

Sculle do much to solidify the architectural and historical significance of “the garage” as a basis for approaching its preservation and interpretation. By reminding us that modern technological advances such as the automobile exist both as commodities and also as personal objects that become embedded deeply into people’s lives, Jakle and Sculle make the case for considering the architectural and experiential requirements for the use, maintenance, and protection of the car as key factors in further establishing its place in American culture.

Small-Town Dreams: Stories of Midwestern Boys Who Shaped America, by John E. Miller. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014. xiv, 528 pp. Photographs, map, notes, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Drake Hokanson is an independent scholar, author, photographer and editor, and professor emeritus at Winona State University. He is the author of *Reflecting a Prairie Town: A Year in Peterson* (1994) and *The Lincoln Highway: Main Street across America* (1988).

Americans have long had a warm spot for the midwestern small-town boy, fishing with a cane pole from the railroad bridge on a summer day, or, a generation later, hanging out at the soda fountain on Main Street, or of any generation gazing down the long road leading out of town, aching to make a mark on the larger world. The formative experiences of midwestern small-town boys in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were different from those of girls, and distinct from those who grew up, say, in seacoast villages in New England or certainly big cities everywhere.

How did a midwestern small-town upbringing help shape the lives of young men who went on—and went away—to do great things? What are the forces in small towns of the region that helped create greatness in politicians, artists, scientists, entertainers, authors, sports figures, industrialists, and mega-merchants? John Miller’s *Small-Town Dreams* is a partial answer to those questions—partial not because of any failings of the book, but because of the enormity of the questions. The questions take on added significance in an increasingly placeless electronic world when so many small towns and villages across the region are down in their cups as the energy of the nation flows to brighter places elsewhere. The book is, as Miller writes, “an effort to comment on and reassert the importance of place in people’s lives, with a specific emphasis on the small-town experience” (4–5).

The core of the book brings readers biographies of 22 varied men, including the likes of Henry Ford (Michigan), Frederick Jackson Turner (Wisconsin), Sinclair Lewis (Minnesota), Ronald Reagan (Illinois), John

Steuart Curry (Kansas), George Washington Carver (Missouri), and Sam Walton (Missouri), plus three Iowans: Bob Feller, Meredith Willson, and Grant Wood, all cast in the context of the shaping influences of their early days in towns on the Middle Border.

Miller's selection of subjects is naturally subjective; the Midwest has generated legions of leaders in many fields over the past 120 or so years. Mark Twain is not profiled, nor Aldo Leopold, Bob Dole, or even Abraham Lincoln. But this is no criticism; his selections are solid, and the essays are well researched, detailed, and strongly written to create a clear sense of the effect that this peculiar sort of American place had on a given man.

But what about the women? Miller, no stranger to women's history and biography, has authored three books on Laura Ingalls Wilder. Here he offers only that he wishes to focus his resources on men. Clearly, given the very different upbringings of boys versus girls in the late nineteenth and much of the twentieth centuries, a book on midwestern girls who shaped the nation would be a very different study.

Miller explores common traits and events among his wide-ranging small-town boys, including the fact that most of them had life-altering experiences early on and dreams of doing big things in bigger places. Perhaps the comparative isolation of midwestern small towns and the call of the train whistle led to the experience common to all of them: Every one of them left, usually for one coast or the other. Nevertheless, most of them returned to the home town to visit from time to time and reflected warmly on early lives there.

Clearly young minds are greatly influenced by the surroundings of their growing up, but measuring that influence is a tricky thing. Miller takes special care to avoid faulty causation and false conclusions, and he builds lovely stories around what these men said of their midwestern upbringings and what they did later that clearly expressed their backgrounds.

No Iowan ever used his small-town roots to better advantage than Mason City native Meredith Willson, the author of *The Music Man*, which ran on the New York stage for 1,375 performances and was made into a popular movie in 1962. Miller accurately points out that Mason City was hardly a tiny burg when Willson grew up there, but Willson, perhaps better than anyone, understood the nature of small midwestern towns at the turn of the twentieth century when he created River City, Iowa, and Professor Harold Hill.

The biographical essays in *Small-Town Dreams* are arranged chronologically into sections, each of which has an introduction to the demographic shifts of, and American attitudes toward, small towns during the era under consideration. That in itself is a welcome foray into how

towns of the region shrank with the century-long migration to cities and suburbs and how the nation's attitudes shifted from thinking of small towns as the hearth of the American idea to places where sentimental boys return.

Limping through Life: A Farm Boy's Polio Memoir, by Jerry Apps. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2013. x, 235 pp. Photographs. \$22.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Pamela Riney-Kehrberg is professor and chair of the history department at Iowa State University. Her latest book is *The Nature of Childhood: An Environmental History of Growing Up in America since 1865* (2014). She is also the author of *Childhood on the Farm: Work, Play, and Coming of Age in the Midwest* (2005).

Jerry Apps's *Limping through Life* provides a unique window into the experience of polio. In 1947, at the age of 12, Apps contracted polio. The illness left him a changed child. The boy who could previously run like the wind would no longer be able to make full use of a partially paralyzed right leg. Fortunately for Apps, his farming parents would not allow him the luxury of self-pity, or permit him to vegetate in the house after the worst of the illness had passed. Instead, his father plopped him on a tractor, and Apps's physical therapy consisted of forcing his right leg to move, so that he could work the brakes. Every night after work, his father massaged horse liniment into his leg. Before long, Apps could walk again, although he would always limp, and he could no longer run.

The damage inflicted by polio was also evident in other ways in Apps's life. The psychological pain was acute. Apps writes, "Being alive and not being able to do what other kids were doing at your age can be devastating. It can change how you see the world and how you react to it. I have never gotten over believing that I must constantly prove myself so I won't be seen as worthless" (235). Nonetheless, Apps credits that feeling of worthlessness for the striving he did in high school, college, and throughout his career. In high school, he pushed himself to achieve, and a kind teacher directed him into activities that did not require two good legs, such as forensics, drama, and the school newspaper. He graduated valedictorian, an achievement that allowed him to think about college, given that it carried a semester's tuition at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Once at the university, Apps pushed himself to succeed in the classroom. Following that first tuition-free semester, he also worked at a number of jobs in order to pay the bills. He never told anyone that he had suffered from polio as a child.