

Reading *Mapping the Farm* is especially pleasant alongside books such as Michael Martone's *The Flatness and Other Landscapes* (2000) or Drake Hokanson's *Reflecting a Prairie Town: A Year in Peterson* (1994).

Agricultural Fairs in America: Tradition, Education, Celebration, edited by Julie A. Avery. East Lansing: Michigan State University Museum on behalf of the FairTime Project, 2000. viii, 104 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, glossary. \$26.00 paper.

Reviewer Jeff Zacharakis-Jutz is a community development specialist with Iowa State University Extension. His research and other professional activities focus on the relationship between adult education and social movements.

In the Midwest, county and state fairs are part of our cultural fabric and tradition. With four children in 4-H, part of my annual vacation is spent at the county and state fairs where, in addition to educational projects and posters, our children show livestock and vegetables. It is with this background and bias that I read Julie Avery's account of agricultural fairs in the United States. Although I found the book interesting, I was not captivated. In fact, I kept looking for something else, not exactly sure what I was looking for but knowing that something was missing.

The book's 13 essays are divided into 5 parts. Part one, "The Essence," provides a good summary of agricultural fairs and begins to reconstruct their history. Part two, "The Collection of the Fair Publishing House, Inc.," adds wonderful visuals to this story with the inclusion of numerous fair posters published between 1900 and 1922, 16 of which are in color. This may be my favorite section as I found myself consumed by the details of each poster, imagining how as the primary form of advertisement during this period they sought to create an atmosphere of wholesome family fun. Part three, "Agriculture, Arts, and Innovation," presents a historical picture of how fairs were used to promote agricultural innovation and served as art galleries for local artists to present their work. Part four, "From Small Town to Metropolis," begins to discuss how the purpose of county fairs changes as society changes from agrarian to urban/suburban. The strength of every county fair, especially those that continue to thrive, is their ability to adapt to their communities. If livestock is a major industry and there are lots of farms in the area, then agriculture should be featured at the fair. In urban settings, people still want to see animals, vegetables, and jars of jelly, but those fairs usually have to identify local interests and then develop opportunities where residents and youth can participate. An example might be having competition in web-page design.

A contemporary perspective of fairs and some trends is presented in part five. The chapter by Virginia Gobeli, "Youth, Fairs, and Experiential Learning," covers the topic that I am most interested in: youth development, incentives and competition, aspects of judging, and experiential learning. This chapter also highlights what is missing throughout the book: critical analysis of what is or is not youth development in county fairs. Fairs place far too much emphasis on competition—especially in livestock—and not enough on youth development. The reward system for most county fairs is based on "winning." Does it matter that the winning lamb or pig was purchased from a "show jockey" for much more money than the animal will ever be worth commercially? Does it matter that the 4-H'er has no knowledge of breeding or genetics? From my experience, knowledge of animal husbandry is seldom used as a criterion in judging. The same can be said about other projects. Fair committees need to continually recommit themselves to youth development. Gobeli's chapter fails to address these critical issues.

Avery's collection of essays tends to focus on an idealized image of county fairs, best captured in the beautiful posters. Her book may itself be another form of county fair promotion rather than a thoughtful analysis of the topic. Clearly this book is worth looking at, but Avery's presentation is too sterile, too institutional, and too bland. Even though 4-H has greatly enriched my family, and we all love going to and participating in our county fair, there is a lot of frustration with the primal focus on winning rather than youth development. This problem is not unique to Iowa. Avery's book would be much more important if it would have at least attempted to address that issue.

On Firm Ground, photographs by Larry Kanfer. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001. 122 pp. Photographs, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Reviewer John Deason, a documentary photographer, teaches art and English at Muscatine High School, Muscatine, Iowa. Collections of his photographs have been displayed at the Davenport Museum of Art and Kirkwood Community College. He has recently photographed "lost towns" of Iowa.

On Firm Ground is a coffee-table book of color photographs of rural scenes in the upper Midwest. Larry Kanfer, a photographer based in Champaign, Illinois, has chosen 114 images that present a nostalgic vision of farms and the natural areas surrounding them. Most of the photos are from Illinois, with 16 from Iowa and a few from Wisconsin and Minnesota. There are no people or towns in these shots. The im-

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