

ennially escape control. Such efforts reflect the intolerance and exclusivity of the larger society.

For such a short book, *The Culture of Wilderness* touches on many topics, so any reader with agricultural interests will likely find some part of the narrative informative. On the other hand, sometimes it is hard to tell if Knobloch's book is a history of colonization, a pre-history of industrial agriculture, a history of agricultural science, or a political history of bureaucratic control. Among the targets of the book's many broadsides, the U.S. Department of Agriculture stands out. Knobloch especially finds fault with the purpose of its research and information management: "the USDA archive represents the fantasy of empire, the unrealizable goal of comprehensive control and uninterrupted progress" (152-53). The uncertain focus accompanying the book's broad sweep may be necessary since it critiques such big chunks of the worldview of American culture. In any case, in an age increasingly influenced by technicians and experts, Knobloch's call for reclaiming knowledge from large institutions, not for nostalgic or escapist purposes, but for reasons of information and accountability, makes sense.

*Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870-1930*, by Hal S. Barron. Studies in Rural Culture. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. xiv, 301 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$49.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY KATHERINE JELLISON, OHIO UNIVERSITY

Writing in his diary on an autumn evening in 1931, Iowa farmer Elmer G. Powers noted, "We tuned in and listened to the National Husking Contest. This evening we have not yet learned who the winners are. . . . Many people are of the opinion that the husking contests will become the greatest sporting event of the year" (H. Roger Grant and L. Edward Purcell, eds., *Years of Struggle: The Farm Diary of Elmer G. Powers*, [1995], 30). In that deceptively simple entry, Powers commented on the results of a transformation that had taken place across the Midwest and the Northeast during the previous sixty years. Between 1870 and 1930, farm residents throughout the northern United States had created a subculture in which they adapted traditional rural practices to the contours of a modern industrial society. Thus, farmers like Powers, who had once attended corn husking contests at the local country school, now listened anxiously for the results of a national competition broadcast over

commercial radio. In his important new book, Hal S. Barron analyzes the process whereby farm residents like Powers negotiated the boundaries between continuity and change to create a rural society that was a "mixed harvest" of both accommodation to, and rejection of, urban industrialism.

Barron refers to the changes between 1870 and 1930 as the "second great transformation" of the rural North. Although his repetitive use of the term becomes a bit tiresome, it is a useful one to distinguish this era from the first phase of social and economic reconfiguration in the rural North, the development of a market economy from roughly 1750 to 1850. In Barron's analysis, the second period of large-scale change in the northern countryside affected its residents in three major categories of experience. First, in their role as citizens, rural dwellers selectively adopted the reforms of urban-based politicians and professionals who insisted on centralizing state authority rather than allowing local control over such matters as road administration and public education. Second, in order to counter the increasing power of large corporations, northern farmers redefined their operations as small businesses and created new institutions and marketing strategies, such as the Dairymen's League in upstate New York and the farmers' grain elevator movement in the Midwest. Finally, rural northerners confronted modern consumer culture, with its mail-order catalogs and myriad of nationally advertised products.

Using interview material, letters to farm periodicals, survey data, and a number of rich local histories, Barron places farm people themselves at the center of this transformation story, showing them as active participants in the creation of a new rural order. In the third section of his book, which contributes significantly to a growing literature on rural consumerism, the author provides an especially deft analysis of the ways rural people adjusted to new economic and social realities while maintaining an allegiance to their traditional way of life. For example, rather than using their recently acquired automobiles to shop at chain stores in metropolitan areas, northern farm families of the 1920s drove their cars to nearby communities, where they shopped and socialized alongside their rural neighbors during locally sponsored "farmers' nights." The discussion of farm women's consumption patterns, particularly as influenced by national advertising campaigns, is a distinct highlight of this section.

Barron's handsomely produced book provides a thorough examination of the major changes that rural people encountered and negotiated throughout the Northeast and Midwest during the years of the "second great transformation." Readers interested in rural

politics during this era, as well as those interested in the history of rural economic and social issues, will find rewarding reading in this story of the pathway northern farm residents forged when facing the challenges of urban, industrial America.

*Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor*, by Robert E. Weir. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996. xi, 343 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth, \$22.50 paper.

REVIEWED BY RALPH SCHARNAU, UNIVERSITY OF DUBUQUE

Despite its status as the nation's leading nineteenth-century labor organization, the Knights of Labor attracts less scholarly attention than other working-class groups such as the American Federation of Labor, the Industrial Workers of the World, or the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Although the 1970s and 1980s brought a spate of local studies, no comprehensive survey of the Knights has appeared in almost seventy years. Yet the AFL-CIO's current commitment to inclusive organizing draws its inspiration from the Knights' creation of a unionism that crossed gender, race, ethnicity, ideological, and skill boundaries.

Previous studies of the Knights of Labor addressed its organizational structure, economic and political activities, and reform ideologies. Besides forging the nation's first mass labor movement, the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor also created a community of workers with associational ties based on egalitarianism and mutuality. Robert E. Weir's new book, *Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor*, provides us with a painstaking overview of this "cultural production" (xiii, xvii). Concentrating on the period of the 1880s when the order reached the pinnacle of its power, Weir constructs a fascinating cultural profile of the Knights. He cites a selected group of primary and secondary sources that includes two Knights newspapers published in Iowa, *The Industrial Leader* (Dubuque) and *The Industrial West* (Atlantic).

After a brief organizational history, Weir devotes separate chapters to the order's cultural expressions, each of which provided an interconnected element of the Knighthood mosaic: ritual, identity, and universal comradeship; religion, morality, and the dignity of work; music, socialization, and social protest songs; poetry, inspiration, and communication of principles; fiction, storytelling, and calls for reform; material culture, badges, and other graphic images; and leisure, picnics, and sporting events. Weir views the Knights' decision

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