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# Small Town America



## Synopsis

In this, his 19th book on the American scene, David Plowden turns to a part of American culture that was once commonplace but is now in danger of being lost or forever transformed. With his photos and engaging text, Plowden has created a vivid portrait of "small town America" that will be instantly recognized--and mourned. 111 duotone photos.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 160 pages

Publisher: Harry N Abrams; First Edition edition (April 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0810938421

ISBN-13: 978-0810938427

Product Dimensions: 1 x 1 x 11.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.9 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

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## Customer Reviews

In Plowden's portraits of backwater America--decaying Main Street, general store, blacksmith, farmer--it is the photographer who ascribes significance to his subject through intense selective vision, technical near-perfection and a guaranteed popular response that can be appealed to again and again. Thus the pictures here wrongly may seem simply to have been left out of Plowden's 18 previous books ( *Commonplace* ) though many are of recent vintage. In a lengthy foreword, he lovingly ticks off a roster of self-reliant hometown people he has known, and nostalgically, almost petulantly, bemoans the now nearly complete surrender of bygone days of horse wagons and railroads to the superhighway's arid malls and condominiums. Plowden fans will be richly rewarded. BOMC dividend selection. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In his 19th book on the American scene, Plowden (*The End of an Era*, Norton, 1992) has focused on what epitomizes small towns--before this endangered species disappears altogether. The well-produced images, arranged roughly by topic (e.g., schools, theaters, churches, home interiors,

restaurants, stores, and grain elevators) and representing towns in many states (including Iowa, Kansas, West Virginia, New York, Minnesota, and Idaho), speak eloquently of small-town life. Even more so, they speak of change; by the time Plowden photographed these towns, most had been cut off from their rural heritages. Nevertheless, the photographs convey order, calm, and congeniality; the best of them evoke the work of Walker Evans, who, like Plowden, left scenes unaltered when he photographed them. For photography and U.S. social history collections. Kathleen Collins, New York Transit Museum Archives, Brooklyn Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

David Plowden is one of the best photographers in America and probably one of the least known of the greats. His images of small-town America are clean, direct, powerful and elegant. Every time I look at his photos I get an education about what a great photograph can be and I think of his work often when I am shooting or reviewing my own photos. Before traveling to Iowa where I occasionally go specifically to shoot, I always take this book out for ideas and to put me in the right frame of mind visually. It's easy to overuse the word, but David Plowden is a genius of a photographer. Every serious photographer should search out his many books and study them.

David Plowden spent nearly fifty years (from around 1950 until he stopped photographing in 2008) meticulously documenting the world he grew up in before it vanished for good. *Small Town America* is perhaps the purest distillation of his work. Each turn of the page presents another immaculately crafted photograph of a Main Street storefront, the lobby of a fading hotel, or the interior of a general store. The composition, framing, and Plowden's superb darkroom skills all combine to present the clearest possible image. Each rewards thoughtful study. Having grown up in such a town, and having seen it "developed" out of existence, I find Plowden's book unbearably poignant. It's a minor treasure.

Mr. Plowden's photos take you to another place and time. He fulfills the promise of a glimpse of unembellished reality outside the city.

Great book. Really touches on the life in small towns

Though published in 1994 and photographed in small town America I can say that three of the places David Plowden visited are still on the map and thanks to Google's Street View I've been able to see the same shot he saw in Frederick, South Dakota, Janesville, Minnesota and Council Grove,

Kansas. The same buildings, railroad tracks and street furniture are still there. It's nice to know that these places still exist though admittedly they might be facing a slow decay. The 111 lovely photos really do capture the feel of towns away from the strip malls, housing sub-divisions, freeways and the rest of visual progress. Plowden has managed to capture a quietness and honesty that seems to exist in these places. I've looked through these photos several times over the years and I always close the book with the feeling that it is just one place. The editorial flow of images is just perfect to suggest Anytown USA. From Main Street with its railroad tracks, exterior and interiors of small shops, a bank, library, pre-1950 housing and inside rooms, small commercial concerns (and sometimes large grain elevators) to the few portrait shots, they all work so wonderfully well. David Plowden has produced twenty or so books, with a constant theme, it seems to me, of capturing the ruggedness of a slightly past America. 'Small town America' covers this theme brilliantly. If you are just discovering Plowden's work have a look at *A Handful of Dust: Disappearing America*, published in 2006 and it continues the theme of 'Small town America'. The 1997 published *Imprints: David Plowden : A Retrospective*, has 179 duotone photos selected from forty years of his work photographing the US. \*\*\*SEE INSIDE THE BOOK by clicking 'customer images' under the cover.

Great real people and real life photos from the midwest and eastern U.S. An excellent theatrical research text for scenic and costume design. Architecture, furniture, signage, decoration and clothing are all well represented.

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