

## The Floppy Show

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into the war. In pursuit of his goal to publish a "people's paper," Evjue would train his sights on big business and industry from then on.

Among the many liberal causes Evjue championed or challenged, perhaps none had more impact than his founding of the Progressive Party with Robert "Bob" La Follette in 1924. Although in his "insurgent" presidential run La Follette won only Wisconsin, by then the course was set. The authors explain, "Progressivism, as espoused by La Follette and his allies at the start of the twentieth century shaped the ideology of the *Capital Times* and its crusading spirit." That spirit was quickly tested when, in the same year, the paper exposed and condemned a mass meeting of the Ku Klux Klan in Madison.

In 1951 the newspaper's editors recognized Joseph McCarthy early on as a demagogue and a fear monger. At a time when many state and major national newspapers were supporting McCarthy, the *Times* fought him relentlessly "with all its resources," even as it would take on environmental, civil rights, racial, and antiwar issues over time.

Between them, Zweifel and Nichols reflect a key transition for their newspaper from hard copy to digital format. Indeed, the published edition of the *Times* outlived most other city afternoon dailies elsewhere in the country by decades, largely due to a joint Madison Newspapers, Inc., with the *State Journal*. Today a quick search of the Web finds the "*Cap Times*" alive and well with "front page" editorial content by Nichols that Evjue would applaud.

As a "house history," this book offers insight to future historians of journalism. As a memoir of another era, it reminds us that progressivism has faced down war and famine before. And that it can, again.

*The Floppy Show*, by Jeff Stein. Images of America Series. Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2018. 128 pp. Illustrations. \$21.99 paperback.

Reviewer Phillip J. Hutchison is associate professor of Integrated Strategic Communication at the University of Kentucky. He is the author of "The Lost World of Marshal J: History, Memory, and Iowa's Forgotten Broadcast Legend" (*Annals of Iowa*, 2009).

Local entertainment television may be one of the most overlooked social legacies of the mid-twentieth century. Most local television stations broadcast two to five hours of locally produced entertainment programming each weekday from the 1950s through the 1970s. Moreover, viewers did not just watch these local television programs passively; rather, they actively engaged these television rituals as part of their experience of local life. Yet often these realities have been lost to history for two reasons: First, few of these programs were documented, much less

archived. Second, all too many contemporary broadcasters, historians, and media critics dismiss local entertainment programs as a prefabricated television aesthetic of little substance—it was amusing, but not much else. Fortunately, Iowa broadcast historian Jeff Stein has never fallen prey to this shortsightedness. Stein's latest book, *The Floppy Show*, is a case in point. Although technically the 127-page book is a popular history that is accessible to diverse audiences, Stein treats the subject matter as a serious social phenomenon. As a result, the book offers valuable insights to any student of Iowa history.

*The Floppy Show* chronicles a well-remembered hosted cartoon program that aired on WHO-TV in Des Moines from 1957 through 1987. Floppy, a high-voiced beagle puppet, was the creation of legendary Iowa broadcaster Duane Ellett. Stein illustrates how Ellett and Floppy helped structure daily life in central Iowa for three decades. Accordingly, readers will learn how Ellett's warm, reassuring presence created a virtual refuge for diverse audiences at predictable times each day. As with most local histories from Arcadia Publishing, *The Floppy Show* emphasizes photographs over detailed historical narratives. In this case, however, Stein collected and presented approximately 250 photographs and captions in ways that create a visual narrative, one that weaves through overlapping institutional, social, and historical phenomena. Broadcast historians, for example, will appreciate how the visual narrative chronicles Ellett's professional evolution. In the absence of early recordings, the book's images document sponsors, studio sets, and program formats, all of which inform the relationship between television institutions and culture. Additionally, the images and captions provide an insightful history of promotional communication during the first generation of television.

To students of social history, the visual narrative also tells an important story of mid-twentieth-century life in Iowa. Ellett and Floppy hobnobbed with nearly everyone who was anyone in Iowa during that era. Accordingly, readers will find myriad photographs of the duo interacting with an array of major celebrities and political figures. Equally significant, Stein documents scores of public appearances in which Ellett and Floppy engaged enthusiastic fans of all ages. Although some of those visits reflected commercial promotions, others (such as hospital visits and charity drives) represented the sorts of community outreach efforts associated with local television personalities. These factors underscore the point that audiences actively engaged these programs and their creators as part of local life. The fact that every Iowa television station featured similar entertainment programs highlights the generalizability of Stein's insights.

Yes, for many readers, popular histories such as *The Floppy Show* will evoke a great deal of nostalgia; but serious historians should not confuse nostalgia with frivolity. As American Studies scholar George Lipsitz observes, “The messages of popular culture circulate in a network of production and reception that is quite serious. . . . A sideshow sometimes can be the main event.” Accordingly, Stein effectively illustrates why a long-running children’s cartoon show that featured a dog puppet should be considered a main event in Iowa history.

*History Comes Alive: Public History and Popular Culture in the 1970s*, by M. J. Rymsza-Pawlowska. Studies in United States Culture. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. xiii, 241 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 paperback.

Reviewer Rebecca Conard is professor history emerita at Middle Tennessee State University, where she directed the public history program. She is the author of *Benjamin Shambaugh and the Intellectual Foundations of Public History* (2002).

Iowa Living History Farms, which opened in 1970, and the World Food Conference of 1976, held at Iowa State University, were Iowa’s two nationally recognized U.S. Bicentennial projects, but Iowans marked the nation’s 200th anniversary with hundreds of undertakings—from the restoration of Old Capitol in Iowa City and Terrace Hill in Des Moines to the 811 towns and cities recognized as Bicentennial Communities, the 1,500 “Iowa Heritage in the American Revolution” study kits distributed to fifth-grade teachers, and the 5,000 farms that qualified for Century Farm designation. Iowa led the nation with 2,800 recorded projects and events, 50 percent more than any other state. (See *Iowa and the U.S. Bicentennial, 1776–1976: The Final Report* [1976].) Iowa isn’t mentioned once in *History Comes Alive: Public History and Popular Culture in the 1970s*, but if you are curious about the larger context in which bicentennial celebrations—and protests—occurred, read this book.

The author, M. J. Rymsza-Pawlowska, sees the bicentennial as a pivotal event in American cultural history. As she reads the 1970s, the bicentennial, as well as the decade itself, marked a transformation of historical consciousness among Americans. She argues that in the 1970s a “logic of preservation” gave way to a “logic of reenactment” as a way of making sense of the past (6–7). By this she means that history-based performative activities, such as living history, reenactment, and immersive or interactive experiences at museums and historic sites, began to challenge the traditional mode of understanding the past through documents and other material evidence. The author’s premise concerning