

terms of honesty, integrity, and fair dealing that obtained within the rural community itself. Montgomery Ward succeeded, Blanke believes, not because it manipulated rural consumers, but because it was attentive to their values and effectively met their desire for variety and quality in the goods they consumed.

There will be critics of this book, and some of their criticisms will be justified. I am dubious about Blanke's use of the term *scientific farmers* and his assumption that they were numerous. I am also troubled by his tendency to make unsupported assumptions, especially about the behavior and motivations of middlemen and consumers. And I find his handling of the relationship between the behavior of individual consumers and community mores to be murky and vague.

Still, this is an important book that tells us a great deal about rural consumers, the development of markets, the nature of distribution, and the evolution of organizational structures in business and agriculture in the nineteenth-century Midwest. Most important, it offers us a dramatically different picture of the nature and motivation of midwestern farmers than those with which we are familiar. *Sowing the American Dream* is an important book, and David Blanke is to be congratulated for it.

*The Haymakers: A Chronicle of Five Farm Families*, by Steven R. Hoffbeck. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000. 213 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 cloth.

Reviewer Pamela Riney-Kehrberg is associate professor of history at Iowa State University. Her current research focuses on children and families in rural communities. Her latest book is *Waiting on the Bounty: The Dust Bowl Diary of Mary Knackstedt Dyck* (1999).

*The Haymakers: A Chronicle of Five Farm Families*, by Steven R. Hoffbeck, is a book about more than the changing technology of making hay. It is the story of a century and a half of change on Minnesota's farms and how that change has affected the ability of farm families to survive and thrive in their way of life. It is also the story of the author's own family's farm, a heartbreaking tale of lives and a farm lost to fatal entanglements with farm machinery.

*The Haymakers* is, in many ways, two books. One of those books traces the haymaking endeavors of five Minnesota farm families since the Civil War. The families involved are largely of immigrant origin: Swedish, German, Norwegian, and Danish. Hoffbeck discusses the technology used, the labor required, and the community relationships formed around the process of making hay. He also examines the way

the hay harvest either supported or worked against self-sufficiency and a sustainable future for the family farm. Hoffbeck develops his story by examining diaries, letters, and oral histories of the families involved. This is a story that will be rather familiar to those who have studied agriculture in the Midwest.

The second book is the story of Hoffbeck's own family, which brackets the larger tale of haymaking in Minnesota. He begins with the story of his own childhood on his family's dairy farm. His father's sudden death was the result of a tragic encounter with a power-takeoff while harvesting soybeans. That untimely death led his oldest brother, Larry, who had always wanted to be a carpenter, to assume responsibility for the family farm instead. Larry is the fifth haymaker in this book, and his story, too, ends in tragedy. Larry's death by suffocation under a swather, a machine used to harvest hay, resulted in the sale of the Hoffbeck family farm and the end of the family's endeavors on that piece of land. The high-technology haymaking of the late twentieth century was too costly economically and physically for the Hoffbeck family.

There are no startling new revelations in *The Haymakers*. The changes in technology, labor, and community involvement that Hoffbeck chronicles are part of a familiar story of agricultural change in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Midwest. What makes the book worth reading, however, is the sensitivity with which the author has brought these accounts together and framed them with his personal story. Unlike many purely academic exercises, he convinces readers of the importance of his topic and the ways agricultural and technological change are felt at the familial and personal levels. Buying a blue silo and making hay in a new way are not simply business decisions, but choices that may mean life or death, the survival or failure of the farm, for the individual and the family. Hoffbeck makes his readers care about haymaking and empathize with the people whose lives he chronicles.

This book will be of great interest to a broad group of readers. Rural and agricultural historians should find the book useful, as should those interested in the social history of the American Midwest. *The Haymakers*, however, should have a broad audience beyond the purely academic. Anyone concerned with the state of midwestern agriculture, the future of the family farm, and the fate of the region's rural communities will find Hoffbeck's book engrossing and even moving. The reader cannot help but be touched by the author's story of his family's farm and its demise. Although the book is specific to Minnesota, the larger story Hoffbeck tells is not. One wonders how many times this story has been repeated on the farms of Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois, let alone the rest of the nation. *The Haymakers* is well worth reading.

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