

were “sources of pride for the communities ... and helped put provincial cities on the map” (25). Nonetheless, this point could be developed more fully to delve deeper into the social and cultural functions of department stores in the twentieth century. It is not entirely clear what consumers are nostalgic for when they yearn for the defunct stores. What has been lost in American society and culture with the “fall” of department stores? Future studies also might probe more deeply into the roles of specific individuals in the industry to examine what they understood their social and cultural roles to be. Overall, *From Main Street to Mall* is an essential contribution to the field that will be a foundation for years to come for scholars of department stores and consumerism.

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Anne Meis Knupfer. *Food Co-ops in America: Communities, Consumption, and Economic Democracy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013. xiv +273 pp. ISBN 978-0-8014-5114-0, \$29.95 (cloth).

Cooperatives have been a part of American agriculture since the mid-nineteenth century. The most successful have been organized according to the British Rochdale model. These associations sold stock to members and paid dividends at the end of the year. They bought goods at wholesale prices and sold at retail. Agricultural cooperatives saved farm families money, but they suffered from under capitalization, poor organization and management, and fickle members who often shopped elsewhere. Less well known are the food cooperatives organized in cities and towns during the twentieth century. Usually organized on the Rochdale model, they too saved consumers money on basic foods, which was often supplied by local farmers. Although many food co-ops were modestly successful, many failed. The attrition rate has always been high.

Until now historians of American agricultural, rural, and food history have not known much about food cooperatives, which are collectively owned by members who make business decisions, such as what to buy, whether to practice political and religious neutrality, and how to share the profits based on each members' purchases.

Food co-ops operate on a cash-and-carry basis. Various ethnic and racial groups organized cooperatives in the Midwest and Northeast, such as African Americans in Harlem, New York. Women often provided, and still provide, the organizational and managerial leadership as well as function as a co-op's consumer activists. Anne Knupfer gives readers an understanding of these complexities that is both detailed and broad. She discusses the successes and failures of food cooperatives before the 1930s and then surveys these organizations from the 1930s through the 1950s. Knupfer provides an important record of major food cooperatives during this time period across the United States, including New York, Illinois, New Hampshire, and Vermont, before turning to the successes and failures of food cooperatives from 1960 through 1990, evaluating those in California, Iowa, and Minnesota. Knupfer does not slight rural food cooperatives in which small towns often provide the support and patronage necessary to survive.

Along with providing a general history of these co-ops, Knupfer also has an eye for detail and a story-teller's ability to weave people in and out of her economic and social narrative. She particularly stresses that while food cooperatives build a sense of community based on collective ownership, they have never been entirely benign. Left-of-center political sentiments prevail and not always harmoniously. Members of many food cooperatives divided over whether to support the grape and lettuce boycotts initiated by Cesar Chavez during the 1960s and 1970s. They contested whether food co-ops should sell Saran Wrap because Dow Chemical manufactured it as well as napalm. Members have contested everything from whether they should sell phosphate detergents, whether they should make a profit or just break even, whether they should be a consumer advocacy group beyond concerns about food issues, whether they should sell Gillette products because the company conducts tests on animals, and whether their employees should unionize, to whether they should sell Chinese-made products. Clearly, food cooperatives are complex political organizations that are involved with more than the sale of food. Growth, expansion, and professional management that changed some food cooperatives from small-scale operations to large-scale grocery stores with an eye for the bottom line has brought success but also failure, acrimony, and disengagement.

Knupfer asks good questions and explains current issues that affect food cooperatives, such as the environmental movement and genetically modified crops. She makes the important point that food cooperatives are not agricultural cooperatives yet also notes that they serve more than economic needs. Co-op members usually have a sense of moral certainty—not necessarily elitism, but a commitment to living lives as untroubled or unrestricted as possible by agribusiness in its many forms. In many respects, co-op members are idealistic to

a fault. Given the tendency for members to be fairly well educated, food cooperatives tend to be located in white, middle-class, and often university neighborhoods, where idealism provides an organizational and driving force.

Although Knupfer writes as a historian, she occasionally becomes a social scientist by offering personal advice. This can be explained or excused, in part, because she has been a member of several food cooperatives across the United States. She identifies with the commitment of cooperative members to democratic decision making and supports their efforts to seek the proper labeling of foods by the federal government, which is in contrast to grocery stores and food companies that do not want this government regulation. Knupfer is supportive of food cooperatives yet she is able to see their problems and explain their failures.

Foods cooperatives will never replace grocery stores, but they are not intended to do so, except for their members. Food co-ops instead provide a way for members to save money, but not always, as well as assert moral authority to support specifically identified consumption policies, all within the context of the group. Overall, this is a good survey of the major food cooperatives in the Northeast, Midwest, and specifically in Northern California by someone who understands the purpose and inner workings of such organizations and who talks about the efforts of food co-ops to incorporate commitments to various political and social causes. It can be used as a ready reference for people, ideas, and operations, including explanations for success and failure. Knupfer has made a solid contribution to knowledge about the importance of food cooperatives in the United States, both past and present.

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Business history is a growing discipline around the world, and an increasing number of scholars are researching Latin America.