

local school boards, the teachers and their training, and the curriculum, complete with examples of questions from the two-day examination that students took to earn an eighth grade diploma. The schools in the photographs show no signs of human habitation, but Tony Hillerman's introduction infuses them with pupils and the passion of baseball toward the end of their era in the 1930s.

These prairie schoolhouses and the values that they embodied are a sequel to the settlement of Iowa and the beginnings of its educational system. Indeed, the parallels are striking—the architecture and siting of schools and their governance, teachers, and curriculum. Strikingly different from Iowa, however, are the landscapes surrounding the schools, and those landscapes are the appeal and the strength of this book. Fittingly, an exhibit of the photographs will appear at the Family Museum of Art and Science in Bettendorf, Iowa, from June 5 to July 18, 1999, provided by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service.

*The Old Barn Book: A Field Guide to North American Barns and Other Farm Structures*, by Allen G. Noble and Richard K. Cleek. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995. ix, 222 pp. Maps, illustrations, appendixes, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY PATRICK NUNNALLY, UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

As agricultural practices evolve, the rural landscape changes; and nostalgia grows for the buildings and patterns that reflect the "old ways." Coffee-table books on barns have proliferated over the years, along with a number of good histories, material culture studies, and regional studies that scrutinize the material dimensions of America's agricultural past. *The Old Barn Book* is a welcome addition to this literature, as it combines scholarly insight with the format of a field guide to create an eminently usable book.

The authors are both geographers, and their disciplinary perspective is manifest in the book's arrangement. They consider the spatial distribution of different barn types, describe salient features of individual structures that may guide field identification, and briefly examine other types of farm properties such as corn cribs. Yet the treatment is primarily descriptive and diagnostic, not analytical, and questions of how particular forms emerged over time, and why, are not addressed. Noble has written more detailed treatments of the history and diffusion patterns of barn types in *Wood, Brick, and Stone* (1984), which should be seen as a more scholarly treatment of this book's subject.

The book's focus is primarily the Atlantic Seaboard and the eastern Great Lakes region, which reflects the scholarship on the subject.

It offers much of value, though. For the casual seeker of barns, this is a handy guide for field identification. For the more serious student, the volume shows how much work remains to be done on the varieties of midwestern barns.

*From the Hidewood: Memories of a Dakota Neighborhood*, by Robert Amerson. Midwest Reflections Series. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1996. xiv, 364 pp. Illustrations, map. \$32.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY JAMES MARTEN, MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

Robert Amerson and his family moved to a rented farm in 1934 with no electricity, phone, central heating, or indoor bathroom. Connected to the nearest town by an unreliable dirt road, the Amersons farmed their quarter-section with horses long after some of their neighbors had bought tractors. Amerson tells about this depression boyhood with a hybrid of history, memoir, and fiction (Amerson dug through county records and newspapers and freely admits that he invented most of the dialogue). Some of his stories may evoke nostalgia, yet the Amersons are not the Waltons, and although many of the chapters end a little too tidily—with problems resolved and the family's firm resolution restored—Amerson does not whitewash rural life. Frustrations abound: a stoic, often noncommittal father, ethnic tension in the form of Robert's mother's resentment of the way she was treated by the "Norskies" as a young bride, the blasted dreams of neighbors and family members seeking their fortunes in far-off places. And, always, there is the sense of inferiority that farmers felt in the presence of better-off and slightly exotic town folk.

I grew up a couple of counties and a couple of decades away from Amerson's Hidewood—in fact, I was one of those not-quite-to-be-trusted town boys—yet this book rings true, not as an elegy to "olden times," but as a reflection on midwestern experiences that cuts across generations.

*Dancing the Cows Home: A Wisconsin Girlhood*, by Sara De Luca. Midwest Reflections Series. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1996. ix, 232 pp. Illustrations. \$24.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY ALISON PHILLIPS KOVAC, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

The photograph on the dust jacket of *Dancing the Cows Home* reveals something of the story inside. In the foreground, attractive teenaged twin sisters dance together in lovely pink and blue dresses. In contrast, the farmstead behind and all around the dancers is dingy gray and

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.