

The Heart of Things: A Midwestern Almanac

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were going and why. The moment they were out of earshot, I promptly forgot to care about those flyover lives, occupied as I was by rock picking, hole digging, and bean hoeing — such homely lives as the rest of us, grounded, are left to wrest from the land.

The Heart of Things: A Midwestern Almanac, by John Hildebrand. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2014. xi, 188 pp. \$22.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Barbara J. Dilly is associate professor of anthropology at Creighton University and an Iowa resident. Her current research focuses on popular culture images of young women in American agriculture. She also applies her research and personal experience as an active participant in the transformation of American agriculture toward more sustainable practices in the Midwest.

In *The Heart of Things*, John Hildebrand helps midwesterners appreciate our lives. He urges us to recognize that we live in interesting places, that we are interesting people. As we read, we can hear ourselves and our neighbors tell our stories. We can sense the importance of day-to-day events like the ones we recorded in those almanacs that hung on the wall. Hildebrand interprets a culturally rich childhood on the farm from his wife's old pocket diary. It was a time and place in which children learned early the harsh realities of life. On February 4, 1965, at the age of 11, she wrote, "It warmed up to 4 above. Then it got windy. When we got home from school had to chase the sheep in because some are going to have lambs." In this ordinary diary, Hildebrand reads and writes a life of useful people. On February 28, young Sharon writes, "Had triplet lambs last night. Went to church. It was nice today too. In the afternoon we thought March would come in like a lamb. We were holding lambs all afternoon."

This work is not just heartwarming; it is also instructive. A celebrated creative writer, Hildebrand is also widely recognized as a scholar and a teacher. He not only understands the Midwest and makes it understandable to those who do not live here, but he also teaches midwesterners to be curious about and reflect on the rich meanings of their own lives. Hildebrand conveys appreciation and deep respect for the extraordinary in the ordinary by seeing the fullness in simplicity. He recognizes how local people solidify group cohesiveness in small talk. Driving down country roads, he asks of every place he passes, "What would it be like to live here?" He sees a whole world of meaning in domestic obligations and reminds us that that is what makes life interesting. Hildebrand notices a lilac bush on the tangled river bank and wonders how it got there. Realizing he has stumbled across an old farmstead site, he imagines what kind of woman planted it and how she

enjoyed the lilac's fragrant blossoms as she brought purpose and beauty to her prairie homestead, of which the lilac is all that remains.

Hildebrand's work reflects his seasoned skills as a writer, but he tells us that writing skills are learned more through insight than technique. Reading Hildebrand's work will get you thinking about your own life. That is what he intends. He writes for an audience not to entertain, but to encourage. As he tells his stories, he gives voice to all of us who have ever sat by a small fire on a summer night and listened to the crickets creak while we watched the faces of our family members. As we look up at the moon, we try to find the words to tell them how much they mean to us. Hildebrand gives us the words. He conveys the honest emotions that are the heart of things.

The Bingo Queens of Oneida: How Two Moms Started Tribal Gaming in Wisconsin, by Mike Hoeft. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2014. xxi, 189 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$16.95 paperback.

Reviewer Kathleen Ratteree is an independent consultant for the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin. She holds an M.S. in anthropology and a masters of public health from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and has written an article series on blood quantum and identity for the tribal newspaper, *Kalihwisaks*. She lives in Denmark, Wisconsin.

The first Oneida bingo game in 1976 grossed \$85. It was held in the first Indian bingo hall in Wisconsin and one of the first in the United States. Today, the Oneida casino, located just outside Green Bay, is a multi-million-dollar industry that generates almost 50 percent of total tribal revenue. Before Foxwoods and Potawatomi Casino, several enterprising tribes got their start in the gaming industry by opening card rooms and bingo parlors. In *The Bingo Queens of Oneida*, Mike Hoeft tracks the progression of Oneida gaming from a small-stakes bingo game to help pay the civic center's light bill to a vital enterprise that finances health care, education, social services, and capital improvements on the reservation. For Hoeft, "Oneida bingo was born of many mothers" (28), and the book tells the story of how two particularly determined Oneida women, Sandra (Ninham) Brehmer and Alma Webster, created the tribe's first major source of revenue on a reservation where about half the population lived in poverty.

Hoeft focuses specifically on Oneida gaming. However, the story mirrors struggles elsewhere in Indian Country. "Indian gaming" is a recent phenomenon that has rapidly developed in unanticipated ways. It has generated complex legal issues ranging from constitutional clashes over state and federal powers to rivalries within and between