

example, he does not mention Secretary of Agriculture David F. Houston's 1913 survey of farm women, which was instrumental in determining early Extension System policies and establishing priorities that affected farm women and men for at least the next two decades.

As a handy reference book, however, Rasmussen's study remains useful. Read in conjunction with a more interpretive history of the results of rural Progressivism, such as David Danbom's *The Resisted Revolution* (1979), Rasmussen's study could provide the reader with a well-rounded understanding of the Smith-Lever Act's legacy. Read alone, this study provides the reader with the major facts of the Extension System story.

*Breadlines Knee-Deep in Wheat: Food Assistance in the Great Depression*, by Janet Poppendieck. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986. xvii, 306 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DAVID E. HAMILTON, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

Two of the most vivid images of the Great Depression are often coupled in the popular and the academic mind. One is that of the long, grim lines of the unemployed suffering the indignity of mass charity as they awaited a bowl of soup and a piece of bread. The other is the distress and destitution of hundreds of thousands of farmers and their families suffering from miserably low prices. These images are coupled, of course, because of the irony of the unemployed wanting food and needing clothes while farmers struggled with price-depressing surpluses of wheat and cotton. During the 1930s the notion of a "paradox of want amid plenty" (xi) became a popular idea. For some it confirmed the irrationality of American capitalism. But according to Janet Poppendieck, it also focused public attention on finding ways of resolving the unseemly contradiction of surpluses and hunger. The subject of her book is an analysis of one result of that heightened public attention: the federal government's food-relief programs of the 1930s.

Poppendieck begins her study with two chapters reviewing the farmers' plight on the eve of the depression and the difficulties confronting relief agencies and social workers in the depression's early stages. These are followed by a discussion of the food relief issue under Hoover. It arose when the failure of the Federal Farm Board stabilization program left the board holding massive stocks of wheat and cotton. After nearly two years of debate, Congress approved legislation donating seventy million bushels of wheat and eight hundred

thousand bales of cotton to the Red Cross for subsequent distribution to the needy. Limited as these initiatives were, they established important precedents for more far-reaching programs, even though the New Dealers entered office with no specific plans for building on the Federal Farm Board and Red Cross examples. Had it not been for the famous 1933-34 hog kill, food relief might not even have been part of the New Deal.

The public indignation over food waste, however, forced the creation of the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation (FSRC), which began distributing large amounts of hog, dairy, and cattle products for relief purposes. Although it ably overcame a myriad of administrative difficulties to distribute large quantities of food to those in need, the FSRC was shrouded in controversy from the start. Farm interests disliked financing it with the Agricultural Adjustment Administration's processing tax; business interests feared competition and a loss of potential markets; social workers objected to it because it violated their long-standing opposition to relief in kind. These controversies, and also frictions with the USDA, prompted the corporation's transfer in 1935 from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration to the Department of Agriculture. No longer the bailiwick of social workers such as Harry Hopkins who were committed to aiding the unemployed, the program then came to be administered by a department committed to the interests of commercial farming. Once it became a part of the USDA, the corporation's potential for addressing social welfare needs languished as it became a tool for controlling agricultural surpluses. Bureaucratic intransigence, interest group pressure, and an ideological predisposition to favor work relief over direct relief combined to limit its role. The result, Poppendieck insists, was the death of a humane program that served those most in need in American society.

Much about *Breadlines Knee-Deep in Wheat* is commendable. Poppendieck has explored voluminous congressional documents, government reports, and pertinent archives and manuscripts to piece together her story. It is a story, moreover, that tells us a great deal about an ignored aspect of depression-era relief efforts. Her account is well written and well detailed (perhaps too detailed in places). She is excellent at capturing the often conflicting views of social workers, USDA officials, farm organization leaders, and members of Congress.

More troubling, however, is the book's central theme. Why, Poppendieck asks, did such "high-minded, well-intentioned, and hard-working reformers" as the New Dealers produce "so inadequate a set of programs in the face of so remarkable an opportunity" (xvii)? In framing her book around this question, she joins historians such as

Barton Bernstein and Howard Zinn in seeing the New Deal as a lost opportunity for restructuring the American economy and establishing more far-reaching social welfare programs. But how real this opportunity was seems doubtful. Much of Poppendieck's analysis, in fact, points out the great obstacles to such changes in American society.

This point notwithstanding, *Breadlines Knee-Deep in Wheat* should be of much interest to anyone interested in the 1930s, in agricultural and social welfare policies, or in the antecedents of more recent food relief programs such as food stamps.

*Corn and Its Early Fathers*, by Henry A. Wallace and William L. Brown. Henry A. Wallace Series on Agricultural History and World Studies. Revised Edition. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988. 158 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$18.95.

REVIEWED BY SARA R. PETERSON AND PETER A. PETERSON, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

*Corn and Its Early Fathers* was first published in 1956 by Henry A. Wallace and William L. Brown to elucidate the significance and accomplishments of the individuals responsible for the development of hybrid corn. The story of this unique and economically valuable plant was, however, incomplete in the junior author's view. He therefore issued this revised edition, which includes a chapter on Henry A. Wallace, who played such a vital role in the promotion of hybrid corn in the Midwest. Henry A. Wallace, a 1910 graduate of Iowa State College, editor of *Wallaces' Farmer* from 1921 to 1933, founder of the Hi-Bred Corn Company (now Pioneer Hi-Bred International), Secretary of Agriculture from 1933 to 1940, and vice-president of the United States from 1941 to 1945, was one of the most important leaders in American agriculture. His many-faceted life is ably described by William A. Brown, former president and chairman of Pioneer Hi-Bred International and noted geneticist, cytologist, and authority on the evolution of maize.

In the preface to the first edition of *Corn and Its Early Fathers*, the authors stated that "the history behind the corn which went into modern hybrid corn is as dramatic and important as the history of the automobile." After reading about the development of corn during the relatively short span of fifty years from a crop yielding 24.1 bushels per acre in 1931 to one yielding more than 109 bushels per acre in 1981, one has to agree with the authors' assessment. They trace the history of this remarkable plant from the earliest known tiny cobs found in caves and rock shelters in the Tehuacán Valley of Mexico

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