Prohibition in Eastern Iowa

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The arc of Douma’s argument is quite plausible: “Dutch American identities were originally anchored in the social structure of the church, which served as a de facto ethnic institution. Dutch American ethnic identities today, however, are tied more closely to the family unit than to community or congregation. . . . Dutch ethnic identification in America has been replaced with a strong interest in Dutch heritage and ancestry, both largely detached from religion” (157). Yet the preponderance of his evidence is from western Michigan in general, and Holland in particular. He gives only a cursory nod to Wisconsin, Iowa (i.e., Pella), Chicago, southern California, and a few other places. Thus, the applicability of his argument for Dutch Americans beyond Holland, Michigan, remains to be shown. Western Michigan was, and still is, the center of midwestern and western Dutch American culture, but it is not, and never has been, the entirety of that culture.


Reviewer Timothy Walch is the director emeritus of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and a volunteer at the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City.

“All I know is what I read in the papers,” Will Rogers told the New York Times in September 1923. That humorous observation could have been the organizing principle for Prohibition in Eastern Iowa. In 128 pages, Linda Betsinger McCann provides something of a compilation of newspaper stories about prohibition in eastern Iowa.

McCann may be familiar to readers with an interest in local Iowa history. She is the author of two dozen books, including seven on the history of the Cedar Valley alone. A history enthusiast who spent many years as a registered nurse, McCann has devoted her retirement to writing histories of various Iowa topics. Her most recent book before this one was on the interurban railroad between Waverly and Cedar Rapids; her next will be on Civilian Conservation Camps, presumably in Iowa.

McCann’s interest in prohibition came as a result of conversations with young people who have never heard of this “noble experiment.” As she did for her other books, McCann conducted substantial library
research, arranged interviews, and began to write. The result is serviceable but far from definitive. It reflects a variety of strengths as well as significant limitations. The book will be informative for those who know little about the topic but will not meet the needs or expectations of academic historians.

Prohibition in Eastern Iowa provides a cursory overview of the implementation and enforcement of prohibition in eastern Iowa from 1920 to 1933. McCann organized her book into eight chapters plus an introduction, conclusion, and bibliography. She includes chapters on organizations involved in the campaign, on brewers and the liquor industry, on the impact of prohibition on the state, and even a chapter on “loop holes.”

McCann writes reasonably well; most readers will have no trouble with her prose. Her chapters use bold type and subheads to highlight subtopics of particular importance. More important, many of the chapters have extended quotations from numerous local newspapers. Each quotation block is printed in italics but not set off from the rest of the text. Some readers will find this use of bold type, roman type, and extended italics to be disconcerting. Although each newspaper quotation is identified by the title of the paper and the date of publication, McCann does not provide specific citations for other sources that she used in her research.

Prohibition in Eastern Iowa is one of several similar books published under the auspices of The Iowan, a company devoted to promoting the state’s culture and heritage. As a magazine, The Iowan goes back to 1952; in recent years, the company has branched into book publishing as well. With all of its publications, The Iowan relies on free-lance writers and historians to produce articles and books that celebrate as well as inform. Both the author and the publisher are to be commended for their work in this effort.


Reviewer Thomas A. Britten is associate professor of history at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. He is the author of The Lipan Apaches (2010); Black Warriors: A History of the Seminole-Negro Indian Scouts (1999); and American Indians in World War I: At War and at Home (1997).

Raymond C. Kaquatosh (Little Hawk) was born July 25, 1924, on the Menominee reservation in eastern Wisconsin. The fifth of seven children born to a Menominee medicine woman, Raymond grew up in a caring and stable household until his father’s death in 1933 at the height