

Mary Logue's personal biography of her grandmother, Mae Kirwin, reflects midwestern life during the past century. Mae Kirwin was born in 1894 in Chokio, a small prairie community in western Minnesota. She married and raised her five children there. After her husband's untimely death, Mae became the town's postmistress and was active in community and political causes until shortly before her death in 1961. Mary Logue's memoir offers a good deal of information about the lives of not only Mae Kirwin but also other family members, including the author herself. The book places these lives in a well-researched historical and socioeconomic perspective.

The author's use of a "multiple focus" is a particularly strong point because, by learning about the lives of several family members within the community setting, readers develop a context in which to assess the life of the title figure. Beyond that, the reader gets to "see" the author at work. This kind of reflexivity is crucial to the reader's understanding of how the author views her subjects and, consequently, how their stories are told.

Halfway Home will appeal to a wide audience, including a general readership as well as those especially interested in immigration history, midwestern settlement patterns, Minnesota history, and intersections of biography with autobiography.

Growing Up in the 40s: Rural Reminiscence, by Jerry L. Twedt. Iowa Heritage Collection. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996. 243 pp. Illustrations. \$12.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY PHILIP J. NELSON, HAWKEYE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Anyone who came of age in the 1940s, especially on a farm or in a small town, will no doubt recognize parts of their lives in this book. Jerry Twedt has not attempted a full-blown autobiography, but rather has written a light-hearted, easy-reading sketch of his boyhood days in the northern part of Story County, Iowa. The author uses a topical approach to present stories and information on the "Roland Consolidated School," "The War," "The Three-Holer," "The Barn," and "The Church," among others. He nimbly intersperses often humorous anecdotes with more straightforward factual accounts of activities such as breaking horses, weaning calves, threshing, and working in a canning factory. Although the book is generally presented through the eyes of a young farm boy, the author still manages to be a discerning observer of cultural and technological change. For example, he recognizes the advent of tractors, rural electricity, and television as powerful heralds of change in the lives of twentieth-century rural folk.

What the author does best, though, is evoke the cultural milieu and rural experiences of an era still largely agricultural in outlook, but also caught up in the process of transformation toward an America dominated by agribusiness, consumerism, and a suburban-like community structure. There in the 1940s we are privy to "bean-shooting wars" in the movie balcony, binder races in the oat field, runaway horse teams on the roads, outhouses tipped over at Halloween, and scrap metal drives during the war. We cannot fault the author for showing the recent past of the rural community at its best and most virtuous, because in the wide-eyed wonderment and innocence of a thirteen-year-old boy, anything and everything was possible.

Carrier on the Prairie: The Story of the U.S. Naval Air Station, Ottumwa, Iowa, 1942-1947, by Elsie Mae Cofer. Ottumwa: Hawley Court Press, 1996. 310 pp. Illustrations, maps, charts, tables, references, notes, appendixes, glossary, index. \$25.95 cloth, \$16.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY GEORGE WILLIAM MCDANIEL, ST. AMBROSE UNIVERSITY

Ottumwan Elsie Mae Cofer has written an interesting account of the Ottumwa Naval Air Station during World War II. Cofer's research is extensive and includes interviews with people who had served at the station. At peak times the station maintained a population of about 3,500, larger than many towns in Iowa. Included in this number were WAVES, and it is an asset of this book that Cofer includes the important roles these women played at Ottumwa. She discusses the daily life of the thousands of men and women who served there, and she also discusses the impact of the navy and the station on the city of Ottumwa and the surrounding communities.

The book is filled with data, from the price paid for land, to prices at the Ship's Store, to the names and ranks of personnel at all levels, to the numbers of airplanes, to the scores of sporting events. At times, readers may feel they are flying through clouds of facts and hope for clearer air.

There are many photographs, some maps, and miscellaneous charts and tables. Several appendixes, notes, a glossary, references, and an index are helpful. One table I missed, however, would indicate the total numbers of men and women who served in Ottumwa and how many became naval pilots and saw combat service. Finally, there was one factual error important to this reader: St. Ambrose College is in Davenport, Iowa, not Dubuque (189).

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