Ball Hawks: The Arrival and Departure of the NBA in Iowa. By Tim Harwood. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2018, x + 184 pages, paper $19.95.)

The exponential growth of American professional sports during the second half of the twentieth century has caused some stories to be overlooked. Tim Harwood uses his knowledge as an Iowa sports broadcaster to present an engaging history of a midwestern sports team that has become lost to time. Harwood utilizes Iowa newspapers as well as his own interviews with the surviving players and their families to tell the story of the Waterloo Hawks, Iowa’s own NBA team from 1948 to 1951.

Lincoln’s Mercenaries: Economic Motivation among Union Soldiers during the Civil War. By William Marvel. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018, 360 pages, cloth $48.00.)

Based on personal, manuscript, and other primary sources, along with an admittedly small statistical sampling of the 1860 census, this study seeks to demonstrate that, especially among early recruits, including Kansans, most Union soldiers were drawn from the poorer ranks of American society. More specifically, it asserts that the economic opportunity that came with enlistment was a greater incentive for Union recruits than patriotic ideology, a claim that runs counter to most historiographic interpretations.

New Farmers. By D. Byron Darby, Tim Hossler, and Paul V. Stock. (Lawrence, KS: P&T Committee, distributed by the University Press of Kansas, 2018, 96 pages, paper $25.00.)

The twentieth-century story of Kansas agriculture is in large part a story of consolidation, of the trend toward fewer and larger farms, but it is more than statistics and economics; it is also a complex human story with profound implications for our twenty-first-century culture. New Farmers does not pine for the “good old days” that really never were. Instead, through beautifully composed and reproduced black-and-white photographs and well-selected quotations from the “new farmers” featured in this slim volume, it allows us to reflect upon what agriculture means to this group of fifteen production units and what they might teach us about first-century culture. New Farmers does not pine for the “good old days” that really never were. Instead, through beautifully composed and reproduced black-and-white photographs and well-selected quotations from the “new farmers” featured in this slim volume, it allows us to reflect upon what agriculture means to this group of fifteen production units and what they might teach us about first-century culture.

The Calculus of Violence: How Americans Fought the Civil War. By Aaron Sheehan-Dean. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018, 480 pages, cloth $35.00.)

The Calculus of Violence takes a fresh look at the bloody statistics of the Civil War and argues that the war could have been much worse. Sheehan-Dean argues that military forces on both sides sought to contain casualties and that the changing scope of warfare challenged the traditional view of lawful combatants. Kansans will find mention of the state’s role in the Civil War as part of the broader picture, but it is not discussed in depth. Overall, the book provides a fresh look at the Civil War and argues eloquently that the individual choices made by the people during this bloody time in American history played a large role in how the violence was enacted.

Great Plains Politics. By Peter J. Longo. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Discover the Great Plains, 2018, xviii+ 127 pages, paper $14.95.)

This volume contains profiles of six men and women who exercised their citizenship and practiced regional politics by participating “in the deliberative nature of the community” (p. xiii) and “readily shared their talents with others in order to perpetuate strong community life” (p. xviii). Those profiled include Wilma Mankiller, Virginia Smith, Junius Groves, George McGovern, Robert Dole, and Harriet Elizabeth Byrd. The selection of these individuals provides a nice balance between shining a light on unsung heroes and providing less well-known details about political dynamos. However, the author falls short in consistently applying his asserted community/social capital framework, particularly in profiling McGovern and Dole, whose careers were defined primarily in national and not community forums. Academic readers will also regret the absence of footnotes for sources.


Following up on the previous publication of Forts and Posts in Kansas during the Civil War: 1861–1865, William C. Pollard’s most recent book deals with Kansas from 1854 to 1861. Pollard begins by discussing general information about posts in territorial Kansas, including the building materials used to construct them and their original purpose. Pollard then moves on to discuss forty-one specific forts/camps spanning the length of the would-be state. Through the use of primary sources, interviews, and visits to the examined sites, Pollard provides an engaging read for historians and the general public alike.