

One-Room Schools of the Middle West, by Wayne E. Fuller. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994. xiv, 139 pp. Photographs, tables, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY KATHY PENNINGROTH, A & P HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Wayne Fuller's *One-Room Schools of the Middle West* is a celebration of rural education and the rural culture that one-room schools both nourished and exemplified from the nineteenth century through the Great Depression of the 1930s. Using narrative and a wealth of illustrations of schools, their pupils and teachers, and examples of minute books and McGuffey readers, Fuller traces the rural school from its humble beginnings to relative prosperity in the early decades of the twentieth century and to its slow decline in advance of the school consolidations of the 1950s. His description of life in the rural schools is complete with accounts of the ubiquitous pot-bellied stoves with long stovepipes, outdoor privies, unadorned playgrounds, the hum of lessons learned and recited, sketches of the teachers and their training, and tales of the farmers who built and maintained the schools, hired the teachers, and directed the course of education for their children.

Fuller is an unabashed advocate of one-room schools, arguing that they achieved some of the highest literacy rates in the United States. Key to this success, Fuller maintains, was the uniquely democratic character of the school districts in which parents were intimately involved with their children's schooling and in which the school was both an extension of the home and a center of community activities. Iowa in many ways embodied this experiment in rural education, counting more of the schools and achieving higher literacy rates over a longer period of time than most other midwestern states.

One-Room Schools of the Middle West is a rich resource for anyone interested in the cultural history of rural Iowa and the Midwest and is, together with Fuller's *The Old Country School: The Story of Rural Education in the Midwest* (1982), indispensable for historians of education. Moreover, although many will be irritated by Fuller's negative attitude toward modern education, professional educators and concerned parents seeking answers to the manifold problems in education today could profit from the success stories of rural education.

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