

cusses each stage of government intervention, Hurt provides statistics that demonstrate the flaws in federal policy. The numbers provide their own drama: in 1900, 42 percent of the American population lived on farms; in the mid-1990s, less than 2 percent of Americans did. As farms became larger and more efficient, fewer young people felt compelled to stay in agriculture. Since mid-century, the average age of farmers has steadily increased.

Federal efforts to promote modernization and economic efficiency through a variety of means—including adopting new technologies, improving access to credit, and promoting global markets—have proved to be a double-edged sword. Improved efficiencies have best served the largest farms. Economies of scale have forced smaller operations to rely on outside income, including both government subsidies and off-farm employment. At the end of the twentieth century, marginal operations increasingly relied on rental agreements with agribusiness to solve problems of income and risk management.

The virtues of *Problems of Plenty* rest in Hurt's ability to synthesize the recent literature in agricultural history in one, slim volume. It provides a solid introduction to the basic problems of farm policy in the twentieth century. Those familiar with the contemporary farm situation will gain a deeper understanding of how the problems at the beginning of the twenty-first century came into being. However, this emphasis on providing a brief history of American farming contains liabilities. Export and tariff policies receive only passing consideration. Postwar policies regarding suburbanization and the promotion of cheap, mass-market food are addressed only tangentially. However, Hurt has provided a comprehensive annotated bibliography to assist those readers who wish to develop a broader understanding of modern agricultural policy.

Patchwork: Iowa Quilts and Quilters, by Jacqueline Andre Schmeal. A Bur Oak Book. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003. xv, 140 pp. Illustrations, index. \$29.95 paper.

Reviewer Barbara J. Dilly is assistant professor of anthropology at Creighton University. Her research and writing have focused on rural Iowa communities.

Jacqueline Schmeal's photographic and ethnographic patchwork of the lives of 17 quilters and 70 quilts reveals the importance of quilts and quilters to the social, cultural, economic, and artistic history of Iowa. As historic texts, quilts illustrate the stories of rural women's social lives, their misfortune and joy, their production techniques and technology, and their creative energy. The cultural values of rural Iowa

women (their frugality, industry, hopeful outlook, love of family and friends, and sense of social responsibility) are preserved in documents of labor and love.

Quilting gave women control over their material and social lives by enabling them to cope with overwhelming difficulties. In the midst of economic misfortune, Schmeal argues that rural women found time for quilting because it energized them by providing social bonds and a form of material wealth. Quilting helped women meet their own families' material needs or to earn cash. Organized in small support groups, church women also quilted to meet the needs of others.

Schmeal's engaging study chronicles the evolution of quilting in materials, design, technique, and social relations. In the midst of change, however, *Patchwork* is also the story of persistent cultural values. Quilting continues as a social, creative, and economic outlet for Iowans. Quilts preserve identities, are precious family heirlooms, and serve as archives of our state history. Many of the quilts featured in this book can be found at the Grout Museum in Waterloo. In addition to an interesting read, the book is a guide to a valuable collection.

Who Invented the Computer? The Legal Battle that Changed Computing History, by Alice Rowe Burks. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003. v, 463 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

Reviewer Brian Peckham is associate professor of economics at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. His research and writing have focused on the history of technology, with special interest in patents.

Students of Iowa history will likely find of interest this book's meticulous defense of the view, which many experts now accept, that the invention of the modern electronic computer took place over sixty years ago in the laboratories of Iowa State University (ISU). For historians in general the book deserves notice as a convincing demonstration of the value of the voluminous legal documents contained in trial records.

Writing with the authority of an experienced historian of the modern computer industry, Alice Rowe Burks makes skillful use of a variety of evidence to make the persuasive case that John V. Atanasoff, a physicist working at ISU from 1937 through 1942, was the true inventor (with the assistance of graduate student Clifford Berry) of the first automatic electronic digital computer. Most of the evidence Burks presents comes from the mountain of legal documents (primarily testimony and depositions) that piled up during a legal battle thirty years ago in which Honeywell successfully challenged the validity of basic computer patents held by its rival, Sperry Rand.

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