



1984

Put a "Landmark" in Your Life

Welsford H. "Gus" Clark

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr>

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Clark, Welsford H. "Gus" (1984) "Put a "Landmark" in Your Life," *Children's Book and Media Review*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 5 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cbmr/vol5/iss5/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Children's Book and Media Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Put a "Landmark" in your Life

by Welsford H. "Gus" Clark

As I was about to leave on a train trip to Northern California (Oakland) in 1952, my father took from a small paper sack a green-covered book and said, "There, son, is something to read to help take the boredom out of the long desert strips." The book was entitled, The Building of the First Transcontinental Railroad. As always, my father knew how to capture the imagination and forge an adventure out of a common, ordinary trip. And, quite unconsciously, he had put the first "Landmark" in my life.

After boarding the train and having a bite to eat, I opened the little green book with its now-familiar flower motif on the spine, and thus it began. Little did I know the impact the book would have. The text was fascinating, so simple to read yet chucked so full of information: facts and details. My father knew I was going to enjoy my trip, especially when I knew the history, the sacrifices, and the people who had helped to create the very tracks and route over which I was moving.

The concept of the Landmark Series began when the late Bennett Cerf, editor at Random House, was vacationing with his family at Cape Cod. At one point during that vacation, Bennett and his son, Chris, were on the beach when the two got into an argument as to where the Pilgrims had landed. In order to solve the problem, Bennett went to a book shop in Princeton and found there were no publications for children or juveniles with any such information. It suddenly struck him that there should be such a series to inform young Americans about their heritage and their nation. Thus was born the Landmark Series.

With great care, competent authors were selected to write the biographies and historic episodes. Most writers were already familiar with or had written about their subjects. Samuel Hopkins Adams, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, and John Mason Brown were only a few of the many accomplished writers commissioned to pen their work for the series. Thousands of copies were produced between 1950 and the mid-1960s. At some point in the production of the Landmark Series, the idea was introduced that a World Landmark Series should also be marketed. All in all, a total of 121 publications of the Landmarks were produced, along with 61 titles of the World Landmarks.

They were a huge success. Public libraries, schools, and homes became saturated with the needed and long-overdue information. Children of the era had the privilege of becoming acquainted with and well informed about the building of our nation and the biographical figures of history. In the mid-1960s, publication ceased, and the market began to fade. Now, after three and a half decades, nearly all are out of print, with the exception of thirteen now being reprinted in paperback.

Because of the early copyright date, thousands of copies have now been discarded from library, school, and home collections. With the coming and going of children and public personnel, people now know little of their context, credibility, and excellence in literary content. In 1976 in honor of our nation's bicentennial I went on a "witch hunt" to form my private collection. Of the Landmark Series, all but three titles were collected, and of the World Landmark Series, all but eleven were found. Secondhand bookstores, thrift stores, and garage sales were sources of supply.

It is shocking and disappointing that libraries and educators know so little of their value and contribution to the American scene. It is time for us all to become reacquainted and familiar with their texts and stop eliminating them from our bookshelves simply because they are a few years old.

It is time to wake up and revive ourselves. Why not put a Landmark in YOUR life?