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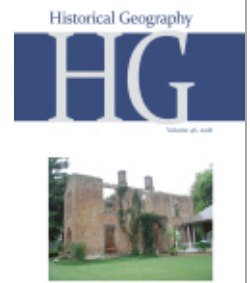
*Curated Decay: Heritage beyond Saving* by Caitlin DeSilvey  
(review)

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Historical Geography, Volume 46, 2018, pp. 310-313 (Review)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hgo.2018.0016>



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story of a mammoth national mapping program that surely will be considered one of the great cartographic feats of the twentieth century. *The Red Atlas* is a captivating read from cover to cover, and, in the words of the authors, reads like a “detective story” (1) as the mysteries of the Soviet maps are unveiled through meticulous analysis and a good balance of written prose and high-quality map images. The atlas will appeal to wide audiences, including twentieth-century historians, cartographers, historical geographers, political geographers, map enthusiasts, and the casual reader interested in a stealthy story with maps at the centerpiece. Readers may feel a chill up the spine as they see Cyrillic writing superimposed on maps of American and British cities while contemplating the intended uses of these maps by the Soviets. *The Red Atlas* will undoubtedly assume its place as an important piece of scholarship in the history of modern cartography, while also prompting readers to wonder about the capabilities of modern mapping technologies used today by countries to spy on each other. Although plenty rich in informative content, the atlas is also a captivating read because of the unanswered questions it leaves with the reader due to the fact that the authors admit that they “don’t know what they don’t know” (1) as the story of the Soviet maps continues to unfold. Hopefully, this sets the stage for a sequel to the saga as more maps are discovered in the future.

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*Curated Decay: Heritage beyond Saving*. Caitlin DeSilvey. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017. Pp. 233, photos, index. \$27.00, paperback, ISBN 978-0-8166-9438-9.

Preservation of heritage, or historic preservation, is commonly thought of as maintaining some site or set of artifacts in a condition that recalls the time period in which they were in everyday use. However, with the exception of well-funded places, many examples of our heritage are effectively ruins—the remains of past buildings, places, and things that for whatever reason have not been well preserved but rather left to decay. Instead of lamenting these sites as lost, Caitlin DeSilvey’s *Curated Decay: Heritage beyond Saving* asks readers to consider possibilities for “preservation” that embrace the decay and decomposition of human-

made things. Drawing on personal experiences over many years in both the United States and the United Kingdom, DeSilvey attempts to conceive of a preservation paradigm that considers decay not as loss but as an equally productive means to understanding human cultural heritage.

*Curated Decay* is unlike many other academic books in that it is written with an attention to narrative. Over the course of eight chapters that are reminiscent of a travelogue, DeSilvey takes readers on a journey from an abandoned ranch in Montana to the former UK nuclear research site in Orford Ness, Suffolk (with a pit stop in the Rhineland). Drawing mainly from personal experience and interviews with locals and government officials, DeSilvey makes the case that each site presents an opportunity to rethink historic preservation through a reconsideration of entropy and more-than-human agency. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction that sets the tone for the rest of the book. Looking back on her doctoral fieldwork in Montana, DeSilvey presents a set of related propositions that question the theoretical basis for preserving the built environment in a sort of stasis. In Chapter 2 DeSilvey draws on her fieldwork at a Montana ranch in the 1990s and reflects back on the various meanings inscribed in a place that is effectively preserved in a particular time, while paying attention to the parts of the ranch that have been left unpreserved. Throughout the chapter she presents examples of the tension of deciding what can be preserved practically and what cannot and uses them to interrogate the very idea of preservation at all. Chapter 3 takes us across the Atlantic to a small harbor in Cornwall where the UK National Trust adopted a plan to allow the harbor's breakwaters to decay "naturally." As DeSilvey shows, however, what counts as "natural" decay is up to interpretation, as a severe storm prematurely (in the eyes of Trust planners) damages the harbor, leading to successful calls for its rehabilitation. Chapter 4 continues a questioning of "nature" at the former nuclear research site at Orford Ness, where the National Trust has allowed natural processes to slowly reclaim the site. DeSilvey draws on Reigl's theories of pastness and age value to argue that Orford Ness is at a point of transitional preservation—the human-made structures having become so intertwined with plant and animal life that it has become hard to see the place as either "natural" or human-made. In Chapter 5 DeSilvey visits Germany's Ruhr region where a former industrial site in Duisberg illustrates the possibilities for incorporating entropy into preservation. The site, in her telling, incorporates the chance for both new

social and ecological roles while maintaining a degree of connection to the industrial past. In other words, the place experiences “positive passivity” (115) where humans as caregivers negotiate a tension between encouraging new uses while resisting other decaying processes. Chapter 6 covers what DeSilvey calls “boundary work” but could otherwise be described as the act of categorization—the ways preservation organizations and bureaucracies label places as repairable, savable, or otherwise. Using three different places from Cornwall to Montana, DeSilvey argues that the making of these distinctions is always being rethought and reformulated by the various agents involved. The final body chapter, number 7, takes us back to Orford Ness where the authorities decided in 2013 to allow a 220-year-old lighthouse to be “left to the sea,” that is, allowed to succumb to the forces of erosion. In this instance, the eventual loss of the lighthouse led to a variety of activities by locals that DeSilvey shows are similar to the ways people treat the loss of a loved one. In this way, structures and places take on the roles of characters in people’s daily lives, and require a measure of care as they effectively die or are left to decay. To conclude, DeSilvey argues that a paradigm of “letting be” (184), when managed with care, can lead toward a preservation ethos that better takes into account the human *and* nonhuman futures of places left to decay.

This book offers much to take in and the summary above can hardly do it justice. It is likely to play a large role in future debates about heritage preservation and the historiography of abandoned, decaying, or otherwise “post-” places. What I couldn’t help but ask myself repeatedly throughout the book, however, is whose heritage is being allowed to decay? DeSilvey occasionally gestures toward the potentially fraught politics of allowing some places to decay while others are preserved, particularly in chapter 3 and the story of the Cornish harbor. Regarding the lighthouse at Orford Ness, she admits that allowing the structure to be taken by erosion sidesteps questions of “who will decide whether and how the lighthouse stands or falls” (165). While she makes a convincing argument that preservation should be thought of as working with natural (as in nonhuman) processes, many of the decaying places she is drawing on seem to be fairly benign in terms of their potential politics. How would the framework of palliative care that she argues for work in a more politically charged environment, for example, the case

of Confederate monuments in the US South? The politics of heritage and preservation are at the heart of sometimes violent confrontations there and elsewhere, and incorporating entropy and planned decay into that scenario would only seem to raise the stakes. As DeSilvey admits in the introduction, her project is not out to prove a new theory of preservation. Instead, she raises a number of questions that lead to further questions, which will undoubtedly lead to even more questions. This, perhaps, is the book's strength and one that will make it an important part of reading lists for anyone interested in preservation, postindustrial spaces, and other places left to decay.

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*Homesteading the Plains: Toward a New History.* Richard Edwards, Jacob K. Friefeld, and Rebecca S. Wingo. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017. Pp. xii+253, maps, illustrations, tables, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00, hardcover, ISBN 978-0-8032-9679-4.

Growing up in the state of Washington, the history of the "Plains" was a subject that received only cursory attention in my early education. There must have been something about homesteading in my Washington history class, but I don't remember it. My college and subsequent studies increased my knowledge, but I needed more. This book, a collaborative effort by three qualified scholars, is an important addition to the literature and has given me a valuable history lesson on both the various debates that have surrounded the purported success or failure of homesteading in the United States and a thorough investigation of those debates using targeted historical and statistical analyses within an organized framework.

The authors hit their main point early by arguing for a new study on plains homesteading through a critical review of many of the standard historical studies concerning homesteading in America. They identify four "stylized facts" that recur in their survey of the literature and claim they have either little or only partial validity. Examining these assertions, that "homesteading was a minor factor in farm formation," that "homesteaders failed to prove up their claims," that "the homesteading