

analyzing the impact of mining on the sense of place in the Rocky Mountains, and James R. Shortridge identifying the emergence of a northern plains regionalism. Essays in parts two (Aesthetic Wests), three (Race and Identity), and four (Extended Wests) are more focused, both in area and topic. They include Peter Boag's study of literature from and about the Snake River region; Mary Murphy's evocative discussion of three Montana working women; the comparative reflections on race, culture, and identity in northern California by Glenna Matthews and in southern California by William Deverell; Richard M. Brown's search for regional identity in British Columbia; and Paula G. Allen's stories of magic and realism in the Southwest. These essays do more than raise important questions about the role of race, class, and gender in shaping western identities; they also demonstrate that the diverse meanings of region may be studied through oral tradition, theater, literature, and architecture.

The only false step in what is otherwise a thought-provoking, challenging collection is when the volume falls into the rhetoric of western exceptionalism. Contrary to the book's opening quotation from Wallace Stegner, there are as many Souths and as many Midwesterns as there are many Wests. For instance, Arnaldo De Leon's essay on region and ethnicity in Texas could just as easily be included in a book on the "Many Souths." After reading this volume, one still may dispute its claim that "American regionalism may find its fullest expression" in the West (9). It would be difficult, however, to dispute that region is important, a force not only of reaction but also of renewal, for the past and for the present.

Sowing Modernity: America's First Agricultural Revolution, by Peter D. McClelland. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997. xii, 348 pp. Illustrations, graphs, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.

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Sowing Modernity had its origins in a historian's quest to understand what is "arguably the central problem of economic history" (ix): the extraordinary rise of western economic productivity in the past few centuries. For Peter McClelland, an economic historian at Cornell University best known for his works on demographic and methodological questions, the search for answers led to America's rural past. In particular, McClelland identifies developments in the agricultural technology of the colonial and early national periods as the basis for America's transformation from the premodern to the mod-

ern economy. More specifically, McClelland focuses on the "seismic shift" in farmers' willingness to innovate and the agricultural innovations that appeared between 1815 and 1830. This is the first of a two-volume study: this volume chronicles the inventions themselves; the author promises that in the second volume he will provide more detailed analyses of and explanations for the burst of inventiveness.

The bulk of the text thoroughly examines innovations in techniques and technologies applied to plowing, sowing, harrowing, cultivating, reaping, threshing, winnowing, and straw cutting. Lacking both opportunity and incentive to develop new approaches before the eighteenth century, farmers relied on methods and machines that could be traced to the medieval era and earlier. Several innovations emerged from the Low Countries and England during the so-called Agricultural Revolution, but for the most part, they were too expensive, too complex, or otherwise unsuitable for a transfer to the rural American economy before the early nineteenth century. In case after case, however, McClelland identifies a new spirit of inquiry in the decade-and-a-half following 1815.

The history of sowing technologies amply illustrates McClelland's argument. Beginning with the biblical parable of the sower, McClelland traces the challenges in developing a mechanical method of sowing that could supplant traditional broadcast sowing techniques. Standard histories of agriculture suggest that the situation remained unchanged until the early eighteenth century, when the heroic Jethro Tull of Britain invented a mechanical seed drill. McClelland challenges this legend, stressing that Tull's invention was not particularly effective in Britain and had virtually no impact on farmers in the United States. No significant inventions for sowing appeared in the United States before 1815, in part because of farmers' refusal to experiment and the relative absence of media to disseminate agricultural information. All of this changed with "startling rapidity" (85) after 1815, when American inventors produced simple, inexpensive, but effective implements appropriate for local conditions.

By directing his focus to the early nineteenth century, McClelland is arguing for a new dating of the turning point in the history of American agricultural technology. In contrast, scholars such as Clarence Danhof, Wayne Rasmussen, and R. Douglas Hurt have suggested that the crucial changes in the history of American agricultural technologies came a bit later. They devote more attention to inventions (and manufacturing and marketing strategies) developed by Obed Hussey, Cyrus McCormick, and John Deere in the decades surrounding the Civil War.

Even more forcefully, McClelland is urging a return to the study of revolutions and discontinuities in history. Insisting that "cloud-bursts of innovations" and a "persistent rain of novel improvements, unthinkable in 1808, had become the norm by the middle of the 1830s," (219) McClelland challenges historians who take the longer view of innovation and change. Other scholars have argued that many rural Americans were unaffected by developments at the United States Patent Office and in the agricultural societies of Boston and Philadelphia. McClelland's central argument, on the other hand, is that the innovations of America's first agricultural revolution were more significant than the persistence of premodern techniques. McClelland also links these innovations with an emergent optimism about America's economic future and the new democratic spirit of the Jacksonian era. Yet for all his emphasis on changing attitudes and ideologies in the American countryside, it is striking that McClelland does not mention the extensive debate among scholars concerning the transition to capitalism. Implicitly, the text provides strong support for the "market revolution" school of early national historiography.

Although the text focuses on developments that preceded the agricultural settlement of midwestern prairies, the book is nonetheless important for those interested in Iowa history. The challenge for Iowa historians is to test his hypothesis for circumstances in the rural Midwest. All readers will profit from McClelland's clear discussion of the parameters and considerations that underlay agricultural technologies, and few books provide such well-illustrated and well-explained descriptions of agricultural implements. In sum, despite its somewhat idiosyncratic thesis, the book remains a solidly researched, well-illustrated, and most informative study of agricultural improvements in the early nineteenth century.

Prairie Voices: Iowa's Pioneering Women, by Glenda Riley. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996. x, 299 pp. Illustrations, notes. \$24.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY ANNE B. WEBB, METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY

In Glenda Riley's *Prairie Voices*, the lives of early Iowa women ring out across a century and a half to reach us in our modern world. Women's own words report their triumphs and failures, their joys and fears, their pride in their work, and, above all, their zest for a life fully lived. Through diaries, memoirs, one interview, a collection of letters, and a report on Iowa's achieving women, Riley offers readers a banquet of firsthand accounts. The menu includes the trip west;

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