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Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture

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Cinematic Journeys: An Uncommon Guide to Classic Movie Theaters: Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, by Mike and Vicki Walker. Kansas City: How High the Moon Publishing, 2007. xi, 158 pp. Illustrations, maps, index. \$14.95 paper.

Reviewer Jennifer Fleeger is a Ph.D. candidate in film studies at the University of Iowa. Her research focuses on sound and music in American cinema.

Cinematic Journeys does not claim to be a comprehensive survey of classic midwestern movie theaters, yet it does serve as an introduction to the region's cinematic heritage by providing a photo, list of historical facts, and descriptive paragraph for 63 operational cinemas in four states. The inclusion of several theaters under the heading "classic," however, remains something of a mystery; although many of the houses were constructed well before the 1940s, the list extends to cinemas built in this century. The book's pages are divided equally among the theaters, but the inconsistency in the level of detail devoted to each belies an uneven research method. Uneasiness about the authors' approach is exacerbated by the insertion of anecdotes about film going on pages with little historical text. Such "movie memories" are usually unrelated to the cinema under discussion and often either originate with the authors themselves or come from anonymous sources.

These criticisms aside, the size and organization of *Cinematic Journeys* make it a handy accompaniment to weekend trips around the Midwest. The theaters are arranged by state and further broken down by region, allowing the traveler to tack a visit to the cinema onto a trip designed for another purpose. Moreover, to supplement the descriptions of many of the houses, the authors offer recommendations for nearby food and attractions. The text includes 12 theaters located in north central and eastern Iowa.

Diaspora in the Countryside: Two Mennonite Communities and Mid-Twentieth-Century Rural Disjuncture, by Royden Loewen. Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Series. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006. xv, 331 pp. Maps, photos, notes, bibliography, index. \$75.00 cloth, \$25.00 paperback.

Reviewer Steven D. Reschly is chair and associate professor of history at Truman State University. He is the author of *The Amish on the Iowa Prairie, 1840 to 1910* (2000).

Roy Loewen has produced a string of books and articles rooted in his comprehensive research on the Kleine Gemeinde (KG) Mennonites in Kansas and Manitoba. In *Family, Church and Market: A Mennonite Com-*

munity in the Old and New Worlds, 1850–1930 (1993), he traced the KG from the Ukraine to Canada and the United States; and in *Hidden Worlds: Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s* (2001), he proposed “regrafting” as an image to explicate migration, in a sense combining “uprooted” and “transplanted.” *Diaspora in the Countryside* extends Loewen’s purview to Mexico and Belize. Research in five nation-states offers powerful potential for comparative history. Loewen addresses theoretical issues in migration, ethnicity, agriculture, gender, political economy, and theology through finely grained accounts of daily life in multiple locations, with special focus on Meade County, Kansas, and the Rural Municipality (RM) of Hanover in Manitoba.

Loewen uses two controlling rubrics to make sense of this complex international research: diaspora, and John Shover’s “Great Disjuncture” thesis. Classically referring to the scattering of Jews in the ancient Mediterranean world, *diaspora* later came to mean almost any extensive dispersal of populations, such as the African Diaspora, whether by coercion or choice. Loewen applies the term to the massive movement of rural populations in North America to small towns, cities, and even foreign countries. As with other diasporas, Loewen finds not only fragmentation and depopulation, but coalescing and creative cultural recreation in new locations.

To explain why so many people were moving about and remaking identities, Loewen borrows historian John Shover’s “Great Disjuncture” term, developed in *First Majority–Last Minority: The Transforming of Rural Life in America* (1976). A mid-twentieth-century perfect storm of political, economic, and cultural shifts produced a radically altered rural landscape: scientific farming with herbicides and synthetic fertilizers; farmland commodification; disparities of wealth and class conflict; consumer culture and its emphasis on individualism; assimilative imperatives in wartime and aggressive nationalism that pressured ethnic farm communities to become less different; specialized and mechanized farming to produce marketable commodities; and intrusive government policies. Historians and rural sociologists have documented the disintegration of rural communities; not many have asked what happened to those displaced people.

Loewen’s answer is fourfold. First, those KG Mennonites who stayed behind, in Hal Barron’s phrase, reformatted their farm economies, by growing larger and growing wheat in southwestern Kansas, and by accepting more government supply and price controls on mixed crops in southern Manitoba. Those directions had much to do with environment (dust versus snow) and with political differences between the United States and Canada, but also with ethnically differ-

entiated responses to the strains placed on ingrained communitarian values.

Second, KG Mennonites who moved to nearby small towns—Meade in Kansas and Steinbach in Manitoba—created new ethnic cultures rooted in consumption, travel, and individuality (58). Particularly in postwar Meade, a reinvented Mennonite ethnicity ironically opened the rural migrants to an “assimilative vortex” of civic, nationalist, and militarist symbols (76). Here Loewen makes his most creative and tightest connection between economic and social change, on the one hand, and ecclesiological and theological shifts, on the other. The increasing dislocation, individualism, and assimilation brought about by the Great Depression, World War II, and the Great Disjuncture supported a reformulation of church life toward mainstream American evangelical faith and away from an Old Order reliance on submission to community authority. Mennonites became “an institution that would compete for individuals” (90), a church built on personal salvation, which in turn required a revamping of programs and leadership (89). Evangelical purity became the new distinction, replacing Low German and plain clothing (94). In Manitoba, however, a critical mass of Old Order people who migrated to Mexico in 1948 preserved communitarian solidarity against the onslaught of individual choice (109, 113).

These cultural and institutional changes also appear in gender identities. Discussing womanhood in Meade County and masculinity in RM Hanover, Loewen shows a keen eye for the revealing representation: diary and account books for farm women; newspaper columns for 1950s “happy homemakers”; and family biographies for professional women. Chapter 7, on manhood in Manitoba, is one of the few extant discussions of masculinity in Mennonite historiography and deserves more attention than a brief review can give.

Third, Loewen follows KG Mennonite migrants to large cities—Winnipeg and Denver—and the coalescing of social fragments into reinventions of evangelicals, neo-Anabaptists, and secularists. Finally, some Canadian KG Mennonites moved to Mexico and Belize, where they paradoxically created modern high-technology farms “to sustain antimodern culture” (188). They changed location to resist cultural change. Both of these are rich stories that deserve more reflection than can be offered here.

There are some minor errors, not surprising in a work of this complexity, but the bibliography is thorough, and the index is helpful, not least in tracking family names.

Roy Loewen is constructing a record as the most innovative historian in the Mennonite and Amish world. *Diaspora in the Countryside* is so meticulous that it may lead to interrogation of the very assumption of "Great Disjuncture," despite Loewen's reliance on that thesis. In the larger sweep of Mennonite history since the sixteenth century, and of rural history in general since that time, "disjuncture" begins to seem the norm. Persecution, migration, wars, agricultural transformations, complex ambivalences toward technology, cultural fragmentation: these have occurred often, almost constantly, over the past five centuries. Perhaps it is the illusion of stability that must be scrutinized. The constant that Loewen identifies most clearly is "a multifaceted story of cultural creativity" (17), illuminating the delicious irony of intentional change to remain the same, or to maintain the fiction of an unchanging social order. Comparative history across national borders, such as this book, can remove many blinders and open new vistas for scholarly creativity in all histories, not merely the history of a tiny group located in two corners of the North American grasslands.

Lucky Man: Memories of a Life in Communications, by William Barlow Quarton III. West Branch: Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Association, 2005. xii, 131 pp. Illustrations, appendix, index. \$20.00 cloth.

Reviewer Steve Coon is a communications consultant and emeritus associate professor and former coordinator of electronic media studies in the Greenlee School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Iowa State University.

It would be difficult to name anyone who has contributed more to the development and growth of broadcasting in Iowa than William Barlow Quarton III. An Iowa native, Quarton remained firmly rooted in the Hawkeye State despite his larger roles on the national stage. As he writes in his short autobiography, *Lucky Man*, Quarton made his reputation and fortune in Cedar Rapids at WMT radio and television in a career that spanned six decades. At the same time, he rubbed shoulders with many broadcast legends of the second half of the twentieth century. As early as the mid-1940s, Quarton contracted with Walter Cronkite to deliver Washington news to WMT. It was one of numerous decisions that would elevate Quarton to the forefront of broadcast pioneers. For his part, Cronkite, in his foreword to the book, writes, "I was blessed, because Bill Quarton was one of the best bosses I ever had."

Iowa's rich broadcast history boasts such luminaries as B. J. Palmer, the Cowles family, and sports announcer Ronald "Dutch" Reagan. Quarton describes them all as he modestly understates his