

the diary is an epilogue explaining briefly the last two years of Martha's life, which, as the editors so poignantly say, "leaves one with a regrettable sense of incompleteness." Although that is true, this reader felt a great sense of pride in sharing the delightful first-person account of the life of one remarkable woman.

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Those Days: An American Album. By Richard Critchfield. (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1986. Pp. x, 419. Illustrations. \$19.95.)

This extremely well-written book describes the history of the author's family in Iowa and North Dakota from 1880 to 1940. It is a captivating blend of historical documents and a novelist's vision. The dust jacket blurbs by Morley Safer—"a jewel of a book"—and William Bundy—"a marvelous family epic"—seem incongruous due to their careers in television and foreign affairs, but this reviewer must repeat their high praise. Few words can express the powerful feelings that spring forth from the flat pages of print. The joys and sorrow, the tears and laughter, all these emotions entangle the reader in a story that begins with a wedding in 1913.

The author, a successful journalist and novelist, decided to compose his family history despite sibling assurances that the family was not significant. Rather, Critchfield wrote, "it was their ordinariness that made them matter" (p. 413). This is not to say that two generations of country and small-town doctors represent the typical Iowan or North Dakotan. Instead, the author depicts his family as an organic structure that grew and withered depending on the prompts and pressures; weddings, children, dreams, tragedies, success, failure, rapid changes in knowledge and technology, and the strengths and weaknesses of saints and sinners. While their occupations may have made the main characters out of the ordinary, their experiences encompassed the ordinary.

The story is a great success, and the author's technique of interspersing historical sources—diaries, letters, photographs, and interviews (taped and stenographic)—with "you are there" dialogues and vivid descriptions make this a powerful book. The reader rejoices with the characters when they celebrate and cry as the author details his father's unsuccessful battle with alcohol and heartbreaking affair with a young girl. Life was not easy in a small North Dakota town during the Depression, and for this family the results were painful but remembered.

The Indiana connections are few; a long Quaker tradition, the move from Indiana to Iowa in 1858, an automobile accident in Muncie in 1935, and the popular book *Alice of Old Vincennes*. It is possible, however, to make many comparisons to the rural way of life in Indiana during the late nineteenth and early twentieth cen-

turies. The descriptions of life in a bawdy river town on the Mississippi and the culture clash of farmers and machinery offer insights for any student of the Upper Midwest. Great technological and educational changes were taking place all across America, and while farm life in North Dakota—"God had leveled the whole country out with a rolling pin" (p. 103)—is not the same as farm life in Indiana, there are similarities that strike Hoosier chords.

The book is not perfect. Editorial decisions separated fine and proper photographs from the applicable text—in one case by more than two hundred pages. The subtitle, *An American Album*, does not add to the reader's understanding. The dust jacket emphasizes that this is the story of an "ordinary" family struggling with a rapidly changing world. More accurately, the hero—a doctor—and the heroine—his wife—were the offspring of ordinary, educated, rural doctors. The ordinary farmer and merchant would have had different viewpoints and experiences as they coped with a new way of life even though they shared a similar fate in the Depression. Also, the explanation of the author's techniques and motivations do not appear until the epilogue and afterword. An earlier placement would have prevented an occasional wondering if "an interview with Anna" and "a letter to Jim," were citations or creations of the author.

Such a well-written and documented book must be recommended to a wide variety of readers and institutions. It is a marvelous account of one family's life in the breadbasket of our nation. The local scene—Alfalfa Day, farm accidents, blizzards, grasshoppers, a syphilitic young man—while dominant, is connected to state and national events and tied into the popular culture of the 1880–1940 era as a way of keeping the reader in touch with more familiar guideposts—holidays, popular music, war, fashion, and fads. Historians will be intrigued by the author's methods, and every reader will be educated and entertained.

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Cities of the Prairie Revisited: The Closing of the Metropolitan Frontier. By Daniel J. Elazar *et al.* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986. Pp. 288. Tables, maps, figures, notes, bibliography, index. \$25.00.)

In 1970 Daniel J. Elazar's *Cities of the Prairie: The Metropolitan Frontier and American Politics* presented the findings of a comparative study of medium-sized communities in ten metropolitan areas in the nation's heartland. Elazar examined local politics during the era 1946 to 1961 in cities ranging from Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, on the east to Pueblo, Colorado, on the west and from Duluth, Minnesota, on the north to Belleville, Illinois, on the