

Annka Liepold, MA

Corn: An Environmental History

My dissertation project aims to examine the impact of corn on the town of Olivia, Minnesota. In this case study I aim to incorporate all contributing aspects (environmental, economic, cultural, ecological etc.) and phenomena that occur all over the Midwest and are representative of the general development of corn on the one hand, and to work out the regional characteristics in the town of Olivia, Minnesota, on the other. These characteristics can include changes in agricultural methods and their industrial use, as well as the effects on the landscape. How did corn form Olivia? What effect did it have on the surrounding landscape? How was the industry affected by the industrialization of corn?

Few crops have changed the American landscape and impacted the American industry as heavily as corn. This massive impact on the American landscape is the more visible end of the story of this cash crop. Interestingly enough, the other—less visible—part has received a lot more attention thus far. Much has been written about the corn (and food!) industry, but much less about the agrarian dimension and the “corn landscapes.” By writing about the effects of corn on Olivia, Minnesota, and the surrounding area, I am trying to paint a more holistic picture of the environmental history of corn.