

## Prairie Visions: Writings by Hamlin Garland

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Interestingly, there is one source that neither Alexander nor I knew about when we wrote our respective books on Coxe's Army: an unpublished autobiography written by Coxe's grandson titled "82 and Still Counting." A couple of years ago a Coxe descendant mailed me a copy of the thick manuscript. The document is interesting for the personal details it provides about "The General" from the perspective of a close family member. The author recalled, for example, that, as a boy, he met his grandfather while walking down the streets of Massillon, Ohio, the family's home town, the old man usually failed to recognize him, Coxe's mind apparently being focused instead on his many ideas. Indeed, Coxe provided the philosophical impetus behind the march on Washington, but it was his California sidekick, the ever colorful Carl Browne, who turned the event into a lively spectacle beloved and occasionally manipulated by journalists eager to sell newspapers.

Alexander's distillation of the details of the march and its leading personalities together with a thorough examination of its long-term significance makes for good reading and a worthy addition to John's Hopkins University Press's Witness to History book series. In addition to his highly readable text, Alexander thoughtfully includes a detailed map of the route of Coxe's march, a variety of pictures, detailed notes, and a list of suggestions for further reading.

*Prairie Visions: Writings by Hamlin Garland*, edited by Keith Newlin; photographs by Jon Morris. Des Moines: The Iowan Books, 2015. 175 pp. Illustrations, notes. \$21.95 paperback.

Reviewer Elizabeth Raymond is professor of history at the University of Nevada, Reno. She has written extensively about a sense of place in the American West and Midwest.

*Prairie Visions* is a project in historical revival, reintroducing early work by a writer who is not today well known, and reimagining the landscape of the Iowa prairies as they were first being broken. The book republishes articles by Iowa author Hamlin Garland that first appeared in *American Magazine* in 1888. According to biographer Keith Newlin, these articles were Garland's first published prose works. Later, somewhat reconfigured, they formed the basis of *Boy Life on the Prairie*, published by Macmillan in 1899 and frequently reprinted. This earliest version of Garland's boyhood sketches, however, appears here for the first time since 1888. Garland was an important regionalist writer at the turn of the century, perhaps best known for his short story collection *Main-Traveled Roads* (1891). In that volume he realistically depicted the drudgery

and tedium of the farmer's existence, a theme that is apparent in the *American Magazine* articles as well.

The six articles in the series focus on the seasonal round of farm work and especially the ways boys participated. While Garland recounts the exhausting demands of cultivating, planting, harvesting, husking corn, and threshing wheat, he also describes the utter freedom and delight of herding cattle or haying on the open prairie that was then still accessible in Mitchell County. He begins with "The Huskin'" in late September and moves through "The Thrashin'" in October and November. He largely ignores winter, when youngsters were presumably occupied with school, ending during "The Voice of Spring," about mid-March. The year continues with "Between Hay an' Grass" in early May and "Meadow Memories" of summer haying and thunderstorms. The articles end with "Melons and Early Frosts," which records the work of plowing for the next crop amid the cold November rains.

The accounts are keenly descriptive and richly observed. The mechanics of corn husking and stacking hay are described at length, with a running commentary on the intermittent ways boys participated in the work. Garland clearly recognizes the differences between the boys' labor, grueling as it sometimes was, and that of the hired men and farmers. He writes also with an awareness of how alien these things will be to most of his readers, as suggested by his indifferent attempt to render the local dialect in his titles. The editor provides useful annotations of some of the more arcane farm equipment and methods that Garland describes.

The articles are accompanied by a series of 40 contemporary photographs by Jon Morris that depict both farm fields and prairie landscape but do not allude to the work so exhaustingly recounted by Garland in the sketches themselves. They reflect instead the quiet beauty and expansive landscape that Garland also recorded in the *American Magazine* articles. Morris made all the images in Mitchell County, Iowa, where the Garland family was living when the author had the experiences described in the book. A list of plates at the end of the volume identifies the images, but they appear in the text accompanied only by quotations from other Garland works, which sometimes have a relatively obscure relationship to the particular image. The photographs are alternately illustrative and evocative but necessarily depict a landscape far different from the one Garland encountered in the 1870s, when he lived there.

Hamlin Garland scholars will appreciate *Prairie Visions*, informed by Newlin's graceful introduction to Garland's themes and method; but it will be of interest as well to a broader readership that includes scholars of nineteenth-century midwestern childhood or farming methods and general readers interested in how one perceptive observer understood his

and his family's place in the opening of the western prairies. Ultimately, *Prairie Visions* depicts the hard work that produced modern Iowa.

*The Selected Letters of Laura Ingalls Wilder*, edited by William Anderson. New York: HarperCollins, 2016. xxvii, 400 pp. Illustrations, maps, index. \$26.99 hardcover.

Reviewer John J. Fry is professor of history at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois. An authority on the life and works of Laura Ingalls Wilder, he is also the editor of *Almost Pioneers: One Couple's Homesteading Adventure in the West* (2013).

Laura Ingalls Wilder's eight Little House books provide fictionalized accounts of Wilder's childhood in Wisconsin, Kansas, Minnesota, and South Dakota. They became instant best-sellers when they were published during the 1930s and 1940s, and they remained popular for the rest of the twentieth century, especially when the television series *Little House on the Prairie* aired from 1974 to 1983. It is unclear whether the books are as popular now as they were during the twentieth century, but there is still publishing interest in Wilder. During the past ten years there have appeared new biographies (Pamela Smith Hill's *Laura Ingalls Wilder: A Writer's Life* [2007] and Sallie Ketcham's *Laura Ingalls Wilder: American Writer on the Prairie* [2015]), her final previously unpublished work (*Pioneer Girl*, edited by Hill [2014]), and a memoir of engagement with the books (Wendy McClure's *The Wilder Life* [2011]). Now William Anderson, the foremost living authority on Wilder, has edited this collection of over 400 letters Wilder wrote between 1894 and her death in 1957. The volume is a worthy addition to the body of Wilder's work.

The letters are arranged in strict date order and divided chronologically into six chapters. Each chapter begins with an overview of the events in Wilder's life during that period. Anderson has added a descriptive title to each letter, usually using words from the letter itself. Most letters also have a brief introduction that provides background on the correspondent and/or the context of the letter.

For those interested in how the Little House books were written, this book provides 100 pages of correspondence from Wilder to her daughter, Rose Wilder Lane, between 1936 and 1940, when Wilder was writing several of the Little House books and Lane was editing and revising them for publication. The letters provide a window on the lively collaboration between the two women. At times Wilder, who was used to being able to tell her daughter what to do, had to accept Rose's advice about writing. There were also occasions, however, when Wilder refused