

If Biels' is an exuberant, thoughtful, and eye-opening book, Thomas Hoving's is a dud. The former director of the Metropolitan Museum makes fun of art historians (while misstating the facts they have provided) and writers on Wood in general. His book, he says, will finally tell us (the average guy) all about *American Gothic* through a kind of do-it-yourself connoisseurship "lite." The result is a redundant series of descriptions of the painting, occasionally hitched to a snatch of garbled scholarship. The footnote numbers don't always match the citations. The few illustrations are printed in a murky black on black. And to top it all off, the last half-dozen pages of the book—where the index should have been—carry a thumbnail biography of the author. For shame! Grant Wood deserved better. Fortunately, Steven Biels has provided a terrific antidote to Hoving's contemptuous nonsense.

William J. Spillman and the Birth of Agricultural Economics, by Laurie Winn Carlson. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005. 210 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Reviewer Jon Lauck is senior advisor to U.S. Senator John Thune. He previously practiced law and was assistant professor of history at South Dakota State University. He is the author of *American Agriculture and the Problem of Monopoly* (2000).

Farm policy was a crucial arena for state building in the United States. Beginning with Lincoln, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) began expanding the bureaucratic and managerial functions of American government and embracing experts and technology. The "farm problem" was a major concern during the formative years of the American state in the early decades of the twentieth century, and policy experts and economists were critical to the debate. As late as the 1960s, John Kennedy was calling the farm issue the nation's most pressing domestic problem.

As the debates over the relationship between the government and farming played out in the early twentieth century, William Spillman was a central figure. After growing up on a farm in Missouri, Spillman matriculated at the University of Missouri and thereafter took a series of teaching posts. He then became involved in research positions at the USDA and became a promoter of efficient farms and a critic of certain farming practices such as the overuse of fertilizer. Laurie Winn Carlson's new book ably traces Spillman's career as a central figure in the debates about farm policy making.

Spillman's most important contribution to farm policy was to argue that the USDA and certain farmers had become too wedded to the ideals of efficiency, technology, and production. Spillman had long

been an advocate of efficient farming and a pioneer in the field of "farm management," but the acute crisis in agriculture in the years after World War I began to change his thinking. While some reformers were advocating export dumping programs, and politicians such as Herbert Hoover were promoting the development of cooperatives (as ably chronicled by, respectively, Gilbert Fite and David Hamilton), Spillman embraced government controls. Spillman came to believe that solutions short of federal management were bound to fail. M. L. Wilson, as many agricultural historians have described, adopted Spillman's ideas and began pressing then-governor Franklin Roosevelt to adopt them, too. Spillman's ideas are still with us in the form of the federal farm program.

Carlson presents a balanced treatment of Spillman's life. One comes away impressed with Spillman as a man and as a conscientious government official. The only ingredient missing from Carlson's account is a better sense of the larger American narrative into which Spillman fits. Carlson might have taken into account the larger literature on the growth of the federal state by such recent scholars as Stephen Skowronek, Theda Skocpol, and Deborah Fitzgerald. In addition, Carlson could have considered how Spillman represented the rise of technocratic experts and scientists who believed that social problems could be solved if the state embraced their social engineering plans. Such faith in the scientific ideal is what James Scott (in *Seeing Like a State* [1998]) terms "high modernism." Even without this context, however, Carlson's book should be read by agricultural and economic historians.

Lou Henry Hoover: Activist First Lady, by Nancy Beck Young. Modern First Ladies Series. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004. xi, 238 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer Lisa Ossian is an instructor at Des Moines Area Community College in Ankeny, Iowa. Her research and writing have focused on the Great Depression and the World War II homefront.

Lou Henry Hoover's deepest thoughts and emotions remained hidden from most historical documents and many of her family and friends. Yet, in a telling detail of her life, uncashed checks were found after her death hidden in a desk drawer, checks that many grateful recipients had written for educational loans, checks that Lou Hoover had never deposited because she considered the completed education and thankful gesture enough compensation.

Nancy Beck Young has written a detailed and thoughtful biography of Lou Henry Hoover's White House years from 1929 to 1933. Subtitled

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