

Book Reviews

Local History Today: Papers Presented at Four Regional Workshops for Local Historical Organizations in Indiana, June, 1978-April, 1979. By Richard Jensen, Robert M. Sutton, Thomas D. Clark, and Thomas J. Schlereth. Introduction by Thomas K. Krasean. (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1979. Pp. viii, 86. Maps, notes, illustrations, appendix. Paperbound, \$1.50.)

This brief collection of papers dealing with interpretive approaches to community history will be of value to those who engage in local history research and its public presentation through museum exhibits, publications, and lectures. The authors, all prominent midwestern historians, were selected to present keynote addresses to four Indiana regional workshops for local historical society personnel during 1978 and 1979; their addresses comprise this paperbound volume.

While each author approaches the challenges of local history from a distinct perspective, two common themes pervade the book: the vital need for grassroots community research and the necessity of reorienting the topical and methodological approaches employed in research and interpretive presentation. Rather than continued emphasis on frontier beginnings, first families, and idiosyncratic happenings, all agree on the need for more meaningful local history utilizing broader hypotheses, perspectives from the social sciences, and concepts that enlighten the process of historical change rather than stressing limited historical facts.

Thomas D. Clark most successfully points out the challenges of local history research, as well as the variety of untapped issues and available sources. Clark is concerned with the historian's social role and sees local history as a means by which humanity can be rescued from scholarly abstractors and from the alienation produced by social and technological discontinuities in modern life. Accordingly, Clark encourages the collection and interpretation of commonplace experiences of the recent past and the synthesis of this social and economic history in a broader new national history. Richard Jensen is far less nostalgic about earlier American life, and he adroitly makes a case for the need to reinterpret local history on the basis of the conflict between "modernization" and "traditionalism" and the victory of the former. While some readers may fear that Jensen comes close to reifying ideal types and oversimplifying a complex historical record, he is quite right

about the need to recognize the basic historical direction of change in the past century and a half. His reminder of the superstition, apathy, and insensitivity of the "frontier generation" also is a healthy corrective for what can occur in local history interpretations. Thomas J. Schlereth presents techniques and Hoosier examples of "above-ground archaeology" as a new means for museum curators and history teachers to encourage a search for historical meaning outside museum exhibits and history texts. Schlereth advocates interpretation of the records of landscape, place names, architecture, and other material culture artifacts, and he deftly demonstrates how this art is practiced. Schlereth's excursion into history without tears unintentionally demonstrates the need for documentary corroboration and the utility of traditional historical knowledge for gaining insight from a community's visual record.

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Local Government Records: An Introduction to Their Management, Preservation, and Use. By H. G. Jones. (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1980. Pp. xii, 208. Notes, illustrations, figures, appendixes, index. Paperbound, \$6.95.)

Among the 81,000 units of local government in the United States, including counties, towns, villages, cities, parishes, and boroughs, there is a bewildering variety of local public records. Their form and content are as varied as the governmental activities they reflect—collecting taxes, administering justice, maintaining roads, conducting elections, providing public education, and recording vital statistics and legal documents. To provide some information about the management, preservation, and use of this exponentially increasing body of records, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) and the American Association for State and Local History commissioned H. G. Jones to write this volume. Jones, past president of the Society of American Archivists, former director of the North Carolina Department of Archives and History, and presently curator of the North Carolina Collection at the University of North Carolina, was an obvious choice for the assignment.

The original objective of providing a manual outlining a model for the management and use of local public records had to be abandoned because there appeared to be little consensus