

Patrick J. Lucey: A Lasting Legacy

Dennis L. Dresang

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A wonderful portrait of a beloved politician, Patrick J. Lucey is an essential addition to the history of Wisconsin politics.

Dennis L. Dresang's expansive biography *Patrick J. Lucey* suggests the national importance of an otherwise state-based progressive icon.

Patrick Lucey dedicated his life to public service, and this book recounts his many successes and failures in the public arena. The proud son of a Wisconsin family, Lucey dedicated his life to improving the lots of regular Wisconsinites, from the urban poor to rural landowners. He was tireless in campaigning and canvassing for working people, and this dogged work paid off. After serving in the Caribbean as a member of the US Army during World War II, he jumped into Democratic politics in his home state. From there, he became the governor, and then the US Ambassador to Mexico under President Jimmy Carter.

Lucey's days in Wisconsin are the primary focus of this researched biography. His background, and the backgrounds of his family members—all of whom were hardworking Norwegian immigrants—are explored in depth in chapters that capture their personalities and political interests, backed up by a multipage bibliography.

The hectic 1970 days when Lucey ran for the governorship for the second time are covered; they earned him the position of the most powerful politician in Wisconsin. The book details a campaign characterized by hard work and charisma, in which Lucey made an earnest appeal to the blue-collar workers of the Badger State.

The biography is chronologically structured, beginning with Lucey's family and their earliest days as frontier entrepreneurs. Each chapter focuses on the development of Lucey's political ambitions. Several pictures are included within chapters—a nice, humanizing touch. Lucey's final years, which were spent out of public office, are also included.

The down-to-earth text includes more than a passing whiff of hero worship: Lucey is often upheld as the paragon of republican virtue, making it seem as if he, and he alone, saved progressive politics in Wisconsin after the death of Robert M. La Follette. It's not clear what his impact was outside of Wisconsin. What is clear is that Lucey helped to keep Wisconsin a left-Democratic stronghold through the 1970s and 1980s, and this legacy persists, although it has been challenged since the 2010s.

A sterling biography that's rich in information about Patrick Lucey as both a man and a politician, this feel-good book is made all the more enjoyable because of its unadorned prose. *Patrick J. Lucey* is an essential addition the history of Wisconsin politics.

BENJAMIN WELTON (January 23, 2020)

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