

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1986

Review of *America's Country Schools* By Andrew Guilliford

Courtney Ann Vaughn-Roberson
University of Oklahoma

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Vaughn-Roberson, Courtney Ann, "Review of *America's Country Schools* By Andrew Guilliford" (1986).
Great Plains Quarterly. 963.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/963>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

America's Country Schools. By Andrew Guilliford, Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1984. Illustrations, appendix, bibliography, index. 296 pp. \$18.95 paper.

In Andrew Guilliford's view, many scholars have portrayed the history of American country schools in too narrow a fashion—presenting them as either pedagogical disasters or as images of the nation's success. Thus, the purpose of Guilliford's quite readable book, *America's Country Schools*, is to present a balanced interpretation of the historic educational setting, reconciling the beneficial elements of traditional education with some of its well-founded criticisms. Although his primary contribution to the literature is a large pictorial collection, Guilliford cites a wealth of scholarly works in his historical review. He takes into account the quality of curricula and teachers, the type of available supplies, the architecture of various buildings, and the schools' relative benefit to the communities they served.

Today 835 country schools (located primarily in Nebraska, Montana, and South Dakota) are still in operation. Several other states are currently involved in historic preservation projects that have renovated various school buildings, and some of these states offer living history programs for participating school children who actually experience a day in the life of a historic student—eating a similarly prepared lunch, reading copies of traditional schoolbooks, using pen and ink, and enjoying recess.

Throughout his work Guilliford accentuates country schools' positive and negative features, pointing out that in 1900 the literacy rate in Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska (states filled with these schools) was the highest in the nation. As an example of how these schools have enhanced local unity, Guilliford recounts how in 1930 a rural Colorado teacher dismissed classes and together with the students harvested a potato crop for a terminally ill farmer. On the other hand, the very isolation and homogeneity of many country schools has caused and still leads to problems. Students' academic work has suffered from a dearth of supplies; while the acculturationist philosophy of most of these institutions often has alienated the newly arrived immigrant child or the

pupil whose nationality is in the minority within a given school district. Occurrences such as these suggest that, regardless of their benefits, some of these small schools have fostered anti-intellectualism within the American educational process.

Beginning sometime during the 1930s Americans stopped building the lone school houses. Nevertheless, the country school refuses to die. As Americans grapple with their diverse needs for collectivity and individuality, the smaller "demassified" school, whether situated in inner cities, suburbs, or rural areas, seems to offer the best vehicle for accomplishing both. Cooperation within a given neighborhood yet toleration of each person's minor individual differences seems to flourish in these educational settings. We can only hope that a pluralistic understanding, rather than suspicion and prejudice, will develop between each of these communities and the schools that they support.

COURTNEY ANN VAUGHN-ROBERSON
College of Education
University of Oklahoma