

Book Reviews

for once, American Communists might have played the role that Mao prescribed for his own followers in China, to be fish swimming in the sea of popular support. Instead, as Dyson shows, the Communists proceeded to drain the sea, using the cooperatives as a source of funds for what they regarded as more important work in the cities. By the early 1930s the Communists had split the cooperative movement and squandered much of their popular support. The Cooperative Central Exchange, Dyson comments dryly, stopped printing the hammer and sickle on its canned goods.

We need to know more about the lives and ideas of these Finnish-American farmers. What role did radicalism play in their lives? How did it hinder or help their eventual "Americanization"? What was it like on those cold Wisconsin winter nights, sitting around the pot-bellied stove in the cooperative store, talking politics and crops, dreaming about warm summer days in a better world? And who were those farmers out in Sheridan County, Montana, briefly mentioned in *Red Harvest*, who read the *Daily Worker* in the barber shop and elected Communists to county government? *Red Harvest* has broken the ground. Now let's see what seeds are sown.

SMITH COLLEGE

MAURICE ISSERMAN

The Old Country School: The Story of Rural Education in the Middle West, by Wayne E. Fuller. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982. pp. ix, 302. Photographs, notes, index. \$22.50.

The one-room country school was a ubiquitous feature of American education for more than two centuries. Although few remain in operation, it is still easy to find people who began their school careers in one. Despite this remarkable fact, specialists in the history of American culture have largely ignored the phenomenon. Because of this dearth of treatment, Fuller's book is particularly timely.

The author seeks to describe "origins and operations of the one-room schools, the rise of professional educators, and the long conflict between them and the farmers over the adequacy of their schools." Additionally, the book "is intended to be a social history of Midwestern rural America, seen through the development of one of its most important institutions." Certainly, Fuller has set for himself a challenging task. As a first effort in a field long overdue scholarly attention, this book suggests some potentially interesting lines of investigation. Tracing the origins and development of the one-room

THE ANNALS OF IOWA

schools, and the changing attitudes of professional educators toward them, is a worthy undertaking as is writing a social history of the rural midwest. But Fuller has stopped short of reaching either of these goals.

Two problems with the book illustrate why the author has not achieved the objectives for which he was aiming: his choice of geographic limits and his loose treatment of chronology in presenting the material. Fuller uses the terms "Midwest" and "Middle Border" interchangeably, and enumerates ten states as defining the geographic limits of this investigation: Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, North and South Dakota (p. 249). In another place he includes Missouri as well (p. 25). Archival material for the study came primarily from Wisconsin, with some from Michigan, Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa. The author does not, however, provide a rationale for why these ten (or eleven) states should be studied to the exclusion of others, nor does he tell us that the country school started in New England more than a century earlier than his account begins. Did people in the Midwest merely borrow a New England invention? Were the one-room schools in Texas or California much like those in Iowa or South Dakota? For that matter, were the schools of Ohio different from those in Minnesota or Kansas? This study gives us no base for even tentative answers to such questions.

Finally, the book is organized topically (e.g., the school district, the school house, teachers), with quotations and illustrations covering the period from about 1850 through the first two or three decades of this century. Opposition by professional educators to the one-room school was just starting in 1850; it reached intense dimensions in the early twentieth century. This fact is obscured by Fuller's jumps across the time period.

Despite these limitations, the book is worthwhile. The notes will certainly help other historians interested in the same topic. It is encouraging that an experienced historian was willing to undertake this project. It is even more significant that a reputable press has issued it. It is a useful beginning in a neglected area.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

L. GLENN SMITH

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.