The essays are informative and chatty and more likely to appeal to the history buff than to the professional historian, and to the omnivorous accumulator of books who seeks treasures at country auctions rather than the serious collector who knows his field and the specialist booksellers who serve it. It is a book likely to find popularity in midwestern public libraries but not one to find a permanent place in research collections.

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When historians take time to reflect, their colleagues tend to cringe and ignore the result. Most of us would rather do history than think about it. For those who care to reflect, here is a thoughtful account of history and the historical profession as they appear in the late twentieth century.

Theodore Hamerow is a distinguished European historian at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. In this book he offers his thoughts about the development and character of the profession. History in his hands is neither good nor bad, simply a job of work. He lavishes care on the task of describing how students join the profession, how they are socialized as historians, and how historians join other disciplinary specialists in conducting the campus-based academic enterprise. Separate chapters treat the student's progress from apprentice to fellow professional, the lifestyle and habits of thought that characterize historians, and the shifting subject matter ("new history" in different guises) chosen by historians.

Beginning with a chapter titled "The Crisis in History," Hamerow refers to current doubts about history's capacity to explain the past or affect the future. But he ends up taking a conservative position. Citing Carl Becker and Oscar Handlin among others, he says that history can "enable the community to judge what it is doing in the light of what it has done" (p. 36). The ancient avocation of telling stories about the past became a profession a century ago, and it is left to us to reconfirm the validity of what its practitioners do. Becoming a historian is mostly dull and repetitious work, but the "pressures and dissatisfactions of graduate training are to a large extent beyond remedy" (p. 116). Life as a historian is mainly a matter of fitting in, but after all "history, despite serious shortcomings, can still provide a satisfying and rewarding way of life" (p. 161).
Some critics prefer to ridicule and not condone the drearier aspects of academic life. Hazard Adams says of historians that they have become "an outgroup... pompous and... long-winded, their styles anachronistic and their gestures desperate" (The Academic Tribes [New York, 1976], pp. 72-73). Really serious critics seek to redirect historians to new intellectual challenges. Hayden White tells us that "discontinuity, disruption, and chaos is our lot" (Tropics of Discourse [Baltimore, 1978], p. 50) and that we had better recognize art and science as bedfellows in ways we will have to accommodate. In the face of all this, Hamerow's conclusions seem banal. "What is the Use of History?" asks his final chapter; if there is any it arises from "the ontological argument that history by its nature, by its being, appeals to the human intellect and spirit" (p. 238). However desirable, that conclusion will not withstand the scrutiny of critics who want history to be more self-conscious and assertive about its philosophy and methodology.

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Ronald E. Butchart's Local Schools is the inaugural volume in "The Nearby History Series" published by the American Association for State and Local History. A thoughtful, well-composed, and attractively produced contribution, it displays all of the strengths but few of the weaknesses of the new social history.

Drawing upon his expertise as a social historian of education, Butchart demonstrates well the value of researching and writing histories of local schools. Social history has always made common human experience its special concern, and Local Schools provides an excellent introduction to the joys and benefits of local history for amateur and professional historians alike. It is difficult to imagine a social history of the American people that ignores the nation's schools. As Butchart repeatedly points out, schools are familiar institutions imbedded in the social lives of everyday folk. Studying schools opens new windows upon America's many-sided past, from the struggles of blacks seeking equal opportunity to that of immigrants shaping a new cultural identity.

Butchart continually reminds the reader of the place of educational history in the larger social history of the American people. Schools affect many people's lives in the modern world in particular, and Butchart highlights many different approaches to study-