

Book Reviews

EDITED BY MICHAEL D. GIBSON

Black Diamonds: Life and Work in Iowa's Coal Mining Communities, 1895-1925, by Dorothy Schwieder. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1983. pp. xiii, 203. Appendixes, notes, index. \$18.95.

While agriculture has sustained Iowa, coal once contributed mightily to the state's economic life. Not only did money flow to owners and operators of the dozens of mines, but 12,000 to 18,000 workers supported themselves and their households. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the soft coal fields of central and southern Iowa boomed. These diggings helped to supply the region's fuel needs—heat for buildings and power for steam engines.

Dorothy Schwieder, a leading scholar of Iowa's past, describes this once prominent occupation. Rather than writing business history, she looks at the human side, both below and above ground. Schwieder graphically reveals the monotonous, dirty, and dangerous nature of seeking "black diamonds." Yet miners generally liked their work; they maintained a pride of workmanship. She quotes a former timberman: "And you know when you walked down the entry, the timbers were uniform and nice and it really looked fine!" Of course, miners—especially those employed by large concerns, usually captive corporations of area railroads—often felt abused and commonly joined the United Mine Workers of America or some predecessor labor organization.

But coal mining was more than male labor, it involved intimately other individuals. Miners usually married and had children. Schwieder explores in detail the saga of the typical Italian-American mining family. While life was difficult for these hard-working immigrants, they seemed to adapt reasonably well to a "cornbelt culture." Often these sturdy folks boosted their income through various self-help methods: truck gardening, animal raising, and boarding fellow miners. In an effort to understand better the nature of Iowa mining families, Schwieder examines the 1895 and 1915 state census data for three incorporated coal-mining oriented towns—Beacon (Mahaska County), Cincinnati (Appanoose County), and Seymour (Wayne County). Her over-all conclusions: "coal miners made lower wages

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and experienced greater unemployment than the other resident populations" (p. 125).

Unquestionably, Dorothy Schwieder has written a pioneering study of life in the Iowa coal fields. Yet this book is disappointing in some ways. For one thing, she ignored what might be considered the state's most significant coal community, Hiteman, located six miles northwest of Albia in Monroe County. This camp, founded in 1890 by the Wapello Coal Company, an affiliate of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad, grew to about 3,500 residents by World War I. But its ethnic composition was more important than its impressive size. Hiteman was originally home to a labor force of Welsh, English, Swedes, and a few blacks, but around 1915, Eastern Europeans, mostly displaced workers from the dying Smoky Hollow mines near Avery, began to arrive. While their appearance did not lead to a massive exodus of first inhabitants, there were those who left. For example, the town's popular druggist, H. A. Dinsmore, relocated his family to Albia and commuted to work on the electric interurban. Hiteman, too, offers the fascinating mixture of company and private businesses. There was the Hiteman Supply Company, but individual merchants co-existed with the company store. And unlike the typical "company" town, workers owned their homes, a factor that gave the community a degree of permanence even after the mines closed in the late 1930s. It is also unfortunate that Schwieder did not examine the extensive Iowa mining materials in the James J. Hill Papers in St. Paul, or the records of the coal companies (including the Hiteman Supply Company) owned by the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy at the Newberry Library in Chicago. And if she had been persistent, she would have discovered that the Chicago & North Western Transportation Company retained a rich variety of records for its Consolidated Coal Company, developer of several southern Iowa camps, including Muchakinock, Buxton, and Haydock. Finally *Black Diamonds* is attractively printed, contains a number of fine photographs and maps, and has a reliable index.

THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON

H. ROGER GRANT

The Governing of Agriculture, by Bruce L. Gardner. Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1981. pp. xii, 148. Appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$9.95.

Bruce L. Gardner's *The Governing of Agriculture* is a straightforward attack on agricultural policy as we know it. In a nutshell, Gardner's argument is that *governing* agriculture has been, with few exceptions, a failure. In addition to the failure to realize its own goals, the govern-

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