

Outstanding in His Field: Perspectives on American Agriculture in Honor of Wayne D. Rasmussen, edited by Frederick V. Carstensen, Morton Rothstein, and Joseph A. Swanson. Henry A. Wallace Series on Agricultural History and Rural Studies. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993. xviii, 158 pp. Illustrations, graphs, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY GILBERT C. FITE, UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA, EMERITUS

The essays and comments that make up this volume were first presented at a conference held in Washington, D.C., in 1987 to honor Wayne D. Rasmussen, whose contribution to the field of agricultural history has been, as the book's title states, "outstanding." Probably no other person has had so great an impact on agricultural history in the twentieth century as Rasmussen.

Raised in Montana and a graduate of the University of Montana, Rasmussen found employment in the United States Department of Agriculture in 1937. Three years later he became the department's historian. For the next fifty years, he promoted agricultural history, wrote on many aspects of the field, gave leadership to the Agricultural History Society, and showed secretaries of agriculture and others in the department the importance of agricultural history. Among his greatest contributions was the assistance he gave to so many other scholars in the field.

Outstanding in His Field is divided into two main sections. A third part contains a short introduction to Rasmussen's writings, followed by a list of his books, articles, and essays. The first section on historiography includes three chapters with three commentaries. James H. Shideler, longtime editor of *Agricultural History*, leads off with an essay on how agricultural history developed as a discipline. Shideler admits that it is not easy to define the field, but says that it is changing and flourishing. Gavin Wright next discusses "Old and New Directions in Agricultural History." He argues that scholars need new models and approaches as they study changes in the productivity of agriculture. Rural institutions and markets, and their effect on communities, also should receive new approaches from scholars, he maintains. In a chapter titled "Old Wine in New Bottles? The Perspective of Rural History," Hal S. Barron makes a case for the new rural history, which, among other things, is concerned with social structure, family life, and the role of women in agriculture and community life. In commenting on the new rural history, Margaret Beattie Bogue urges writers in the field not only to immerse themselves in manuscript sources, but to visit farms and rural communities to gain clearer insights into rural life and institutions.

The book's second part deals with "Historical Studies." Working from the manuscript census of 1860, with a focus on the Middle West, Jeremy Atack and Fred Bateman ask, "Was There Ever an 'Agrarian Democracy' in America?" They found that there was much inequality in landholding and wealth in the midwestern states in 1860, but federal land policy helped to provide a decent standard of living for most farmers. The most common farm in Iowa at that time was 80 acres, but, according to Atack and Bateman, overall land distribution in Iowa was less equal than in most other midwestern states. Pete Daniel's discussion of "A Hundred Years of Dispossession: Southern Farmers and the Forces of Change" is sharply critical of mechanization and government policy, which, Daniel argues, drove many southern farmers from the land. He claims, as he has done in other writings, that modernization of agriculture in the South ruined farmers and rural communities. In the last main chapter, Harold D. Woodman discusses farming as a business and shows how most modern agriculture is still a family enterprise.

These essays and the accompanying comments make a genuine contribution to the field of agricultural history. The authors are among the field's heavy hitters whose works here and elsewhere have made strong contributions to agricultural and rural history. The volume appropriately honors Wayne Rasmussen. It is unfortunate, however, that the editors did not include a much fuller biography of Rasmussen. Louis Ferleger's brief introduction to Rasmussen's writings is inadequate. The field of agricultural history is stronger and much more vital because of Rasmussen and his work, and those who have written essays in his honor have advanced the field even further.

Kitchen Gardening in America: A History, by David M. Tucker. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993. ix, 205 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY CLIFFORD E. CLARK JR., CARLETON COLLEGE

The history of vegetable gardening, as presented by David M. Tucker, is more than a survey of plants, tools, and tillage techniques. Through his insightful eyes, the history of kitchen gardening becomes a window into shifting American attitudes toward nature, science, medicine, folk rituals, and social reforms. It is, in effect, an overview of changes in American assumptions about horticulture and the natural environment, starting with practices of Native Americans and running up to the contemporary debate over the use and misuse of chemicals and pesticides.

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