

sions of black, Latino, and Asian in-migration that emphasize the diversity *within* those groups that tend to be lumped together as monolithic and cohesive communities. Also, an analysis of working-class neighborhoods by Judith Kenny and Thomas Hubka is a model for reading social meanings in the built environment. And Genevieve McBride, in surveying the portrayal of women in Milwaukee's past, raises the provocative question of why a city so steeped in progressivism remained extraordinarily resistant to granting political and economic rights to women.

The editors state that the purpose of this collection is to "identify what is known about a particular aspect of the city's history and identify future areas of interest" (10). To that end, the authors in varying degrees devote significant space in their essays to historiographical review and pointing out topics in need of further study. This is a boon to scholars and especially to doctoral students in search of dissertation topics. However, I suspect that the nonacademic audience will find this approach somewhat frustrating. *Perspectives on Milwaukee's Past* succeeds admirably in stimulating interest in this complex metropolis, but this tantalizing glimpse is likely to leave the general interested reader unsatisfied and wishing for more.

The Federal Art Project and the Creation of Middlebrow Culture, by Victoria Grieve. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009. x, 229 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.

Reviewer Gregg R. Narber is assistant professor of history at Luther College. He is the author of *The Impact of the New Deal on Iowa: Changing the Culture of a Rural State* (2008) and coauthor of *New Deal Mural Projects in Iowa* (1983).

Middlebrow culture is usually a pejorative term, one associated, for example, with the Book of the Month Club as it once operated or with Oprah's Book Club as author Jonathan Franzen perceived it (he objected to Oprah including his novel *The Corrections*). Middle-class anxieties about reading the "right books" are supposedly assuaged by someone selecting books for them (the Editors' Choice, Oprah's latest pick). Of course, this was and remains fraught with marketing implications, objectionable to those who believe that books are "art" that should find their audience on the basis of merit, not someone's reassuring say-so.

Grieve argues that the controversies surrounding the Federal Art Project (FAP) of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) are best understood in terms of opposition to middlebrow culture from art constituencies wedded to "highbrow," elite conceptions of art. They

argued that exposing masses of people to and encouraging their consumption of art dumbed down supposed “products of genius” (as geniuses recast their work to appeal to the masses) and exposed artists to government control as had occurred in Hitler’s Germany.

Certainly, defending “highbrow” art was part of the opposition to the FAP. Even so, the primacy Grieve gives this opposition is ultimately unpersuasive. The FAP exercised no content control. Commercialization, a mark of the “middlebrow,” was a late development for the FAP, and artists could offer up whatever they chose in the “Buy American Art” days promoted by the FAP. The first National Art Week was in late 1940, the last was in November 1941. The Index of American Design, an FAP project that sought to record the best examples of American folk art, was and remains largely inaccessible to most people. Community art centers — by 1941, more than 100 had been founded — were well attended and did mix accessible exhibits with art instruction. However, most of the art centers ended with the war and the related shift from federal to local funding. (Of three such art centers in Iowa, only Sioux City’s survived.) The ubiquitous art fairs of our present day and the number of art museums founded since World War II, a high percentage of which include programs of art appreciation and instruction, may, as Grieve would have it, signify FAP success in implanting middlebrow culture, but I suspect that few organizers or sponsors would appreciate the characterization.

As a study of New Deal art programs and the FAP in particular, this study is marked by some errors of fact. The FAP’s precursor, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) *was* indeed intended as a relief measure, although the program was so rushed into existence that laxity characterized determinations of need. Outcries from local communities about the content of Treasury Section murals — including Fletcher Martin’s infamous mine disaster mural for Kellogg, Idaho (it is Martin, not Marin as this text and index refer to him) — are offered as examples of community involvement with FAP mural content. In that the examples relate to another New Deal art program, one structured to encourage community involvement through, for example, local juries in many cases, the examples say little about the FAP.

Grieve’s case that the FAP sought to implant middlebrow culture *on a national basis* is undermined by the actual demographics of FAP employment and production. The FAP operated primarily in large urban centers such as New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, where artists needing relief tended to concentrate, and on only a small scale elsewhere. In Iowa the program lacked a director for some time. A few murals were produced in Sioux City and Des Moines, three art centers

opened and a fourth operated, and numerous posters and entries for the Index of American Design were created. Yet few artists were employed in Iowa, and little art was produced in the aggregate.

Grieve's contextualization of the intellectual history preceding this middlebrow/highbrow debate is splendid. In lucid, well-organized chapters, she introduces readers to John Dewey, Constance Rourke, John Cotton Dana, Van Wyck Brooks, George Santayana, and many others, and just enough of their writings and thinking to understand the debate that engaged them. These threads are nicely tied together in the biography of Holger Cahill, who headed the FAP. The excitement of this intellectual debate — what American art was or should be, what a museum was or ought to be, the place of art in a democratic society — is readily apprehended through Grieve's telling. Because these issues are still with us, this exceptional resumé of that intellectual history is of great value.

They Opened the Door . . . And Let My Future In, by Helen Phelan Augustine. Emmetsburg: The author, 2006. vi, 126 pp. Appendix of photographs, documents, and maps.

Reviewer Jeffrey A. Kaufmann is professor of history at Muscatine Community College. His doctoral thesis focused on country schools in Iowa in the 1930s.

Helen Phelan Augustine's book is a delightful journey to a bygone era in Iowa and midwestern history. Augustine is clearly inspired by her own experience in Iowa country schools. She weaves this inspiration throughout her description of the country school experience, focusing on 34 former teachers who shared their reflections on teaching in Iowa country schools in the 1930s and 1940s. The book is a wonderful mixture of memories, anecdotes, and reflections embedded in the context of rural educational history. The book is well organized into topical chapters with appropriate teacher memories supporting summaries and generalizations about Iowa country schools.

The focus of the book is on teachers and their experiences, including a wide array of topics such as pedagogical techniques, contract language, teacher training, boarding in the community, and more subjective areas such as motivation, autonomy, and the impact of World War II on the school experience. An appendix of documents and photographs personalizes both the topics and the 34 teachers interviewed for the book.

This is an excellent mix of nostalgia and oral history, an opportunity fading fast with time. The use of former teachers and their insights grounds the book in authenticity, even as a positive tone pervades