

STATE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF IOWA

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

# The Annals of Iowa

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Volume 66 | Number 3 (Summer 2007)

pps. 341-343

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## Images of a Vanished Era, 1898–1924: The Photographs of Walter C. Schneider

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ISSN 0003-4827

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### Recommended Citation

Wajda, Shirley T. "Images of a Vanished Era, 1898–1924: The Photographs of Walter C. Schneider." *The Annals of Iowa* 66 (2007), 341-343.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.1154>

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sions of the reading habits of farm families and their reactions to the reform impulses are valuable resources for scholars. Some readers may wish that Fry had reached further to place the farm families' reactions and the reactions of the press into a broader discussion of the changes that were occurring in rural life during these three decades. He concludes that the papers had influence largely by offering options that their readers then accepted or rejected depending on particular circumstances. I hope he will continue the research and examine the nuances of the effects further.

*Images of a Vanished Era, 1898–1924: The Photographs of Walter C. Schneider*, edited by Lucian Niemeyer. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007. xiv, 178 pp. Illustrations. \$49.95 cloth.

Reviewer Shirley Teresa Wajda is assistant professor of history at Kent State University. Her dissertation (University of Pennsylvania, 1992) was "Social Currency: A Domestic History of the Portrait Photograph in the United States, 1839–1889."

If you are a member of the baby boom generation, you likely remember your parents' acquisition of your family's first television or first new automobile. If you do not have those memories, you likely have inherited an album or a shoebox of photographs of family members posing in front of that television or automobile. Each generation possesses its iconic material and visual culture, and the sentimental associations of those things and their representations blur the boundaries between history and memory.

According to photographer and editor Lucian Niemeyer, the 1,200 4" x 5" glass-plate negatives stored in a Chicago basement by the grandchildren of amateur photographer and Kankakee, Illinois, native Walter C. Schneider (1884–1964) provide a "wonderful record of Americana" (x). This is an unfortunate choice of words, for this collection provides a multivalent record of the past that is not necessarily rare or focused only on the American scene. The book's six chronological sections begin with Schneider's early life, dating from his acquisition of a camera in 1898, and end in 1924, with the early death of his wife after a long battle with tuberculosis.

First of all, then, this collection constitutes Schneider's visual autobiography as a family member, community member, college student, European traveler, and husband. We see in these images the experiences and memories of a German American family prospering in Kankakee in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Although we learn little about Kankakee's population, growth, and built environment,

we do view picnics, community events, and commercial buildings (including family businesses in carriage construction and insurance) as the subjects of the teenaged Schneider's early work. His growing expertise in wet-plate, then dry-plate photography is detailed in records he kept. (Without notes or bibliography, the reader is left to assume that the evidence for the well-written, contextualizing narrative is based on these records and, perhaps, on family members' reminiscences.) As a law student at the University of Wisconsin, Schneider captured the campus in bird's-eye views as well as the rooms of his classmates. A year spent in Germany resulted in images of an "Old World" of women washing laundry in canals and village wells that seemingly stand in stark relief against the scenes of women at leisure in Kankakee. The time-consuming duties of establishing a law practice and married life curtailed Schneider's photographic output; the last images in this collection are those of his children and wife Edith.

This collection also offers an illustrative chronicle of the American Midwest's modernization, found in images such as the expansion of a grain elevator as well as the aftermath of the building's burning, his grandfather's and uncle's carriage shop, individual carriages, the growing interest in the automobile, and the shift from dirt roads to paved streets. Unexplored here are the connections between photographic scenes of carriages, buildings, and disasters and the Schneider family business enterprises. Walter's father, Albert Schneider, joined his father's insurance agency, which later became a savings and loan company and a travel agency. Beyond the pride of craftsmanship in carriage building, what would an examination of the records of these enterprises reveal about young Walter's choice of subject matter?

Such an examination is important, for it would deepen our understanding of the choices of subject matter and the commercial and civic imperatives of amateur photographers in the opening decades of the American Century. Yet *amateur* here is likely better placed within quotation marks, for, at a time when contemporary photography periodicals carried editorials and letters arguing about the definition of the amateur (because so many "hobbyists" were entering competitions and being compensated for images), several of Schneider's images were commissioned, and a European scene was published in the *New York Herald*. The photographer's intent and purpose as well as the survival of the resulting collection help to shape what we see in photographic images of a "vanished era." Walter Schneider's images would not lose the luster evoked in this romantic celebration by exposing them to a more rigorous historical investigation. As it stands, however, *Images of a Vanished Era* provides an engaging visual autobiogra-

phy, one that adds to the study of what historians are now calling vernacular photography. Take care of those shoeboxes of snapshots.

*Radical Unionism in the Midwest, 1900–1950*, by Rosemary Feurer. The Working Class in American History Series. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006. xix, 320 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$65.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

Reviewer David M. Anderson is assistant professor of history at Louisiana Tech University. He is the author of the forthcoming *"Things Are Different Down Here": The 1955 Perfect Circle Strike, Conservative Civic Identity, and the Roots of the New Right in the 1950s Heartland*.

At a time when analyses of our political culture are reduced to a facile and absolute "red state-blue state" divide, it is easy to forget that the Midwest once featured a profound ideological struggle, as conservative employers squared off against radical "left-led" unions for control of the region's political economy. As Rosemary Feurer shows in this deftly executed study, no segment of the heartland's labor movement was more radical than the St. Louis-based District 8 of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE), which was led by William Sentner, openly a member of the Communist Party (CP). Beginning in the mid-1930s, Sentner and his left-wing allies advanced a notion of "civic unionism" that inspired militant rank-and-file workers in the region's electrical products industries to contest their employers for shop floor and civic supremacy. The UE was never able to consolidate its power as did those CIO industrial unions in the automobile and steel sectors, but up through the 1940s District 8 held its own against some of the nation's most intransigent anti-union firms, reaching a peak of 50,000 members during World War II. At the same time, Sentner also reached the height of his influence, putting together a broad coalition of farmers, employers, workers, and conservationists in support of the proposed Missouri Valley Authority (MVA), which he envisioned serving as an effective regional planning board in the postwar years.

Sentner's grand plans for the UE and the MVA never materialized. As Feurer shows, the onset of the Cold War spelled the end of District 8's left-wing leadership and decimated the UE. After the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 made Communists a liability for the labor movement, the CIO's liberal leaders expelled its 11 "left-led" unions. Besieged by right-wing anti-union forces, Sentner was convicted under the Smith Act, quit the CP, and died, penniless, in 1958. The UE fared no better, as much of its membership was picked off by the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE), which the CIO established as