

Out of Hitler's Reach: The Scattergood Hostel for European Refugees, 1939-43, by Michael Luick-Thrams. Mason City: Michael Luick-Thrams, 1996. [Order from Michael Luick-Thrams, c/o 15118 Lark Ave., Mason City, IA 50401.] x, 321 pp. Illustrations, references, notes, bibliography, appendixes. \$15.00 paper.

REVIEWED BY DONALD M. DOUGLAS, WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Michael Luick-Thrams's book, *Out of Hitler's Reach*, is a narrative of the beginnings, operation, and closing of the Scattergood Hostel for European refugees, based largely on interviews and written reports of many of the hostel's inhabitants and staff. The hostel was located near West Branch, Iowa, and operated by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). It served as temporary home for 185 European refugees, mostly German and Austrian, during its brief lifetime. Its overriding purpose was to "Americanize" these newcomers. Iowa was seen by the AFSC as a most felicitous place for this purpose, substituting the grass-roots society of rural mid-America for that of the urban streets of the country's major cities. The newcomers, always referred to as "guests," were to learn English, American history, and the elements of the American political system through regular instruction. They shared the housekeeping chores, gardening, cooking, canning, and repair and maintenance of the facility. Once "Americanized," they were then to take their place in their new homeland. The subject of the book should be of interest to Iowans and especially to members of the large Quaker community as a bit of both Iowa and Quaker history.

The book is organized in a loosely chronological fashion, beginning with the selection, initiated by young Iowa Quakers and endorsed by the AFSC, of a vacant Quaker boarding school near West Branch, Iowa, as the site for a refugee hostel. Scattergood School had been closed in 1931 as a result of the depression and was much in need of refurbishing. The AFSC sent a small group there in a single automobile load to begin the task. From that point onward, the author follows the course of the hostel's development, growth, and activities, largely through the words of the staff and "guests" of the Scattergood Hostel, from its inception until its closure, in early 1943, for want of "guests."

The author tries to organize his account of the work and activities of the hostel topically, but the intertwined nature of work, learning, and social activities there makes this, at best, awkward. Indeed, the entire book is awkward. It is a doctoral dissertation (Humboldt Universitaat, Berlin) apparently rushed into print via a vanity press, with the author serving as editor and publisher as well. The author has, to a large extent, simply strung together his source material in the

form of extensive direct quotations with connecting paragraphs; what he could not get into the text he has included in numerous appendixes and voluminous (23 full pages) fine print explanatory footnotes. There is much information here, but it is largely undigested. The book lacks synthesis and badly needs the services of a professional editor.

The creation and operation of Scattergood Hostel was an unusual and difficult undertaking. It deserves better than this book.

Mr. Smith Went to Washington: From Eisenhower to Clinton, by Neal Smith. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996. xxiii, 440 pp. Illustrations, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY ALAN JONES, GRINNELL COLLEGE

Congressman Neal Smith's part memoir and part legislative policy manual begins with an account of his Iowa childhood. He was born in 1920 in a house his pioneer great-grandfather built when he came west to Iowa with a "vision of a better future." The book ends with Smith's hope that his grandchildren will have a future in which the instrument of government "can be supported and can be used for the benefit of the whole society." Smith's own generation came of age in the New Deal years, and as a congressman for 36 years (longer than any other Iowa representative) he has helped transmit the vision of his great-grandfather to hopes for his grandchildren.

This a generational book. The first chapter has grandfatherly tales of ponies and oil lamps and dirt roads and corn husking and 4-H clubs in the depressed Iowa of the 1930s when, as Smith says, "there was no talk about government being the enemy." He adds, "I grew up thinking government can be good and that its purpose is to help people." A decorated pilot in the Pacific during World War II, Smith is modestly brief on his war experiences, but he quietly notes that the war years caused him to resolve that he would use his life "to make this a better world."

After the war, Smith used the GI Bill to go to college and law school, and he and his wife, Bea, developed a successful law practice in Des Moines, where he was an active young Democrat building connections with other young Democrats such as Hubert Humphrey. His first campaign for Congress in 1958 was successful, as were all ensuing campaigns until 1994. From the beginning he had a "vision for the Des Moines River Valley," and he began to implement it over the opposition of conservative Des Moines businessmen. Flood control and recreational projects such as Red Rock, Rathbun, and Saylorville attest to the attainment of that early vision.

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