

# Add Iowa writers to your shelves

New York may be the center of the publishing world, but Iowa has its share of literary fame, largely due to the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop. Beyond Iowa City, Iowans across the state pen works that, while perhaps not well-known, provide compelling glimpses into familiar landscapes as well as exotic locales and lifestyles.

Starting today, The Des Moines Register begins a new column, an every-other-month roundup of select books by authors who are Iowa natives or who have lived in the state.

The reviewer is Des Moines native **Christine Riccelli**, a freelance journalist and lecturer at Iowa State University. As the Register's travel reporter and editor in the 1990s, she traveled the state, covering the places that often provide the setting of Iowa writers' stories. An avid book lover, she enjoys reading everything from literary essays to page-turning suspense thrillers.

Here is her first installment:

"**Children on the Farm**" and "**From the Heartland**," both postcard books of photographs by Pete Wettach, edited by Leslie A. Loveless (University of Iowa Press, paperback, each with 30 black-and-white postcards, \$9.95 each).

As a supervisor with the Farm Security Administration and later a freelance photographer, A.M. "Pete" Wettach (1901-1976) of Mount Pleasant snapped thousands of photos of his clients, friends and neighbors as he traveled through Iowa.

We're lucky he did. Wettach's brilliant black-and-white work in these two volumes provides a compelling, intimate glimpse into Iowa farm life during the Depression, World War II and post-war years. You don't just look at these photos

—you feel as if you've suddenly dropped into the subjects' lives, whether you're beside a young boy struggling to lead a team of draft horses or leaning over a boiling vat as a farm woman makes soap.

You won't find the stereotypical Depression-era images of the downtrodden farmer; instead, Wettach's candid, poignant photos document the everyday tasks and triumphs of a rural lifestyle.

Each postcard is perforated and printed on heavy cardstock. While you'll be tempted to send out the postcards so you can share the photos, you'll ultimately want to keep them for yourself.

"**The Egg Lady and Other Neighbors**," by Tricia Currans-Sheehan (New Rivers Press, 131 pages, paperback, \$14.95).

The most memorable characters in this short-story collection are girls and women from Iowa farms and small towns who refuse to buckle under the strictures of a rural society. Fearless, ingenious and sometimes very funny, these women dare to challenge country convention. Currans-Sheehan, an English professor at Briar Cliff College in Sioux City, writes with honesty and clarity, yet with a nuanced subtext.

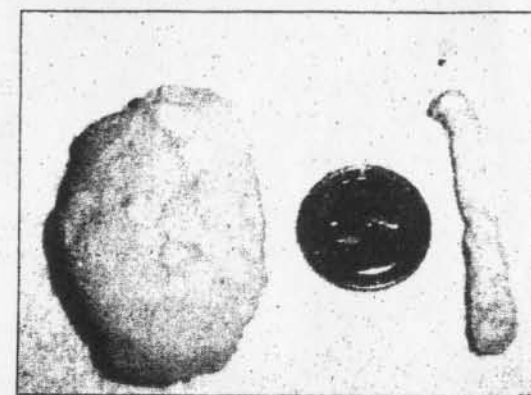
In "The Men with the Leopard Wallpaper," a farm wife befriends an ostracized gay farmer stricken with the HIV

virus, rejecting the AIDS hysteria sweeping through her community and her own household. In "The Secrets that Men Have," an insatiably curious seventh-grader infiltrates the Knights of Columbus wearing a feather-and-felt hat she found at a garage sale and brandishing a \$9.98 gold plastic sword.

Other stories feature a middle-school counselor who's a little too aloof for her spiteful, meddling neighbors; a widow who exacts revenge on her late husband's lover by tampering with her eggs; and a young farm girl who figures out how to get the upper hand when forced to serve dinner to a group of rude balers.

"**Iowa Curiosities: Quirky Characters, Roadside Oddities and Other Offbeat Stuff**," by Dan Coffey and Eric Jones with Berit Thorkelson (Globe Pequot Press, 263 pages, paperback, \$13.95).

The word "wacky" is rarely used in the same sentence as "Iowa." But a whimsical side of Iowa does exist, and Iowa City writers Dan Coffey and Eric Jones capture it in this witty tome, covering some of the state's eccentric characters, local lore and unusual events and places.



**Big cheese:** The giant Cheeto in Algona is one of many Iowa curiosities.

## Other Iowa books

Other recently published books by Iowa authors include:

**POETRY:** "Century's Road," by Patricia Kirkpatrick.

**NOVELS:** "Eden so Near," by Robert Underhill; "Jena's Choice," by Beverly J. Scott; "Bloodlink to Sorcery," by Rune Macey; "We Are Surely Blessed," by Ann Williams; "A Distinct Touch Watson," by David L. Hammer.

**PERSONAL ESSAYS:** "We Are What We Were When," by William C. Jacobson; "Gardening Your Soul and Replanting Memories," by Maxine Aynes Schweiker.

**MEMOIRS:** "Journey to a Closed City with the International Executive Service Corps," by Russell R. Miller; "O College Fairest of Our Dreams," by David L. Hammer.

**HISTORY:** "Living History of Council Bluffs," by Kathleen Meldrum and Mary Lou McGinn.

**FAMILY HISTORY:** "The Brushy Crick Kids," by Beverly Royster Veenbaas.

body

like a Midwest storm. You grew quiet as cornfields stretching out on an Iowa farm.

I wanted to awaken you, like shaking rain

from a tree. But other fields were in your eyes.

"**Portraits of Iowa**," edited by Jon Leu and Tom Schmitt (Nonpareil Publishing, hardback, 256 pages, \$34.95).

A combination history book, tourism guide and economic handbook, this coffee-table volume profiles 25 towns across the state, from Adel to Woodbine. Reporters at each town's respective newspaper wrote the stories, which include key historical events and people, plus current attractions and developments.

Readers may discover some surprises. For example, the Charles City library contains an art gallery with works by Rembrandt, Picasso and Grant Wood. Mount Pleasant, incorporated in 1842, was once known as the "Athens of Iowa" because of its abundance of early schools, which ranged from a one-room log cabin to a seminary for girls.

"Portraits of Iowa II," featuring 25 different communities, will be published in late October.

## CHILDREN ON THE FARM



A Postcard Book of Photographs by Pete Wettach



SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER

**Hard times:** Pete Wettach's two books showcase his photography of farm life during the Depression, World War II and post-war years.

Alzheimer's stripped his memory and ravaged his mind, as in this passage from a poem titled "Cycles":

The disease traveled through your