

The final section of the book focuses on religion and politics. The scope of Swedish-American religious choices and activities is surprising and encompasses most Protestant churches. The issue of teaching evolution has long been a topic of lively discussion and more. In that context, the life of Minnesota educator, philosopher, and politician David Swenson will interest—and perhaps inspire—scientists as well as political scientists. The elections represented include that of 1918, marked by the challenge of disloyalty, as well as the struggle between the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party and the Republican Party in 1970.

My favorite work from the Minnesota Historical Society continues to be *They Chose Minnesota* (1981), a major reference work that includes all immigrant groups. However, *Swedes in the Twin Cities* offers a great deal more than the title suggests to those interested in the history of the Midwest or in immigrant history in general. The book may not serve as a text for courses other than those on Swedish-American immigrant history, but it will be interesting to any student or scholar of ethnic and immigrant history. Most of the essays are well written and quite readable. It has been simultaneously published in Sweden, another positive suggestion for historians who focus on other immigrant groups.

*Our Common Country: Family Farming, Culture, and Community in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest*, by Susan Sessions Rugh. *Midwestern History and Culture*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001. xxi, 285 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.

Reviewer David Blanke, assistant professor of history at Texas A & M University–Corpus Christi, studies rural history and popular culture. He is the author of *Sowing the American Dream: How Consumer Culture Took Root in the Rural Midwest* (2000) and *The 1910s* (2002).

Susan Sessions Rugh examines the evolution of family farming and the rural community in Hancock County, Illinois, from the first permanent Anglo settlements of the 1820s to the end of the nineteenth century. In eight carefully crafted and exceptionally well-written chapters, Rugh lays bare the tensions between the actions of these typical midwesterners and the social, economic, and political forces that flourished around them. Three broad concepts direct her analysis: the consequences of cultural conflict between settlers from differing regions, the significance of the expanding marketplace on this population, and the corresponding responses by farming families. Productive in various ways, the text is particularly successful in its treatment of gender, religion, and the regional ethnic conflicts that she contends “amalgam-

mated into a homogeneous farm culture" by 1900 (xix). Rugh's reliance on local newspaper accounts proves problematic at times, but her use of other primary sources, such as wills, census rolls, and store and county court records, is both creative and precise.

Regional ethnicity is an important component in understanding the development of the Midwest, according to Rugh. Tracing family migration patterns from the upper South, Yankee North, and middle states, she skillfully shows how conflicting cultural values were largely responsible for the initial settlement patterns seen in Fountain Green, the epicenter of Hancock County and Rugh's narrative. Her lucid writing makes it possible to follow the complex histories of the Lincoln (distant kin to the future president), Perkins, Beebe, and Geddes families. According to Rugh, colony "clustering reflects not only familiar strategies of land settlement but also a deliberate distancing from strangers of a different regional culture" (14). As the population swelled, this "deliberate distancing" assumed the form of cultural conflict. Citizens grappled for control and influence over the region's key institutions. Rugh convincingly argues that the relative success of distinct family units is strongly linked to their ability to extend kinship networks throughout the farming community, not least because of the labor provided by such associations. New England families tended to take up town residency, and the influx of southerners slowed in the 1840s. Both groups suffered as pools of like-minded farm families dwindled. By contrast, Scots-Irish migrants from Pennsylvania pursued strategies that increased their families' odds of persisting. Aided by the success of their Presbyterian churches, by 1860 two of five farm head-of-households originated in the middle states (88).

Rugh's description of gender and religion in the countryside is equally balanced and enlightening. Farm women, she claims, made conscious and calculated decisions within the limits imposed by their regional, religious, and familial roots. Women often found their personal ambitions at odds with the patriarchal practices that were so central to the persistence of family farms. Rugh concludes, "For many, what was at stake in expanding women's rights was the unsexing of women, which would topple the structures of gender that bound women to a tightly circumscribed social place" (144). Particularly moving is Rugh's treatment of the rising divorce rate. Through powerful personal narratives that typify her approach generally, Rugh demonstrates the convoluted and often self-defeating options open to many married women. Similarly, Rugh shows how religious institutions precipitated a sense of belonging or ostracization. The proximity of the large Mormon population in the 1840s provided regional farmers a

mirror whereby they could examine their shared values. Finding the Mormon worldview at odds with their own, opponents organized to drive the infidels out. Near the close of her book, Rugh introduces the appeal of evangelicalism in much the same way, concluding, "people who felt uneasy about the social dislocations of prosperity and out-migration sought security in the institutional safety of a church" (166).

Rugh's ordinarily deft focus on historical contingency, conflict, and continuity seems to fail, however, when she addresses the concept of rural republicanism in larger institutions. Defined here loosely as independent farm ownership and economic agency, the ideology appears in the text as a means to explain why farmers acted as they did when forming institutions or when participating in politics (although it is also used to explain other qualities as well). Although her treatment of republicanism is well justified, given the ample historiography, there is rarely a sense of how Hancock County farmers defined the concept on their own terms. Rather, economic conflict appears in a stark, menacingly deterministic fashion, with industrial "culprits" and "village leaders valiantly attempt[ing]" to prevent change to a community that was merely "a sinking ship" (160). External institutions are used to support this dichotomy. The Grange appears here as an elite rural organization intending to bring about railroad and granary reforms (the Granger Laws). The complexity of the Granger movement is lost in Rugh's efforts to identify the shifting ideologies of Hancock County farmers. She does not need to interject such a cursory analysis of rural republicanism to show, as I believe this book does, that "people are not the victims or objects of larger structural changes" (185).

These individual criticisms should not detract, however, from what is an excellent book, finely written, and a significant contribution to our understanding of rural populations. Through the stories of Fountain Green's farm families, *Our Common Country* shows how the Midwest was born.

*Sowing the American Dream: How Consumer Culture Took Root in the Rural Midwest*, by David Blanke. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000. xiii, 282 pp. Notes, tables, appendixes, index. \$59.95 cloth, \$21.95 paper.

Reviewer David B. Danbom is professor of history at North Dakota State University. He is the author of *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (1995).

In *Sowing the American Dream*, David Blanke analyzes the "consumer culture" that developed in the nineteenth century among farmers in the Midwest, defined as Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin. In keeping with the conclusions of all but a handful of ro-

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