

how they viewed themselves and their companions, and what they saw and heard and smelled. My goal is to put the reader inside the skins of those heroic, sad, and reckless men" (p. 5). In the fourteen chapters plus a prologue and epilogue, the story of the discovery is told—how the news spread throughout the world; the experiences on the trails in 1849 and 1850 around the Horn, across Panama and Mexico, up the Rio Grande, west from Ft. Smith, and the great overland trail; and the life in the mines and coastal cities. Using newspaper accounts, excerpts from dozens of diaries and letters written back home, and other sources, the author puts together a fascinating account that goes beyond a record of events. A reader can even follow the fears of a young man who had a sweetheart back home to whom he wrote soul-searching letters, the operations of a crook who organized a group to go up the Rio Grande, or the development of mining codes in lieu of law. The book is a skillful integration of the collective experiences of the gold rush. Some readers may learn more about the gold rush than they want to know, since the experiences on the trails and in the various mines are often similar if not identical. However, the quality of selection and of writing is always top-flight. This reviewer would take exception to the two occasions when the author speaks of mosquitoes being "damned thick" (p. 203) and of 43-year-old Alonzo Deland being "too damned old" (p. 192) for such a trek, and doubts if the language adds anything to his exposition.

There are other books that can give a reader a good account of the gold rush on the Central Overland Trail, published diaries such as Bruff's meticulous account that can give insights into the human side of the gold rush, and others, but this book will serve as the best treatment of the total gold rush experience for a long time.

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Journal of a Tamed Bureaucrat: Nils A. Olsen and the BAE, 1925-1935, edited by Richard Lowitt. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980. pp. 245. Introduction, index. \$15.95.

Nils Olsen was director of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the Department of Agriculture from 1928 to 1935. In this position he was chief of the department's statistical and research programs and its efforts to aid farmers through better planning. Richard Lowitt has

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edited his diary of those years and has provided us with a lucid and helpful introduction which casts Olsen and his bureau's affairs in an appropriate historical context. The entries cover mainly the years from 1929 through 1934 and are generally revealing, effusive, full of conversation, and written with a spontaneity one would hope to find in a diary.

The diary offers a partial glimpse of the conflict and bureaucratic evolution within the Agriculture Department during a severely troubled period in American farm history. Throughout the 1920s American farmers dress-rehearsed the tragedy that would befall most Americans in the 1930s. Encouraged to produce for the world during the Great War, farmers soon found themselves plagued by an excess of production, debt, and falling prices after the armistice. As their position worsened, the Agriculture Department became the center for debate over competing recovery prescriptions. The most prominent among these proposals, the McNary-Haugen and domestic allotment schemes, would have required extensive federal intervention in the farm economy, and were championed by Agriculture Secretary Henry C. Wallace and his economists in the BAE. But these programs were continually stymied by the equally vigorous advocacy of more modest cooperative marketing plans put forth by Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover. With Wallace's death in 1924, Hoover's faith in more efficient marketing mechanisms as the key to farm recovery would prevail as federal farm policy until 1933.

Olsen joined the BAE as an economist in the Division of Statistical and Historical Research in 1923. He enjoyed swift promotion under Wallace's successor, Hoover-ally William Jardine, and in 1928 was appointed chief of the BAE. As the situation worsened in 1929 to 1930, Olsen prodded Arthur Hyde, Hoover's agriculture secretary, into a more aggressive opposition to Hoover's failing policies. With the ascension of FDR and the appointment of Henry A. Wallace as agriculture secretary, Olsen and similar veteran activists in the BAE looked forward to the consummation of the elder Wallace's drive for federal intervention to limit farm production and raise price levels. The New Deal's Agricultural Adjustment Administration appeared to be the answer. But in rushing to meet the national emergency the AAA raided established bureaus, behaved as a sort of bureaucratic prima donna, and alienated veteran staffers, particularly those like Nils Olsen who found their advice increasingly ignored. Embittered, Olsen resigned in 1935 to join an insurance firm.

The diary is a revealing record of personalities and their foibles. But aside from its evident humanity, it offers additional evidence of the

extent of technocratic thought and planning underway in the 1920s. Historians have only recently come to recognize the importance of this era for the elaboration of planning and managerial institutions. The BAE was one such institution. Through its research activities, and particularly through its "Outlook" program, the bureau sought to unite the planning capacities of social scientists with the business needs of farmers. And Olsen's diary shows that he and his agricultural economists endured frustrations similar to those experienced by social scientists in other fields attempting to "manage" unemployment and the business cycle during the 1920s. In virtually every instance, insufficient and unreliable data hamstrung the planning abilities of technocratic social scientists. Although the Outlook program suffered from other complications, Olsen's diary illuminates another instance of what is now emerging as a dominant theme in the historiography of the New Era—the frustrating gap between planning vision and planning competence.

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Esther's Town, by Deemer Lee. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1980. pp. viii, 267. Photographs, appendix, notes, index. \$12.95.

Nobody was better qualified to write the history of Estherville, Iowa than the late Deemer Lee. He was a native son of Esther's Town, a trained observer, and, for forty-one years, editor and publisher of his town's newspaper.

The residents of Estherville and Emmet County are infinitely richer for Deemer Lee's willingness to spend hundreds of hours pouring over newspaper files, jogging his own memory, talking with old-timers, and laboriously pounding his typewriter. His manuscript was accepted for publication within a week following his death in 1979; the book is a fitting legacy.

Its strength as a detailed and thorough local history is, however, the book's greatest weakness as well. It is so parochial and personal, so caught up in the minutiae of Estherville that it has limited attraction for persons without an Emmet County or Lee family connection.

The author relied heavily on secondary sources, including some of dubious value, while ignoring reliable published accounts including some in the *Annals of Iowa* and the venerable *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*. This author's unique qualifications may entitle him to the

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