

Quarterly. The author of *Power and the Promise of School Reform* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), he is currently writing a history of the origins of the American high school.

On Doing Local History: Reflections on What Local Historians Do, Why, and What it Means. By Carol Kammen. (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1986. Pp. 184. Notes, index. Paperbound, \$13.50.)

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

this essay are wise indeed: write as if no town is an island, and "leave footnotes unto others as we would have footnotes left unto us" (p. 103).

Chapter Four, "The Local Historian," describes the ideal community scholar as widely read, curious, involved in the community, imaginative, open-minded, and perseverant. How should the local historian treat the local worthy with a Klansmen in his family tree, the nice lady with a jailbird father? The scholar-community member must describe an event or pattern honestly, but sometimes without naming names. Kammen's examination of document preservation includes horror tales of dumpings and burning of valuable materials. "Writing Local History in the Popular Press" gives practical advice on how to write for the newspaper. Reminding us that a newspaper is "not an educational organ, but 'a business'" (p. 150), Kammen recalls one unpublished local historian who set an example for us all: he bought the paper.

On Writing Local History is a clearly written, concise account with much of value to any historian. Academicians will presumably be aware of many of Kammen's ideas, but the amateur will find much *terra incognita*. As local history professionalizes and "modernizes," Professor Kammen's valuable treatise should be widely read. And the cover of the next edition should offer a warning from the Historian-General: "Read This Before You Write."

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