

*A Diverse Community of Believers and Seekers: A History of the First Christian Church in Iowa City, Iowa, 1863–2013*, by David Hudson. Coralville: First Christian Church, 2013. viii, 189 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendixes.

Reviewer Bill R. Douglas researches Iowa's religious history from Des Moines. He retains church membership at Heartland Presbyterian Church, Clive.

"One day in the early 1980's, a woman came in to the church office to see Bob Welsh. 'God told me to come talk to you,' she announced." As uncomfortable as that pronouncement might make historians—and many mainline religionists—how Welsh, the First Christian Church, and the Iowa City religious community responded to that challenge provides a better take on the state of Iowa religion than a cynical view.

As a historian of Iowa religion who belongs to a generation that seeks to write history from the bottom up, why can't I read congregational histories? I'm guessing it's the hagiography; the most interesting congregations seem too busy making history to record it—or, not infrequently, are embarrassed by history and want to erase it. There are exceptions—Allen Fisher and David Hay's take on First Presbyterian Church in Cedar Rapids and Tamara Andrews's "folk history" of Grace United Methodist Church in Des Moines. The fall/winter 2013 issue of the *Journal of Presbyterian History* has welcome advice on how to make local church histories contextual—and then ignores its own advice by describing the Scotch Grove Presbyterian Church without mentioning Barbara Scot's memoir, *Prairie Reunion*.

The rhythms and tumults of a congregation are complicated, contradictory, and mysterious, as anyone who has stayed awake occupying a pew could testify. The grace of David Hudson's book is to evoke such complexity—although only in the later years do we get much of a view from the pew, surely due to the availability of evidence.

Interspersed in a mostly narrative history, three chapters of excursus—covering revivalism, ecumenism, and campus ministry, along with chapter 14, "Our Ministry with Others"—may be more valuable to those who are not members of the congregation. Congregations contemplating a new building may find helpful Appendix C, "Building for Worship," written from separate drafts by Sally Smith and Welsh. [Full disclosure: As a graduate student at the University of Iowa in the mid-1970s, I knew Smith as campus minister, and know nothing to detract from Hudson's high praise of her.] Of the resulting structure, though, I must have passed by it hundreds of times, more bemused by what already seemed a modish retro vibe than invited in.

Extensively researched and eminently readable, the narrative chapters also contain insight. Hudson correctly points to the congregational

event that was most significant for the denomination's history: Caroline Pearre's founding of a women's missionary society that blossomed into the national Disciples group. Hudson locates this at a time of local retrenchment. More national denominational context would have been welcome; for example, when the local church sponsored an overture to the national Disciples convention to recognize conscientious objection (138), we are left wondering what became of that resolution.

But back to that importuning woman in Welsh's office: she said many people needed shoes and clothing. The community response packed clothes nearly to the rafters. Miracles are outside a historian's jurisdiction, but capturing small acts of compassion could be congregational histories' dissent to larger narratives of avarice and power.

*Grant Wood's Iowa: A Visitor's Guide*, by Wende Elliott and William Balthazar Rose. Woodstock, VT: Countryman Press, 2013. xviii, 112 pp. Illustrations, maps, index. \$19.95 paperback.

Reviewer Jan Olive Full is senior principal and managing member of Tallgrass Historians L.C., an Iowa City-based historical and archaeological consulting firm.

Few American painters are as well known as Grant Wood, especially for his ubiquitous *American Gothic*. Yet outside Iowa, the physical locations that nurtured Wood and served as his bucolic settings are much less familiar. This slim, well-illustrated volume intends to rectify that. Organized into five geographic chapters focused on clusters of Wood-related sites, the book is reminiscent of the "tours" promoted in the 1938 WPA guide to Iowa. Following autobiographical prefaces, the author and her spouse, the book's photographer, describe each location and explain its historical association with the artist. Not all sites are directly linked to Wood. Sidebars offer interesting if tangential information on other artists and areas.

The author's insights on Wood's personal and professional life, as well as Wood's evolving reception by art historians, are perceptive and informative though frequently purely speculative. Much of the text is overly dramatic and romanticized. And despite living in Iowa for a decade, the author manages to paint modern-day Iowans as provincial sorts—not an easy task in today's global village—and their cities as charming cultural oases (87). Cedar Rapids, for example, home of a large Quaker Oats factory adjacent to the city's downtown, is compared to "a modern-day Florence," its small skyscrapers evocative of the Superman television set (20). Despite sometimes confusing directions (West Branch is recommended as a "good pit stop" after