Book review

The historian's dream scenario—serendipitously stumbling upon a cache of previously unexamined documents in one's own home—prompted Susan Bartlett Foote's inquiry into a group of post-war reformers who envisioned nothing less than a complete overhaul of Minnesota's mental health system. Although Foote's subjects were ultimately defeated, they nevertheless animated state politics between 1945 and 1954, created powerful grassroots alliances and, for a time, successfully ameliorated institutional conditions. They also, significantly, served as the precursors to later organisations, including the Mental Health Association of Minnesota, which would prove more enduring.

The book's empirical prowess is facilitated by its archival richness. It documents the minutiae of shared concerns and organisational efforts that culminated in the wide-ranging reform legislation of 1948. The bill proposed changes to employment practices, dietary regimens and the status of research; it also offered a blueprint for treatment and therapeutics beyond the institution. Of the innumerable personalities who brought this legislation to realisation, five receive particular attention in Foote's account. Especially emphasised are the contributions of Engla Schey, whose father was institutionalised and whose work in a variety of Minnesota mental institutions meant that she was well-poised to describe their deplorable conditions. And describe she did: the initial spark of reform can be traced to the account she offered at the 1946 Minnesota Unitarian Conference (MUC).

Creating the movement, however, depended on collaboration with like-minded people, and Schey found allies among the ranks of fellow Unitarians. Political activist Genevieve Steefel and Rev. A. Foote, both of whom served on the MUC's newly-formed Committee on Mental Hospitals (CMH), proved essential for their organisational and networking acumen. As Chairman of the CMH, it was Foote who forged an unlikely alliance with the Governor Luther Youngdahl and persuaded him that mental health reform mattered. Advisory boards were created, committees formed and data on present conditions collected. Meanwhile, recognising the powerful potential of the press, reformers enlisted Geri Hoffner, who reported on the reformers and the institutions they targeted.

Schey, Foote, Youngdahl and Hoffner are a well-chosen quartet. Across the narrative, they come to symbolise the factors that Foote articulates as the more significant for understanding the shape of this particular reform effort: the tenacity of citizen-activists; the grassroots focus and moral authority of the Unitarians; formidable, well-placed political support; and the media's capacity to shape public opinion. Without inveterate networks and insistent reportage, Schey's experiences may not have gained traction. Without Youngdahl's privileged political position, that traction may never have been translated into legislation. And, without public support—galvanised along grassroots networks as well as in the popular press—it is doubtful that conservative Minnesota legislators would have voted 'aye'.

Despite these alignments, the bill had been undermined to insignificance by 1954, sacrificed at the tripartite altar of economic efficiency, military prowess and individualism. Yet Susan Foote's brief epilogue proposes that this history can, nevertheless, be rendered into lessons for the twenty-first century. Yoking 1948 to 2018, she assesses the current state of mental health care in the United States, concluding that '[t]here is much work to do' (p.245). To begin, Foote suggests looking to the strategies of the Minnesota cohort. It was, after all, a grassroots movement mobilised under the rubric of advocating for the institutionalised, one that flourished without regard for traditional boundaries of religion, science and civil service. This irreverence seems to have been a mark of its sometime-success.

It also means that *Crusade* may be of interest to a diverse set of historians—with caveats. The portrayal of the psy-disciplines has a whiff of whiggishness about it, and Foote's treatment of the reformers is unusually sympathetic. Perhaps more significantly, the lack of explicit engagement with relevant historiographies means that the reader must assess the study's implications beyond current policy debate. One of the more significant oversights may be scholarship on twentieth-century US advocacy and activism as it relates to mental disabilities, associated with historians such as Alison Carey and Bradley Lewis.[1] Despite their shared object of analysis, Foote diverges in that people with mental disabilities tend to recede into the background. Rather, they materialise primarily as 'unfortunate Minnesotans' (p.1) who inadvertently motivated reformers. Advocacy, rather than collaborative or self-advocacy, is privileged.

Although Foote does not always do this work for us, it should nevertheless be noted that *Crusade* connects to current trends in several ways. Her attention to Schey, who began on 'the lowest rung on the institutional ladder' (p.37), will engross those researching institutional labour regimes. Foote's emphasis on cross-institutional connections will attract scholars emphasising the extent to which ostensibly isolated mental institutions were embedded within local, national and global networks. Finally, the book highlights recurring themes in the longer history of mental health reform. Many of the changes the Minnesota cohort proposed—visitations, occupational therapy and appropriations—seem straight from the nineteenth-century playbook. Despite quibbles, Foote has narrated an important moment in this history.

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[1]Alison C. Carey, *On the Margins of Citizenship: Intellectual Disability and Civil Rights in Twentieth-Century America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009); Carey, 'Parents and Professionals: Parents' Reflections on Professionals, the Support System, and the Family in the Twentieth-Century United States', in Susan Burch and Michael Rembis, eds, *Disability Histories* (Urbana, Chicago, & Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 58–76; Bradley Lewis, 'A Mad Fight: Psychiatry and Disability Activism', in Lennard J. Davis, ed. *Disability Studies Reader*, 4th edn (New York: Routledge, 2013), 339–54.