

## Book Reviews

*The book review editor of the Annals of Iowa invites qualified historians and professionals in related fields to submit their names as potential book reviewers. The Annals will review books on Iowa and midwestern regional history, on topics relevant to Iowa history, and on subjects of major historical or methodological significance. If you are interested, please send a vita or similar indication of your qualifications and areas of expertise to Book Review Editor, Annals of Iowa, Iowa State Historical Department, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. —KSS*

*John Deere's Company: A History of Deere & Company and Its Times*, by Wayne G. Broehl, Jr. Garden City: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1984. xv, 789 pp. Photographs, paintings, bibliographical essay, notes, index. \$24.95, cloth.

On first sight of this massive book the reader's reaction might be: "This book will tell me everything I need to know about the John Deere Company—and more." If one faithfully perseveres to the end, like those who claim they have read every word of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, one may well say: "Yes, I have learned all I needed to know about John Deere's company, but not more than I want to know." The author persuasively argues for a version of the story that is well-nigh exhaustive. He presents it in a meaningful way and makes only points essential to an understanding of this significant chapter in American business history. Indeed, my chief adverse criticism of the book is that it needs one more, not one less, element.

Professor Wayne Broehl was a fortunate choice for the stupendous task of writing a history of the Deere companies. He is by birth (Peoria) and education (University of Illinois, University of Chicago, and Indiana University) a Midwesterner whose early environmental influences inescapably included exposure to an agricultural economy; his educational specialty has long been and is now business history. His studies, research, and teaching career in the Midwest and at Dartmouth College's Amos Tuck School of Business have enabled him to master the general historical background, the specialized

techniques, and the lore of his craft. Fortunately, Deere management has long been history-minded and has maintained an archives under professional direction. The author has roamed at will through the company records and, equally important, has used the archives of Deere rivals and competitors, especially those of the International Harvester Company. It is difficult to imagine anyone faulting the author for neglecting any important sources of information.

In 789 pages of text, 44 pages of notes, a valuable appendix made up of 39 "exhibits" (tables, charts, and diagrams), and two highly essential genealogical tables—one of the Deere family and one of the company's leadership—the author ploughs (no pun intended) his way through nearly two centuries of Deere family history and 140 years of Deere company history. He emphasizes Deere's leadership: remarkably, for better or worse (mostly for better), the family supplied, until 1982, successful and dedicated leadership from its own members, sons-in-law included. Deere reached its peak under the direction of Chairman William A. Hewitt, who was one of these sons-in-law. One might inject a reminder that few family companies could claim such continuity.

The book's plan is readily transparent, which helps readers deal with this long, important, and ongoing story. Broehl divides it into five parts, sixteen chapters, and 178 subdivisions, each one accurately labeled and specifically dealing with the topic indicated. This division lends itself to a combined chronological and topical treatment in which no average reader should get lost, in spite of the book's length. Indeed, the book is so clearly written and so well organized that it lends itself to skimming, which would be the reader's loss.

Broehl's treatment of the company's founding and growth as a manufacturer of farm implements is more than adequate, but his principal interest is in company organization and the decisionmaking process. As for company organization, John Deere, the patriarchal founder, soon realized his limitations outside the realm of tool-making. Fortunately, trustworthy partners attended to business matters until a son, Charles Henry Deere, could take over management of the business in the 1850s, clear up its debts by 1860, and then lead the company to a high position in the industrial sector. In 1907 Charles Deere's son-in-law, William Butterworth, took over and held the reins until 1936, although Charles Deere Wiman, a grandson of John Deere, became president in 1928. Wiman led the company with great success until 1955, except for a leave of absence from 1942 to 1944 when he served his government in Washington. In 1955, his son-in-law, William A. Hewitt, became president and in 1964 became

chairman and chief executive officer (CEO) as well. In 1982 the corporation was forced to look for leadership outside the family for the first time, though not outside the company, when it selected Robert A. Hanson as chairman-CEO. By sheer merit, Hanson had risen through the management ranks to president in 1978 and CEO in 1979. Yet Broehl leaves no one in doubt of his opinion that William Hewitt was the best thing that ever happened to the Deere corporation; he guided the firm to its highest position by centralized executive leadership of a worldwide industrial empire that had outstripped all its rivals.

In the light of the present-day parlous situation of American exports, all readers will be interested in the treatment of Deere's attempts to establish foreign factories, sometimes from scratch, sometimes by buying out local firms. Also of greater than casual interest, especially to Iowans, will be Broehl's account of the invention of a workable gasoline tractor and of how Deere got into tractor manufacturing. John Froelich had made a tractor that would "work" and had moved his business to Waterloo, Iowa. The Deere company had been unable to build a satisfactory product of its own, and even though President Butterworth counselled Deere *not* to go into tractor manufacturing, the company did what it so often did: expanded by buying out an established company, the Waterloo Gas Engine Company, and built on these foundations. All in all, Broehl does about as well as the limited sources allow with this topic. More extensive treatment of other rivals, especially the Hart-Parr Company of Charles City, Iowa, would have enhanced the account.

The book, *John Deere's Company*, is magnificently produced, worthy of the company that ordered it into being and, one would suppose, that guaranteed to meet any deficits it had. The gorgeous but horribly expensive illustrations, many of them in color, complement the text and are deserving of deep study themselves. The footnotes are at the back of the book and are a fountain of additional information, aside from pinpointing the sources as used. A long bibliographical essay attests to the author's exhaustive labors and thorough command of his subject.

The author's prose is adequate and fits the subject matter. The editorial work and the proofreading could have been better, though the percentage of error is small considering the book's length. The author's word selection occasionally seems inappropriate, the spelling inconsistent, and the identification of terms incomplete. The word "cornet" is correctly spelled in the lettering on a bass drum in one of the pictures but misspelled in its caption as "coronet" (48). "Comanche" (the Iowa town) should have been "Camanche" (95).

Broehl should have identified "Iowa College" as the future Grinnell College (104). The author uses "affected" where "effected" seems better (346), and "endorsement" when he means "endowment" (347). He misuses "fortuitous," (xiv, 315), and he misplaces information about the Hart-Parr Company in the footnotes (Ch. 7, fns. 13, 14). Incidentally, how many general readers would know who Hart and Parr were without identification? Iowa Governor Harding's initials were "W.L." not "W.N." (433-434), "suppression" needs another "p" (444), it is doubtful that Deere's Minneapolis Branch "had its expenses balloon" (457), and "waiver" has a surplus "i" (607). The book's great strengths, however, more than offset its weaknesses. One such strength is the way that the author briefly sketches the national and international historical background as he moves along through the story. He always keeps the reader aware of the contemporary scene.

There is one area where the author might have given us more, not less. In a book which places such high value on the contributions that minor and major executives, heads of departments, branch managers, and so on have made to the company's well being, the author is all too often content to mention the name and then proceed to describe the individual's work or policy. Some sort of background identification, be it ever so brief, perhaps in a footnote, perhaps in the text, would have improved the book. Examples are Burton F. Peek, George N. Peek, F. H. Silloway, Leon Clausen, Benjamin Keator, Ralph Lourie, and George Crampton. A good example on the positive side is Broehl's treatment of George Mixter. These sketches would have added a few pages to the length of the book, but they would have been well worth the extra expense. All in all this splendid book should generate much pride among the sponsors and give immense satisfaction to the author.

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

LELAND L. SAGE

*Main Street Iowa, 1920-1950*, edited by Carl H. Larson. Humboldt, Iowa: Educational and Creative Graphics, 1983. 179 pp. Notes, illustrations, bibliography. \$9.95 paper.

Newspapers have played a rich and varied role in American society, both reflecting and shaping its evolution. From the revolutionary declarations of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine, to the jingoistic "yellow journalism" of William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, to the careful yet shocking reports of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, newspapers have described and influenced the coun-

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