

be done on the women of the 1950s and 1960s who laid the groundwork for the “firsts” to accomplish their achievements.

As journalism critics look at when newspapers lost their connection to their communities, it may be when newspapers “transformed” their women’s pages in the early 1970s. The women’s page journalists were a true tie to their readers. Take, for example, Maude Coons, who started at the *Omaha World-Herald* as the household editor in 1936. She answered 60–75 questions from callers each day, she estimated. Sometimes the questions veered from fashion and food into other areas, as some callers “really were just lonely and wanted to talk.”

On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women’s Activism since 1945, by Jenny Barker Devine. Iowa and the Midwest Experience Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa, 2013. xi, 188 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$19.95 paperback.

Reviewer Nancy K. Berlage is assistant professor of history at Texas State University. Her Ph.D. dissertation (Johns Hopkins University, 2000) was “The Farm and Home Bureau: Organization, Family, Community, and Professionals, 1914–1928.”

In *On Behalf of the Family Farm*, Jenny Barker Devine offers a fresh and intriguing interpretation of farm women’s organizational activities. She demonstrates that women performed vital functions in support of Iowa’s key farm organizations, including the Farm Bureau, the Iowa Farmers Union, and the National Farm Organization. Devine begins with the 1920s and then moves forward in time as she considers the varied approaches each organization took to farm problems. She convincingly demonstrates that women bolstered these organizations as they tackled the key problems of fluctuating markets and policy, population shifts, and technological change that increasingly threatened the viability of Iowa farms and communities after World War II. Clearly, gender expectations restricted leadership opportunities for women. Still, these activists were able to negotiate such strictures. They worked through female auxiliaries, alongside male leaders and members, and even in their daily and community activities to shape organizational programs in ways they thought best served agriculture and their own needs. Devine also illustrates how these activists developed strategies for enacting their multiple roles as wives, mothers, community organizers, and advocates for rural life. Over time, women renegotiated their own sense of identity in ways that allowed them to create new types of opportunities for themselves. By the 1970s and 1980s, activists increasingly assumed positions of leadership and

power and asserted authority based on their technical expertise. Working through the all-female Iowa Porkettes and an affiliate of Women in Farm Economics, they demanded to be heard as “professional spokespersons” knowledgeable about agricultural industry and as women who could provide a “unique perspective on agricultural production” (13).

Devine’s work not only unveils women’s organizational activities but also complicates our notions of postwar feminism. In contrast to more common interpretations of rural women’s actions, Devine asks us to view her subjects as feminists, albeit not the stereotypical sort that aggressively challenged female subordination and pressed for feminist ideologies. Certainly, she admits, these women did not call themselves feminists. Nonetheless, through different types of organizational activities, Iowa farm women pushed against arbitrary male dominion in ways that made sense in their rural environments. Circumscribed by a patriarchal system, Iowa farm women constructed complex and shifting strategies that allowed them to comfortably enter into public spaces and exert a degree of influence while still adhering to dominant gender expectations. Devine contends that farm women developed evolving varieties of feminisms, all specific to historical time and space. First women enacted “social feminisms” built on social conventions about their innate abilities. That allowed them to create public spaces separate from men where they could engage in activism on issues such as public health and community. Later they developed “agrarian” feminisms that reflected shifts in their consciousness about the marginalization of women. That ultimately empowered women to reassess their own status and form new female-structured channels for effecting change in agriculture—and in their own lives.

I suspect that Devine’s unproblematized use of the term “social feminisms” will give pause to some gender historians. They might puzzle over why she does not explicitly engage with the historical literature on that loaded and debated concept, given its centrality to her interpretation. Others might wish that Devine had integrated into her analysis the extensive relevant literature on maternalism, some of which would reinforce her interpretation of social feminisms and augment her arguments about the multidimensional nature of feminist empowerment. In fairness, Devine does draw on the work of political scientists who use the concept of social feminisms; she also cites an influential article that discusses its value as an interpretive tool. The article’s author, however, is strongly critical of the term, but Devine fails to draw on her material to address or dispatch this critique.

Ultimately, Devine has chosen sides in a debate that she never explains to the audience. As such, she overlooks an excellent opportunity to contribute to a broader discussion in gender history and theory beyond the agricultural field.

Devine does, though, accomplish something unusual and admirable: she blends scholarly, analytical interpretation with a highly readable narrative that will appeal to diverse specialists and general audiences. This is certainly not just a book for women; it provides a lively portrayal of relations between men and women and a window into rural community life that will engage individuals interested in the history and culture of Iowa, as well as the agricultural history of the Midwest. This study is also welcome for its fascinating account of the particular difficulties experienced in rural Iowa during the understudied Cold War period. Additionally, the book provides thoughtful insight into the pre-World War II years, despite the somewhat misleading subtitle. Devine's work is a good example of how a local study can help us better understand the complexities of broader historical developments. She crafts a rich narrative culled from correspondence, oral histories, and other material left by community organizations and members, a difficult task. Overall, Devine has produced a work that is a valuable contribution to the small but steady trickle of scholarship on rural women, and it will certainly provoke a good deal of discussion among those interested in the topic.

The Amish, by Donald B. Kraybill, Karen M. Johnson-Weiner, and Steven M. Nolt. The Companion to American Experience/PBS. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. xvi, 500 pp. Maps, tables, graphs, illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Rod Janzen is professor of history at Fresno Pacific University. He is a coauthor of *The Hutterites in North America* (2010).

Donald Kraybill, Karen Johnson-Weiner, and Steven Nolt's comprehensive work, *The Amish*, is an important and all-encompassing introduction to Amish life in North America. This helpful "companion" work to the PBS series *American Experience* provides in-depth analysis and insights while not omitting discussion of the extensive diversity found among the hundreds of Amish settlements and church districts in existence in the 2010s.

The writers themselves are without question the reigning experts on Amish life. Kraybill, a sociologist, has been conducting research on the Amish the longest (and he has also published the most books and