

Book Notices

Moments in Iowa History, by Jean Florman. Cedar Falls: KUNI/KHKE, University of Northern Iowa, 1997. x, 179 pp. Illustrations, bibliography. \$12.95 paper.

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Jean Florman tells readers in the preface to her entertaining collection of tales of Iowa's past that "history is storytelling, and without stories—of self, family, community, nation, and world—we would be bereft of our humanity" (ix). In this sometimes rambling collection of tales about Iowa's political, religious, social, ethnic, and economic communities, Florman attempts to reconstruct images of life in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her series of brief, mostly anecdotal narratives cover some of the more memorable events and personalities from Iowa's past. In addition to relying on county histories and travel accounts, Florman has drawn on the more scholarly research of historians such as William Petersen and Leland Sage to provide a broader historical context for such topics as politics, banking, and the changing Iowa economy. There is, however, no extended analysis of the underlying issues raised by the stories that she tells. The heart of her work—and what is likely to make it both popular and worth reading—are the stories of individuals and communities at work and play.

The book lacks both footnotes and an index, but it does not pretend to be a scholarly study. The work, which began as stories to be read on public radio as part of a celebration of Iowa's sesquicentennial, has an informal and even conversational tone that makes it accessible and at times even lively. Florman's approach is reminiscent in some respects of previous publications by Iowa writer George Mills, such as *A Judge and a Rope, and Other Stories of Bygone Iowa* (1994), although she gives greater attention to frontier social and economic life, the experience of women and ethnic minorities, and the development of religious and educational institutions. *Moments in Iowa History* will be especially useful for general readers who are interested in learning something about Iowa's past.

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