

The Iowa Review, volume 39, number 2 (Fall 2009). 255 pp. Illustrations. \$9.95 paper.

Reviewer Patrick Nunnally is program coordinator in the Institute on the Environment, University of Minnesota, where his River Life program collects and disseminates data on rivers, including the stories that surround them.

As might be expected from *The Iowa Review*, this special issue on Iowa's rivers is an extraordinary collection of writing. The rich array of voices gathered here and expressed as poems, essays, short fiction, memoir, and photographs is an appropriate response to the richness that rivers offer to our cultural identity and daily lives in the upper Midwest. When Wallace Stegner, an alumnus of the University of Iowa, wrote about "the humid east," he was often referring to the Iowa of his birth and early childhood. And the upper Midwest *is* humid and well watered, certainly by comparison to Stegner's beloved American West. Anyone wanting to understand the human settlement of the region now recognized as the Midwest would do well to start with understanding the rivers that flow through the landscape.

This volume provides an excellent introduction to the human dimensions of those rivers. Cornelia F. Mutel explores the complex connections between landscape, agriculture, river floods, and the restorative work that is taking place at locations such as the Whiterock Conservancy. Laura Sayre, Bradley Cook, and Dianna Penny offer quite different but equally compelling accounts of growing up where rivers ran through their lives. For other writers, such as Nate McKeen and E. Keene, rivers have been the location for more intensely dramatic though short-term experiences.

Some of the essays collected here develop richly multidimensional understandings of how a river literally and figuratively flows through the region's history. Robert F. Sayre's study of the Iowa River and Laura Rigal's examination of the place rivers had in the white settlement of eastern Iowa both point to the places where history, geography, natural history, and natural science meet. Both demonstrate that the study of rivers cannot be confined simply to one department at a university or one kind of intellectual discipline.

The work collected here speaks to the history of the region in two distinct ways. On one hand, several of these essays shed new light on the past of this place, using the geographical and metaphorical facts of flowing waters as their avenues for understanding how the place has emerged through time. Other pieces, reflections on the 2008 flooding across the state, for example, provide vivid and specific reflections on the immediate impact of rivers on people's lives. These writings offer

insights for historians in the future who will be writing about the longer term impacts of those events.

An important aspect of most of these essays is their accessibility. Readers don't need to be thoroughly versed in the biochemistry of water to understand points made about pollution; nor do they have to be hydrologists to understand the impact of flooding rivers. Given the importance of rivers in our lives — as sources of drinking water, as essential components of industrial processes, as the center of greenway corridors that provide respite and rejuvenation for our spirits — it is vital that we hear these voices and understand their insights.

Historic Photos of Steamboats on the Mississippi, by Dean M. Shapiro. Nashville: Turner Publishing Co., 2009. Photographs, notes on the photographs, glossary of steamboat terms, bibliography. x, 206 pp. \$39.95 cloth.

Reviewer William E. Lass is professor emeritus of history, Minnesota State University, Mankato. He is the author, most recently, of *Navigating the Missouri: Steamboating on Nature's Highway, 1819–1935* (2008).

Historic Photos of Steamboats on the Mississippi includes 197 black-and-white photographs of steamboats on the Mississippi River and its major tributaries. Many of the photographs include vivid images of river towns, rural landings, passengers, crew members, and scenery. Each photo is attractively presented on a 10" x 10" page.

Photographs are an important source of information about steamboats. Unfortunately, photography did not become popular until after steamboating peaked in the 1850s. Consequently, most steamboat photos, including those in this book, portray a declining activity.

Anyone interested in steamboats, which have a rich tradition in Iowa history, should enjoy these photographs. But those concerned about accurate history of steamboating would be well advised to ignore the one-page chapter introductions. Shapiro, perhaps because he was so smitten with the romance of steamboating, did not systematically research steamboating as a business. Consequently, he makes such colossal errors as placing the "Golden Age" of steamboating near the end of the nineteenth century and grossly understating the impact of railroads by the time of the Civil War. Such books as Mildred L. Hartsough's *From Canoe to Steel Barge on the Upper Mississippi* (1934) and William J. Petersen's *Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi* (1937) would have provided a proper historical perspective. But Shapiro apparently did not use them.