

Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876–1956

Jean Preer

Indiana University School of Library and Information Science-Indianapolis

ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

Preer, Jean. "Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876–1956." *The Annals of Iowa* 72 (2013), 76-78.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.1681>

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concluding notes, Twedt relates the fictional characters to the historical figures from whose lives the story is drawn.

The novel is based primarily on a number of regional and local histories, as well as stories preserved by the author's own family (which included the historical Branjords). Twedt also consulted more broadly focused works related to immigration history, as well as the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah. *Land of Promise, Land of Tears* provides a clear description of the kinds of hardships Scandinavian immigrants experienced when they settled in Iowa. The creation of Norwegian American society involved a complex mixture of old and new, Norwegian and American. The difficulties of that process are described well in this novel.

Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876–1956, by Wayne A. Wiegand. Iowa and the Midwest Experience. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011. xi, 244 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$25.95 paper.

Reviewer Jean Preer is professor emerita at the Indiana University School of Library and Information Science–Indianapolis. She is the author of *Library Ethics* (2008).

Combining traditional historical research with an analysis of library accession records, Wayne Wiegand examines public library development and collections in four rural towns in the upper Midwest, an area known for its active civic life. The communities shared similar demographics but enjoyed distinct identities. Sauk Centre, Minnesota, was the birthplace of Sinclair Lewis; Osage, Iowa, named for its pioneer settler, Orrin Sage, was the boyhood home of Hamlin Garland; Lexington, Michigan, attracted the summer tourist trade; and Rhinelander, Wisconsin, supported manufacturing, attracted immigrants, and elected a socialist mayor. Using a wealth of local records, Wiegand provides detailed accounts of each community, exploring the dual role of the library as a source of reading matter and as a public space.

Beginning his study in 1876, Wiegand depicts the various ways public libraries got their start. In Sauk Centre and Lexington, local literary associations provided impetus and collections for public libraries. Local philanthropists played an important role. In Osage, Orrin Sage deeded land to cover construction of the Sage Public Library and created an endowment to cover operating expenses. In Lexington, the daughters of Charles H. Moore used their inheritance to build a library in his honor. Sauk Centre, Osage, and Rhinelander

all built Carnegie libraries. Rhinelanders had a professional librarian beginning in 1902; in the others, library directors often lacked library training.

Wiegand has two larger objectives. In an introductory chapter, he takes issue with what he describes as the librarians' faith in the public library as essential to the creation of an informed citizenry. Drawing on library accession records, Wiegand argues that public libraries, in fact, provided popular fiction and responded to user demands for entertainment rather than enlightenment. Wiegand depicts this response to popular taste as an example of "the user in the life of the library," that is, users affecting library policy and practice, in contrast to "the library in the life of the user," a more top-down management approach. Wiegand's work, a rather short volume given the scope of the topic, is at once a fascinating library history and a frustratingly one-sided interpretation of his findings.

The tension between what experts perceive as literary excellence and what users desire for their reading pleasure pervades public library history and professional practice. While libraries are justified by their educational potential, their continued support depends on usage, most often circulation statistics. Because the libraries Wiegand studied emphasized the educational aspect of the library's mission, he depicts philanthropists, reformers, and especially professional librarians as the villains in the case. Using what they learned in library school, he argues, librarians sought to impose books recommended by experts and to apply national standards that were at odds with the individual identities and predilections of local communities. Wiegand does not include contrary examples of how the library profession sought to respond to library users. From John Cotton Dana's 12 Rules of Reading ("Read enjoyable things.") to Helen Haines's principles of book selection ("Represent all subjects that apply to community conditions and reflect community interests. Give preference to an inferior book that will be read over a superior book that will not be read."), librarians themselves negotiated between literary taste, board dictates, and community preferences. Wiegand does not mention that librarians rejected the recommendation of the Public Library Inquiry, conducted by social scientists in the late 1940s, that public libraries collect serious and controversial works and let readers buy popular fiction at newsstands, feeling that it was contrary to the democratic responsibility of the library to meet the reading needs of the entire community. Wiegand refers to, but does not explore, Lester Asheim's 1953 article contrasting selection and censorship. Writing in opposition to censorship, Asheim, in powerful language that actually supports Wiegand's argument,

expressed confidence in the intelligence of readers to make choices about what to read.

In his concluding chapter, Wiegand draws from his database of library accessions to see whether the four libraries studied acquired works of serious literature, popular fiction, series books, or banned or controversial works. With small book budgets and dependent on donations, library collections before 1956 did not grow according to plan. Nonetheless, Wiegand's comparisons of library holdings against lists of best sellers and challenged books are often intriguing, although it is hard to draw conclusions about motives in particular cases. What his findings show is great variety in book selection that reflected not only the local communities but also the historical roots of the library and the philosophy of the librarian in charge. Iowans may read more about Osage in Christine Pawley's *Reading on the Middle Border* and would be interested, as well, in the work of Forrest Spaulding and the Des Moines Public Library in actively supporting community forums in the 1930s and adopting its own Library Bill of Rights in 1938.

Turn Here, Sweet Corn: Organic Farming Works, by Atina Diffley. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. 335 pp. Illustrations. \$24.95 cloth.

Reviewer Barbara J. Dilly is associate professor of anthropology at Creighton University. Her research focuses on rural economic development, ecology, ecotourism, gender and agriculture, agricultural adaptations, rural religious community life, rural community revitalization, rural environmental sustainability, rural health, rural art forms, and rural volunteerism.

Atina Diffley's autoethnography is a personal story placed in an ethnographic context. Diffley presents organic farming as a cultural innovation based on the same values of hard work, risk taking, determination to succeed, creativity, extended kinship relations, spiritual connections to the land, specialized knowledge, and neighborhood networks of traditional family farming agriculture. But she explains how urbanization and industrial systems threaten those relationships and the land. In the story of her life, Diffley argues that organic farming works to sustain marriage, family, neighborhood, and community relationships. Organic farming not only keeps body and soul together, but it also works to save soil fertility, balance water use, dignify labor, harmonize plant, animal, and insect populations, and provide fresh, nutritious, and delicious fruits and vegetables for local consumers.

But this testimony does not present organic farming as a romantic escape from urban alienation. Iowans intrigued with organic farming