

the decision of the current one to opt for diversification, which resulted in what a writer for *Forbes* has called a "so-so conglomerate."

In any event, Stover's is a good book—one in which both the author and the publisher can take pride. It is a must for serious scholars of transportation history, rail buffs, and Iowa libraries.

—Donovan L. Hofsommer
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A Primer for Local Historical Societies, by Dorothy Weyer Creigh. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1976.

Strong threads of common sense, practicality, and experience run through this book and tie it together into a cohesive whole. It is obvious that the author is drawing upon the pleasures and pains of personal experience in the local historical society field when she describes the various programs. In addition to these characteristics, the material is presented with a wit that makes even the most dogmatic directions seem palatable.

Such a guide book as this is a much-needed item. The renewed interest in state and local history, spurred on by the Bicentennial celebration, has produced a burgeoning number of small historical societies, many with museums connected. Current trends in preservation of historic buildings have added to this number. Obviously all of the people involved in these activities are well-meaning and able. But they frequently need specific sorts of advice, particularly during the initial steps of organizing a society or beginning a major project. This book will be a constant companion for them, guiding their steps through the intricacies of such activities so as to avoid the more obvious pitfalls.

The book has some weaknesses. There is an unevenness in the quality of advice given on the various topics. This may be explained quite easily, because anyone is more familiar with some matters than with others. A greater flaw is in the appendices. A quick spot check shows that the information given for the State Historical Society in Iowa, on page 130, is erroneous, as is that for the State Historic Preservation Officer for Iowa, on page 146. Granted that the organizational network of historical agencies in the various states is unbelievably complex. In such instances, it might be better to leave these lists out completely, than to have wrong information included.

The strongest chapters are those on initial organization, on tours, on oral history, and on museums. A few quotations from the book will illustrate this.

"Museums tend to be the attics of communities."

"You must decide in the beginning what you want, or you will soon look like a garage sale."

"Arranging a display is far different from packing a suitcase, . . ."

"Each display should teach. It should not be a hodgepodge collection of curiosities and relics, and it certainly need not include every single object the museum possesses."

These are very sound words of advice. Anyone who has visited museums in the United States knows how useful this advice is, and how many museums, large and small, have failed to heed it. Even though each individual museum must serve its own particular audience and purpose, it ought not to misjudge that audience, and may assume the role of leader and educator for such things.

The advice about oral history is equally apropos. It emphasizes specificity of the story to be told, and gives excellent clues as to how to aid the interviewee in recalling time sequence, seasonal contexts, and shows the interviewer how to phrase questions in terms that will evoke additional memories.

The author states that: "Tours are picnics—for everybody except those in charge of them." But the careful steps listed to help plan a tour are so good that I think even those in charge, if they have followed these directions, would enjoy the tours too.

The two chapters on organizing an historical society are written in such a logical way that they are really blueprints for success. How many headaches would be avoided if groups were to proceed in such a fashion. These clues range from establishing a purpose and scope, through incorporation, membership and financing, to such mundane, but crucial, factors as logos, programs, elections of officers, and the design of letterhead stationery.

This book is a good one, a needed one, and, because of its format, can fulfill the promise expressed in the title. It can be a primer for training incipient groups, as well as existing organizations. All of us who are interested in the cause of local historical societies and museums should thank the author for her valiant and successful efforts.

—Loren Horton

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Division of the State Historical Society

Encyclopaedia of German-American Genealogical Research, by Clifford Neal Smith and Anna Piszczan-Czaja Smith. New York and London: R. R. Bowker Company, 1976. pp. xiii, 273. \$35.00.

To hope for any success in tracing an ancestral line into the former German Empire, one must first gather all the data available on this side of the Atlantic, so that the conditions for European research may be precisely known and, if possible, there may be found some clue which will point to that place, or at least that region, whence came the immigrant. The Smiths have not given their readers much help in this initial phase of the problem.

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