

### Book Reviews

West. Thomas's thesis, so thoughtfully developed, is, at once, both provocative and convincing.

By the publication of *Ranchers' Legacy*, Patrick A. Dunae and the Western Canadian Publications Project Committee have underscored once more the debt we all owe to Lewis Thomas when we venture north of the forty-nine degree latitude and west of the ninety-six degree longitude.

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

GENE M. GRESSLEY

*Corncribs in History, Folklife, and Architecture*, by Keith E. Roe. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988. xi, 103 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth.

The development of farm and other commonplace buildings and structures, little studied until recent years, has become the focus of increasing attention. Most of the work to date has been done by cultural geographers and folklorists, studying log buildings and other folk housing and associated rural structures. Such studies have pointed to the uneven spread of one or another type across rural landscapes and within regions, and have suggested connections to ethnic and cultural traditions to explain the presence of particular buildings and their patterns of diffusion across the United States. Some scholars are now also beginning to probe deeper—digging beneath geographic place and looking beyond cataloging the incidence of surviving building traditions—to document the development of particular kinds of buildings over time. It is this "historical perspective" that characterizes Keith Roe's *Corncribs*. This perspective encompasses modern corn storage and building practices and also stretches back to examine past forms of bygone building traditions.

*Corncribs* is a splendid contribution to helping Iowans and others living in "Corn Belt" states better understand farm structures as they reflect the vast changes that have been wrought in our farms and farming. Roe's emphasis is clearly on twentieth-century developments, which absorb two-thirds of the text in the final chapter. The character of corn cribbing in preceding centuries Roe ably sets forth in three chronological chapters: he gives attention to corn storage practices among Indians as well as Euro-Americans in the colonial period, and carries the narrative on through the nineteenth century in a chapter on the era of "Pioneer Spirit and Westward Expansion." Throughout, we see the influence of changing requirements for corn storage brought on by changing methods of harvesting, mechanical improvements—the portable elevator, tractor, and corn picker—and the introduction of

commercial hybrids and fertilizers that immensely expanded crop yields. These developments are coupled to changing designs in corn cribs—pioneer log and split-rail varieties, then keystone or V-shaped structures, and later wood octagonal, wire mesh, wood double crib, and concrete and clay tile versions among other manufactured designs. Field shelling by combine has since forced cribs for storing ear corn into rapid obsolescence, replaced by shelled corn bins and grain handling complexes, but corn cribs still remain a commonly seen feature of farmsteads.

Richly illustrated and well written, Roe's balanced treatment will bring readers to a new awareness and appreciation for what a plain structure like the corncrib can impart of the history of farms as one passes them by on the road. I did find myself wanting to know more about those who promoted particular corn crib designs—individual manufacturers and trade organizations such as the Portland Cement Association—and of the influence that agricultural experiment stations and the Midwest Plan Service exercised over what types of cribs proliferated across Iowa. The absence of footnotes acknowledging sources of specific information and concepts is also unfortunate, but these minor quibbles aside, the book stands with T. Lindsay Baker's *Field Guide to American Windmills* as an outstanding recent contribution on the historical development of rural structures.

From where might more such historically based studies be expected? We cannot count on them from historians in the academy, where the subject of rural buildings has yet to find a respectable home outside the discipline of folklore. Nor will they likely emanate from state historic preservation offices, which largely rely on existing knowledge, set their research plow to a shallow depth, publish rarely, and emphasize short-term over long-term projects. Rather, historical knowledge will likely be enlarged by the few individuals, like Keith Roe, who become interested in one or another rural structure and then make of it a research labor of love.

DES MOINES, IOWA

LOWELL J. SOIKE

*Remaining Faithful: Amana Folk Art in Transition*, by Steven Ohrn. Des Moines: Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, 1988. 56 pp. Illustrations, bibliography.

This thin volume introduces the traditional Amana arts experiencing a revival: quilting, basket weaving, tinsmithing, carpet weaving, throw rugs, handwork (embroidery, crochet, and knitting), and woodwork-

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.