

dismissed, but page 64 refers to him as being dismissed; and single-cross/single cross is inconsistently hyphenated), but the footnotes are at the bottom of the page where they belong.

Instead of a narrative history of the development of hybrid seed corn in Illinois, the author is concerned with the complexity of the way science develops and with the impact of scientific development on scientists, the institutions that do science, and the society that accepts or rejects the fruits of science. So she is concerned with the culture of institutions: the Bureau of Plant Industry, the University of Illinois College of Agriculture, the private seed companies, and the experiment station organizational structure, which influences the way the staff saw its role, its work, and its opportunities connected to scientific discoveries. In this, she documents the complexity of the subject and offers valuable insight and information to historians of agriculture and science.

The United States Department of Agriculture in Historical Perspective, edited by Alan I Marcus and Richard Lowitt. *Agricultural History* 64 (Spring 1990). 351 pp. Table, illustrations, notes.

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL W. SCHUYLER, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT KEARNEY

In 1989 the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) celebrated its one hundredth anniversary as a cabinet department. As a part of its centennial celebration, the USDA's Economic Research Service, the Agricultural History Society, and Iowa State University's Center for Historical Studies of Technology, Department of History, and College of Agriculture cosponsored a symposium, "The United States Department of Agriculture in Historical Perspective," on the campus of Iowa State University in Ames. This volume, edited by Alan I Marcus and Richard Lowitt, professors of history at Iowa State University, is a collection of papers and comments presented at the symposium which examine the USDA's first one hundred years. The thirty-two essays included in this volume explore various aspects of the transformation of the USDA from a small agency, whose primary role was to serve farmers, into a large, complex organization with far-ranging scientific, economic, and social responsibilities for the society as a whole.

A major activity of the USDA, from its earliest years to the present, has been to promote scientific research to increase production and to make life on the farm easier. Essays on the history of agricultural experiment stations, efforts by regional research laboratories to

find industrial uses for surplus agricultural commodities, research to improve nutrition, and experiments to increase production by controlling insect infestations illustrate important contributions scientists in the USDA have made to increasing and improving the food supply in the United States and the world during the past century. Other essays focus on changing roles and responsibilities of the USDA for promoting soil conservation, protecting the nation's forests and grasslands, regulating the quality of food and drugs, administering the food stamp program, working with farm laborers, providing economic research services, and preserving historical records relating to United States agriculture. Still other essays explore the impact that key individuals, such as James Wilson, Harvey Wiley, Edwin Meredith, Mary Engle Penington, and Henry A. Wallace had in shaping the history of the USDA.

This volume is not intended to be a general history of the USDA. Its contribution is that it fills a number of gaps in our knowledge about the the USDA, updates previous research in a number of areas, and provides valuable syntheses on a number of topics of general interest to historians. Most of the essays are based on traditional research in government archives and rely on conventional analytical frameworks to place the activities of the USDA in historical perspective. Although a number of controversial questions, such as the reckless use of chemicals, the role of the USDA in supporting the development of large commercial farms, the department's uneven record in protecting the interests of small farmers and poor agricultural laborers, are often mentioned, most of the essays view the activities of the USDA as positive and generally celebrate the achievements of the USDA during the past century.

The essays in the volume are largely narrative histories that tell part of a complex story, but for the most part fail to provide new interpretations to broaden our understanding of either the USDA or the history of United States agriculture. An exception is David Hamilton's essay, "Building the Associative State: The Department of Agriculture and American State-Building." Building on the previous work of such historians as Louis Galambos, Robert Cuff, Ellis Hawley, and Robert Wiebe, Hamilton suggests an organizational model to study the modernization of United States agriculture. Hamilton's thesis—that scientific planners in the USDA sought to promote order, efficiency, and stability without centralizing absolute authority in Washington by developing and nurturing voluntary and cooperative relationships with groups in the "associative" sector, such as the land grant colleges—will undoubtedly be used by future historians of the new rural history.

Commentaries on essays in the volume by Don F. Harbinger, Harold Woodman, Allan Bogue, Ross B. Talbot, and Lauren Soth help integrate the essays into a meaningful framework of analysis. This collection is an important source of information about the USDA, but scholars interested in a general history of the USDA should begin with the still standard work, *A Century of Service: The First 200 Years of the United States Department of Agriculture*, by Gladys L. Baker, Wayne D. Rasmussen, Vivian Wiser, and Jane Porter.

Blue Ribbon: A Social and Pictorial History of the Minnesota State Fair, by Karal Ann Marling. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1990. ix, 328 pp. Illustrations, index. \$39.95 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY CHRIS RASMUSSEN, RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

American agricultural fairs, in Karal Ann Marling's words, are home to "a curious symbiosis," in which educational exhibits and amusement features coexist side-by-side (187). Appropriately, *Blue Ribbon*, her history of the Minnesota State Fair from its inception in 1854 to the 1980s, is an engaging book that both instructs and entertains the reader. Marling, one of America's most accomplished historians of popular culture, has written with distinction on topics as diverse as regionalist mural painting, roadside architecture, and the virtual beatification of George Washington in American culture. Her characteristic insight and irreverent wit are both on display once again here.

Only a historian with a heartfelt respect for popular culture could declare, as Marling does in her preface, that the Minnesota State Fair, and by implication all midwestern state fairs, "is our central cultural institution—the place where all the varied strands of immigration, agriculture, commerce, politics, aesthetic preference, and moral standards meet and mingle" (vii). The state fair is thus a microcosmic Minnesota, or at least the nearest thing to it that we are likely to find. It is surprising that these important and fascinating institutions have been largely neglected by historians, and we may thank Marling for beginning to redress this oversight.

Marling's preface also includes two caveats. First, she warns the reader that she has not attempted to write a comprehensive history of the agriculturists whose devotion to economic improvement led to the founding and guided the subsequent development of the Minnesota State Fair. Second, and more important, this is a book not "much given to isms" (vii), but one that allows the sources to speak for themselves, without subjecting their testimony to historical and methodological cross-examination. It is also unencumbered by footnotes and most

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