

## Book Reviews

consumer reaction and the diminishing political clout of farmers.

The decline of political power was paralleled by another basic phenomenon which had full impact after 1945: the rise of agribusiness. Farming was in the process of consolidation in which the small American family farm unit was economically absorbed into larger units. The development reflects the fewer numbers of farmers each year who as marginal operators either fail or sell their land which is worth more in asset value than in terms of operating cash flow. The net result, observes Fite, is the "ever-shrinking minority" by the 1970s. At the end of that decade, farmers constituted less than 5 percent of the population. He concludes his analysis with the often unsuccessful protests of this declining minority through the American Agricultural Movement, the National Farmers Union, and the tractorcades which marched on Washington during the Carter administration years.

*American Farmers* is a masterpiece that is researched and written with skill, talent, and insight so reflective and typical of Gilbert Fite's distinguished list of publications. Fite modestly notes in the preface to this volume that his observations are designed mainly for the general reader of a non-agricultural background; but the fact is that this seminal work has defined the main interpretative points which twentieth-century American agricultural historians will follow closely for a considerable time to come. Fite has produced a classic work that should be read in the White House, in congressional offices, by urban consumers, and last and most important, by the agrarian minority itself.

TEXAS A & M UNIVERSITY

DAVID E. SCHOB

*Farmers, Bureaucrats, and Middlemen: Historical Perspectives on American Agriculture*, edited by Trudy Huskamp Peterson. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980. pp. xvii, 357. Photographs, maps, notes, index. \$19.95.

For a number of years the National Archives has sponsored conferences on historical topics ranging from American Indians to statistics in order to show the wealth of source material in the National Archives, its branches, and the presidential libraries. Trudy Huskamp Peterson, an Iowa native, directed a conference on agricultural history in 1977 and she edited the proceedings, a handsome, easy-to-read volume. Many of the participating scholars have studied or taught in Iowa.

The subject as a whole and specific papers by Iowa State Univer-

sity faculty members concern Iowa's past. Dorothy Schwieder writes on Iowa farm wives, 1840 to 1880, and Ardith Maney and Donald Hadwiger discuss recent pesticide regulation by the state government. Other papers on broader geographic areas refer to Iowa's involvement with the Farm Holiday; Farmers Union, and nineteenth-century farm tenancy.

The historians, economists, and political scientists represented in the volume tend to be established scholars, with a sprinkling of younger academics. Their papers are on significant topics without regard to the availability of sources at the National Archives. The papers are in the mainstream of scholarly opinion but divergent voices are heard, usually second-hand, from New Left historians on the New Deal's attempts to deal with rural poverty to conservative opposition to recent farm programs. A handful of audience remarks at the conference are printed.

Because the conference was faithful to its announced title, also used as the title of the book, the book is more than a guide to National Archives holdings of agricultural records. One must still use specialized finding aids, although one chapter, "The National Archives and the Study of Agricultural History," and other remarks by archivists succeed in showing the wide range of sources available for research. Maps, photographs, and sound recordings were demonstrated at the conference and are used in the book by archivists, if not by the participating scholars. The volume concludes with a brief, incomplete index.

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EARL M. ROGERS

*The Ranchers: A Book of Generations*, by Stan Steiner. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980. pp. 241. Illustrations. \$13.95.

Oral history does not translate easily to the printed page. A successful book of oral history must be tightly organized and edited with care. Its writer must be a master of his craft. Without these elements a book of oral history such as Stan Steiner's *The Ranchers* can meander for pages until the reader becomes lost, bored, or both. *The Ranchers* does not meander and it does not bore.

*The Ranchers* consists of ten chapters—a prologue, an epilogue, and eight remaining chapters in which Steiner has organized reminiscences around common themes. In the prologue Steiner introduces his interviewees. These ranchers—men and women—are the pioneers or descendants of the pioneers who homesteaded in the

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