

"a broad approach to the subject," any single aspect of which "could be expanded into a dissertation" (ix). The result, however, can be disconcerting if not simply annoying. For example, it is impossible to read this book without wondering what was so "American" about Americans' relationship with fire. After all, Europeans also had to deal with the daily nuisance of tending fires and trimming wicks. How, if at all, did the American relationship with fire differ? How did Americans make fire their own? Similarly, the authors discuss fire-related entertainments and games, many of them designed specifically for children, but a few pages later they discuss the passage of municipal ordinances designed to take fire-related entertainments out of the hands of minors; obviously something happened to make Americans change their attitude toward either fire or children, but no explanation is offered. Discussions of the dangers of fire and the sense of helplessness that people often felt in the face of fire are followed by a section devoted to the growth of the fire insurance industry and fire safety codes, with no attempt to explain how Americans moved from that sense of helplessness to a belief in their ability to control. In short, the Hazens sidestep every opportunity to link this important subject to a broader cultural or social context.

But that kind of deeper analysis was never their intention, so perhaps that failing cannot be held against them. More important, the lack of cultural analysis does not detract from this book's obvious strengths: its clear prose and marvelous array of information. While *Keepers of the Flame* certainly will appeal to the general reader, professional historians interested in domestic, urban, pioneer, or social history in general can learn much from this book.

The Orphan Trains: Placing Out in America, by Marilyn Irvin Holt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992. 248 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$27.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY RUTH M. ALEXANDER, COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

In *The Orphan Trains*, Marilyn Irvin Holt tells the story of "placing out," a system devised by Christian charity workers in the nineteenth century to alleviate urban poverty. Between the 1850s and 1920s charity organizations, most notably the New York Children's Aid Society (NYCAS), relocated "at least 200,000 infants, children, and teenagers, as well as thousands of women and hundreds of men and couples" from cities to agricultural communities (156). The emigrants traveled by transcontinental railroad and were taken into the homes

of complete strangers, usually western farmers who needed additional hands in the field or kitchen and pitied children whom they believed to be orphans "thrown friendless upon the world" (broadside, illustration #6). Boys and girls who had lived precariously on city streets adopted the steady work habits of men and women on family farms; in adulthood, many became dependable citizens in their "adopted" communities. Popular writers published laudatory tales of urban waifs transformed into self-made men and honest women, convincing the public that relocation was a resounding success.

Despite the high regard in which it was held by many contemporaries, placing out, in Holt's consideration, was a complicated and problematic enterprise. Charity organization reports, newspaper accounts, and personal reminiscences show that sponsoring charities provided scant supervision in rural communities and were unable to ensure that emigrants received kindly treatment along with adequate food, shelter, clothing, and education; some children became victims of abuse and mistreatment. Moreover, only a minority of the child migrants were true orphans; most had at least one living parent and were separated, without giving informed consent, from biological kin. Still, Holt is loathe to condemn placing out as a failure or a fraud. Rather, she examines relocation programs in the context of nineteenth-century cultural ideals, pressures, and innovations, contending that "placing out and the people it involved reflect the complexities of American life and growth" (184).

Holt traces placing out from its origins in the 1850s to its demise in the 1920s. Fearing that children raised amid urban poverty would become dependent and degenerate adults, middle-class Americans developed relocation programs to rescue "innocent" youngsters (and the nation) from social disorder. Charles Loring Brace, a founder of the NYCAS, began to place poor city children on eastern farms in 1853. By the 1870s, numerous charities were resettling children (and some unemployed adults) in rural, mostly western, communities. Placing out satisfied many needs. For farmers the newcomers mitigated a chronic labor shortage; for charity workers with romantic notions about the West, placing out gave disadvantaged children "opportunity for self-improvement in a more healthful environment" (27). Some children saw placing out as a chance to escape unpleasant homes. Finally, many impoverished parents viewed placing out as a way to reduce the costly burdens of childcare.

By the late nineteenth century, however, placing out was under attack. Worried about poverty and corruption in their own burgeoning cities, western states complained that they were becoming a "dumping ground" for the East. "Professionals" in the new field of social work

criticized placing out as an "unscientific" and haphazard system of Christian charity. The NYCAS and similar organizations tried to defend placing out by improving placement and follow-up procedures, but they finally abandoned relocation during the 1920s, in favor of family rehabilitation programs for the urban poor.

Although Holt's book offers a fine institutional history of placing out, readers in Iowa and elsewhere with personal ties to agricultural communities, and those interested in social history, may find *The Orphan Trains* disappointing. Holt highlights the cultural values of individuals who created and operated relocation programs, paying rather superficial attention to the children and farmers who experienced placing out firsthand. Still, Iowa accepted many emigrants from the East, and Holt's book will undoubtedly encourage many Iowans to investigate the history of their communities.

American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898, by Robert C. McMath Jr. New York: Hill and Wang, 1993. vi, 245 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$10.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY ROBERT D. JOHNSTON, YALE UNIVERSITY

All kinds of historical readers will enjoy and greatly benefit from Robert McMath's *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898*. College students can learn the basic contours of the movement as well as get a good sense of why Populism remains so important to historians today. General readers will find a strong narrative about late nineteenth-century rural life as well as have the opportunity to ponder the long-term failures of third-party movements in America. Scholars will appreciate McMath's synthesis of a wide range of research as well as his complex perspective on the agrarian crusade. Without a doubt, *American Populism* will be a significant and influential book.

As the subtitle indicates, McMath's is avowedly a "social history." He treats Populism not just as the political insurgency that was its most visible manifestation. Instead, McMath emphasizes the deep roots of Populism in the changing rural life of, above all, the postbellum American South and Great Plains. For McMath, Populism consisted as much of an evangelical camp meeting where members of the Farmers' Alliance met to affirm their communal ties as it did of the 1892 Omaha People's Party convention that drafted one of the most significant radical platforms in American history. Yet McMath by no means slights politics. Indeed, one of the most welcome contributions

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