Print Resources About Agriculture – Non-Fiction

Here are some books you may want to consult if you are doing research into the history of Illinois agricultural topics. They relate to topics in the AVBarn Oral Histories and provide a background and context for them.


Egan, Timothy [2006]. *The Worst Hard Times*. Houghton Mifflin, NY, 340 pp. ISBN-10: 0-618-7734709. Traces the agricultural growth of the area surrounding the Panhandle region from 1901 to 1930, the coming of the Dustbowl and Depression, and the long years of suffering during those years to 1939. Many oral histories are used of the people who experienced the tragedy. Statistics and press reports add to this powerful narrative that makes the reader appreciate the scope and depth of the man-made ecological disaster.


Web Resources for Oral History

Oral History
http://oralhistoryeducation.com/education  Useful website on teaching students how to conduct oral interviews. Power Point presentations for teacher, students, and lesson plan. Kelly Philpott Brisbois, J.D., Principal and Creative Director. My Storycatcher, Inc. Email: brizkel@aol.com www.mystorycatcher.com  Tel: (415) 515-5111 Her blog keeps one up to date on her projects.

Literature Related to Agriculture

Garland, Hamlin [1893]. Main-traveled Roads. Very memorable stories about the difficult lives of small farmers in Wisconsin in the late nineteenth century. He wrote it to dispel the myth about the romantic pastoral life of pioneers. His style evokes the rich colors and sounds of rural life and the struggle for survival both physically and emotionally of farmers, particularly of women, whom he felt were often prisoners of farm life. Available free on Manybooks.net as an e-book.

Grey, Zane [1919]. Desert of Wheat. A man travels to the Southwest to start a new life in agriculture. He studies the farming situation of rented and owned land, the amount of land one needs to succeed, the access to water, access to financing. He has to fight land speculators, drought, illegality, and helplessness of neighbors to finally succeed in growing wheat in the desert area. Written with a strong sense of place with strong characters. Available free as an ebook on Manybooks.net.

Kirkland, Joseph [1887]. Zury: The Meanest Man in Spring County. Kirkland recreates the dialect and details of life near Danville, Illinois through an amazing character—a farmer who builds up a fortune. Available as an ebook from archives.org. Many of the characters in this book are the same or similar to those in Harold Sinclair’s American Years, which takes place in the same geographical area.

Oppenheim, E.P. [1921]. The Profiteers. During WWI a British industries investment firm tries to buy all the world’s wheat to increase prices and profits. Two enemies are involved. The more ethical one believes the scheme is wrong because poor people are the ones that get hurt. Coercion and kidnapping force one to sell stock. The other avoids arrest by leaving the country. Available as an e-book on Manybooks.net.

IBID [2000]. *A Year Down Yonder*. Puffin Books, NY. ISBN: 0-14-230070-5. 130p. Sequel to *A Long Way from Chicago*, this novel has Mary Alice going to live with Grandmother during the Depression when her father lost his job and her family lost their Chicago apartment. She enrolls in school, finds a few friends, and follows Grandma on her adventures that include stealing produce from fields to make pies, poaching fish traps, and setting traps for vandals. Newberry Medal winner for 2001.

Quick, Herbert [1922] *Vandemark’s Folly*. This novel follows the adventures of a boy of Dutch extraction from New York state as he runs away from an abusive step-father to try his luck on the Erie Canal trading boats. He eventually works his way west to Wisconsin and Iowa, where he finds the land he was given is mostly swamp. He builds his farm and life there. This book is available in many formats as an ebook on manybooks.net, Internet Archives, and other book sites.

Rölvaag, O. E. [1927] *Giants in the Earth: a Saga of the Prairie*. Translated from the Norwegian. This book can be found as a pdf downloadable from Gutenberg Australia. This novel follows the settling of Norwegian immigrants in Iowa and South Dakota. Per Hansa is a strong, determined man who wants to tame the prairie, build a farm, and thereby help build America. His wife Beret, becomes frightened of the prairie, isolated by her choice not to speak English, and worn down with work. The story follows the Norwegian community of friends as their farms grow despite hardships of drought, plagues of grasshoppers, and fire. It tells of a less romantic side of pioneer life with a very strong story. 500p.

Ibid: *Peder Victorious* [1929]. This sequel to *Giants in the Earth* is about Per Hansa’s son, and how the experience of the second generation of immigrants differs from the first. Peder is expected to become a preacher, but he finds politics and farming more attractive. His mother, Beret, plays a strong role in the novel, of dark foreboding that Americanization is equated with sin.

Sinclair, Harold [1938] *American Years*. Literary Guild, Doubleday, NY. 411p. This historical novel traces the development, events, and residents of a town called Everton, Illinois from 1830 to 1861. It introduces characters and families and follows major events. The location is the area around today’s Bloomington/Normal. Founding pioneers, immigrants, emerging leaders, business owners, and politicians people the pages. The main plot is the growth of the town from frontier settlement to town. The climax is the coming of the Civil War after Lincoln wins the Presidency. Locally famous characters such as David Davis, Abe Lincoln, Jesse Fell, Leonard Swett and others (also found in this website: [http://www.mrlincolnandfriends.org/index.asp](http://www.mrlincolnandfriends.org/index.asp) ) appear. It is interesting to compare the stories the friends tell in their own words with the stories in the novel to see how the author wove his research into a story with dialog.

Sinclair, Upton [1906], *The Jungle*. 
A Lithuanian immigrant family moves to Chicago, after having read advertisements that salaries are high. Prices are also high. They meet lots of con men, intermittent work and conditions that are physically challenging, even dangerous. They suffer one disaster and death after another. Local unions seem to be as corrupt as the business owners. The author stresses Socialist activism as a remedy. Publishers made Sinclair edit the novel to remove the most disagreeable incidents and references. The author was hoping that in exposing horrible working conditions, the public might rise up and demand reforms and regulations. The public was upset about the impurities in their food, but not about the bad conditions for the workers. This book is available free on Manybooks.net as an e-book.

Webster, Henry Kitchell. *The Banker and the Bear*. A Chicago banker leaves his father’s old-fashioned bank to be mentored by a vicious, manipulative dealer. He learns well, and strikes out on his own after learning the business. His old mentor spies on him, challenges him about a customer who borrowed a million to corner the lard market. Continuing their feud—at the crucial moment, the mentor is arrested and a bank run is averted. This book is available as an e-book at http://www.manybooks.net