

## The Editor's Perspective

Once upon a time, I was asked to justify the existence of the *Annals of Iowa*. While looking for something else recently, I stumbled across that brief report and thought that readers of the *Annals* might be interested to see what reads as sort of a mission statement for the journal. I would be interested in readers' reactions. How well does the journal do what I claim it does? Are there other things it does that I've overlooked? Are there things it should do that it doesn't do? With that prologue, here's how I see it.

The *Annals of Iowa* is the scholarly journal of record for Iowa history. Every discipline and subdiscipline needs such a journal. For Iowa history and Iowa historians, the *Annals* is it.

The *Annals* is where scholarly conversation about the history of Iowa takes place. Through its articles, researchers tell readers what they've found out. Through its book reviews, reviewers let readers know about the latest books that are relevant (or not relevant, according to their judgment) for people interested in Iowa history. The "Announcements" section lets people know about opportunities to meet at conferences, funding opportunities, which articles and books have been honored with awards, etc. "New on the Shelves" notifies potential researchers of new materials in SHSI collections.

The *Annals* mediates the conversation between authors and readers. It provides an opportunity for people who do research on Iowa history to present their findings to an audience of interested readers. If they did not have that opportunity, there would be little incentive to do such research or, at least, to write about it. On the other hand, it's a place where people know they can find reliable articles about Iowa history. That is true not just for current readers, but for those in years to come who will seek to build on the findings contained in *Annals* articles. Those articles are essential building blocks for scholars who try to construct more comprehensive overviews of Iowa history or who need context for other research. For example,

Dorothy Schwieder, author of *Iowa: The Middle Land*, the authoritative adult survey of Iowa history, has testified to the critical role the *Annals* played in her writing of that book. This long-term, cumulative role is the *Annals's* most important one. Unfortunately, it's also the hardest one to measure.

But the *Annals* also apparently meets the needs of a fair number of present-day readers who read it for the sheer joy of reading serious Iowa history scholarship. About one-third of *Annals* subscribers are readers without academic affiliation. They are people, like my own father, a high school graduate, who enjoy listening in on the conversations and reflections of scholars. As I edit the journal, I like to picture my father reading the journal, and I long to attract more such readers even as I continue to shape the journal to meet the long-term needs of the scholarly community.

On another point, if you'd like to extend the conversation begun in these pages, I invite you to join H-Iowa, a new H-Net electronic discussion list on Iowa history and culture. H-Iowa's primary mission is to foster discussion about the history and culture of the state of Iowa and, relatedly, the history and culture of the Midwest, as well as provide a forum for information exchange. Discussions, which the editors encourage list members to initiate, are wide-ranging, including idea exchanges, civil debate, reference inquiries, teaching methods, and other professional materials and practices. (Subscribers are encouraged to participate in such discussions but are also welcome to just "listen in.") Informational postings include book reviews and announcements of conferences, web sites, publications, etc. With more than 100 subscribers within our first few weeks, H-Iowa is proving to be a wonderfully diverse group of folks. If you would like to join us, send a message from the e-mail account where you wish to receive mail to: [listserv@h-net.msu.edu](mailto:listserv@h-net.msu.edu) (with no signatures or styled text, word wrap off for long lines) and only this text: sub H-IOWA firstname lastname, institution (for example: sub H-Iowa Leslie Jones, Pacific State U). Follow the instructions you receive by return mail. If you have questions or experience difficulties in attempting to subscribe, send a message to: [help@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:help@mail.h-net.msu.edu).

—Marvin Bergman, editor

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