

In the final paragraphs Hurt returns to his view of the ambivalence at the heart of Illinois writing—the uncertainty about “what sort of life a life in prairie land should be” (143). This reader would have preferred more attention to such broad concerns—and a more ambitious volume than that provided, as Hurt acknowledges, “by the handful of texts we have looked at” (142). Nonetheless, the ongoing analysis of midwestern literature and culture needs all the help it can get, and this narrowly aimed book is a welcome addition to the enterprise.

Seventy-Five Years of Service: Cooperative Extension in Iowa, by Dorothy Schwieder. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993. xiv, 270 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY MARGARET BEATTIE BOGUE, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN—MADISON

In *Seventy-Five Years of Service* Dorothy Schwieder traces the evolution of the Iowa State University Cooperative Extension Service from its formal creation under the provisions of the Smith-Lever Cooperative Extension Act in 1914 through the 1980s. Employing almost three dozen oral interviews, manuscripts in the special collections of the Iowa State University Library, newspapers, printed state and federal documents, and a wide range of secondary works, Schwieder examines a significant segment of rural economic and social history: the ways informal education offered by the state agricultural colleges influenced farm people's lives.

The Smith-Lever Act was a logical continuation of federal support for agriculture begun early in the nation's history, demonstrated repeatedly in land policy, in technical assistance offered farmers, and in its encouragement of agricultural education through the Morrill and Hatch Acts. Smith-Lever became law in 1914 as a central part of the progressive package to improve farm life, an important tool that helped to implement the objectives of Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission. Then American agriculture flourished, and most people still lived in rural areas. The Smith-Lever concept of taking education directly to farm people made good political and economic sense, designed as it was to keep rural life healthy by encouraging federal-state cooperative programs, using a system of county agents, teaching by demonstration, and emphasizing club activities for youth and domestic science for farm women.

Schwieder begins her book by broadly sketching the nature of Iowa agriculture in 1900. A discussion of the formative years of Cooperative Extension, 1903–1918, the period of “shaping” and “legitimizing” (33), follows. The agency met its first major crisis in World War I by launching an all-out effort to encourage food production and conservation. During the 1920s it evolved from “an institution in the making” to one with a defined mission and experienced leadership, more and more visible in state and nation (35). Notable as the decade when the state legislature mandated a strong formal relationship between Extension and the Farm Bureau, and the decade when the emphasis on production and cooperatives could not dent an agricultural depression, the 1920s revealed Extension as an institution that was stable, flexible, and willing to experiment with new programs to meet hard times (65). In the depression decade of the 1930s, Extension acted as educator and implementer of federal programs, especially the AAA and its successor, the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act. Administering these programs enhanced its image among farmers, but it remained vulnerable to criticism for its domination by the Farm Bureau, and its preoccupation with large producers. During World War II, county agricultural and home economics agents once more found themselves acting as champions of all-out food production. In the author’s opinion, “During the second world war, the Iowa State College Cooperative Extension Service experienced one of its finest hours” (126).

In the decades following World War II, in the face of uncertain and often hard times for agriculture, Extension struggled to meet changing farm needs. In 1955 the state legislature severed the long-criticized relationship with the Farm Bureau (135–39) and provided for county councils to help administer programs. Extension began to soft-pedal its traditional emphasis on production and openly recognized the need to bring farm output and demand into balance by consolidating and eliminating farm units, and by greater cost efficiencies in production. Rapid-paced reorientation and reorganization characterized its educational program. It expanded to reach urban dwellers. Nutrition, low-income groups, and the elderly became major concerns. Program emphasis shifted to teaching governmental policy, problem solving, decision making, and skills acquisition with the objective of helping the farm population handle farm and family crises emanating from hard times. If ever the qualities for which Extension was well known—versatility and adaptability—were put to the test, they surely were as the seventy-fifth birthday of the Smith-Lever Act approached with both appropriations and staff declining.

Dorothy Schwieder's study is well and thoughtfully done and makes important reading for all who wish to understand Iowa and American agricultural history in the twentieth century. Its great strengths come from the skillful way she has related Iowa's Extension programs over the years to major national developments and trends in American agriculture and at the same time put them in the context of Iowa agriculture. While many histories of Cooperative Extension are so narrowly written that its importance in American agricultural development is unclear, this study sets an admirable standard. It is hardly surprising that Wayne D. Rasmussen, leading scholar in American agricultural history and author of *Taking the University to the People: Seventy-Five Years of Cooperative Extension* (1989), has characterized her work as "the best Extension history that I have read."

American Dreams, Rural Realities: Family Farms in Crisis, by Peggy F. Barlett. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993. xxii, 305 pp. Tables, charts, references, notes, maps, bibliography, appendixes, index. \$45.00 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY MARK FRIEDBERGER, TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

The publication of Peggy Barlett's book about the farm crisis in Georgia in the 1980s suggests that a reappraisal of that miserable decade is in order. Most of the commentary on the farm downturn came from those sympathetic to the plight of the struggling farm families. Scholars and journalists stressed the wrenching despair of a farm loss and the trauma that it caused, rather than the complex issues that a severe recession brought to rural America. Barlett's book stands with those who believe that farmers were victims of circumstances, rather than individuals who brought problems on themselves through poor judgment.

When the history of the late twentieth century is written, and the impact of the farm protest movement of those years is analyzed, Iowa's position will be given considerable prominence. For unlike Barlett's Dodge County, Georgia, where there was no farm advocacy activity, Iowa organizations such as PrairieFire Rural Action had a great impact on the outcome of mobilization efforts to solve the crisis. They pushed for foreclosure moratoria, the initiation of mediation, fairer lending regulations, and the implementation of a farm bankruptcy chapter in 1986. Pressure from farm advocates turned the farm crisis in Iowa into a political issue that no politician could ignore.

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