

Leannah deftly traces the evolution in Lauermand's advertising campaigns, starting in the 1890s. "Always a little cheaper than the cheapest" (136) was the store's mantra, and for decades Lauermand Brothers held itself to the slogan while drawing customers and turning a handsome profit, which in turn was invested back into the community. In the chapter covering the store's civic initiatives, readers learn that the Lauermand family supported the Marinette Bijou Theatre, sponsored a semiprofessional football team in the 1920s, and donated money to Marinette's parks and football stadium. Friday evenings in Marinette belonged to Lauermand Brothers as it was the social place to be during the evening's extended business hours.

From the 1920s to the 1940s, Lauermand's expanded its regional and even national reach. Iowa readers will be interested to note that a Lauermand Brothers store existed in Waterloo, Iowa, during the 1920s and 1930s, the biggest of over a dozen Lauermand branch stores. By the 1950s, the Lauermand family also included a prosperous Marinette Knitting Company, which held exclusive rights to produce Disney clothing, in its portfolio.

Leannah does a great job of chronicling the social and cultural history of Lauermand Brothers Department Store as an iconic institution, although the book should not be taken as a scholarly history. It is devoid of notes, while offering a casual approach to the subject that makes it easy to read. The author's main sources include newspaper advertisements and articles supplemented by personal interviews with past employees. Readers who fondly remember a bygone shopping era dominated by regional, flagship department stores will not be disappointed.

The Church and the Land: The National Catholic Rural Life Conference and American Society, 1923–2007, by David S. Bovée. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010. xiii, 399 pp. Tables, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$79.95 hardcover or e-book.

Reviewer Philip J. Nelson is adjunct professor of history at the University of Northern Iowa. His research interests include soil conservation and communitarian thought and movements.

The Jeffersonian ideal of the vital, propertied, middle-class farm family as the cornerstone of the republic and backbone of society has resonated down through American history. The belief system associated with it attained mythic status even as America became a largely urbanized, commercial colossus. The viability of a large class of independent, semi-self-sufficient farmers was threatened as early as the 1920s. In response, a whole host of individuals and organizations joined a

growing effort to lead America's development along the lines of a small-scale, substantially rural, agrarian, decentralized society. *The Church and the Land*, by David Bovée, chronicles the history of one such group, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC).

Bovée argues that the immediate reason for establishing the NCRLC in the 1920s, beyond the concern with the fundamental direction of American society, was the growing belief that rural Catholics were increasingly being lost to the faith. The stated purposes of the NCRLC, then, became "solving the Catholic rural population problem and forming the rural arm of the American Catholic social action movement" (163). Bovée calls these the manifest functions of the NCRLC. But it also had a more hidden or latent function of "forming an 'identity group' for rural Catholics, who were unrepresented by any formal organization until 1923" (163). Bovée deals most directly with the former purpose and mostly indirectly with the latter.

Bovée employs a strictly chronological approach for most of the book, except for the last few chapters, which tend to wander thematically through the past four decades. As the first full-length study of the NCRLC, the book is a valuable addition to the literature. Bovée's description of the book as an institutional and intellectual analysis is largely borne out by his first-rate institutional history of the NCRLC, with meticulous research and copious footnotes. He also brings to life the wide-ranging diversity of thought in the twentieth-century American Catholic church without sectarian cheerleading.

Another strength is the succinct writing style. The book opens with an excellent stage-setting chapter on Catholic rural America in the 1920s. Even before the formation of the NCRLC under the leadership of Bishop Edwin Vincent O'Hara, agrarians in the church, as Bovée shows, were divided between those who wanted to pursue radical social reform and those concerned with the more mundane problem of a perceived decline in the number of rural Catholics. The developing rural policy was in accord with the overall defensive nature of the church, which felt itself under attack from movements such as immigration restriction, a resurgence of the KKK, prohibition, and compulsory public schooling. In response, the NCRLC explored a wide variety of solutions, including land colonization, religious correspondence schools, vacation schools, home missionary work, cooperatives, conventions, and an array of publications. The Great Depression forced the NCRLC to increasingly address economic issues. Even as it turned more and more toward government intervention to stem the crisis, it remained critical of that approach.

The dominant theme of the 1940s and 1950s was the charismatic leadership of Monsignor Luigi Ligutti. Much of his early notoriety came from his work with the Granger Homestead subsistence farming project just north of Des Moines, although the author does not spend much time on it or on any of the land colonization schemes initiated by the Catholic church. This and other topics flow by quickly, treated methodically yet sometimes cursorily. Bovée gives more expansive treatment to the inner workings of the NCRLC. Like any institution, it was not immune from bureaucratic infighting, and Bovée is appropriately critical at times, especially of the contradiction of trying to restore simple rural life using modern bureaucratic means. Ligutti injected an added dimension into the NCRLC by turning toward international concerns. In fact, he spent so much time traveling, lecturing, and soliciting donations that his absence from the office contributed to recurring financial crises.

In later chapters, filled with interesting and little-known stories, Bovée presents the NCRLC's more contemporary interests in issues ranging from rural poverty to agribusiness to environmental concerns. As part of his solid treatment of the farm crisis of the 1980s, he shows how the NCRLC supported the radical National Farmers' Organization while engaging in a two-decade-long feud with the Farm Bureau. Throughout, Bovée remains faithful to his stated thesis that the NCRLC maintained its basic founding principles, although in altered form as an accommodation to changes in the larger society. The author admits that fighting to save the family farm was a losing battle.

In a short final chapter, Bovée competently assesses the NCRLC's important effects and main developmental themes. But he seems reluctant to ask the nagging, big question that hangs over the subject of American decentralist reformers of the mid-twentieth century: Why did the NCRLC, along with hundreds of mainly secular cultural reformers, fail in their attempt to direct the evolution of American society more along the lines of a rural, decentralized society? They truly believed that most aspects of rural and small-town life were superior to those of a centralized, urban/surburban civilization. If it is true that humans make their own history and produce their own societies and that no particular cultural form is historically inevitable, then it would appear that there was a short but real window of opportunity between 1920 and 1960. Given the fundamental problems that beset present-day Americans, perhaps a revisioning of the cultural order, partially along the lines of this road not taken, would be advisable.