

designed to be informative, but is primarily intended to be diverting. Both the extraordinary variety of visual sources and the evocative text will pique historians' curiosity and jog the memory of anyone who has ever attended the Iowa State Fair.

Skeletons of the Prairie: Abandoned Rural Codington County, South Dakota, text by Ried Holien, photographs by S. Paul Tuszynski. Watertown, SD: Codington County Historical Society, 2000. 160 pp. Illustrations, maps. \$40.00 cloth.

Reviewer Fred W. Peterson retired last year as professor of art history at the University of Minnesota-Morris. He is the author of *Building Community, Keeping the Faith: German Catholic Vernacular Architecture in a Rural Minnesota Parish* (1998).

Skeletons of the Prairie is primarily a photographic documentation of abandoned structures in rural Codington County, South Dakota, accompanied by brief notes about the history of the county, homesteading, and houses and outbuildings on area farms. Poems, quotations, and relevant commentary also accompany the photographs as aids to interpret the images.

Both text and photographs address a general audience in an almost "folksy" manner. Reading the text and studying the photographs of the book is like riding the back roads of the area with a local farmer who tells stories about the way things were and the families who once lived and worked on the now abandoned farms. One does not, however, learn about the technological and economic forces in American history that have caused the failure of these family farms. Neither is there any attempt to analyze and explain the farmhouses and outbuildings as significant architectural monuments.

It seems ironic that a book documenting the devastation of rural America originates from the county where artist Terry Redlin has built a museum to commemorate his own commercialized paintings. Reproductions of those paintings found in galleries to grocery stores sentimentalize the life and environment of the family farm, presenting a vacuous vision of a Disneyland life in the rural Midwest. It is unfortunate that *Skeletons of the Prairie* did not directly address that kind of falsification of history with a factual and substantial account of how the flesh was ripped from the noble vernacular structures of the American farms.

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