

recipient of the university's Faculty Distinguished Teaching Award (1991) and of teaching citations from the National Agricultural Honor Society (1988) and Future Farmers of America (1990). Schob is the author of *Hired Hands and Plowboys: Farm Labor in the Midwest, 1815-60* (1975).

Farm Wife: A Self-Portrait, 1886-1896. Edited by Virginia E. McCormick. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990. Pp. ix, 243. Illustrations, notes, index. \$22.95.)

Margaret Dow Gebby was a farm housewife, the wife of a farmer, the mother of three sons, a loving daughter and daughter-in-law, a full participant in the life of the community where she lived in the last part of the nineteenth century. Her home was in Ohio, but the life she lived resembled that of farm wives throughout the Midwest, including Indiana. Unlike most of her contemporaries, however, Margaret, for eleven years, kept a meticulous diary in which she recorded the weather, her work in the house, the farm work, the life of the community, all expenditures and income for home and farm, and, all too infrequently, her opinions. These diaries have been edited by Virginia E. McCormick, who was raised on an Ohio farm and has spent her adult life working in the Cooperative Extension Service, which deals primarily with rural people. In *Farm Wife* McCormick draws not only on her research but also on her deep understanding of country women.

The book consists of two voices: those of Margaret and Virginia. Margaret tells the facts of her life; Virginia explains, gives background, and comments.

Margaret: *30 September 1889: Jerry [husband] met the well digger at the train, they drove down about 20 feet broke the pipe four or five feet below the ground have not succeeded in getting it out. We were much surprised indeed by some friends calling on us telling us this was our 21 anniversary, 101 ate dinner . . .*

Virginia: *It sounds as though the men were busy digging a well and no one was expecting company. Of course unannounced visits were much more common before telephones . . . but it strains the imagination of the modern reader to visualize a house able to accommodate 101 persons for dinner . . . even though the guests brought the food potluck-style (p. 158-59).*

Edited excerpts from the diaries are grouped topically rather than chronologically. Chapters are grouped under four headings: "Farm," "Home," "Leisure and Culture," and "Community." This arrangement works well, as readers can follow the rhythm of the seasons in the chapter on "Crops" or the worry and sorrow in a chapter on "Health and Home Nursing."

Such a set of diaries is a mine; different miners would extract different gems. McCormick looked mainly for the role of the farm wife, with special emphasis on the integral part she played in the working farm, the life of the community, and, most important of all, in the farm home. Margaret cared for her husband and children and her aged mother-in-law who lived with them. An analysis

of the farm records shows that her butter-and-egg business produced 25 percent of the farm income each year. Margaret's feelings of contentment and self-worth are evident throughout.

An introductory chapter sets the background for the diaries, providing genealogical information on the family and geographical information on the county, township, and town near which the Gebbys lived. A short epilogue describes Margaret's life after she ceased to keep her diaries. A glossary and notes, plus interesting illustrations, complete the book. If one must quibble, one could wish for a more coherent arrangement of topics. Further the notes in the back of the book are difficult to integrate into the reading experience. But such a complete set of diaries is priceless, and McCormick's editing has made them easy to read and understand. In an age that seeks either to beatify or to pity the farm housewife of another era, it is refreshing to see a straightforward account of life as it was actually lived.

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Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876–1915.

By Thomas J. Schlereth. (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991. Pp. xvi, 363. Illustrations, tables, notes, index. \$27.50.)

The fact that Thomas J. Schlereth describes the period between the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition and World War I as Victorian and not Progressive speaks volumes about his scholarly intentions, for "Victorian" is a term most closely associated with pure style. It conjures up fuzzy images of rooms—dark, faintly musty ones—crammed to the picture rails with bric-a-brac and stiff horsehair sofas and handmade antimacassars. It attaches itself readily to manners and mores, including fashions in dress that reflected the period's rigid codes of sexual decorum. As the bright young moderns of the 1920s used the word, it connoted things that were old-fashioned, quaint, hopelessly stuffy, and un-modern: the ideas and the ethics of their elders were "Victorian" and therefore despicable but so were the brooding, irregular shapes of their houses and self-important public buildings, the exuberant too-muchness of their taste in hotel lobbies and billiard parlors on steamships.

Progressivism identifies political processes. Victorianism gestures toward the world of objects. Schlereth realizes that material culture holds the key to the era in which a modern mass culture of abundance and consumerism was forged; thus, his text is shaped by a prologue, an interlogue, and an epilogue describing the three great American World's Fairs of the period—Philadelphia (1876),