

already gleaned from the rich traditional sources. We are left, then, with few surprises.

The study is a well-written detective story on the use of material culture as evidence, and its succinct and clear explanation of the nature of the discipline is certainly intelligible to the historian. Few historians, however, will come away convinced that the archeological study of Millwood's material culture offered insights that extended beyond Orser's careful use of traditional written and oral historical sources.

*Des Moines and Polk County: Flag on the Prairie*, by Barbara Beving Long. Northridge, CA: Windsor Publications, 1988. 160 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, index. Cloth \$29.95.

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Designed primarily for local history buffs, this is a modest book with limited objectives. It is "an admittedly brief account" (9), writes Long, a prominent historic preservationist, that seeks to "point out the important themes" and "to celebrate the major events" (9) in the history of Des Moines and Polk County beginning with the city's inception in 1843 as an army post and Indian agency. She is successful in achieving her purposes while describing the growth of city and county in the nineteenth century. The four chapters Long devotes to these formative years focus on the developments that shaped the emergence of Des Moines as Iowa's leading commercial, financial, and political center. The chapters include early settlement, the coming of the railroads, the selection of Des Moines as county seat and state capital, the Civil War and its aftermath, and the growth of Des Moines as a transportation and distribution center based on wholesaling, retailing, banking, insurance, publishing, and coal mining. Imbalance sets in, however, and the meaning and importance of themes and events become blurred as Long moves into the twentieth century and squeezes immigration, changes in life styles and living standards, the advent of the interurban, the coming of the automobile, Progressive reform of municipal government, World War I, the depression, and World War II into a single chapter. She then touches on education, religion, entertainment, the arts, and redevelopment of downtown Des Moines in two successive chapters. The final chapter, written by Denny Rehder, a local business historian, comprises historical sketches of a number of prominent business and community organizations that subsidized publication of the volume. Including numer-

ous photographs of the founders and leaders of these groups, the chapter is reminiscent of the "mug books" that were so popular at the turn of the century.

The strengths and weaknesses of the book reflect its design and purpose. It is profusely illustrated, well organized, clearly written, and readable. Long enjoyed access to private as well as public collections of photographs and made the most of her opportunity; the illustrations that appear on every page are the most original feature of the account and its most important contribution. Carefully selected and annotated, the illustrations offer a rich and varied range of drawings, paintings, portraits, and photographs that add color and vitality to the text. Aside from the illustrations, however, the book, while presenting many interesting and colorful details, does not add a great deal to our knowledge and understanding of the subject. Descriptive and factual rather than analytical or interpretive, designed to be celebratory, the tone of the book is laudatory and uncritical, emphasizing achievement rather than failure. Long mentions the miserable living and working conditions of the coal miners at the turn of the century, refers to the segregation of blacks, and deprecates the lack of effective community leadership and spirit during the decline of downtown Des Moines after the Second World War. Generally, however, she avoids the warts, saying little about ethnic, racial, and religious tensions, the struggles between management and labor, neighborhood jealousies and rivalries, or the complex issues arising from metropolitan growth. The book also lacks context. There is no indication, for example, that the adoption of the commission form of government in Des Moines in 1907 was part and parcel of a nationwide effort to reform government at all levels; the book does not mention the Progressive movement or the Progressive Era. There is a similar vacuum in the 1930s; Long speaks of federal relief programs but does not mention the New Deal.

Judged by professional standards, *Des Moines and Polk County* has some serious weaknesses. However, the book addresses a popular rather than a professional audience. Interested lay people looking for a lively summary account of the history of Des Moines and Polk County will probably find the book attractive and enjoyable.

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