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## The Farm Press, Reform, and Rural Change, 1895–1920

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*The Farm Press, Reform, and Rural Change, 1895–1920*, by John J. Fry. Studies in American Popular History and Culture. New York: Routledge, 2005. xxvii, 230 pp. Graphs, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$80.00 cloth.

Reviewer Kurt E. Leichtle is professor of history at the University of Wisconsin–River Falls. Formerly the manager of the Gibbs Farm Museum, he has presented papers on tractor manufacturers, the social effects of the tractor, and the history of rural women in the Midwest at the turn of the twentieth century.

John Fry takes on a large task, to understand the effect of the farm press on farmers and their world from 1895 to 1920, a period marked by many changes in rural America and many attempts to control those changes through various reforms. Fry divides his study into two parts. First, he describes the newspapers and explains how farmers reacted to them in relation to their other reading. Then he discusses three areas of reform: the role of the church and religion, the movement toward school consolidation, and the question of why one should farm. He starts by citing a 1913 U.S. Department of Agriculture survey, which concluded that the farm press was so widely read that it was the most efficient way to communicate with farmers. He also searched archives in Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri to glean information about which newspapers farmers read and what else they read. His data, spread across the three states, provides fascinating insights into what was being read by members of farm families.

Fry describes the key farm journals in the three states, tracing their histories, editorial policies, and financial successes and failures. In the process he confirms the general movement toward consolidation in American business during this period. He provides excellent data on circulation and advertising revenues and ably differentiates between the journals based on their editors' and owners' perspectives and the issues within their respective circulation areas. He notes that during this period the editor became more an employee following the owner's vision than the person setting the vision. That conclusion raises a theme that could be further developed. As 1920 approached, the journals became more business ventures and less drivers of reform.

The later chapters address reform issues through a discussion of the journals' content, including letters from farmers. The material gathered is impressive, but the analysis seems flat. The material has the potential for a more thorough analysis. The descriptive level is very good, though, enabling the reader to move to the next level.

Fry's detailed research and clear reporting and writing make this a book worth reading. It will help readers begin to understand the role of farm journals at the beginning of the twentieth century. His discus-

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,