

STATE HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY OF IOWA

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

The Annals of Iowa

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Volume 73 | Number 2 (Spring 2014)

pps. 187-189

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## Food Co-ops in America: Communities, Consumption, and Economic Democracy

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ISSN 0003-4827

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### Recommended Citation

Nelson, Philip. "Food Co-ops in America: Communities, Consumption, and Economic Democracy." *The Annals of Iowa* 73 (2014), 187-189.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.12078>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](http://iowa-research-online.org)

in July. Liberals led by Hubert Humphrey forced through a strong civil rights plank over a bland version the administration favored. Then, in late July, at the very time the third-party convention was being held, Truman issued an executive order to desegregate the armed forces. Truman would make a real (and ultimately successful) effort to attract the black vote, speaking in Harlem at the end of the campaign. Wallace, on the other hand, took his campaign into the Deep South, refusing to speak to segregated gatherings and denouncing Jim Crow. His efforts in the South helped dramatize the civil rights issue. Devine shares that view and credits Wallace with drawing attention to Jim Crow as a moral issue.

In some respects, *Henry Wallace's 1948 Presidential Campaign and the Future of Postwar Liberalism* is a critique of historians who have seen postwar Popular Front liberalism as a positive force in American politics. To its author's mind, those historians "romanticize Popular Front liberalism, exaggerate its real and potential influence in postwar politics, and largely misunderstand the motives and goals of anticommunist liberals" (xiii). There is some merit to that comment, yet many of those same historians have furthered our understanding of postwar liberalism, including its efforts in the areas of civil rights, civil liberties, and organized labor.

The Wallace campaign marked the end of an era in American liberalism and the Left. Between 1945 and 1948, a sizeable number of liberals thought there were possibilities to build upon the New Deal, promote social justice, and work out an accommodation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Other liberals shared some of the same goals but were unwilling to work with Communists and saw the Soviet Union as a threat to the United States and peace. Ultimately, as Devine and others have shown, that perspective would prevail.

*Food Co-ops in America: Communities, Consumption, and Economic Democracy*, by Anne Meis Knupfer. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013. xi, 273 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer Philip Nelson is adjunct professor of history at the University of Northern Iowa. He is the author of "The Rockwell Co-operative Society and the Iowa Farmers' Elevator Movement, 1870-1920" (*Annals of Iowa*, 1995).

Food co-ops can be seen as a tangible manifestation of the cultural nexus where interest in food and nutrition, the co-operative tradition, and the desire for participatory democracy and community formation all meet. As such, it is no small or insignificant topic. In *Food Co-ops in America*, Anne Meis Knupfer offers a fresh look at a part of the co-op

movement that has tended toward the small scale, as opposed to many farmer co-operatives, which have often become big businesses. This plays to the author's interests and emphases throughout the book: healthy, affordable food, egalitarianism, small-scale workplaces, and consumer advocacy. In fact, the author is open and honest about being an unabashed advocate of "food co-ops that are responsive to a sense of place" (4). This frankness concerning the author's biases is refreshing and somewhat remarkable (as it is not the custom of otherwise scholarly books to proudly announce their authors' likes and dislikes). Surprisingly, this stance does not compromise the objectivity of the narrative and the analysis, which are generally presented in a balanced and nonpartisan manner, even as the author seeks a new discussion "about the economic and democratic ideals of food" (6).

The book is organized in three main segments. The first part deals with food co-operatives before the Great Depression. The second looks at collective visions of the Depression years. The third focuses on food co-ops founded in the 1960s and later. Each part features a general history of that era, while the latter two parts have additional chapters devoted to case studies. These histories of individual food co-ops, while not long or exhaustive, are where the book really shines. The author has obviously done a great deal of legwork, both literally and figuratively, visiting food co-ops from coast to coast. This research in primary sources is the book's strength and constitutes its main contribution to the historical literature. This effort goes well beyond the usual dusty archival sources to include numerous personal interviews with people in all aspects of the food co-op experience.

By her choices for the case studies, the author gives readers a good introduction to the variety of food co-ops in the United States. But those choices also highlight the difficulties in generalizing about them. For example, why did food co-ops in Ithaca, New York, a college town organization, and one in Hyde Park, an inner-city Chicago co-op, both fail, when other co-ops established during the Depression era, such as the one in Hanover, New Hampshire, and two small-town Vermont co-ops succeed? The author's answer is that successful co-ops were ones that remained small in size and responsive to the desires of their members. Not surprisingly, this coincides with the author's stated biases. The problem here is that the evidence cited by the author does not always seem to support her conclusion. In some cases, bad financial decisions and poor economic conditions appear to be the culprits, while in other cases, local power plays and "poisoned" interpersonal relationships undermined otherwise successful operations. True enough, it may well be that these situations themselves were caused by co-ops be-

coming unresponsive to their members. Nonetheless, this is a difficulty that is never resolved — although, to be fair, it may not be resolvable.

Of special interest to Iowans and midwesterners are the chapters on the New Pioneer Co-operative in Iowa City and cooperatives in the Twin Cities. Both are solid chapters, with the one on the Twin Cities especially fascinating given the extreme ideologically based conflict that erupted in the 1970s. A Marxist-Leninist faction actually took over a food distribution center, The People's Warehouse. Protests, demonstrations, theft of funds, destruction of property, and even physical violence ensued in this year-long battle. The narration of how it all played out is handled well, but one wonders whether more space could have been allocated to a fuller explanation of the conflict's genesis.

The book has a few other minor deficiencies that tend to crop up in the chapters intended as historical summaries: scholarly name-dropping; the introduction of a topic, issue, or case and then leaving it unfinished; and sometimes the jumbling together of a number of seemingly unrelated ideas without an indication of the paragraph's main idea. These all detract from otherwise adequate histories of each period under review. For example, at one point, criminal actions were filed against the A&P grocery chain for selling below cost to drive food co-ops and other stores out of business, but the author does not tell readers how the case was concluded. Overall, these glitches are minor and do not compromise the general value of the book.

The book is laced with headings in bold print of various sizes, denoting the form of a textbook, but at 203 pages of actual text, it is probably too short to fulfill that function adequately. What remains here of substantial value is the noteworthy field research, which will no doubt become the basis of textbooks on food co-ops and other secondary works.

*Wheel Fever: How Wisconsin Became a Great Bicycling State*, by Jesse J. Gant and Nicholas J. Hoffman. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2013. xxx, 255. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95 paperback.

Reviewer Leo Landis is museum curator at the State of Iowa Historical Museum, where he curated the exhibit "Riding through History: A River-to-River Legacy on Wheels."

Is the bicycle for transportation, recreation, or both? Following the Civil War, Americans found new opportunities for leisure and entertainment, and the bicycle provided a means for getting from place to place. Wisconsinites driving these questions are the focus of *Wheel Fever*,