Detour Iowa: Historic Destinations, by Mike Whye. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2020. 192 pp. Illustrations. $21.99 paperback.

Reviewer Valerie Van Kooten is Executive Director at Pella Historical Museums in Pella, Iowa. Prior to joining Pella Historical Museums, she taught courses on writing and worked as a grant writer at Central College in Pella.

While there are a variety of guidebooks about Iowa (place names, biographical dictionaries, nature guides), few, if any, deal strictly with historic destinations. Enter *Detour Iowa: Historic Destinations*, by Mike Whye, a Council Bluffs photographer and author. Broken down into ten sections of the state, *Detour Iowa* highlights the best-known—and sometimes totally unknown—historical sites, oddities, businesses, and homes around the state that have a point of historical interest. Black-and-white photos, taken by the author himself, accompany some of the entries.

Occasionally the book includes a collection of items within an area, such as the "Soda Fountains of Southwest of Iowa," or an overview, like "Van Buren County." Each entry highlights why that destination is important to the area or the state overall, along with a brief description of its history and what the visitor will experience. A website or phone number would have been helpful with each location, as would a designation of whether the featured site is on public property (such as cemeteries and parks) or requires a paid admission. The size of this paperback book makes it easy to tuck into a pocket in your car for your next road trip—or anytime you're traveling in Iowa and find yourself wanting to learn some state and local history.

Iowa's Remarkable Soils: The Story of Our Most Vital Resource and How We Can Save It, by Kathleen Woida. Bur Oak Books. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2021. xv, 238 pp. Illustrations, glossary, notes, index. $25.00 paperback.

Reviewer Charles Connerly is professor emeritus of planning and public affairs at the University of Iowa. His most recent book, *Green, Fair and Prosperous: Paths to a Sustainable Iowa* (2020), was published by the University of Iowa Press.

Joseph Frazier Wall begins his history of Iowa with the assertion, "For Iowa, the land serves as more than an introduction. It is the major story line" (Wall, *Iowa: A History*, 1978). In Kathleen Woida's *Iowa's Remarkable Soils: The Story of Our Most Vital Resource and How We Can Save It*, land, more specifically soil, is the main story. Like Wall, Woida recognizes that Iowa's highly fertile soils are key to the state's identity and purpose as a leading agricultural state. But while Wall's book covers the human interaction with the soil, Woida literally looks underground to help the

reader understand and appreciate the structure and formation of Iowa's soils and how they have contributed to the state's environmental and agricultural riches. She follows this with an analysis of how our mode of agriculture is degrading the state's chief resource, resulting in the loss of the state's fertile topsoil at an astonishing rate.

In this well-written and well-edited book, the author is equally adept at explaining the basics of soil science including what contributes to soil fertility, discussing the history of Iowa agriculture and its impacts on soil, and examining both the threats to soil conservation and their solutions.

The book begins with an introduction that clearly explains the significance of Iowa's "black gold," known to soil scientists as Mollisols, the world's most fertile soil, which is found in abundance in the steppes of Russia and Ukraine, the pampas of Argentina, and the hilly terrain of Iowa that once accounted for more than two-thirds of the state's land. The grasslands that these diverse regions have in common contributed to the soil's richness. In Iowa, the loose (*loess* in German) "deposits of silty sediments" (203) that covered the state over thousands of years also helped to develop a finely granulated soil that facilitates root penetration and plant growth as well as the soil's ability to absorb moisture.

Woida is a scientist and even though this book is written for generalists, its goal is to enable the reader to obtain at least a rudimentary understanding of soil structure, classification, and formation. The reader learns the importance of key terms, concepts, and fundamentals including soil classifications, texture, density, consistence, porosity, horizons (including the fertile A horizon commonly known as topsoil), and coloration as well as the key factors that affect soil formation—parent material (the geologic and organic matter in which soil forms over time), climate, organisms, time, and topography.

In the book's second half, Woida adds the sixth factor in soil formation—the impact of people and agriculture. The history of agricultural transformation in Iowa is succinctly told, and in the following chapter, "Squandering the Inheritance," Woida explains how the means of farming—both cultivation and grazing, along with Iowa's hilly topography—combine to make Iowa the nation's leader in sheet and rill erosion. This level of topsoil loss, of course, is unsustainable and is a tragic loss of the state's most valuable resource. And climate change, with its increase in intense rain events, will only make the problem worse.

Woida's answer is to practice sustainable agriculture by adopting farming practices that reduce erosion and add organic matter to the soil. Examples she cites include Iowa farmers who practice no-till farming, which reduces erosion by keeping crop residue in place and limiting the amount of soil compaction created by heavy farm machinery. Farmers

can plant cover crops whose root systems help feed the "soil food web" that sustains the organic vitality of soil. Cover crops reduce erosion by protecting against the impact of raindrops on soil while increasing soil porosity and rainfall infiltration through their underground roots.

Woida's book is a concise and readable guide to soil conservation in Iowa. She writes with the care of an expert who enjoys guiding a novice through the intricacies of soil science applied to our Iowa environmental challenges. And just in case the reader gets lost, Woida provides a very useful glossary so that readers don't have to flip pages to refresh their memories. Overall, this book stands well with Cornelia Mutel's *The Emerald Horizon: The History of Nature in Iowa* (2008). Together, these books provide readers, regardless of whether they have a background in biology or soil science, with a basic understanding of the science behind Iowa's environmental challenges as well as their solutions.

Nebraska History Moments: Stories and Photos from the Collections of History Nebraska, by David L. Bristow. Lincoln, NE: History Nebraska, 2021. ix, 132 pp. Illustrations, photo credits. $14.95 paperback.

Reviewer Becki Plunkett is special collections archivist at the State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.

As publications editor for History Nebraska (formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society), David L. Bristow is well-acquainted with the cultural collections managed by that organization and their power to convey the state's heritage. For this book, he selected artifacts and archival material from that agency's holdings to present 120 stories from the past. In one-page vignettes, an image of the item is paired with commentary examining some aspect of Nebraska's recorded history that it encapsulates. Moments revealed can be personal—a farm woman with a washer powered by the REA—or, of larger scale—the first session of the state's unique unicameral legislature. Bristow avoids chronological or thematic arrangement of the stories, allowing his audience to curate their own experience as they meander through time and topic. The author's stated mission to entice readers into deeper investigations of History Nebraska's collections is supported by end credits providing agency collection identifiers for each item examined.

Original documents, photos, and artifacts are often used to illustrate the narratives of historical publications. In this book, the narrative itself derives directly from the primary sources: an 1819 painting so visually accurate it was used to locate archaeological remnants of the Stephen Long Expedition; an 1877 photograph whose details reveal what