On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women’s Activism since 1945

by Jenny Barker Devine

xi + 188 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.

Historians have never disputed the significance of women’s roles in American agriculture; interpreting these roles, however, has yielded insight from various perspectives. Jenny Barker Devine’s On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women’s Activism since 1945 contributes a feminist interpretation of twentieth-century Iowa farm women who engaged in political and local activities to preserve the family farm. Although working from an admittedly small number of farm women, Devine is particularly interested in tracing the post–World War II shift in rhetoric used to motivate women’s participation in agricultural organizations, from that of improving farms and local communities to stemming their decline. Devine argues that farm women in Iowa—and, by extension, in Kansas and the Midwest—have been consistently attuned to agricultural issues such as land and commodity prices, government policies, and farm safety but have been less committed to rectifying gender inequality despite being hampered by it.

Though paying only scant attention to the historical context of gender relations among farm women and men, Devine examines women’s struggles since 1920 for inclusion, leadership, and recognition as advocates for family farming through the prisms of leading Iowa and national farm groups, including the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF), the Iowa Farmers Union (IFU), and the National Farmers Organization (NFO). Iowa is a good case study because of its high percentage of farm group membership. For women, activism in the early IFBF meant working through women’s committees to expand membership and to identify women’s issues and programs. Dramatic shifts during the World War II era in farm production (mechanization, higher capital investments) and demographics (rural depopulation) prompted a new emphasis on preserving farms and rural communities, farm safety, and rural health. Despite addressing a broader range of issues, the IFBF and IFU faced declining membership among women by the 1960s. The NFO, which focused on farmer collective bargaining and marketing methods, offered women a more “transformative” experience in uniting political activities with protecting the family farm, as seen in farm women’s participation in holding actions. Clearly, though, Iowa farm women have been “notoriously difficult to organize” (p. 138).

To a problematic degree, Devine’s study fails to recognize the continuum of rural Midwestern and Iowa women’s history. Although the author examines the debilitating effects of sexism in the countryside on twentieth-century women, which, she asserts, required them to create separate public spaces to find their own voices, she surprisingly fails to connect her story with highly visible Populist women of the 1890s, such as Kansan Mary Elizabeth Lease. These women, too, actively fought to save their midwestern farms, regardless of the discriminatory attitudes that existed. True, Populism was less powerful in Iowa than in other states, but, given the rising women’s rights movement in the Hawkeye State described by Louise Noun in Strong-Minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman-Suffrage Movement in Iowa (1986), was the Populist legacy truly lost on Iowa women? Another problem with this volume is an important premise about gender dynamics in the lives of farm women. In characterizing the roots of sexist gender relations among Midwestern farm families, Devine appears to rely solely upon anthropologist Deborah Fink’s Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880–1940 (1992), which offers a decidedly narrow and negative characterization of the relationship between farm women and men rooted in traditional, male-dominated Jeffersonian ideology. A clearly more optimistic, flexible, and partnership-oriented relationship among Iowans is evident in their own words, as seen in numerous published Civil War–era letters, including Love and Valor: Intimate Civil War Letters Between Captain Jacob and Emeline Ritner, edited by Charles F. Larimer (2000), and Love in an Envelope: A Courtship in the American West, edited by Daniel Tyler (2008), which includes a young Iowa wife’s playful bantering that she intends to do the outdoor work while her husband can work inside. Jeffersonian agrarianism, at least by the mid-nineteenth century, was characterized more by flexible than by rigid gender attitudes and roles.

Devine has written an important feminist perspective of twentieth-century Iowa farm women. Her provocative conclusion, revealing sensitivity to current farm women’s issues, makes this reviewer eager to see her next project.

Reviewed by Ginette Aley, Carey Fellow, Department of History, Kansas State University, Manhattan.
Crooked Paths to Allotment: The Fight over Federal Indian Policy after the Civil War
by C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa
xi + 228 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.

In Crooked Paths to Allotment, C. Joseph Genetin-Pilawa illuminates the previously marginalized role of both individuals and organizations in the late nineteenth-century development of U.S. Indian policy-reform initiatives. Examining instances of Indian policy-making “that force us to stop and reconsider assumptions . . . about the Native experience” (p. 2), the author contributes to the existing literature in this field by fleshing out the role of several neglected historical actors and agencies, including Ely S. Parker, the Board of Indian Commissioners, the National Indian Defense Association, and the Indian Rights Association.

Genetin-Pilawa successfully argues that Indian confinement—as manifested spatially through removal and economically through allotment—required the strategic subjugation of both external and internal sovereignty by way of political maneuvering at the local and federal levels of government. Such repression became an object of bureaucratic conflict when the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) shifted from the War Department to the Department of the Interior in 1849. Repeated attempts to transfer the OIA back to the War Department failed, and the administration of Indian policy thus fell to a government entity fraught with corruption and hamstrung by inefficiency.

The first three chapters overview Indian policy throughout the antebellum period and the Civil War. This lengthy introductory framework gives way to the crux of the monograph, which commences with an examination of President Ulysses S. Grant’s Peace Policy and extends through the allotment era of 1887 to 1934. Scholars will find this book of seven chapters important for its contextualization of Indian policy debates within multiple broader topics: political entrepreneurship, American colonialism, westward expansion, postwar Reconstruction, social and moral reform movements, landownership, and Gilded Age politics are all interwoven throughout the narrative.

Central to midcentury Indian policy formulation was Ely S. Parker, the first Native American to serve as commissioner of Indian affairs and a pivotal participant in procedural reform initiatives. Previous publications, the author tells us, have underrepresented Parker’s impact on Indian policy alternatives, and this work deservedly elevates him to a central role in the story. As a “political entrepreneur,” Parker favored military enforcement of Indian policy, sought to eliminate corruption in the OIA, supported gradual assimilation, and became an outspoken proponent of Indian education. Imbued with a level of political power that was unusual for a Native American of his time, Parker surprisingly emphasized strict adherence to treaty stipulations—even when he knew that such adherence would be detrimental to indigenous interests.

Ironically, Parker’s policy reforms—designed to provide alternatives to rapid assimilation—ended up being partially responsible for the implementation of land allotment at century’s end. With the passage of the Dawes Act in 1887, assimilationists emerged successful in the repression of Indian policy alternatives, and the wholehearted efforts of Christian reformers thus failed to attain the desired outcome.

Exhibiting an impressive depth of primary research and utilizing a number of sparsely consulted archival collections, Crooked Paths to Allotment is a useful contribution to the historiography of American Indian policy. By focusing on lesser-known historical actors and contextualizing their policy initiatives within broader national frameworks, Genetin-Pilawa underscores the political complexity of the post–Civil War era, during which moral reformers clashed with capitalists bent on economic exploitation and land allotment and assaults on tribal sovereignty served as the means toward that desired end. The two decades between the Civil War and the Dawes Act epitomized such contention, and this book sheds light on that heretofore underanalyzed period in the history of Indian policy.

Reviewed by William S. Kiser, PhD candidate, Arizona State University, Tempe.
Civil War General and Indian Fighter James M. Williams: Leader of the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry and the 8th U.S. Cavalry

by Robert W. Lull

ix + 289 pages, illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index.

About 10 percent of the troops that Kansas raised for service during the Civil War were African Americans assigned to two infantry regiments and an independent artillery battery. James Monroe Williams commanded one of these units, the "1st Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry" (or First Kansas Colored). This biography by Robert Lull, a retired army officer and descendant of Williams, details the latter’s service with that regiment and as a regular army officer after the war.

Born in upstate New York in 1833, James Williams later moved with his family to Wisconsin, and in 1856 he and his brother Sam came to Bleeding Kansas and became businessmen in Leavenworth. Williams was a staunch abolitionist and soon became friends with future U.S. Senator James H. Lane, both of them doing their best to ensure that Kansas entered the Union as a free state. Shortly after the Civil War began, Williams was commissioned as a captain in the Fifth Kansas Cavalry. In 1862 Lane was appointed as a recruiting commissioner for the army’s Department of Kansas (Kansas and several surrounding territories), and he divided his responsibilities between Williams and another officer, with Williams recruiting from the northern part of the state. Although Lane was not authorized to organize a black regiment, he took it upon himself to do just that, and the First Kansas Colored was the result. Williams left the cavalry and was appointed as the lieutenant colonel (second in command) of the new regiment, which was not officially added to the rolls of the Union Army until January 1863. In May Williams rose to command the unit, which was later redesignated the Seventy-Ninth U.S. Colored Infantry (USCI) (new). Under the steady hand of Colonel Williams, the black infantrymen gave a good account of themselves fighting Confederate forces in the Indian Territory (Battles of Cabin Creek and Honey Springs) and in Arkansas (Battle of Poison Spring). When brevet Brigadier General Williams and the Seventy-Ninth USCI finally mustered out of federal service at Pine Bluff, Arkansas, in October 1865, the unit had suffered more fatalities than any other Kansas regiment.

Williams decided that he enjoyed military service enough to join the regular army, which was greatly expanded in 1866. He was commissioned as a captain in the Eighth U.S. Cavalry, one of the army’s four new mounted regiments. Williams joined the unit in California in early 1867, unfortunately making an enemy of Thomas Devin, the regimental lieutenant colonel, right off the bat. Later that year, while courageously fighting Apaches in Arizona Territory, Williams earned a brevet promotion to major, but he also was badly injured by two arrows in his back. One arrowhead pierced his kidney, remaining there for the rest of his life, and his health suffered. Lingering pain from his injury and further problems with Devin convinced Williams to resign from the army in 1873.

Williams resettled his family in Trinidad, Colorado, and went into business there and in Lamar. In 1890, in recognition of his generally excellent twelve years of military service, congressional legislation allowed him to rejoin the army as a captain in 1891 and retire with a pension a few days later. Williams died in 1907 and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

The author writes well, and he has done an impressive amount of research. Initially, all he knew about his ancestor was that he had been a general in the Civil War, but he was able to track down the sources that illuminated the fascinating career of James Williams. Maps of three of the regiment’s main battles and thirty-seven other well-chosen illustrations greatly complement the text. All those interested in Bleeding Kansas, the Civil War in the Trans-Mississippi theater, and the postwar “Indian-fighting” army will find much to enjoy in this volume.

Reviewed by Roger D. Cunningham, retired U.S. Army officer, Fairfax County, Virginia.
Pen and Ink Witchcraft: Treaties and Treaty Making in American Indian History

by Colin G. Calloway


Colin G. Calloway’s Pen and Ink Witchcraft: Treaties and Treaty Making in American Indian History takes its title from the evocative 1791 words of an Ottawa chief who complained that treaties constituted a nefarious sort of “pen and ink witchcraft” and that whites “make [treaties] speak things we never intended, or had any idea of, even an hundred years hence” (pp. vii and 106). A title and subtitle so apt create expectations that Calloway’s magic as a historian cannot quite meet, despite his command of the subject and his powers of synthesis. For Calloway, the devil is in the details, and at the heart of Pen and Ink Witchcraft are three richly detailed narrative chapters that offer case studies of three critical treaties representative of three major phases in Indian-white relations in colonial America and the United States: the Treaty of Fort Stanwix (1768), the Treaty of New Echota (1835), and the Treaty of Medicine Lodge (1867). Around these case studies, an introduction, conclusion, and three briefer intervening analytical chapters provide background, context, and broader analysis meant to achieve the promise of the subtitle—to give readers a comprehensive history of treaties and treaty-making in American Indian history.

Calloway’s analytical framework is sound; his command of the events and personalities involved in the negotiations he examines is masterful; and his larger conclusions about the devastating impact of treaties and treaty-making on North America’s Native people are convincing, sobering, and in the end unsurprising. We are not shocked to learn that treaties were the “stepping-stones of empire” or that “in treaty after treaty, Indian people were coerced, deceived, manipulated, and misled into giving up their lands in return for pittances and promises that more often than not proved empty” (p. 2). Calloway centers attention on the hundred-year period between 1768 and 1871 (when Congress ended U.S. treaty-making), during which time some 400 treaties were negotiated, though fewer were ratified. Such a focus produces a valuable but uneven work, hobbled somewhat by the thin ligaments that connect its case studies and by the superficial treatment of the twentieth century, when forgotten or neglected treaties assumed, perhaps surprisingly, new force as Native activists, courts, and more sympathetic officials found in them support for Native sovereignty claims and protections for Native lands and resources. Pen and Ink Witchcraft is thus a missed opportunity because of the limitations of its scope and a restricted interpretive vision.

Calloway sticks closely to the facts and established historical explanations, and his occasionally provocative suggestions about new ways of understanding American treaty-making too often lack elaboration. Most basically, Calloway might have pondered more substantially: What is a treaty? And which ones demand our attention? Are treaties living documents, as the author suggests (but barely explains), and how exactly are they like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, to which he compares them in a sentence (p. 10)? The Declaration has no ongoing legal standing but remains a touchstone of American political culture, whereas the Constitution, which has preeminent legal status, has both guided and helped transform American life for over two centuries. Have Indian treaties had a similar impact? Twentieth-century developments suggest as much; modern judges have made treaties “speak things . . . never intended” or anticipated a hundred years after their negotiation—as in the 1970s, when U.S. District Court Judge George Hugo Boldt declared that certain treaties originating in the 1850s guaranteed to Northwest tribes half the permitted salmon catch in the “usual and accustomed grounds and station” they had fished for generations. Yet Calloway treats this critical saga in half of one paragraph (p. 240), and similarly important matters receive shallow attention in the book’s conclusion or interlinear chapters.

Colin Calloway writes credibly, “Treaties are a barometer of Indian-white relations in North America” (p. 3), and he provides a useful guide to the storms that have howled through Native America. Still, we might have hoped for a more complete weather report—a history with greater analytical depth, geographic range, and chronological reach into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Reviewed by Matthew Dennis, professor of history, University of Oregon, Eugene.
**Indians, Alcohol, and the Roads to Taos and Santa Fe**

by William E. Unrau

xi + 193 pages, illustrations, notes, bibliography, maps, index.

Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013, cloth $29.95.

In *Indians, Alcohol, and the Roads to Taos and Santa Fe*, distinguished scholar William E. Unrau explores the intricate linkages between the opening of the Santa Fe Trail, Indian removal from the east, and alcohol peddling in the often ill-defined “Indian Country.” As Unrau demonstrates, William Becknell’s seemingly uneventful venture from Westport, Missouri, to Santa Fe in 1821 set the precedent for sustained overland trade along what became the Santa Fe Trail. In Becknell’s wake, expansionist politicians, most notably Missouri’s Thomas Hart Benton, pressed for government funding to chart a road roughly following Becknell’s path that, they argued, would improve the lives of those living in Indian Country. Despite claims of good intentions, the opening of the roads did not lead to an elevation of the status of Indian peoples. Instead, Indians reorganized their way of life as alcohol and loss of territory became central to their experience.

Unrau convincingly argues that Benton and other politicians paved the way for a trade system that encouraged thousands of Indians, many recently relocated, to accept alcohol or annuity payments in exchange for valuable bison products by convincing the public that trade would help improve the lives of Native peoples while also enriching the non-Native businessmen. On the other hand, claims that Indians were “induced by non-Indian traders to exchange [buffalo robes and products] for corn-and wheat-based alcohol produced in western Missouri and northern Mexico distilleries” is difficult to demonstrate given the lack of documentation from Indian perspectives (p. 3). This leaves the question: Could these traders have been responding to a demand for alcohol rather than convincing Indians to accept it?

In any case, once the roads were charted, American traders had access to thousands of Indians who collectively received hundreds of thousands of dollars in annuity payments each year. As more tribes were forced to move westward in the 1830s, the number of Indians and the amount of annuity payments increased, which in turn expanded the market for trade goods and especially alcohol. Unrau cites W. J. Rorabaugh’s *The Alcohol Republic* (1979) to demonstrate the prolific use of alcohol across the country in the antebellum era. From there he argues that, given alcohol’s prevalence in wider society at the time, it is not surprising that it became a popular trade commodity. He concludes that traders likely saw governmental attempts to restrict alcohol sales as misguided and unjust given the government’s own use of alcohol in Indian relations. On top of this, alcohol offered high profit margins that outweighed the risk of the possible penalties. Although Unrau’s conclusions seem logical, more evidence would have solidified these claims.

Unrau more persuasively demonstrates that enforcement of the prohibition on alcohol sales in Indian Country was virtually nonexistent despite increases in restrictions and penalties on paper. He links this failure to enforce with tight federal budgets, which left the often corrupt Indian agents without the resources to police the trade and prosecute offenders. Even when resources were available, a general lack of will to apprehend and prosecute alcohol peddlers prevented any real restriction of the trade.

Overall, *Indians, Alcohol, and the Roads to Taos and Santa Fe* is a concise and well-researched study on the scarcely restricted alcohol trade in Indian Country after the opening of trade routes through Kansas in the early nineteenth century. This trade shifted Native lifestyles as Plains and Prairie peoples responded to the demand for buffalo robes and products and their thirst for alcohol. Unrau utilizes a variety of primary sources, including records from frontier outposts, business records, Congressional records, Office of Indian Affairs records, and newspaper accounts, and deftly synthesizes his prior research and the work of other scholars into a highly readable history of the negative aspects of the opening of the roads to Taos and Santa Fe.

*Reviewed by Seth Isaacson, independent scholar, Moline, Illinois.*
In *Railroaded*, Richard White, the Margaret Byrne Professor of American History at Stanford University, unleashes a well-considered discussion about the “unruly youth of corporate capitalism” (p. xxxiv). He argues that the transcontinental railroads in the United States, Mexico, and Canada “would have been better left unbuilt,” at least in the decades immediately following the Civil War. Instead of providing needed services, they “flooded markets with wheat, silver, cattle, and coal for which there was little or no need” (p. xxvi). This “triumph of the unfit” (p. 509) rewarded wealthy builders who eventually defaulted on their credit obligations to the U.S. government, and these actions contributed to the deep depressions of 1877 and 1893. This argument hearkens back to *The Octopus*, Frank Norris’s 1901 critique of the Southern Pacific.

Although this 500-plus-page narrative seems, at first blush, to be its own octopus, it is not a rambling diatribe against post–Civil War modernism. It has a human side and is written with enough wit and authority to remain engaging from start to finish. Although White rolls many stories into one, he skillfully holds the narrative together by focusing on five main contentions, all of which impacted the development of Kansas in the early years of its statehood: the lines “between corporate competition and federal regulation” were oddly “smudged” in the heady days of post–Civil War progress (p. xxix); the construction and operation of these long roads reshaped the continent’s senses of time and space; dysfunctional corporate structures profited from railroad building while the public paid heavy costs; antimonopolist movements—such as the Populists in Kansas—emerged as a result of corporate and government collusion; and the famous and sometimes infamous lions of industry and finance that built the railroads were “not that smart” and rarely intended to create the massive social and economic changes they helped usher in (pp. xxix–xxxii).

The race to build railroads into western Kansas between 1885 and 1889 illustrates several of these contentions. White suggests that building into Saline, McPherson, and Barton counties—all places with ample and regular precipitation—made economic sense because a growing population of wheat farmers needed to move their crops. Working in concert with settler preferences, expanding transportation systems encouraged even greater immigration. The six railroads that invested in the state’s semiarid western regions, however, were never likely to become profitable. Still, the availability of land grants and government-backed bond opportunities created rampant, unhealthy speculation and miles upon miles of track hauling minimal freight. In contrast, South Dakota—a state with no land-grant lines—developed through “unsubsidized regional railroads built to meet demand” and avoided many of the unsustainable settlement patterns that other places on the Plains experienced (p. 485).

White examines the famed cattle industry as another unsustainable practice and argues that it “was a creature of finance” above all else (p. 471). Again, the speculative fever of the era led to unsound practices. Investors poured money into ranches, railroad cow towns, and trail drives without considering the details of the business; livestock need to be managed to survive, and even then shrinkage is inevitable. Still, railroads encouraged and obtained greater animal production because they desperately needed freight on their overbuilt western lines. In the end, supply-and-demand issues and bad weather destroyed the monopolistic cattle industry. White does not recount its transformation into a series of family-run enterprises.

*Railroaded* does not present a heroic story. Rather, White attempts to be honest. He generally succeeds, although he sometimes cannot hide his amazement or amusement at the most unsound practices. Still, he is not revisiting Norris nor simply contributing to a body of literature that glosses railroad builders as robber barons. Rather, White successfully argues that the transcontinental roads were built decades before they were necessary or profitable because business and government found doing so advantageous in the short term. The public interest, however, was roundly ignored, and the results were often disastrous.

Ultimately, the volume has more to offer than just the author’s cogent narrative. It is well mapped and illustrated. The fifteen charts in the appendix and the vignettes that follow each chapter—about both famous and fairly average individuals—could have good application for discussion and other classroom exercises. All in all, confronting the octopus that is *Railroaded* is a worthwhile venture.

Reviewed by Kurt E. Kinbacher, assistant professor of history, Chadron State College, Chadron, Nebraska.
In this lively and enjoyable book, Stan Hoig provides a well-researched and elegantly written narrative of the Spanish incursions that went north from New Spain and into the American Southwest between the late 1530s and the first years of the 1600s. Hoig examines not only the massive expeditions of Francisco Vasquez de Coronado and Juan de Oñate but also the exploits of several other adventurers and missionaries. The author’s careful plotting of these incursions is a valuable resource to anyone interested in Spanish activities in this part of America; those with an interest in Kansas history will find the detailed discussion of Oñate’s route in the appendix especially intriguing. Hoig also provides a vivid portrait of the lives of the conquistadors and successfully recreates what it was like to be a participant in these treks into the American interior. Hoig is careful not to romanticize the conquistadors (he never hides their astonishing brutality toward the Indians in their path), but neither does he demonize them. Instead, he paints a realistic portrait of these men and their experiences. Recreating the past as lived experience (however unsavory we find the actions and attitudes of those who lived it) is central to historical scholarship, and Hoig manages to bring the conquistadors to life.

A fascinating thread running through Hoig’s discussion of all Spanish incursions into the Southwest is the extent to which the hunt for legendary riches—mythical cities of gold that always seemed to glimmer in the distance—informed the actions of the conquistadors. It is difficult to gauge the historical impact of fantasies, and although it may seem surprising that hard-nosed conquistadors let themselves be beguiled by such romantic delusions, *Came Men on Horses* convincingly establishes the importance of myths in shaping the plans of these men. When the Spanish crossed the Atlantic, they carried with them Iberian legends of golden cities of untold wealth. Not only did the plunder of Mexico and Peru seem to confirm the truth of such dreams, but many Native individuals—such as the enigmatic El Turco, who led Coronado’s expedition close to ruin on the plains—were ready to deceive or indulge the invaders by spinning gold-threaded yarns of their own, leading Coronado, Oñate, and numerous lesser adventurers to gamble their lives and fortunes on chasing after Cibola, Quivira, and other places shrouded in myths of treasure. Even after the surviving conquistadors had come back to New Spain exhausted after yet another futile excursion to the north, there were always those who were ready to believe that if only they had looked harder—if they had gone a few miles more—they would have found an El Dorado in the end.

Hoig’s narrative would have benefited from more in-depth analyses of the cultural and political backgrounds of the Indian individuals and groups who encountered the conquistadors. Indians are everywhere in this book (and Hoig treats them in a sympathetic manner), but he does not spend much space discussing their cultures and societies. Indians appear as military auxiliaries, slaves, guides, and informants—and above all as local people whose lives were disrupted and too often cut short by the Spaniards—but less as members of complex cultures with ideas and motivations of their own. Of course, Spaniards, not Indians, are the subject matter of this book, but because it is clear from Hoig’s narrative that the actions of Native individuals and communities shaped the outcome of these expeditions in a variety of ways, some further consideration of the Native perspective seems merited. Sometimes the Indians assisted the Spaniards, sometimes they fought them, and sometimes they submitted to these intruders and later rebelled, but what cultural and political assumptions underlay these responses often remains unclear in this account.

Nevertheless, this is a well-crafted book, and as an investigation of the actions and mentalities of the conquistadors it will be read with interest by scholars of Spanish colonization and the early history of the Southwest alike.

*Reviewed by Tom Arne Midtøed, assistant professor of history, University of Iowa, Iowa City.*
Sight Unseen: How Frémont’s First Expedition Changed the American Landscape

by Andrew Menard

xxix + 249 pages, illustrations, notes, index.
Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012, cloth $29.95.

The subtitle of Ken Burns’s national parks documentary, “America’s Best Idea,” indicates the degree to which landscape has come to define the nation. But that has not always been so. To many Americans of the early republic, the great expanse of continent stretching west was foreboding. Some, recalling Montesquieu’s assessment that republics must remain geographically small or fracture under pressures from competing internal interests, believed that the young nation should cling to the Atlantic seaboard. They appreciated early explorers’ comparisons of the West to deserts that would curtail expansion. Others, believing that history, not land, signaled national greatness, sought to invest the young nation with European allusions or to ground its legitimacy in an exotic Indian antiquity. The evolution of Americans’ ideas about landscape, from the Great American Desert to America’s Best Idea, is an important but largely unwritten chapter in the story of American nationalism. With Sight Unseen, Andrew Menard has traced one compelling piece of that crucial history.

Essential to that story, Menard argues, was John C. Frémont’s Report of the Exploring Expedition to the Rocky Mountains. Originally written for Congress in 1843 and disseminated widely thereafter, the Report chronicled Frémont’s 1842 travels for the Army Topographical Engineers across the Great Plains to the crest of the Continental Divide in Wyoming. Menard reads the Report as a foundational document of American expansion. Not only did it provide geographic information necessary for westward expansion, it also pioneered a radically new aesthetic that encouraged Americans to think of the western half of the continent as a national landscape, that is, a place of variety, beauty, and opportunity, the occupation of which would fulfill the nation’s aspirations and demonstrate its achievement.

Frémont responded directly to those who echoed Montesquieu’s concerns or who considered the western prairies and mountains a wasteland. Although his data debunked these myths, he knew that Americans’ dim view of western lands was not based on data. Therefore, to persuade Americans to see national fulfillment instead of future fracture and opportunity instead of obstacle in the West, he attacked the problem aesthetically. He juxtaposed the imagery of sublime wilderness with that of lovely domestication. He also emphasized topographic description, implicitly invoking the authority of scientific empiricism to subtly undermine previous misapprehensions. For example, whereas early explorers had treated the Great Plains as a monolithic and undifferentiated wasteland, Frémont described them in minute detail, highlighting their variation and contrasts and thus portraying them as a composite of many landscapes rather than a monotonous whole. The Report climaxes with Frémont atop the Continental Divide, on which he planted an American flag and playfully observed a bumblebee—a potent contemporary symbol of domesticated landscapes that apparently thrived in this supposedly difficult environment. Why not, the Report implied, the entire nation too? In sum, Frémont, no less than editor John O’Sullivan, who coined the phrase “Manifest Destiny,” helped to transform the image of the western landscape from an impediment into a horizon of opportunity, the conquest of which embodied national achievement.

Though the title does not suggest it, the book also engages the work of Washington Irving, Henry David Thoreau, Thomas Moran, and many other literary and artistic figures who shaped American understanding of land and nation. Menard weaves Frémont’s Report into a rich intellectual tapestry that conveys the range of landscape ideas available to mid-nineteenth-century Americans.

Kansas history enthusiasts will particularly appreciate Menard’s chapter on the state’s prairies. Eastern Kansas is where Frémont first subjected the negative images of the grasslands to the scrutiny of firsthand observation and where he first employed the aesthetic techniques of describing variety and scenery to challenge these misconceptions. This depiction of Kansas, Menard contends, constitutes a microcosm of the entire Report. If the state is essential to the Report, and the Report is central to Manifest Destiny, then Kansas is a cornerstone of American nationalism.

Readers who have read the Report or are familiar with Frémont’s travels will find Sight Unseen quite accessible. The book is not, however, a biography of Frémont or a narrative of his adventures. Readers seeking those should look elsewhere. Anyone interested in how Americans transformed western lands from obstacles into symbols of national achievement will find much of value in Menard’s work.

Reviewed by Jared Orsi, associate professor of history, Colorado State University, Fort Collins.
Political scientist Linda Allegro and historian Andrew Grant Wood compiled this collection in response to Oklahoma’s 2007 “draconian law attempting to expunge the undocumented population” (p. xi). The volume contains an introduction, conclusion, and eleven chapters by social scientists, historians, and educators. Six states constitute the U.S. Heartland, according to the editors: Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Oklahoma. For reasons known only to them, however, they include chapters on Idaho, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania.

Allegro and Wood write that “the Heartland is no longer a quaint, traditional ‘American’ political, economic, and social backwater but a complex, rapidly changing realm being transformed by globalization and the related process of international migration” (p. 5). Whether the region was ever a “quaint . . . backwater” is debatable, but the transformations that new immigrants and refugees have brought to its small towns and micropolitan communities are not. The essays open with Wood’s overview of Anglo-American western expansion, the violent redrawing of U.S.-Mexican boundaries in the mid-nineteenth century, and U.S. reliance on Mexican labor migrants. They end with Scott Carter’s overly long presentation of 2000-2007 demographic and economic data on Hispanics in the six Heartland states and in six traditional destination states for Latin American immigrants.

Tisa Anders recounts the role of migrant farm workers in western Nebraska’s sugar-beet industry early in the twentieth century, and Errol Jones notes Protestant and Catholic efforts to improve conditions for Mexican migrants in Idaho since 1950. Jones’s chapter is one of three that drastically redraw the editors’ own boundaries of the so-called Heartland. Another is Sandy Smith-Nonini’s analysis of the federal H-2A agricultural guest worker program in North Carolina. Midwestern agriculture is not dependent on H-2A workers, but, given the agroindustry’s desire to expand guest worker programs and quotas in proposed U.S. immigration policy reform, this chapter is timely.

Agricultural guest workers must return home at the end of each growing season, but other transnational migrants do put down roots in their new homes. Miranda Hallett writes about Salvadorans who have developed “an emergent sense of belonging is ‘precariously permanent,’” thanks to their liminal legal status in their adopted homeland.

Linda Allegro exposes the precursors of the 2007 Oklahoma law designed to expel “illegal immigrants,” unearthin the ironies of its passage in a right-to-work state whose economy is heavily dependent on both authorized and unauthorized immigrant workers. Less than 1 percent of Altoona, Pennsylvania’s 50,000 residents were foreign born. Even so, in 2006 its city council enacted the Undocumented Alien Control Ordinance, which imposed fines for renting to or hiring unauthorized immigrants. Passage of such laws is fueled, Jane Juffer contends, by “an unholy alliance of politicians, white supremacists, the Christian right, and anti-immigrant activists whose platform rests on delineating the ‘Outsider’ from the ‘citizen’” (p. 251).

Two chapters analyze events that received considerable media attention. Jennifer Reynolds and Caitlin Didier recount the exploitation of Guatemalan and Mexican workers at the Agriprocessors kosher meat plant in Postville, Iowa. Ted Hamman and Jenelle Reeves review print-media accounts of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids in 2006 on six Swift & Company meat-packing plants as well the ICE’s 2008 Agriprocessors raid.

Laszlo Kulcsar and Albert Iaroi combine analysis of articles and online reader replies in the Emporia Gazette and key-informant interviews into a fascinating account of how public discourse changed when new-immigrant Hispanics and then Somali refugees came to work in the town’s beef plant; the plant later restructured and downsized, resulting in a Somali exodus. Readers of Kansas History will regret that this is the only chapter on our state, but it is an important first look at public reaction to significant events in the Kansas beef industry and its impact on host communities.

Latin American Migrations to the U.S. Heartland contains some welcome additions to the growing literature on Latino immigrants in rural settings. However, the editors owed readers an explanation of how they put the collection together and why they could not stay within the geographic boundaries they set for themselves. The book suffers from excessive and unnecessary academic jargon. All the articles would have benefited from careful copyediting, and the book would reach a broader audience had several authors toned down their rhetoric. Despite its shortcomings, readers interested in Latin American immigrants and their new destinations in rural America will find value in this collection.

Reviewed by Donald D. Stull, professor of anthropology, University of Kansas, Lawrence.
Lynching Beyond Dixie: American Mob Violence Outside the South

edited by Michael J. Pfeifer

vii + 325 pages, maps, notes, bibliography, index.

Michael J. Pfeifer is the most important historian of lynching since W. Fitzhugh Brundage began reinvigorating the field in the early 1990s, and Pfeifer solidifies this position with an excellent collection of essays that pushes us to consider lynching as a national phenomenon rather than as something unique to the American South. Pfeifer’s major innovation has been the argument that lynching was not simply one form of racial antagonism emerging from the collapse of slavery but also a contest between an ad hoc, community-based “rough justice” and a more orderly, legalistic system of punishment administered by the state. In Lynching Beyond Dixie, Pfeifer pulls together work by several scholars of lynching, both established and new, to show that this dynamic was at work across the country.

These essays especially shine in offering new ways of thinking about the history of lynching outside the South. Many are case studies, but the collection begins with Helen McLure’s wide-ranging consideration of the lynching of Native American women in the West. McLure argues compellingly that we should consider many of the massacres of Native Americans in the West within the framework of lynching because they had very little to do with warfare. Pfeifer contributes an essay about lynching in Michigan, which had banned capital punishment in 1846. Partly because of the strong New England influence in Michigan, the few lynchings that accompanied the post–Civil War lumber boom did not shake Michigan’s commitment to law and order without capital punishment. Some of the essays suggest ways of thinking about lynching that simply would not arise if we focused only on the South. An essay by Clive Webb and William D. Carrigan about the lynching of Mexicans in Arizona points out the complexities raised by the presence of an international border and also the concern of Arizona politicians that lynchings would make their territory seem backward and unready for statehood. Christopher Waldrep uses the San Francisco vigilance committee of 1856 to carefully delineate a conflict between constitutional principles and political power that underlay much mob violence in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Constitutional principles, Waldrep implies, were behind many lynchings whether or not race was a factor.

Readers of this journal may find Brent M. S. Campney’s essay on racial violence in Kansas during Reconstruction the most instructive. A precursor to a forthcoming book on white supremacy and racist violence in Kansas from the 1850s to the 1920s, this essay blasts apart the notion that white Kansans’ struggle for free-soil principles in the 1850s gave them any kind of moral superiority regarding treatment of African Americans after the Civil War. Postwar attacks on African Americans happened primarily in the more settled band of counties nearest Missouri and in the towns springing up around army posts in the western part of the state, a settlement process that created a band of “sundown counties.” In fact, taking into account the low percentage of black Kansans, the lynching rate in Kansas from 1865 to 1875 was more than twice as high as Florida’s rate from 1880 to 1930 and three times as high as Mississippi’s. The frequent violence against African Americans in Kansas demands reconsideration of the historical narrative of the Exodusters, who were not reaching such a haven as they had hoped.

Finally, it is important to point out that, in addition to the essays, this collection has useful ancillary material, including maps and a fifty-seven-page table listing lynchings in the Northeast, Midwest, and West, with source citations. This material will be the basis for much research in years to come.

Reviewed by Bruce E. Baker, lecturer in American history, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne
Custer, Cody, and Grand Duke Alexis: Historical Archaeology of the Royal Buffalo Hunt

by Douglas D. Scott, Peter Bleed, and Stephen Damm

xix + 205 pages, illustrations, notes, index.

Perhaps the most celebrated royal visit to the United States in the last half of the nineteenth century was that by Grand Duke Alexis of Russia (1850–1908), third in line to succeed his father, Tsar Alexander II, for four months in 1871 and 1872. The grand duke’s tour began with a celebrated arrival in New York in November; continued with visits to Boston, Buffalo, Washington, and Chicago; and climaxed with a mid-January buffalo hunt in the southwestern corner of Nebraska. Grand Duke Alexis returned from the hunt by way of Denver and across Kansas. He stopped in Topeka to attend an open session of the legislature and was feted at a grand luncheon on January 23; that evening he waved to a large crowd from his train in Lawrence. The grand duke’s trip ended with a cruise down the Mississippi from Memphis to New Orleans, where he was crowned king of the Mardi Gras. He then joined his squadron in Pensacola to resume his around-the-world journey, all part of his preparation for a naval career and long service as Russian minister of navy (1882–1905).

The handsome young Russian won over Americans through lavish receptions everywhere he went, which newspapers covered in detail, but above all through the buffalo hunt. General William T. Sherman in Chicago, commander of the Army of the West, staged the event after he learned that Grand Duke Alexis was fond of hunting. Fortunately, a herd of buffalo was on hand, the weather in January was good, and a rare period of peace with the Indians prevailed. Sherman had assembled the best available support for this venture: General Philip Sheridan was in charge, and Colonel George Armstrong Custer, William F. Cody, and most of the Seventh Cavalry all served as participants or chaperones. The major coup, however, was the cooperation in this event of Spotted Tail, other Sioux chiefs, and 600 members of their nation, who reminded the grand duke of the “exotic” flavor of Russian Central Asia.

This well-written investigation of “Camp Alexis,” a day’s journey from a North Platte station on the Burlington Railroad, southeast of present-day Fort McCook, focuses on the archaeological research of the January 1872 camp, where Indians, soldiers, a Russian delegation, and the American managers met, accompanied by journalists who assured that the world would be well apprised of the event. Teams of student archaeologists under the supervision of the authors used metal detectors to locate dig areas at the site. This enabled them to identify specific locations of tents, such as those of the grand duke, Spotted Tail, and the cavalry encampment, by accumulated debris—bottle shards, tin foil, nails, and other items. Much of the location had already been “mined” by local collectors, but some of them cooperated in the project. The most important new find was a flat silver earring belonging to Spotted Tail, identified through an earlier photograph of the chief. The discovery of a large number of fragments of wine and champagne bottles confirmed that the members of the hunt lived well. Though lacking the grand picture of why a Russian grand duke would endure being stuck in a barren area of the American West in 1872, this study demonstrates what can be revealed long after an event through a combination of contemporary sources and on-site investigation.

The authors also consulted relevant published sources, including Russian materials, though they apparently missed a newly discovered diary of Alexis in English. They might have extended the study chronologically to show what happened to the main players: William Cody would go to New York to become a stage performer as “Buffalo Bill,” George Custer would meet his fate at the Battle of Little Bighorn, the American bison would nearly go extinct, and the grand duke himself would go down in infamy for overseeing the demise of a large Russian fleet at the Battle of Tsushima in 1905 during the Russo-Japanese War.

Reviewed by Norman E. Saul, emeritus professor of history, University of Kansas, Lawrence.
Two Americans: Truman, Eisenhower, and a Dangerous World

by William Lee Miller

404 pages, sources, index.

Parallel biographies can offer more than descriptions of two lives in one book. They can demonstrate why certain periods of time produce certain kinds of politicians and how their lives influence each other. Miller’s goal is more limited—Harry S. Truman’s and Dwight D. Eisenhower’s lives barely intersected before 1945—but nonetheless he offers a rewarding study. Miller emphasizes that the two presidents who set America on a Cold War footing after World War II had similar family backgrounds, shared many values, and confronted almost identical problems in postwar America. One reason why we look at the 1950s as one continuous historical period, despite the change from a Democratic to a Republican White House, is because the two men shared such similar outlooks.

Truman and Eisenhower were not born to wealthy and cosmopolitan families like Franklin D. Roosevelt before or John F. Kennedy after them. Instead they proved that ordinary men of humble origin can accomplish extraordinary deeds if circumstances force them to do so. How does an “ordinary” American rise to become president? To a large extent, Eisenhower’s and Truman’s careers were the result of chance and circumstances. Eisenhower had an unfulfilling career in the military before the Second World War. Truman served in World War I and held a number of jobs before he ran for the U.S. Senate in the early 1930s with the support of Tom Pendergast’s Kansas City Democratic machine. World War II changed both men’s lives in profound ways. Eisenhower was suddenly promoted to General and Supreme Commander of the Allied troops in Europe. Truman was chosen as the Democratic vice presidential candidate in 1944 because his two main rivals for that position, Henry Wallace and James Byrnes, had antagonized various political groups. By war’s end, Truman and Eisenhower had become America’s leading politician and military leader respectively.

Miller aptly and in clear prose describes the rise of both men and outlines their policies as president. The added value of this parallel biography comes in the last chapters, which examine common problems of the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. Many central issues, such as the emerging Cold War, the hot war in Korea, the Joseph McCarthy phenomenon, and intensifying racial tensions at home, were defining features of what might be called the “long fifties” (1945–1961). In his treatment of these issues, Miller sometimes emphasizes differences between the two presidents. Their attitude toward Senator McCarthy is a case in point. Truman, as Miller put it, “responded [to McCarthy] with a small number of blunt and spontaneous hostile comments, without a general plan . . .

Eisenhower refrained from quick denunciations or rejections of McCarthy, but—eventually—dealt with him in a carefully planned way” (p. 298). One wonders, however, whether these were indeed two different strategies of dealing with McCarthy, or whether both men were similarly concerned about the potential backlash that they would encounter should they openly confront the Wisconsin senator. The two men also approached the developing civil rights struggle similarly. Both had lived most of their lives in segregated worlds, Truman in Independence, Missouri, and Eisenhower in the armed forces, and both contributed to the eventual downfall of racial segregation. Truman integrated the armed forces in 1948, and, almost a decade later, Eisenhower intervened in Little Rock, Arkansas, to end segregation at Central High School. At the same time, as Miller points out, both men doubted whether a racially integrated United States would be feasible.

American historiography tends to divide history according to presidential terms. Miller makes a strong case for expanding that view and looking at presidential successions. In Miller’s analysis, the 1950s were dominated by two politicians from Missouri and Kansas.

Reviewed by Georg Schild, professor of history, University of Tübingen, Germany.
The Battle of Carthage, Missouri: First Trans-Mississippi Conflict of the Civil War

by Kenneth E. Burchett


Students of the American West are keenly aware of the region’s significance in the sectional crisis of the mid-nineteenth century. The origins of the Civil War can indeed be traced to the Kansas-Missouri border, where partisan warfare in the late 1850s foreshadowed the more catastrophic violence of the following decade. In The Battle of Carthage, Missouri: First Trans-Mississippi Conflict of the Civil War, Kenneth Burchett offers a lively military history of an oft-overlooked clash between two armies of Missourians and thus affirms the West’s distinctive part in the early years of this internecine struggle. “Later engagements,” Burchett writes, “quickly eclipsed the Battle of Carthage,” but, in the summer of 1861, “almost everyone recognized that the first serious engagement” between Union and rebel forces “happened not in the East but in the West, on the isolated prairies of southwest Missouri” (p. 101).

By July 1861, the Missouri State Guard, the militia organized by pro-Confederate governor Claiborne Fox Jackson, and several secessionist legislators moved into the southwestern corner of the state, eager to join Confederate reinforcements from Arkansas. Pursuing Union commanders hoped to overtake the rebels and drive them from Missouri. Yet before the anticipated convergence of Union columns under Nathaniel Lyon, Thomas Sweeny, and Samuel Sturgis—who led Kansas volunteers into western Missouri—federal troops led by Colonel Franz Sigel intercepted the State Guard in southern Jasper County. Sigel soon discovered that the 6,000-man rebel army far outnumbered his own forces. Following a brief artillery exchange on the morning of July 5, the federals found themselves outflanked on both sides by enemy cavalry. Sigel, unaware that roughly one-third of the rebel volunteers still lacked arms, ordered his army to withdraw across Dry Fork Creek, rather than risk its destruction with a frontal assault. Disorganized and inexperienced, the State Guard—which proved to be the only Civil War army led into battle by a sitting governor—failed to inflict serious damage upon the retreating Union troops, who managed to fall back to Springfield with fewer than fifty casualties.

Burchett, a professor of art at the University of Central Arkansas, has crafted his finely grained account of the battle by combing through the commanding officers’ reports in the Official Records of the War of the Rebellion, as well as through newspapers and local histories. His analysis, however, often leaves much to be desired. A topical chapter on slavery in Missouri and the author’s suggestions about why men on each side fought fail to engage seriously with recent scholarship on these subjects. Burchett notes the deep divisions within Missouri society, but he curiously and consistently applies the term “the Missourians” to the State Guard volunteers but not to Sigel’s men, most of whom were from St. Louis. Finally, a study that offers such compelling descriptions of the local landscape ought to have better maps.

There is, nevertheless, much to commend this study. Burchett is a skilled storyteller and offers many interesting anecdotes, perhaps none more charming than the tale of Old Sacramento, a cannon from the Mexican War that had been set aside as a trophy until it was used in the struggle over Kansas Territory and was eventually repurposed at the Battle of Carthage. Readers no doubt will appreciate the author’s sharp eye as he carefully details what kinds of weapons the raw volunteers carried, what they wore, and how they struggled to feed themselves and stay dry. Such narrative gifts make The Battle for Carthage a valuable addition to the bookshelf of any Civil War enthusiast.

Reviewed by Jeremy Neely, instructor of history, Missouri State University, Springfield.