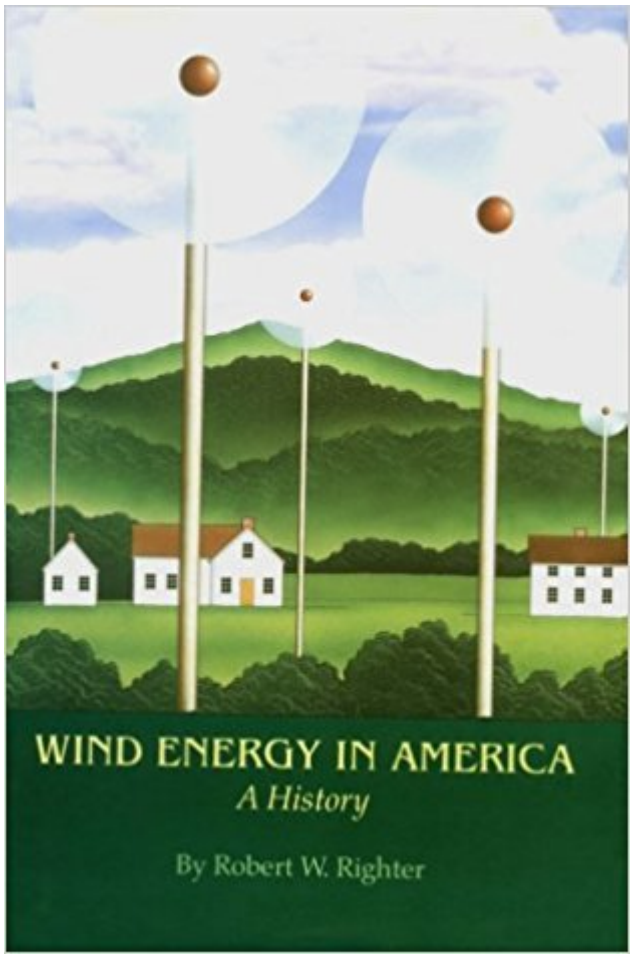
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Wind Energy In America: A History



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Synopsis

This compelling saga recounts the human effort to capture the power of the wind for electricity--from the first European windmills, to nineteenth century experiments in rural electrification, to the immense wind farms in California and the plains states that feed power grid today.Environmental historian Robert W. Righter describes eccentric inventors and techinical innovations, analyzes the politics of the power industry, past and present, and demonstrates that individuals and small businesses have made the greatest contributions to wind-energy development. Wind Energy in America also focuses on contemporary developments, including U.S. government research and regulation and the international race for dominance in the wind-turbine business. Righter explores the arguments of people and organizations opposed to the spread of wind generators--often the same environmental groups, paradoxically, that hailed wind energy as a savior in the late 1970s.This abundantly illustrated history, free of ideology and cant, will be of lasting interest to environmentalists, scholars, and all readers alert to the need for alternatives to coal and oil. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

Robert W. Righter is Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Texas at El Paso and the author of several books on the history of environmentalism and conservation, including The Battle over Hetch Hetchy: American’s Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Thank you professor Righter for a lovely read. You show a remarkable understanding of the history of wind energy development in America. Your points are well made. The reading flows nicely, as expected from such a tenured professor.

Sorry I couldn't resist. The punssibilities are endless here. I really enjoyed this book and found the history intriguing. Starting with the earliest attempts to harness wind in ancient times, the author brings us forward through 12th century Europe, early American settlement, western expansion (a Conestoga wagon with a sail?), the industrial revolution, the Depression, post WW II America, the Arab oil embargo, the boom and bust of the early 1980's and the precarious state of affairs for wind energy in the 1990's. The tale ends in 1996. If you've ever wondered: "Why VHS versus Beta?" or "Why internal combustion versus external combustion?" or "Why water, but not wind?". This may be the book for you. What succeeds and what fails in the market place and the market place of ideas doesn't always "make sense" from a long term perspective, but short term considerations are always a reality that must be dealt with. Of particular interest in this book is the history of the American windmill pioneers from the 1920s to the 1950s who designed both for water and electrical production. Entrepreneurs and their companies long forgotten make for interesting lessons for any innovator seeking to challenge the status quo. This naturally leads to a tale of the trade off between centralized versus distributed power generation and forces that battled for supremacy. It also begs the question: What makes a subsidy? Clearly centralized power won, but the oil embargo of 1973 breathed new life into the technology. So why didn't it take off? Dr. Righter takes a through a tale of great expectations followed by great disappointments in the 1980s. The nineties bring even more surprises. Do you know who tried to opposed wind power in California? How about environmentalists. Believe it. Since the book ends in 1996, it's a little out of date if you want the latest and greatest status of wind energy production (you can get a lot of it on the internet), but the book covers the history well and is well documented. It also tries to strike a tone which is, in my mind, fair to all parties concerned. All too often the subject of alternative energy can give rise to utopian visions of problem free power or tales of conspiratorial corporate evil. I didn't find that here. He addresses the pros and the cons and has realistic expectations of the even greater possibilities. And most importantly he points out that the cost of any energy source must include the larger price society pays for it (pollution, disease, waste disposal, environmental impact, etc.) when comparing it to other means of production.

I used this book to write a paper on wind power, however I wound up reading it outside of class as well. Righter gives a comprehensive overview of wind power in America, contrasting it to some wind development in Europe. Although there is some technical jargon (inescapable in this sort of book), it is also an approachable book, full of good anecdotes, historical narrative, and good photos, including many of the author's own. Although the book doesnt go in depth on any one subtopic in wind power (politics, financing, technical aspects) this is plus for the book since the style makes it accessible to the lay reader. Overall, a great read.

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