

From the Garden Club: Rural Women Writing Community

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Silver Screens: A Pictorial History of Milwaukee's Movie Theaters, by Larry Widen and Judi Anderson. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2007. xi, 180 pp. Illustrations, appendix, bibliography, index. \$24.95 paper.

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

Silver Screens extends Widen and Anderson's work on Milwaukee's cinema history, which began in 1986 with the publication of *Milwaukee Movie Palaces*. The authors write with an eye to the local, highlighting aspects of the city seemingly intended to spark the memory of the reader. The inclusion of a range of detailed and beautiful photographs, however, will interest even those who have never visited Milwaukee. The authors rely primarily on interviews and archival research, a combination that maintains an aura of reminiscence even as it presents precise data on individual theatrical sites. The text is divided into six chapters, ordered chronologically from 1842 to the present, and includes an afterword that focuses on recent renovation and improvements in comfort and projection.

Aside from the photographs, the most remarkable aspects of *Silver Screens* are its numerous sidebars that provide portraits of local businessmen, discussions of specific districts, and descriptions of the theaters themselves. Less useful, perhaps, are the more general inserts on popular stars, films, and technologies. Nonetheless, most of these broad paragraphs do attempt to connect a comprehensive history of the cinema to the local event; for example, the shifting responsibilities of projectionists from the silent to the classical Hollywood period center for Widen and Anderson around the formation of Local 164. Finally, an appendix listing the addresses, seating capacity, and current status of any theater ever to exhibit a movie in Milwaukee will be appreciated by historians and longtime residents of the city alike.

From the Garden Club: Rural Women Writing Community, by Charlotte Hogg. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006. xiv, 182 pp. Appendix, bibliography, notes. \$15.95 paper.

Reviewer Christine Pawley is professor of library and information studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is the author of *Reading on the Middle Border: The Culture of Print in Late-Nineteenth-Century Osage, Iowa* (2001).

When Charlotte Hogg was 11 years old, her family moved from Fargo, North Dakota, to Paxton, the little town in western Nebraska where

her father had grown up and where her grandmother, Dorlis Osborn Hogg, had lived her whole life. From sixth grade until she left for college, Charlotte lived in this "agrarianist" community of about 600, where everyone knew her and her family, and where her grandmother was a well-loved and respected figure. In Paxton, as in hundreds of other small midwestern towns, older women such as Hogg's grandmother led lives in which reading and writing played a highly significant part, yet one that is easily glossed over in the depiction of older rural women as narrowly confined to the privacy of the home. Such literacy activities were often the basis of older women's community involvement and the source of their public identity and authority.

As a graduate student, Hogg returned to Paxton to research the role older women played in the town's literacy practices. Drawing on scholarship such as Anne Ruggles Gere's work on clubwomen's literacy, Deborah Fink's on the lives of rural women, and especially Deborah Brandt's concept of literacy sponsorship, Hogg examines older rural women's literacy work as researchers and as members of local organizations. *From the Garden Club* is an account of this ethnographic study of such everyday literacy events as documenting cemetery records, writing the town history, running the public library, finding information for the Garden Club, and uncovering family genealogies. Such mundane activities, Hogg shows, are the very foundation of small towns like Paxton, where much stability and richness of community life depends on women's cultural work of telling stories, maintaining memories, and enhancing the literacy opportunities of its members.

From the Garden Club also engages broader issues that affect small midwestern communities. Hogg herself took part in the "brain drain" to the city; as an adolescent, she recalls, everyone correctly assumed that she would eventually leave Paxton and not return. The continual outward migration of the young represents a loss of investment that is almost impossible to replace. The elderly, too, find themselves leaving when they can no longer live alone and need the medical facilities of larger towns. Hogg avoids romanticizing life in Paxton as a rural idyll. In the process of being robbed of his new pickup truck, she relates, her cousin Steve was murdered by a meth addict from Texas. Still, the prime focus of this book is on the pleasures and satisfactions that the cycle of literacy sponsorship brings to the older women and their adult children whom she interviewed, and even more importantly to the rural communities of which they form such an integral part. Reflective and sympathetic in tone, the book itself is a pleasure to read.