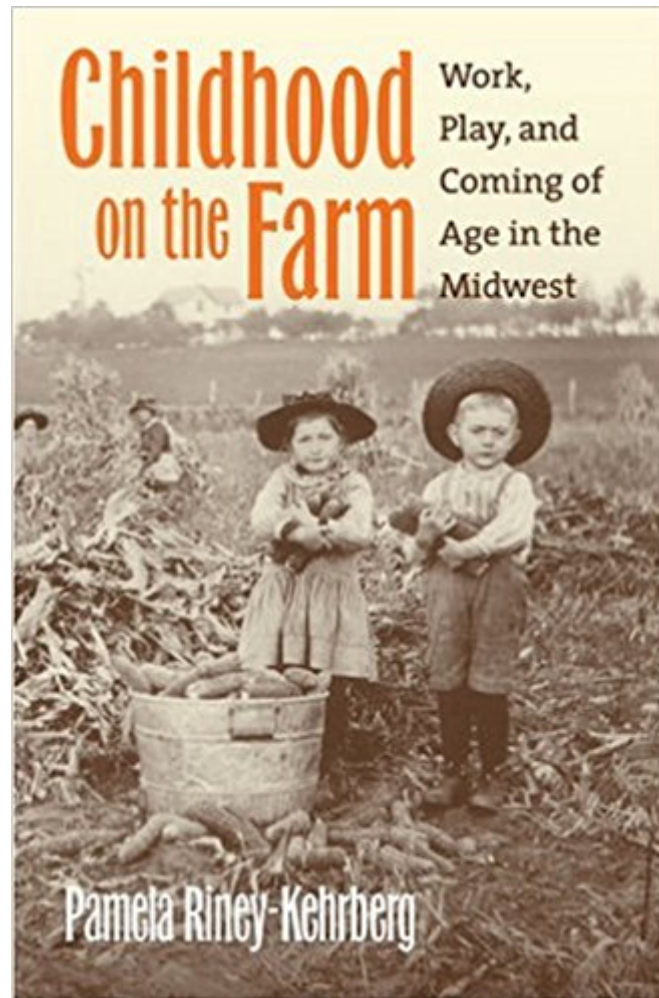




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Childhood On The Farm: Work, Play, And Coming Of Age In The Midwest



Synopsis

As the United States transformed itself from an agricultural to an industrial nation, thousands of young people left farm homes for life in the big city. But even by 1920 the nation's heartland remained predominantly rural and most children in the region were still raised on farms. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg retells their stories, offering glimpses—both nostalgic and realistic—of a bygone era. As Riney-Kehrberg shows, the experiences of most farm children continued to reflect the traditions of family life and labor, albeit in an age when middle-class urban Americans were beginning to redefine childhood as a time reserved for education and play. She draws upon a wealth of primary sources—not only memoirs and diaries but also census data—to create a vivid portrait of midwestern farm childhood from the early post-Civil War period through the Progressive Era growing pains of industrialization. Those personal accounts resurrect the essential experience of children's work, play, education, family relations, and coming of age from their own perspectives. Steering a middle path between the myth of wholesome farm life and the reality of work that was often extremely dangerous, Riney-Kehrberg shows both the best and the worst that a rural upbringing had to offer midwestern youth a time before mechanization forever changed the rural scene and radio broke the spell of isolation. Down on the farm, truancy was not uncommon and chores were shared across genders. Yet farm children managed to indulge in inventive play—much of it homemade—to supplement store-bought toys and to get through the long spells between circuses. Filled with insightful personal stories and graced with dozens of highly evocative period photos, *Childhood on the Farm* is the only general history of midwestern farm children to use narratives written by the children themselves, giving a fresh voice to these forgotten years. Theirs was a way of life that was disappearing even as they lived it, and this book offers new insight into why, even if many rural youngsters became urban and suburban adults, they always maintained some affection for the farm.

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