

*The Dirtfarmer's Son*, by Wayne Andersen. Boston: Editions Fabriart, 2003. xi, 299 pages. Illustrations, notes. \$27.50 cloth.

Reviewer Tom Morain teaches Iowa history at Graceland University, where he is Director of Community Relations. He is a former administrator of the State Historical Society of Iowa and the author of *Prairie Grass Roots: An Iowa Small Town in the Early Twentieth Century* (1988).

Wayne Andersen's autobiography is a novel contribution to Iowa's collective memory. While Andersen works out his own interpretation of what the impact of being a Danish Iowan and a farm kid meant in the 1920s and 1930s, the reader gains insights into the transition that ethnics of Scandinavian descent experienced in the depressed midwestern farm economy that followed America's participation in World War I. The book revolves around the importance Andersen attaches to his Danish Iowan and farming background. What gives the book its distinctive perspective is that the Andersens were typical in neither category.

There is an underdog scrappiness in Andersen's boyhood narrative. Born in 1928 on a farm near Hinton in Plymouth County, Andersen describes rural life in terms both endearing and brutal. There is the usual tribute to family togetherness and neighborhood cooperation, but he also notes the harsher elements of farm life. Animals that became a problem—livestock, domestic pets, strays, wild animals—were eliminated. Children were expected to work.

The Andersens were part of a large rural community of Danish Iowans, bound by bloodlines, traditions, and the Lutheran church. Andersen offers interesting commentary on customs carried over from rural European traditions. For example, he maintains that many Danish Iowan families had a more pragmatic view toward premarital sex than their evangelical Protestant neighbors. Because fertility was critical to rural survival, prospective grooms often demanded proof of pregnancy before marriage. Andersen also notes that dancing was a community pastime in his younger days when the dances and music were traditional. When young people opted for jazz and left the local dance halls for the swing bands of the city, however, dancing took on a much more ambiguous place in the world of entertainment.

To survive during the Great Depression, Andersen's father moved the family into the tiny town of Leeds north of Sioux City and then into Sioux City itself. His most successful venture was operating beer halls in Sioux City, one of which included a brothel upstairs. Andersen describes the arrangement without judgment, praising his father's gritty determination to hold the family together in tough times. The account moves through the familiar and often painful transitions of a farm boy learning to negotiate the city. The boy bred champion pigeons,

excelled in school, and played saxophone in dance bands. In his mid-teens, he took off for California on his own but returned home later. Never far away in the narrative is the author's awareness that he is indeed a "dirtfarmer's son."

The book occasionally steps back from autobiography to provide background in the history of northwest Iowa and Sioux City in particular. The prohibition crusade of the late nineteenth century, Governor William Harding's World War I-era "English only" proclamation (not a popular move among loyal Danes), and the Milk Strike and Farmer's Holiday movement of the early 1930s get attention. Although sometimes slightly inaccurate in historical detail, the book provides useful insight into the way events were remembered. The "dirtfarmer's son" can sympathize with the frustration of the farmers who threatened to hang the LeMars judge who presided at farm foreclosure hearings.

Andersen went on to earn a Ph.D. from Columbia University, to teach art and art history at several prestigious universities, and to design mosques in Saudi Arabia. Demonstrating this wisdom, Andersen sometimes inserts discussions of what was going on in the international art world simultaneous to the Iowa events he is describing. For example, the reader learns that Andersen's birth in 1928 coincided with Meyer Shapiro's first lecture on Impressionism at Columbia University and the death of Victorine Meurent in Paris, "the Olympia of Paris' 1863 Salon des Refusés that set the art world on end" (2). To my knowledge, no other Iowa history makes those particular connections. *The Dirtfarmer's Son* tells a unique story. Particularly in its farming and Danish Iowan perspective, it is an adolescent coming-of-age narrative that will have familiar overtones for many.

*The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism*, by Andrew C. Rieser. Religion and American Culture Series. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. xiii, 399 pp. Maps, illustrations, diagrams, appendixes, notes, index. \$37.50 cloth.

Reviewer Paisley Harris is assistant professor of history at the University of Wisconsin at Fond du Lac. Her dissertation (University of Minnesota, 2000) was "Taking the Stage: Traveling Shows, Traveling Performers, and Competing Narratives of Respectability in the Public Sphere, 1905-1930."

Andrew Rieser's *The Chautauqua Moment* is the first book-length scholarly study of the chautauqua and its impact on American society. Rieser conducted an impressive amount of archival research to write a study of national scope but with considerable richness and detail. His holistic approach—in which he examines not only institutional

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