History From Below: How to Uncover and Tell the Story of Your Community, Association, or Union. By Jeremy Brecher. (New Haven, Conn.: Commonwork Pamphlets/Advocate Press. Pp. 53. Illustrations, notes, appendixes, bibliography. Paperbound, $8.00.)

The past twenty years has witnessed an ever-increasing interest in studying the American past by looking at what is variously described as "local history," "nearby history," "ordinary people," or the "common man." Both professional and nonprofessional historians have made serious attempts to uncover the facts about the everyday lives of the citizenry who inhabit ground-floor America. During this period a number of publications have rolled off the presses praising and advocating the "new social history" that has moved historical research and writing from the ivory tower to the courthouse attic. History From Below, a guide for the nonprofessional historian, is yet another voice in this frontier chorus.

This fifty-three-page how-to volume moves the potential researcher at a quick pace through the various steps in gathering source material. Topics covered include: doing a history project, gathering and using documents, oral history, collecting visual materials, and finally the publication, public event, exhibit, or media presentation. Each chapter provides an ample dose of well-conceived and informative suggestions and ideas on specific elements of collecting historical resource material. Some 40 percent of the book deals with the topic of oral history, a time-tested means of gathering historical information that has grown in popularity over the past twenty years with the introduction of the modern and easy-to-use tape recorder.

When suggesting topics to be pursued in the local community, Brecher—who is co-editor of Brass Valley: The Story of Working People's Lives and Struggles in an American Industrial Region (1982)—leans heavily on his own experiences in writing about labor versus management. In History From Below he stresses topics dealing with labor, unions, and minority groups; consequently, readers and potential researchers may not learn of the tremendous variety of other topics needing study on the local level. Brecher's emphasis, however, does not detract from the main purpose of the publication; i.e., to encourage nonprofessional historians to consider the fascinating study of local history and thus to learn more about themselves. History From Below is a good, basic, sound introduction. Those seeking more detailed information may wish to consult two publications from the American Association for State and Local History: Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History (1983) and Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around You (1982).

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