

# Introduction to the Special Issue on Agriculture

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Surprisingly little has been published about the cultural history of South Dakota's agricultural past. Motivated by the demands of recent exhibit planning, the staff of the Agricultural Heritage Museum in Brookings, with the support of the Division of Public Programs of the National Endowment for the Humanities, undertook the task of investigating the role of people in the state's agricultural history. The articles in this special issue represent the culmination of three years of planning and research.

The Agricultural Heritage Museum, which was founded in 1967, is one of four state museums administered by the South Dakota Office of Cultural Preservation. The museum is charged with the responsibility of preserving objects related to the technological, social, and cultural history of farming and ranching in the state of South Dakota. Based on its facilities, collections, and scope, the Agricultural Heritage Museum has the potential of becoming one of the leading traditional agricultural museums in the country. The bulk of the museum's collections, which are the result of a continuum of collecting activities at the South Dakota State University since 1884, span the range from household items

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to agricultural implements and machinery. Most of the over nine thousand objects date from the period 1860 to 1940. New acquisitions are selectively added to the collections each year.

In 1975, the museum was assigned the old Stock Judging Pavilion on the campus of South Dakota State University in Brookings as a permanent facility in which to develop these collections into exhibits and educational programs. The pavilion, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, has been restored to its 1925 appearance on the exterior, while the interior is being adapted for museum purposes. The renovation of the facility, started in 1975, nears completion.

In planning the permanent exhibits that would occupy this facility, the museum staff determined that the agricultural history of South Dakota could be organized into three categories: the technology associated with the production of agricultural commodities; the agricultural goods produced; and the cultural history of the people involved in the production of agricultural products. When research for the exhibits at the museum began in 1980, staff members discovered that a great deal of information had been published concerning the agricultural technology of the Great Plains between 1860 and 1940. By combining these regionally oriented publications with oral histories and other state materials, it was possible to extrapolate the technological history of South Dakota. Similarly, a great deal of written information was available concerning the agricultural goods produced in South Dakota during this period. A summary of this information could serve as the basis for the development of exhibits about the crops and livestock produced.

In contrast, however, little had been published about the people who produced the agricultural products in the state. Local centennial histories formed the bulk of information available, but, because of the localized and specific nature of these publications, they were found to be inappropriate. The need for generalized social history about South Dakota's rural people led the museum planners to seek support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Funds from the NEH grant awarded to the museum were utilized to provide salaries for social historians to conduct research into areas crucial to the development of the museum's permanent exhibits. When these research reports were completed, it seemed important to share them in a published form with the people of the state, and this special double issue of *South Dakota History* is the result.

While the following articles do not constitute a comprehensive social or cultural history of the agricultural peoples of the state, they do highlight and explore areas of that heritage that have been given little, if any, previous attention. In some cases, the studies overlap slightly, giving additional treatment to areas such as the agricultural methods of American Indian women. The topic of women's roles in agriculture, an almost completely neglected topic, is thus accorded a great deal of coverage, culminating in Glenda Riley's in-depth look at the roles of non-Indian women. Similarly, the background of the peoples who settled the South Dakota area is discussed in two articles as is the general American Indian agricultural experience. Finally, the concluding article by Herbert T. Hoover tackles an aspect of the farming and ranching experience in South Dakota that has never been given comprehensive treatment but which has occupied a good deal of the agriculturalist's attention—political and collective action movements. These five articles, then, provide an opening into the unexplored agricultural topics of South Dakota history. Further attention can now be given to these and other neglected topics in a continuing effort to understand the agricultural experience of the people of this state and region.

The staff of the Agricultural Heritage Museum wishes to thank the Division of Public Programs of the National Endowment for the Humanities for its financial support, the consultants for their dedication, the support staff of the South Dakota Office of Cultural Preservation for its assistance, and the South Dakota Historical Resource Center for publishing the information that follows. The first phase of the Agricultural Heritage Museum's exhibits opened in the summer of 1983. The remainder of the exhibits are scheduled for completion by late 1984. The museum is open to the public from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from 1:00 p.m. through 5:00 p.m. on Sunday. There is no admission charge.

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