

Book Reviews

places becomes so cluttered with general war history and policy-making details that it ceases to be very satisfying as biography. The problem of writing about a period filled with great men and great events while maintaining a focus on Hopkins has obviously been a difficult one, and it has not been entirely solved.

Still, the book's excellences far outweigh its defects. It is solidly and extensively researched, engagingly written, persuasively argued, and successful in developing an insightful and convincing portrait of a fascinating and important historical figure. It is likely to be the standard work on its subject for some time to come.

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

ELLIS W. HAWLEY

Remembering America: A Sampler of the WPA American Guide Series, edited by Archie Hobson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985. xviii, 391 pp. Index, illustrations. \$24.95 cloth.

The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa, introduction by Joseph Frazier Wall. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1986. xi, 584 pp. Chronology, bibliography, illustrations, index. \$14.95 paper.

The Great Depression of the 1930s seems to be fading in America's collective memory. Yet there is much worth remembering and perhaps recycling. Among depression-decade developments that should have been "keepers" were the humane welfare programs and the widespread recommitment to community and reexamination of the quality of American life. With the unemployment rate sometimes bouncing over 20 percent, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) offered public welfare to the jobless under the less degrading rubric of "work relief." The Federal Writers Project (FWP), which lasted from 1935 to 1943, was one of hundreds of WPA workfare projects. FWP existed to sustain writers (preachers, teachers, office workers) through the economic emergency and to prevent atrophy of their skills.

Organized by state and guided by a strong administrative/editorial office in Washington, FWP's first priority was to research and publish a guide book for each of the forty-eight states. The project's central planners thought America needed a modified version of the Baedeker guides that instructed tourists about places and local customs in Europe and Asia. This sort of reference work was within the capacities of writers on relief. Nationally, upwards of six thousand self-proclaimed writers earned their welfare checks from FWP. The American Guide series (the state guide books) topped a list of achievements that featured over 275 books and more than a thousand smaller writ-

ing projects. Nearly forgotten during World War II and the worst of the Cold War, the American Guide series began to attract new attention at the end of the 1960s. Since then, most have been reissued in paperback editions.

In his "sampler" of the forty-eight state guides, Archie Hobson has selected about five hundred short pieces under general topics such as "The Land and Its Improvements," "Work," "Everyday Life," and "The People." *Remembering America* brings together a great deal of anecdotal evidence that the sense of community had been strengthened and that people were coming to appreciate the unique features of American life. Yet, taken out of their broader context, these excerpts project too much the aura of Clem Kididdlehopper (comedian Red Skelton's bumpkin character). Some people have said the guides offer a nostalgic view of the states, but they are more than that. They offer vivid, colorful portraits of history, places, and life at the grassroots.

The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa (originally published in 1938 as *Iowa: A Guide to the Hawkeye State*) follows the format prescribed by FWP headquarters. An introductory section contains fifteen essays on subjects from the state's geology to its arts, from its history to its sports. A second section describes the seventeen largest cities. The third section, the heart of the book, offers the automobile tourist seventeen alternative trips. Using the odometer to calculate distance from a starting point, this guide describes the interesting sights, the relationships to the past, and the monuments to genius and folly just beyond the windshield. Fifty years after its first issue this guide remains a useful reference and finder's guide to the rich texture of life in Iowa that interstate highway drivers never see.

Never mind the problems of producing this guide (Iowa had so few writers on welfare that Opal Shannon, an unsung heroine, had to write a great deal of it herself). Never mind that the steam ferry (fifty cents per car) no longer connects Montrose with Nauvoo, Illinois, or that the residents of Ackley no longer offer free sauerkraut, sausages, and entertainment on Sauerkraut Day. When *Wallaces' Farmer* took notice of this book in 1938, the reviewer advised that it should "go in the car alongside of the road map." That would be a good way, despite the ravages of time and progress, to "rediscover Iowa" today.

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-KANSAS CITY

RICHARD MCKINZIE

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