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Book Review: Wapsipinicon Almanac: Selections from Thirty Years

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In This Issue

RAYMOND HAUSER examines the role of females in Native Illinois society and how a deeper understanding of how females contributed to life in the Illinois Country might inform major scholarly work from the last two decades. In particular, he draws on primary and secondary accounts of Illinois life to illustrate how females functioned in Illinois society in a way that was distinct not only from males but also from the men and women they enslaved.

DANIEL D. SUNNE considers changes in the enforcement of abortion-related laws in nineteenth-century Iowa. By combing through official state reports, newspapers, and court records, he argues that Iowa code maintained a consistent prohibition on abortion with key exceptions; however, prosecution of abortion-related crimes varied throughout the century in ways that reflected Iowa's own growth, development, and commitment to enforcement.

Front Cover



JOHNNY BRIAN

Milky Way over Farm with Hay Bales

June 21, 2022, 3:40:26 AM

16x10.666 in.

Ink Jet Print

Artist statement included inside.

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years after the organization's founding by George Khouri with the help of the Amen, Atwil, Younis, and Yemeni families. Uncritical accounts and surface institutional politics in Detroit account for Hassen's prominence in the book. Overall, this read is valuable for what it provides and a poignant reminder of what's missing in the Arab American story.

The Wapsipinicon Almanac: Selections from Thirty Years, edited by Timothy Fay. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2023. xi, 249 pp. Illustrations. \$27.50 paperback.

Reviewer Andy Oler is an associate professor of humanities at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida. He is the author of *Old-Fashioned Modernism: Rural Masculinity and Midwestern Literature*.

Founded by Timothy Fay in 1988, the *Wapsipinicon Almanac* published 25 issues before its eventual closure in 2018. Each issue was hand-set on a letterpress printer at Route 3 Press in Anamosa, Iowa, and delivered by Fay in his Toyota hatchback. According to its now-defunct website, the magazine's founding purpose was "to assert that we [in Iowa] did indeed possess beautiful landscapes populated with fascinating characters, but that those landscapes were rapidly disappearing."

If this is also the goal set out by the University of Iowa Press's compilation of essays, artwork, and advertisements, entitled *The Wapsipinicon Almanac: Selections from Thirty Years*, then the collection is a triumph. As an object, this is a beautiful book that captures the feel of the magazine, from the ads for companies, clubs, and politicians in Anamosa and throughout Iowa, to the selected covers printed inside and out, to the ornaments placed before and after each chapter. Fay, the artists, and the press's production team should be commended.

As a collection of essays, the book's disappearing landscapes and fascinating characters are both its greatest strength and, possibly, a weakness. Befitting the magazine's 30-year run—and Fay's dedication to representing a variety of subjects and contributors—this collection ranges widely and, as a result, may feel cacophonous to some readers. Every essay won't please everyone. Some of them will feel dated, some sentimental, some aggressive. There's not always a smooth progression from one essay or one topic to another.

But let's consider, in this case, whether such gregarious chattering is a flaw at all. This book, like the almanac before it, doesn't set out to be an in-depth treatment of environmental conflict or the naming of birds. Its subject is Iowa, an entire state, particularly the rural parts. The magazine was composed, in Fay's words, of "various tidbits" (ix). At its best, this collection simultaneously tells a story and shows how those tidbits

fit together. See, for instance, Jonna Higgins-Freese's essay on Iowa's Indigenous history and the limits of her schooling: "I learned that U.S. history had been presented as happening on the east coast, not because nothing was happening in the blank middle of the continent, but precisely because there was so much" (193).

This book knows it's a collage, a collection of snapshots, something to look at for a moment, to read over coffee, then hear, in context, a snatch of song from the next tree. Here are some standouts. Several essays offer colorful incidents in Iowa history, including Raymond M. Tinnian narrating nineteenth-century fights about the Fillmore County seat (including dismantling the courthouse!) and Steve Maravetz recounting his attendance at a notorious 1970 rock festival in Wadena. As expected, there are stories about the incursion of individual and corporate outsiders, including Osha Davidson's story of a five-and-dime closing and Larry Stone, who makes the point, "you can only sell rural charm once" (116). There are a variety of personal essays: Dan Ehl on social life and aging, Carmen Kraemer-Clark on the lessons learned when inheriting an eccentric farmhouse, and Shirley McDermott on uncovering the history of a family member who turned out to be more valued by the community than she understood.

Some contributors attempt to create a system out of their personal experiences and memories, such as Verl Lekwa, who visited every town in Iowa and ranked them based on attractiveness, and Beth Chacey De-Boom, who writes about salvaging old buildings and the sense of place that develops when they remain in use. Such themes arise alongside other essays that struggle with the existing systems, whether that's Jane Purcell's history of eugenics and the state hospital system, J. Harley McIlrath veering into the absurd in his criticism of academic disregard for rural culture, or Michael Rossmann, who attempted a neighborly solution to an environmental problem and was rebuffed in the name of profit.

In the introduction, Fay writes that he hopes this anthology will inspire similar publications. While we don't yet know whether this book will realize those inspirational goals, I hope it does. Current magazines that seem, at least in some ways, to fit as successors to the *Wapsipinicon Almanac* are the Rust Belt-oriented, online *Belt Magazine* and the lower Midwest's *New Territory* (full disclosure: I am a section editor). Though they aren't state-based like the almanac, these magazines follow its spirit, perhaps best expressed along the lines of Annie Grieshop's contribution: a willingness to wander and the desire to travel back roads—in short, to find a sense of place by listening to the songs being sung all around us.