
Book Reviews

Magic Middletown. By Dwight W. Hoover. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, in association with Historic Muncie, Inc., 1986. Pp. 181. Illustrations, bibliography, index. Clothbound, \$29.95; paperbound, \$14.95.)

During the last ten years publishers have disseminated a rash of illustrated history books containing scores of photographs combined with a general history of the community or area being documented. The primary purpose of these efforts is to sell nostalgia, not necessarily to provide a scholarly historical analysis. *Magic Middletown*, a history of Muncie, Indiana, in the 1920s, is not just another picture book, however. It is a serious attempt by Dwight W. Hoover to use photographs in the same way that historians have utilized more traditional original materials.

More specifically, Hoover is attempting to use the recently salvaged collection of Muncie photographs acquired by the Bracken Library at Ball State University and taken by photographer W. Arthur Swift either to confirm or refute the series of generalizations about Muncie made by Robert and Helen Lynd in their classic book *Middletown*. For example, the Lynds contended that by the 1920s Muncie had become completely integrated with the national economy, thus losing its character as a "county seat town" that served as the hub of a local distribution network. According to Hoover, however, the visual evidence indicates that at least in the area of food production Muncie was still independent from the national economy. Another interesting insight garnered from the Swift photographs concerns the role of women. Statistical evidence suggests that by the decade of the 1920s more and more women were leaving the home for jobs in industry. Photographic evidence reveals that, in Muncie at least, they appeared to be taking their traditional roles with them by working in kitchens, bakeries, cleaning establishments, and similar businesses.

Hoover's conclusions from his survey of the Swift collection are incisive and based on a healthy respect for the things that photographs cannot show. He quite rightly notes that Swift, as a commercial photographer, only took photographs that people commissioned him to take. Consequently, Muncie's lower classes, particularly its black citizens, are mostly invisible. On the other hand, he concludes that few interior photographs of factories were taken because there was little demand for them when it is more



THE INTERIOR OF THE INDIANA BELL TELEPHONE COMPANY, 215 EAST JACKSON, MUNCIE, INDIANA, PHOTOGRAPHED SOMETIME BETWEEN 1922 AND 1925. THE WOMEN'S REVERENT POSE AND THE AMERICAN FLAG SUGGEST AN ARMISTICE DAY COMMEMORATION.

Courtesy Center for Middletown Studies, Bracken Library, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, reproduced from Dwight W. Hoover, *Magic Middletown* (Bloomington, 1986), 42.

likely that few were taken because the primitive state of photographic technology precluded most interior photography at that time. Additionally, the book would be better organized if the photographs were numbered so that they could be coordinated with the text. On the whole, however, *Magic Middletown* contains numerous pictures covering a broad spectrum of Muncie life in the 1920s and including some of the most stunning and intriguing photographs of the Ku Klux Klan available anywhere.

Overall, this book is necessary reading for anyone interested in photographic analysis of the past and particularly for anyone interested in the 1920s when the Klan paraded in the streets, the automobile emerged as a dominant force in American culture, and Muncie, whether Munsonians like it or not, was fixed by the Lynds "as a model American city."

Indiana Historical Society,
Indianapolis

Tim Peterson

Jokelore: Humorous Folktales From Indiana. By Ronald L. Baker. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. Pp. xliii, 234. Notes to introduction, sources and notes. Clothbound, \$29.95; paperbound, \$9.95.)

The Indiana State University Folklore Archives collection, begun in 1967, has become a major resource for the study of the survival, and the scope, of oral traditions in Indiana. In this volume Ronald L. Baker has drawn heavily on the collection's tape recordings and transcripts to explore Hoosier humor, offering a selection of over 350 tales and jokes that attest to the continued appeal of humor in folk studies.

A few of the examples reflect the rural spirit that many readers probably associate with the folk tradition, including Rufe, the man who was such a liar that his friends had to call his hogs. The vast majority of the items, however, are products of an urban world. Grouped in twenty-three sections covering everything from shaggy dogs to schoolteachers, the tales concentrate upon such staples as religion, sex, and ethnicity. Baker's examples show how often humor is still used to explore taboos or to define one's group against outsiders. Ethnic remarks directed toward Jews, blacks, Irish, Poles, and especially Kentuckians are almost a third of the entries. Frequently crude, and occasionally cruel, these verbatim records stand in sharp contrast to the more literary reeditings found in many earlier collections—a point brought sharply home by the inclusion of thirty examples from the materials assembled fifty years ago by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). A majority of entries date from the years between 1968 and 1972 and occasionally include specific references to events and personalities of that time.