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-
ing educational institutions. Examining teachers' memoirs, for example, can open vistas in women's history and labor history as well as in the history of pedagogy. School board minutes and local newspapers often highlight the intensely political nature of many school decisions. Studying the role of race, class, gender, or ethnicity within a single institution, the public school, demonstrates the intersection of contradictory and often contentious forces that shape everyday life. *Local Schools* very effectively illuminates the many contributions historians of nearby institutions can offer to professional readers and the general public.

In a brief but well-conceived bibliographical essay, the author introduces readers to many first-rate contributions in state and local history that have focused on education. Certainly it is difficult to deny that well-crafted case studies helped reshape the historiography of schooling during the past two decades. Scholars such as Carl Kaestle provided novel approaches to understanding the evolution of urban public schools. Michael Katz has continually highlighted the value of state and local history in understanding major questions of social history and public policy. And still other writers such as Ronald Cohen have examined how local innovations such as the Gary Plan became a national rage. In the hands of talented scholars, historical analyses of small geographical units have made large contributions.

Left unexamined in Butchart's history is the modern dilemma of the social historian. Whether written by amateur or professional historians—the great strength of historical writing is that there is room for everyone—social history has drifted toward a kind of new antiquarianism. Ever more highly magnified studies appear on ever narrower topics. Knowing more and more about less and less is hardly what Butchart desires, yet *Local Schools* does not deal critically enough with its own subject. History can be written by anyone, for anyone, for any number of purposes. But is the fragmentation of knowledge, excessive specialization, and continual fascination with local studies part of the mixed blessings of social history? Has the effort to write the history of ordinary people in common institutions ironically produced excessive knowledge about topics cast too narrowly?

In the hands of skillful writers, state, local, and regional history does not suffer from any sort of provincialism or antiquarianism. But social historians, whatever their special interests, need to alert more people to a new problem: professional historians who have an antiquarianism all their own. *Local Schools* wonderfully highlights the very best in how to write the social history of local schools. What is needed now is more discussion of the common pitfalls of local history and especially social analysis.

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Local history has followed a winding path. Gentleman and lady amateurs have passed along its byways unchallenged for a century and more, cobbling popular and didactic, feminized and commercialized, patriotic and Christian narratives of communities and their older, usually Anglo-American families. The professional historian drove amateurs from the high road of historical research and writing around 1900, then ignored the conquest for grander themes. The American Association for the Study of Local History launched a reunification movement after 1940, and today the line between the “professional” or “academic” historian and the “amateur” or “local” writer is blurred.

Many local historians are still untrained in the historical arts. Realtors, housewives, bankers, editors, civil servants, and retired businessmen, they simply “like history.” Many support a penniless local historical society, offer tours of the “old Smith house” or the “Johnson Inn,” and, eventually, tape recorder and word processor at hand, write the history of “Our Town.” This book is for them.

Carol Kammen, a professor at Cornell University, teaches and writes local history. *On Doing Local History* reveals her keen appreciation of the isolation and limited resources of the local historian. Kammen redefines local history as a modernized “study of past events, or of people or groups, in a given geographical area—a study based on a wide variety of documentary evidence and placed in a comparative context that should be both regional and national” (pp. 4-5). She calls on the local historian, who “researches, collects, preserves, and communicates what he or she knows” (p. 120), to match the standards of the professional scholar.

Kammen, who insists that the historian depends chiefly on “intelligence and common sense” (p. 1), has not written a “How-To” book. She offers instead a body of practical advice, liberally salted with examples and projects, compressed into six essays that examine “what it is we do and the conditions and traditions in which we labor . . .” (p. 2). Kammen’s first essay traces the art of local history from post-medieval Europe to the American present. “Researching Local History” asks writers to include “everyone” in community histories and to consult a variety of oft-neglected sources. “Writing Local History” examines selectivity and writing and offers caveats against biases and boosterism. Two nuggets from