Hearts Beating for Liberty: Women Abolitionists in the Old Northwest
by Stacey M. Robertson
xiv + 303 pages, illustrations, notes, index.

As historians, we strive to uncover the lesser-known details and perspectives of events in hopes of gaining new insight and sharing stories. Until recently, the Old Northwest, or, emerging Midwest, represented a relatively modestly harvested historiographic field. Stacey Robertson’s Hearts Beating for Liberty: Women Abolitionists in the Old Northwest brings together important considerations of nineteenth-century women’s history, particularly western women’s involvement in the antislavery cause, in a much-needed regional analysis of the movement. By rooting her study in the Old Northwest, instead of the urban Northeast, as is typical, Robertson at once demonstrates the distinctiveness of western women’s approach to antislavery activities from the 1830s to the 1850s in a largely rural region with its own complex history of racism and slavery.

Like their eastern counterparts, western women formed antislavery societies during the 1830s, including the Ashtabula County (Ohio) Female Anti-Slavery Society, which became the largest women’s group in the region. Western women also charted their own paths, characterized more by cooperation, inclusiveness, flexibility, and pragmatism than their eastern counterparts. This meant, for example, that by 1840 western abolitionism incorporated hundreds of both “single-sex” and “mixed-sex” organizations. Robertson attributes this adaptable and effective strategy to a recognition of the region’s environmental and historical realities. Perhaps the most compelling of these (and largely underappreciated by Robertson even after conceding that most westerners were making their living from farming) is not only the rural nature of most of these women’s lives, but their agricultural activities, which of course makes their participation in the antislavery movement that much more impressive. Indeed, the political activism of nineteenth-century farm women is also evident in the later Populist revolt. Historically, western women were deeply cognizant of the region’s contradictory views over slavery and racial discrimination, in place since the establishment of the Old Northwest, and consequently embedded within the territories and states that emerged from this region. The Black Laws, a series of discriminatory and exclusionary laws aimed at restricting the lives of African Americans, represent a major manifestation of debates over race in the Old Northwest. Western antislavery women employed several strategies to combat them, such as working for African American education in Cincinnati (the major pork-processing center, and regional shipping point for farmers), advocating against racial inequity, and assisting fugitive slaves crossing the Ohio River.

Western women’s commitment to antislavery took on a range of organizational forms. For example, they participated in antislavery fairs as well as meetings of the Liberty Party, a third-party movement that served mainly to pressure both mainstream political parties to address slavery (and was superseded by the Free Soil Party in 1848). More specifically, and again revealing the prevalence of agrarianism, activist-minded Quaker women from Michigan and Indiana promoted the free-produce movement, urging the boycott of all slave-made goods such as cotton, sugar, rice, and coffee. While their attempt to negatively impact the slave economy was both insufficient and difficult to sustain, western women’s actions encouraged Northerners to understand their own participation in the slave system. Of interest to students of Kansas history, Robertson makes a final important connection regarding western antislavery women and the Bleeding Kansas era. In addition to the well-known presence of New Englanders who migrated to Kansas after the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 to aid in making Kansas a free state, many Old Northwest women committed to antislavery came as well, even taking up homesteads and creating farms for the cause.

Hearts Beating for Liberty is an important, well-researched, and fascinating study that would no doubt be eagerly read in the classroom. Its focus on the regional Midwest successfully disrupts the eastern bias in the antislavery historiography, and, as has also been done recently regarding the Northern home front during the Civil War, adds to our understanding of the fundamental role that the Midwest played in nineteenth-century history.

Reviewed by Ginette Aley, adjunct professor of history, Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas and Carey Fellow, History Department, Kansas State University, Manhattan.
In the long history of child welfare practices, many options have been tried and promoted, only to be set aside in favor of seemingly more attractive alternatives. Megan Birk’s *Fostering on the Farm* takes a long look at one such practice, the placement of dependent children with farm families beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

“When child placement first emerged as a leading care option,” writes Birk, “rural America stood as a pillar of strength and tradition against the ills of an industrializing and urbanizing nation” (p. 159). Agrarian society was increasingly idealized by non-rural Americans who pictured farms and farm communities as places where youngsters enjoyed a special connection to the natural world; learned self-reliance and a strong work ethic; and developed tight family bonds as they worked alongside their parents. This sort of environment and family life was arguably superior to institutionalized care in orphanages or county poor farms. Thus, the practice of farm placement became standard policy between 1870 and 1890. This volume follows the policy through its general acceptance, its inherent problems, attempts by local and state agencies to improve the practice, and, finally, to its demise. In trying to strengthen policies, the author argues, reformers and social-welfare workers of the early twentieth century concluded that farm life was not as idyllic as believed. Dependent youngsters were not necessarily better off on the farm, and social-welfare professionals soon turned to foster care instead, placing children in homes that were not on farms or in rural towns. Birk emphasizes that foster care did not immediately replace farm placement of children, but, by the later years of the twentieth century, it had become the preferred choice.

To understand why farm placement became so dominant during the 1800s, the author ably explains why county poor farms and institutions such as orphanages were considered as less-than-desirable options. Even so, farm placement had a dark side of abuse, neglect, and overwork. This is dealt with at some length, with wrenching examples. The author, however, does not quite know what to do with the commonly held assumption that placed youngsters did the same work as a family’s biological children and were disciplined in the same ways. If “children working for their own families suffered from the burdens of farm labor and a lack of personal freedom,” should we conclude that they were mistreated on the scale found among placed children (p. 149)? This is not a criticism of the book, but an observation of the obstacles faced by any historian trying to look inside the dynamics of families’ interior lives. The author does, however, make a strong case for one comparative experience: biological children attended school more often than placed children and attained higher grade levels before leaving school.

*Fostering on the Farm* is particularly strong in its study of the rise of state agencies, state laws dealing with dependent children, the role of judges, and the influence of Progressive-era reformers at the federal level. In the latter instance, one would expect to read about the U.S. Children’s Bureau and its child-centered initiatives, but the inclusion of the Country Life Commission is a pleasant surprise. Although the commission did not directly change placement policies, it did underscore rural communities’ deficiencies. This came at the same time that child welfare workers stopped idealizing agrarian society and stopped believing that farm placement was the best solution for dependent children.

This volume concentrates on the Midwest. (Ohio and Indiana are especially prominent.) It is not about Kansas or the Plains states. Nevertheless, this book should be read by Kansans. What it says about the Midwest is applicable to Kansas and other states west of the Mississippi where farm placement of children was common, child indenture was acceptable, and welfare practices came under greater scrutiny during the early 1900s. Ideas about the benefits of rural life were not confined to one region, and no matter the location, child welfare was intricately tied to agrarian society.

Reviewed by Marilyn Irvin Holt, independent historian, Abilene, Kansas.
Jacksonland: President Andrew Jackson, Cherokee Chief John Ross, and a Great American Land Grab

by Steve Inskeep

421 pages, illustrations, notes, index.
New York: Penguin Press, 2015, cloth $29.95

In Jacksonland: President Andrew Jackson, Cherokee Chief John Ross, and a Great American Land Grab, Steve Inskeep presents a parallel narrative of Andrew Jackson (U.S. Army general, land speculator, and eventually president) and John Ross (merchant of mixed Scottish and native ancestry, and eventual leader of the Cherokee Nation). The two travel around the peripheries of one another’s careers, occasionally crossing paths, on a trajectory toward ultimate confrontation over the fate of Cherokee country. Inskeep examines each man’s political rise, as well as their respective views of land in general and Cherokee land in particular. Ross, although adept at functioning in the white man’s world, becomes the primary champion of preserving his nation’s hold on traditional Cherokee lands, even when some of his oldest allies abandon hope and accuse Ross of endangering his people by his obstinacy. Jackson, meanwhile, has a vision of a United States that is not burdened by pockets of autonomous Indian tribes who think they are sovereign nations, and whose land is open to development by its citizenry.

It is this latter view that becomes Inskeep’s focus, and it is his principal contribution to the historical discussion. Throughout Jackson’s political career, he worked toward developing the lands the U.S. federal government acquired through his own military and diplomatic victories, all while keeping a keen eye toward making a profit for himself and his friends and investors. “Jackson mixed public and private business in ways that would be considered scandalous today, and were criticized even in the nineteenth century,” Inskeep notes (p. 9). Jackson’s efforts, Inskeep argues, would shape the Deep South in ways that reverberate into the twenty-first century, making it into “Jacksonland.” Jackson’s loyalty to friends and sense of personal honor was superseded by his overall goals, often ruthlessly. He saw no difference between his public service and his private enrichment; both served to open new Indian lands to American settlers.

John Ross was Jackson’s principle obstacle. Inskeep emphasizes similarities between the two leaders, particularly each man’s determination, although it often seems that Ross’s mentor-turned-enemy Major Ridge is more like Jackson; Ross was a warrior of Jackson’s generation, honored for his past service, who ultimately viewed his people’s political future and his personal ambition through the same lens. Ross worked tirelessly to gain allies for his nation’s effort to maintain its territory, traveling back and forth to Washington lobbying for many years. He gained such allies as Congressman Davy Crockett, Chief Justice John Marshall, missionary Samuel Worcester (who would go to prison for the Cherokee cause), author John Howard Payne (who wrote the song “Home Sweet Home”), and—with some ambivalence—Senator Henry Clay.

In a compelling section that could be a book in itself, Inskeep outlines “the first mass political action by women in the history of the United States”—an anonymous petition campaign in support of the Cherokee Nation’s resistance to removal. One of the key figures in this campaign was Catherine Beecher, sister of Uncle Tom’s Cabin author Harriet Beecher Stowe. The Ladies’ Circular of 1829 became a significant spark, not just for anti-removal efforts, but also for abolitionism.

Inskeep’s work is engaging and well documented, and he sets forth his arguments effectively. It is the sort of book that can hold the interest of the non-specialist and provide a good overview of the politics surrounding Indian Removal, while giving those more familiar with the field a fresh perspective and a more concise narrative of Jackson’s mixture of the personal and the political than most works, especially where Jackson’s land acquisitions are concerned. While Inskeep does not have the deep cultural knowledge that an ethnohistorian would bring to the subject, he does an admirable job helping the reader understand these two leaders and their respective strengths and weaknesses.

Reviewed by Troy D. Smith, assistant professor of history, Tennessee Tech University, Cookeville, Tennessee.
The Notorious Luke Short: Sporting Man of the Wild West
by Jack DeMattos and Chuck Parsons
xxii + 326 pages, illustrations, notes, index.
Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2015, cloth $29.95.

Authors Jack DeMattos and Chuck Parsons present the true account of a well-known Western personality in The Notorious Luke Short: Sporting Man of the Wild West. Each writer brings his own perspective to the story of Luke Short. DeMattos has written and illustrated a number of historical works on gunfighters, while Texas lawmen and law-breakers feature prominently in Parsons’ prize-winning history books. Together, they examine pistolier Luke Short’s life and career from his birth in 1854 to his early death in 1893. The story they tell covers a wide geographic territory that includes Dodge City, Fort Worth, Chicago, and all points between.

A small man with elegant taste in clothing and a penchant for games of chance, Luke Short was born in Arkansas but moved to Texas with his family while still an infant. In his youth he worked as a cowboy and a dispatch rider before settling on gambling as his primary occupation. Short owned, or was part-owner, of a number of saloons and gaming establishments and during his life his name was linked with some of the most famous sporting houses of the West: the Long Branch Saloon in Dodge City, Kansas, the White Elephant Saloon in Fort Worth, Texas, and the Oriental Saloon in Tombstone, Arizona. He was friends with the real men who became part of Western mythology, such as Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson, and, near the end of his life, Short found the love of a good woman who became his wife. Even the baldest retelling of Short’s life would seem like it came straight out of a penny dreadful; carrying the reputation of a deadly gunfighter, he lived the life of a Western legend, although it was disease that claimed him at age thirty-nine—not a bullet.

This book is not for beginners or the casual Western enthusiast; rather, this is an insider’s book, meant for those already well acquainted with Short’s life and the lives of his associates. DeMattos and Parsons offer sparse context for the events and key players in their story. Aficionados of Western gunfighter lore will recognize the well-worn story of the Dodge City War and Short’s later violent entanglements in Texas. The authors’ real contribution to the field is in their documentation of Short’s career in horse racing and as a promoter of boxing matches, interests sparked by his long and loyal friendship with fellow Western character Bat Masterson. Masterson’s own post-Western life took him to New York City, where he pursued sports writing; Short moved to Chicago to further his interests in horse racing and boxing.

Meticulous research is at the heart of The Notorious Luke Short. In the foreword, Texas historian Rick Miller observes that readers will appreciate the “thoroughly sourced” information in contrast to that of previously published Short biographies, and indeed, this is the case (p. xix). With the stated purpose of allowing Short to “speak for himself” through documentary evidence, Parsons and DeMattos use extensive quotations with exhaustive annotations (p. 3). At times, this makes the narrative difficult to read, at least for the first several chapters and for a few at the end. Eventually, however, the authors warm to their task and allow the story to unfold and carry readers along with only an occasional abrupt return to detailed textual notes. In sum, the book offers a fascinating story and makes for gripping reading.

Reviewed by Juti A. Winchester, assistant professor of history, Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas
The Cherokee Kid: Will Rogers, Tribal Identity, and the Making of an American Icon
by Amy M. Ware

317 pages, illustrations, notes, index.
Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015, cloth $37.50.

Amy Ware’s *The Cherokee Kid* is much more than a biography of Will Rogers, the accomplished and influential entertainer, author, and cultural critic. It is a call for resetting the frameworks through which we view not only Rogers’s life, but also the field of U.S. history. Instead of chronicling the events of Rogers’s life, *The Cherokee Kid* “takes a different approach by asking how this Cherokee artist so profoundly shaped the face of American popular culture by calling on Cherokee traditions” (p. 3). The result is a rich exploration of Rogers’s work in film, newspapers, and radio, which allows the reader to apprehend the complexity and the subversiveness of Rogers’s work, and indicates the possibilities for more tribally specific studies of the influence of Native peoples on U.S. history.

Ware begins with a brief history of Rogers’s youth in the Cherokee Nation, locating his family in the social and political world of the Indian Territory during the nineteenth century. As Ware argues, “Without understanding what was specifically Cherokee about his childhood...it is easy to overlook how deeply Rogers was embedded in tribal cultural traditions and history” (p. 15). Ware describes conflicts between Cherokee citizens, the struggle of Cherokees to retain their sovereignty in the face of U.S. colonialism, the legacy of slavery and disenfranchisement in the Cherokee Nation, and the elitism sometimes assumed by Cherokees in relation to other American Indian groups. All of these, Ware finds, would inform Rogers’s later career, as he became “a part of a modernization of Cherokee identity that was key to tribal-nation survival,” building his career upon the effort to “develop a Cherokee-infused celebrity style that was a success in quintessential American venues” (p. 48).

If we understand the ties to the Cherokee Nation that Rogers maintained throughout his life, we can appreciate the ways in which he upset the stereotypical dichotomies that structured both U.S. culture in the early twentieth century and our efforts to understand that culture. Two examples taken from the many provided in this book show the importance of this project. First, in his vaudeville and film careers, Rogers complicated the stereotyped categories of “cowboy” and “Indian” by inhabiting them both and playing with the categories themselves in increasingly sophisticated ways. Ware analyzes a 1924 film Rogers wrote and produced, *Two Wagons, Both Covered*, which parodies the contemporary narrative of westward expansion in many aspects, not the least of which is its culmination in an attack by “Escrow Indians”—white real estate agents attempting to sell the settlers land at inflated prices. This analysis and its place in a book about Will Rogers as a Cherokee man who became an American icon reveals the importance and daring of specific American Indian critiques of American history and popular culture.

In addition to Ware’s exploration of Rogers’s challenge to popular Western mythology, *The Cherokee Kid* also stands out for its exploration of Rogers’s sophisticated traversing of the boundary between the U.S. and the Cherokee Nation, exhibiting what Ware terms Rogers’s “domestic transnationalism,” his work as “a tribal transnational writer speaking to a largely non-Native American audience as a Cherokee” (p. 163). By highlighting the influence of Cherokee (and Indian Territory) authors on Rogers’s writing style and highlighting his interest in subjects of importance to indigenous nations, Ware underscores the ways that “native ideas flow from tribal nations to the United States” (p. 147). That Rogers was such a popular author and personality, who—as Ware argues—struck a chord with U.S. audiences, demonstrates the effect of Cherokee traditions on U.S. culture. In exploring Rogers’s use of his popular radio platform to critique American colonialism, Ware shows how Rogers utilized “the unfunny,” moments when his jokes intentionally failed to elicit laughter from the audience but succeeded in challenging their beliefs, in order to shake the framework of the popular culture he embodied (p. 193).

One of the benefits of the *The Cherokee Kid* is its specificity, and even more so, its call for specificity in future studies. Because Rogers is presented as an individual who was influenced by and influenced two nations, the complexity of cultural production becomes clear. For example, although much of Rogers’s work encouraged a critique of colonialism, Ware also connects Rogers’s life experiences to actions that reinforced rather than criticized U.S. failings, in particular his racial paternalism toward African Americans. *The Cherokee Kid* is a significant contribution to several fields of history. Those familiar with Will Rogers as an American icon may find a new importance for him here. Readers interested in American Indian history will find both an encouraging model for future scholarship and the benefit of an addition to the growing scholarship on Will Rogers as a Cherokee artist and intellectual. For audiences interested in the American West and the western genre, revisiting Rogers’s work in this way may encourage them to take a new look at the funny and the unfunny of American rural comedy.

Reviewed by Kerry Wynn, associate professor of history, Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas.