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Book Review of *Unearthing Indian Land: Living with  
the Legacies of Allotment* by Kristin T. Ruppel.  
Tucson

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**Unearthing Indian Land: Living with the Legacies of Allotment.** By Kristin T. Ruppel. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008. viii + 227 pp. Photographs, notes, references, index. \$35.00 paper.

The legacies of allotment on reservations—fractionated heirship and dispossession most notably—have been apparent to numerous observers since the early 20th century. In *Unearthing Indian Land: Living with the Legacies of Allotment*, Kristin T. Ruppel explores contemporary efforts on the part of several Native individuals to correct more than a century of land tenure questions and outright fraud. Although such efforts have potential impact throughout Indian country, *Unearthing Indian Land* focuses on the local efforts of activists such as Ernee Werelus at Fort Hall in Idaho and Helen Sanders on the Quinault Reservation in Washington.

Ruppel correctly traces the origins of Indian land definitions and interpretations to European colonization and, more specifically, to the early 19th-century Marshall Court trilogy of decisions related to Cherokee removal. The author gives less attention to the actual General Allotment Act of 1887 and Burke Act of 1906, which became the more direct mechanisms for Native land tenure difficulties in the 20th century. Despite this imbalance, the warren of regulations and case law surrounding Indian land becomes all too clear in the book. Much of the discussion in *Unearthing Indian Land* by necessity includes legal descriptions.

Ruppel focuses on selected modern examples of attempts to mitigate and correct past abuses of Indian land and resources, up to and including the Cobell case against the Bureau of Indian Affairs regarding Individual Indian Monies. While the overall discussion is somewhat abbreviated, one of the book's great strengths is its clear demonstration of the complexity of Native perspectives regarding resource questions. Ruppel makes evident that the interests of individual land owners are often at odds with the interests of tribal governments. For example, tribal governments may support legislation such as the Indian Land Consolidation Act of 1983, but individual

owners resent the lack of information offered them and the potential further alienation of land title. It is a confusing and exasperating problem for all concerned.

Stories such as Ernee Werelus's success in creating and administering the Fort Hall Landowners' Alliance are inspiring and offer hope of justice for current landowners. *Unearthing Indian Land*, however, offers only a few other examples of Native activism. Werelus apparently visits and consults with Native communities across the country, but this larger impact of her work is not explored in the book. It is primarily a local study, albeit one with national implications. Many of the primary sources consist of unpublished manuscripts or Ruppel's reflections on personal experiences. Nevertheless, the book provides a respectable starting point for investigations into contemporary Indian land problems and attempted solutions. Native landowners are already familiar with the themes developed in the volume. Yet the question of Indian land ownership, control, and consolidation in the era of self-determination will only become an increasingly critical avenue of investigation for historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and politicians. **Elizabeth James**, *Department of History, University of Alaska Anchorage*.