

Gilbert N. Haugen: Norwegian-American Farm Politician

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contact between Danes and Poles then. Groups do not interact in property tax lists or on ethnic maps, but in real events recorded in the local press. That is another consequence of preferring oral interviews over contemporary newspapers. Interviewed decades later, subjects often omit conflict. What is left are mainly platitudes.

The secondary literature listed in the bibliography rarely informs the analysis. Robert Ostergren's model of social and economic communities in Swedish-American Isanti County, Minnesota, would work wonderfully for the Poles' decision to retain railroadless Wilno while trading in the railroad town of Ivanhoe. Radzilowski gives a good description of Wilno, but his promising start falls short when he follows the conventions and ignores the best evidence—local newspapers.

Gilbert N. Haugen: Norwegian-American Farm Politician, by Peter T. Harstad and Bonnie Lindemann. Iowa City and Des Moines: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1992. xi, 217 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, appendixes, tables, chronology, index. \$14.95 cloth.

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After a nearly twenty-year hiatus, the State Historical Society of Iowa has added another volume to its long-standing Iowa Biographical Series. Actually, much of the research for this book, primarily in the Society's extensive but uneven Haugen Collection, was done in the late 1970s when the authors worked for the Society—Peter T. Harstad as director and Bonnie Lindemann as a temporary employee. Much of the writing was also done at that time, but as the authors explain in the preface, changes in their personal lives, including new jobs, along with Society reorganization and a major building project resulted in the manuscript laying dormant for more than a decade. Fortunately, the authors and the Society eventually revived the project and guided it to publication.

Most students of American history are at least vaguely familiar with Iowa Congressman Gilbert N. Haugen (1859–1933) and can identify him as a champion of agricultural reform during the 1920s. His name is forever linked with that of Oregon Senator Charles McNary as co-sponsors of the McNary-Haugen Bill, one of the most controversial pieces of farm legislation ever introduced in Congress. But as the authors rightly point out, there was much more to Haugen's life than this farm bill.

Born to immigrant parents in Wisconsin on the eve of the Civil War, Gilbert N. Haugen was only fourteen when he joined the steady stream of Norwegian and Norwegian-American migrants to northern Iowa.

Before long he was the owner of a 160-acre farm near Kensett in Worth County. Widowed in 1892, when his wife died shortly after the birth of their second child, he never remarried. Instead, he devoted the remainder of his life to farming, banking, and Republican politics. His political career, so remarkable in its longevity that he eventually broke the record for continuous service in the House of Representatives (33 years and 20 days), spanned the period from Populism to the beginnings of the New Deal. It also paralleled a prolonged term of Republican domination of Iowa politics, a time when the state's congressional delegation was one of the most important and influential in the nation's capital.

Haugen was the first Norwegian American elected to Congress from Iowa, and throughout his long career he seldom missed an opportunity to remind the residents of the Fourth District of his ethnic heritage. Yet the district's Norwegian population was never large enough to ensure election. Haugen's repeated victories owed more to his sensitivity to rural and small-town issues, such as opposition to oleomargarine and daylight savings time, and to his creation of an effective political organization. The authors' accounts of Haugen's battle with James E. Blythe for the 1902 Republican nomination is a classic description of politics at the grass roots in an era long before radio and television changed much of the election process.

Haugen served as chairman of the House Agriculture Committee from 1919 to 1931. In that position he was required to deal with a much broader and more diverse agricultural constituency than that of Iowa's Fourth District. Although he proudly pointed to many achievements, including the Packers and Stockyard Act of 1921, the Grain Futures Act, and amendments to the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Food Control Act, his inability to secure enactment of the farm relief legislation that bore his name was a bitter defeat. Rejecting production controls as "immoral," Haugen embraced a scheme to reduce price-depressing commodity surpluses by having a government corporation purchase excess production and sell it at a lower price in the world market. After years of debate, the McNary-Haugen Bill finally passed Congress in 1927 only to be vetoed by President Calvin Coolidge. It suffered the same fate the following year. Haugen was angered by Herbert Hoover's opposition to the bill and found it difficult to support his fellow Republican from Iowa for the presidency in 1928. A disappointment of the book is the authors' failure to explore more fully the animosity between Haugen and Hoover over farm policy.

On balance, *Gilbert N. Haugen: Norwegian-American Farm Politician* is a useful addition to the Iowa Biographical Series, a brief but solid work that should be of interest to a wide variety of readers. One can hope that it will soon be joined by additional books in the series.

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