritans who imagined that their ethos constituted a new Israel in a new Jerusalem were, like the prophets of old, soon disillusioned by abundant evidence of their inability to regulate, much less purify, morals in their native land. Wickedness, most conspicuously Sabbath-breaking, persisted, making it clear that atonement was limited not to some new ‘chosen people,’ but rather to a more selective elect. Because wickedness was thought by the Puritans to invite God’s wrath, and because God’s wrath was not always unleashed in what we today call a surgical strike, but often took the form of a general devastation by plague and pestilence, it was prudent for the elect to remove...