

segregation and a severe housing shortage crowded and exasperated the black community. By the mid-1960s the residential situation in San Francisco's black community resembled a northern city such as Chicago, which had a well-defined black ghetto. Broussard concludes that the city "never came to grips with racial discrimination in many areas and that the black community had grown increasingly frustrated by the mid-1960s with the lack of progress" (242). Based on solid scholarship and sound conclusions, this work admirably illustrates the black experience in the urban West.

*All Our Yesterdays: A Century of Family Life in an American Small Town*, by James Oliver Robertson and Janet C. Robertson. New York: Harper Collins, 1993. 512 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, index. \$30.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY MYRON A. MARTY, DRAKE UNIVERSITY

*All Our Yesterdays* is the story of a house, a home, a family, a neighborhood, and a town, all set in their broad social and economic context. Because the authors are players in the story, having made the house a home for their family, it bears the marks of an autobiography. Indeed, the entire work is autobiographical in character, for the house and the traces of its former owners often speak for themselves.

Although writers of local history in other regions of the country cannot reach as far back into the past as could the authors of this book, it is in many respects a model of what can and should be done with local resources. The wistful reflections on what is no more are not out of place in a work like this; rather, they add to its considerable appeal.

In 1967 James Oliver Robertson, a historian, and Janet C. Robertson, a novelist, purchased an aged, decrepit house in Hampton, Connecticut, a town encompassing 25.3 square miles, which recorded a population of about 1,500, the largest in its history, in the 1990 census. The town, say the authors of this book, "seems to have survived from a forgotten time. It is still very rural. Its only businesses are its three or four farms, a general store, a garage, an insurance agency, a gas distributor, and assorted small manufacturers and cottage industries. It is still governed by the direct democracy of a town meeting" (2). The Robertsons' participation in the political, economic, and social affairs of the town deepened their grasp of the lives and circumstances of those who had lived in their house through the decades.

When the Robertsons found the house that became their home, they "walked into a time warp" (2). Although it had not been lived in for years, it was filled with leftovers from the lives of those who

had once made it their home, even if only for summer visits. From the sellers, descendants of the family that purchased the home in 1804, the authors received not only the oral history of the house and its dwellers, but also bundles of treasures—twenty-five large file boxes in all—of the family's history as recorded in pamphlets, prints, stacks of deeds, packets of receipts and accounts, inventories, books, pictures, business documents, love letters, reports of travels, news of kin, advice from parents, agonies of children, and newspapers ("still folded back to the page being read when they were put down 150 years ago" [5]). There were also visiting cards, invitations to dances, college catalogs, programs of plays, class speeches, and course notes, as well as countless relics and figurative footprints adorning the house. The documents revealed that Roger and Solomon Taintor had purchased the house and eleven acres in 1804 and moved in with their wives, Abigail and Judith, who were sisters and the Taintor brothers' first cousins. Each couple had a son. With these families begins the story the Robertsons tell, a story of four generations of Taintors who made this house their home, and of the communities near and far of which they were a part.

Noting that every beginning has a past, the Robertsons dip back into the one-hundred-year history of Hampton preceding the arrival of the Taintor family there in the 1790s. Hampton's residents had established churches, practiced politics through town meetings, developed a rural economy, and played proud roles in the Revolutionary War. It did not take the Taintors long to become participants in the life of the town, and in one way or another they remained so for a century and a half. The family had its ups and downs, successes and failures, good times and bad. Some of its members shone, others faced hardship, even institutionalization. The Robertsons elaborate the general themes of the family's story in intricate detail. Sometimes the absence of source materials results in holes one wishes they could have filled, even though their diligent efforts to provide the context for the available materials led them far beyond the materials given to them by the Taintor descendants.

Woven into the story is the history of the house itself. Remodelings and refurbishings through the years made it a quite different place in 1967 from what it had been in 1804, and the Robertsons do a fine job of describing, documenting, and accounting for the changes. Yet there are puzzling omissions. Was the one photograph showing the house in the "late nineteenth century" the only one to be found (448)? There are floor plans showing the initial layout and the probable arrangements after an 1824 remodeling (100), but descriptions of subsequent remodelings of the house made me wish for more. Finally, in the absence of a full family tree showing relationships through the

generations, I gave dog ears to the pages where partial trees appear; the table of contents should at least list where these partial ones appear.

*All Our Yesterdays* is a good story well told. Its authors deserve much credit for using the house and family they came to know intimately as a window to life in nineteenth-century New England. There is no question that they made the most of the materials available to them. At the same time, the story is a curious one in this respect: rather than developing a plot for the story and unfolding it with appropriate evidence, they apparently felt compelled to use all the evidence at hand, even if straining was required to connect it to the story. Consequently, digressions are frequent, and the whole of the story is something less than the sum of its parts. A shorter, more tightly written story, more fully illustrated, would have made this very good book an even better one.

*Reflecting a Prairie Town: A Year in Peterson*, by Drake Hokanson. American Land and Life Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994. xiv, 259 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JOHN E. MILLER, SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Drake Hokanson, a writer, photographer, and assistant professor of writing at Lakeland College in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, spent a year in 1990–1991 back in his home town of Peterson, Iowa, taking pictures, interviewing people, researching, and meditating about the town and its people and the land around it. The result is this large-format book, a combination of history, geography, journalism, photography, archeology, geology, agricultural science, botany, and climatology, not to mention literature, for the author is a wonderful writer, capable of straightforward description and analysis as well as of lyrical evocations of the landscape and people's lives. His own term for the book's genre is "vernacular landscape study: a detailed, prolonged look at a common place in what I think of as an uncommon fashion" (3).

Hokanson is well acquainted with the town, for he was born and spent his first five years there during the early 1950s. He moved away with his family only to return for his junior and senior years of high school, and then returned to spend another year in his old home town after having worked and traveled all around the world, including Egypt, India, and Australia. The vantage point he brings to this study, therefore, is that of both the insider and the outsider. He is able to analyze the evolution of the environs around Peterson from prehistoric times to the present because he brings the curiosity of the questor after

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