

Lyell D. Henry, Jr. **Was this Heaven? A Self-Portrait of Iowa on Early Postcards.** Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1995. Pp. ix + 255, illustrations, references, index. \$29.95 cloth.

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During the first dozen years of the twentieth century, Americans purchased and mailed thousands of locally photographed postcards which recorded images of the unusual, the whimsical, and the commonplace in the surrounding communities. By preserving consciously-selected images of "everyday life," collections of these postcards form unique resources for students of folklife, material, and popular culture. Henry's volume is one of several recent publications which present such collections with commentary to a larger audience.

The volume's title is a play on words from the movie "Field of Dreams," in which a ball-player returned from the "Beyond" asks, "Is this Heaven?" and receives the reply, "No, this is Iowa." Henry uses this exchange in his introductory essay to underscore the essential boosterism and self-containment underlying these postcards, citing such scholars as Walter Lord, Richard Hofstadter, Henry F. May, William Dean Howells, and Frederick Lewis Allen who agree that early twentieth century American rural life imbued qualities of hope, innocence, and a sense of the "rightness of things."

Henry draws mainly from the collection of David A. Wilson, whom he graciously acknowledges for his cooperation. He does not, however, disclose information about Wilson's motivations as a collector or his sense of aesthetics. Instead, the book is mostly a series of generic images that present a range of events and activities. Henry provides a concise introduction to each section of the book, and is careful to note that the pictures present ideal images rather than particularly accurate representations of everyday Iowan life. Yet while Henry's brief commentary does provide some context for the images, its focus is more presentational than analytical. As a compendium of images, then, the book is quite fascinating. In this sense, the book strikes me as "folklore lite," in the best sense of the slogan "tastes great; less filling."