

in an attack—they need not know what utter destruction it sometimes means” (56–57). Sounding a much different tone, another contends that a friend turned his underwear inside out every day in an effort to outsmart the lice. A World War II army nurse writes about the psychiatric cases she cares for, and a flier relates his initiation when crossing the equator for the first time. One letter describes the battle for Iwo Jima; another tells of the experience of seeing the concentration camp at Dachau soon after its liberation.

In publishing this book, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin has done a service not merely for the citizens of the state, or for fellow midwesterners. It has provided a valuable service for us all. The letters make evident the human dimensions, and the human costs, of war, and they enable us to share vicariously in the experiences of people like ourselves in moments of national and often personal crisis.

*Townships*, edited by Michael Martone. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992. 210 pp. Photographs, notes on contributors. \$29.95 cloth, \$13.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY ROBERT F. SAYRE, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Collected here are twenty-four memoirs of growing up in the north central Middle West. Editor Martone wanted the authors to give their sense of the “bordered regions of their childhoods” (12), and “township” struck him as the quintessential such midwestern space. The photographs by Raymond Bial, taken in small towns in Illinois and Indiana in the 1980s, complement the memoirs by being of similar places (mostly). Yet they also clash with them by representing a later era, the depressed present. It is as if the photographer could not quite choose between protest and memory, Walker Evans and Eugene Atget.

The brilliance of the memoirs is in their variety and vitality. This might be expected of the authors raised in cities, such as Stuart Dybek (Chicago) and Philip Levine (Detroit), who are sort of sneaked in the back door. But it is just as true of small-town and country authors such as Amy Clampitt (Hardin County, Iowa), C. J. Hribal (northern Wisconsin), and Ellen Hunnicutt (Jay County, Indiana). In the 1930s, '40s, and '50s the rural Middle West was a place of all kinds of eccentricity and excess, not just a “good place to raise kids,” as parents said, but a good place to raise writers. The sorrow is that it may not be any more. As Paul Gruchow testifies in his angry essay on the depopulation of rural Minnesota, his township is effectively gone. All that is left of his country school is a rusting pump in a plowed field. Farm

amalgamation did it in. In Portage County in northeastern Ohio, where Scott Russell Sanders grew up, the destroyer was a dam. Built ostensibly for recreation and flood control, it destroyed the land and the people on it.

Many of these essays rightfully mix nostalgia and anger. Others, however, have a lot of humor, like Mary Swander's tribute to the bootleg whiskey industry in Templeton, Iowa, where production in 1931 was one hundred gallons a day and in droughts the mayor made sure the distilleries got enough water. Deborah Galyan celebrates growing up on the wrong side of the tracks in Bloomington, Indiana. James B. Hall and Ellen Hunnicutt honor their Ohio and Indiana accents. David Foster Wallace evokes the heroics of playing junior tennis in Philo, Illinois, where he learned to beat the kids from suburban country clubs by taking advantage of prairie winds.

Nearly every essay thus dispels the notion that this land of checkerboard townships is monotonous and uniform. Variations of wealth, religion, and previous nationality are enormous. Space and isolation have preserved differences, and a national ethic of tolerance generally allowed people to go their own ways. At least, those are the messages of the memoirs—even those that protest against the obliteration of former township boundaries. The technically superb but somehow predictable photographs project a different image, however: the Midwest of old *Life* magazines. The conflict here between photos and texts, between a photographer's current universals and the writers' vanished particulars, is the dilemma of the contemporary Middle West.

*The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West*, by Carl Abbott. The Modern American West Series. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993. xxiii, 244 pp. Illustrations, maps tables, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JON C. TEAFORD, PURDUE UNIVERSITY

In *The Metropolitan Frontier* Carl Abbott discusses big cities and rapid growth, two topics not generally associated with twentieth-century Iowa. This volume is, then, an account of what Iowa is not, and it deserves the attention of Iowans interested in placing their state in a broader national context. Focusing on the period from 1940 to 1990, Abbott describes the development of American cities from the Missouri River west to Honolulu. Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, and Dallas receive the most coverage, but Abbott demonstrates his knowledge of a broad range of cities, including a number of references

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