

Building the Invisible Orphanage: a Prehistory of the American Welfare System

ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

"Building the Invisible Orphanage: a Prehistory of the American Welfare System." *The Annals of Iowa* 59 (2000), 183-184.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.10356>

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Smeins never systematically addresses the issue suggested in the book's title: the relationship between domestic architecture and American identity. The closest she comes to addressing this question is to quote a contemporary observation of what was called the "anonymous style." The nation's "native work," that observer claimed, was "the natural thing for a people restless, inventive, restrained by no artistic scruples or diffidence, fond of positive and even startling effects and given to display" (262). For those interested in understanding the promoters of Victorian house designs, this is a useful and informative book.

Building the Invisible Orphanage: A Prehistory of the American Welfare System, by Matthew A. Crenson. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. xii, 383 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$45.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY KENNETH CMIEL, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

The past few years have seen the publication of a bevy of books on the history of orphanages in the United States. In general, those books have been more sympathetic to the historic orphanage than its popular stereotype as a heartless place cruel to children. Matthew Crenson's *Building the Invisible Orphanage* adds another brick to the literature. He provides an overview of policy and debate about U.S. orphanages from the middle of the nineteenth century through the 1920s.

Crenson is a little less friendly to the orphanage than some other recent historians (this reviewer included), yet he does not caricature. His book is a finely etched portrait of what the orphanage was and what people thought about it. He tells of the increasing reliance on orphanages as the nineteenth century progressed; how most children in those institutions actually had a parent living; how there never were enough orphanages to house all dependent children. Finally, he recounts how late nineteenth-century progressive reformers became disenchanted with what they called "institutionalism" and devised the modern foster care system and mother's pensions as alternatives. The latter became the basis for the New Deal's Aid to Families with Dependent Children program. In all, *Building the Invisible Orphanage* is a fine overview of the history of the institution and its alternatives.

Many of these themes have been discussed in other recent work on the orphanage. Yet Crenson tells the story well. Moreover, he shrewdly adds to our understanding in a number of places. I have never read as good an account of the politics of "placing out" in the nineteenth and twentieth century. In the 1800s, unattached children in large cities were indentured and sent West to live on farms. The archi-

fects of this placing out system thought they were taking children from bad environments and putting them in Christian (that is, Protestant) homes. Crenson nicely shows how both Catholic and Protestant managers of urban orphanages opposed the practice because they preferred to keep siblings together in an orphanage than separate them forever. Crenson cites a few moving examples of children indentured on Iowa farms whose overriding memory was of the cold, demanding, and sexually abusive households they lived in.

At times Crenson conflates the attack on the orphanage with its downfall. Yet most orphanages existed until after World War II. Crenson does not see that progressive reformers did not control urban welfare networks in the years before the First World War. Nor does he acknowledge the détente between reformers and orphanage managers during the 1920s. Reformers who advocated modern foster care generally preferred to expand the whole child welfare system rather than simply replace the orphanage with foster care. This changed only in the late forties. Despite these reservations, this is an excellent piece of scholarship. It stands with Timothy Hasci's *Second Home* as the most synthetic of the recent work on orphanages.

Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917, by Elizabeth Sanders. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. xi, 532 pp. Tables, maps, notes, index. \$48.00 cloth, \$16.00 paper.

REVIEWED BY JEFFREY KOLNICK, SOUTHWEST STATE UNIVERSITY

Elizabeth Sanders has written a useful book that provides new insights on the reforms of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. She contends that "agrarian movements constituted the most important political force driving the development of the American national state in the half century before World War I" (1). Agrarian movements, as set out by Sanders, maintained a complex set of beliefs and policy goals, whereby farmers and workers sought to have the state restrain corporations, prevent the excessive concentration of wealth and market power, and provide public services either not made available by private industry or provided only through monopolies. Through such a "Jeffersonian and republican" vision of a producer/entrepreneurial economy, agrarians hoped to create a genuinely free commerce that would lead to a more just and broadly prosperous society (4).

Sanders sees the core agrarian political agenda as a series of policy goals widely debated during the Populist and Progressive Eras. Those goals included improved public education, reformed tax and mone-

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