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## The Iowa State Fair

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*The Iowa State Fair*, by Kurt Ullrich. Iowa and the Midwest Experience Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014. ix, 134 pp. Illustrations. \$25.00 paperback.

Reviewer Chris Rasmussen is associate professor of history at Fairleigh Dickinson University. He is working on a book about the Iowa State Fair.

For most fairgoers the Iowa State Fair is a kaleidoscopic blur, but Kurt Ullrich's appealing black-and-white photographs of the 2013 fair freeze time, capturing moments that enable us to see the fair more clearly.

Ullrich's book is divided into chapters on the fair's history, sounds, animals, competition, commerce, and youth. The fair's history is a tale of both tradition and innovation. The livestock judging and midway look nearly identical to their predecessors a century ago, but Iowans now take selfies and photos of the fair's exhibits to post on Facebook or send to friends. Ullrich's photo of a fairgoer snapping a cell phone photo of the iconic Butter Cow encapsulates the mixture of tradition and innovation that has always lain at the heart of the fair. To the extent that pictures can illustrate sound, his photographs suggest the fair's cacophony of rock bands, brass bands, fiddling, and yodeling. Iowans will compete at seemingly anything: biggest boar, best ears of corn, plate of apples, chess, barbecue, best beard, stacking hay bales, throwing cow chips. Some of these contests are lighthearted, but Ullrich's most revealing photos capture the intense, competitive focus of the 4-H exhibitors, so different from the carefree gaze of the fairgoers ambling across the grounds. As for the animals, as we look at them, they look right back at us. The fair has always been accompanied by salespeople, who hawk everything from lemonade to satellite dishes. And the young people, whether showing livestock or riding the carousel, are evidence that the fair will still be there, reassuringly familiar, yet new as always, decades from now.