

start. We also learn that American taxpayers have always been stingy as we tried to pass on the costs of services to the future through growth, but that we have historically been willing to create the service providing city and to indebt ourselves for infrastructural expansion, which in turn has promoted technological change" (243-44).

Monkkonen's well-researched and well-thought-out study breaks little new ground, all claims to the contrary, in relation to the "old traditional urban history" or "urban history as it was written in the 1960's," where the emphasis has been on using traditional forms of evidence to reach conclusions. However, in terms of the so-called "new urban history," with its reliance on ideology and neo-Marxism to reach mechanistic conclusions about cities, *America Becomes Urban* is startling, calling into question much of what has been written in the 1980s by New Left historians, currently in the ascendancy in urban history. As such, the book makes major contributions by adding to our knowledge of the functions of city governments and by bringing urban history back to its roots in solid historical research rather than off-the-wall particularistic ideological interpretations based on limited evidence.

*Threshing in the Midwest, 1820-1940: A Study of Traditional Culture and Technological Change*, by J. Sanford Rikoon. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988. ix, 214 pp. Illustrations, tables, charts, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY PATRICK NUNNALLY, COLLEGE OF ST. CATHERINE

J. Sanford Rikoon's *Threshing in the Midwest* is a fine, detailed analysis of the intersection of mechanical and social changes in the Midwest. Rikoon traces the development of threshing from preindustrial flailing and treading practices brought to this area by immigrant farmers up through the introduction of gasoline-powered combines in the mid-twentieth century. Along the way, he attends closely both to the minute details of material life and to the sweeping cultural changes that those details add up to. He skillfully blends diverse types of evidence in his analysis. He uses the conventional documents of social history such as census records along with descriptive works such as diaries and letters, and he deftly incorporates material from many oral history interviews into his overall narrative.

*Threshing in the Midwest* is a story of broad-based change. When settlers began to populate Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, they employed human and animal muscle power to separate grains from straw in harvesting wheat and oats. Rikoon's description of preindustrial flailing and treading provides exact descriptions of the tools used, the precise

way the grain bundles were laid out, and the use of horses to tread on the bundles to separate grain from straw. His account is descriptive rather than analytical, establishing the preindustrial practices as a basis for measuring later changes.

Gradually, though, threshing changed under a variety of imperatives. The growth of a regional market economy for small grains and the developments of, first, horse-powered and then steam-powered machinery brought new machines into the wheat and oats fields of mid-western farmers. Rikoon describes the differences between shock threshing, which involved threshing from small bundles, and stack threshing, which entailed amassing all of the crop into one stack before threshing. Different arrangements of the crop required different techniques of threshing, techniques that both generated and responded to machine development. As Rikoon tells the story, threshing changes during the period of incipient mechanization, between 1825 and 1860 in the earliest settled parts of the region and later in western states such as Iowa, involved small-scale mechanization that did not substantially alter traditional patterns of rural work and the arrangement of farm buildings. Although the threshing machine developed as a nexus between traditional rural culture and industrial society, in this early stage it did not call forth large-scale changes in rural life.

Rikoon next takes up the "golden age of threshing," the period late in the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century when steam-powered threshers went from farm to farm in cooperative endeavors. He attends carefully to both the social and the economic factors of this form of cultural behavior. He describes how threshing rings evolved primarily as a means to get the economic work of the farm done more quickly and efficiently, and only secondarily became the kind of social activity that brought families together. Although he is careful not to romanticize the period of farm cooperation and neighborliness, he does point out the many ways threshing rings provided community and local continuity. A significant part of Rikoon's analysis is his discussion of the formalization of threshing rings. As threshing patterns changed, the rings underwent different kinds of institutional developments, including the establishment of elaborate charters and bylaws, partly in response to the growing rationalization of farming and, indeed, of all of American life, as well as in response to individual needs.

One strength of this book is Rikoon's reluctance to provide sweeping generalizations. He neither condemns the influx of industrial products and processes into the threshing process, nor wholeheartedly celebrates the growing ability of regional farmers to increase productivity. His account recognizes, as the best social history does, that history as an account of cultural change over time is both particular and general, and

that a complex nexus of material, economic, and ideological factors goes into the processes of choice and adaptation to change. The history of technology, as he rightly notes, is not just a matter of new machines, but involves as well the changed social and cultural orders that accompany them. His astute awareness of multiple factors involved in material historical change, that is, the everyday life on individual farms, and his close attention to how farmers both initiated change and responded to it, preclude any broad summaries about "industrialization" or "modernization" that was imposed from outside on resistant, traditionalist farmers.

Stylistically, the book is unremarkable. The writing becomes general and categorical in places, as Rikoon's interest in group dynamics and change makes categories of people rather than shows us the individuals who lived and worked in the past. The accounts from his fieldwork interviews help alleviate a sometimes tedious style, but the book would be improved by a greater inclusion of those voices.

An important problem with the book is Rikoon's treatment of the gender implications of threshing in particular and of rural culture as a whole. Women do not figure prominently in his discussion, either as active field workers or in other roles. His only sustained attention to women's work is in the chapter on meals and social activities, which appears almost as an afterthought. Although he interviewed farm women for the book, Rikoon seems to have adopted the traditional rural ideology of gender, which relegates women to roles as "helpers" rather than as full participants in the entire range of rural activities. More attention to the ways changing machinery altered women's work in all kinds of tasks would be a valuable addition to his treatment.

Still, this is a nicely detailed and subtly argued piece of work that should interest those concerned with the development of farming and rural life. Rikoon's study stops just before the period of rapid change associated with World War II, but the groundwork he lays gives clues to the impetus for ideas and technological change that have created the rural culture that we now know.

*Union Brotherhood, Union Town: A History of the Carpenters' Union of Chicago, 1863-1987*, by Richard Schneirov and Thomas J. Suhrbur. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988. xvi, 211 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendixes, index. \$24.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

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In commemoration of their hundredth anniversary (1981), the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of North America commis-

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