

Farming in the Midwest, 1840-1900, edited by James W. Whitaker. Washington: The Agricultural History Society. 1974. pp. 226. \$6.00.

Although a 1968 survey of history departments in land grant colleges and other selected institutions revealed that few schools offered courses in agricultural history, the research arm of the profession continues to investigate the many facets of the history of agrarian America. One sign of the continued high level of interest in the history of American agriculture, in the research library if not in the classroom, and of the development of new approaches to the subject, is the recent appearance of four special issues of *Agricultural History*, each of which examined in detail a particular aspect of the history of farming in the United States. The January 1969 issue focused on "Eighteenth Century Agriculture;" a year later, the January 1970 number featured "The Structure of the Cotton Economy of the Antebellum South;" the January 1972 issue examined "American Agriculture, 1790-1840;" the most recent special issue, January 1974, studied various aspects of "Farming in the Midwest, 1840-1900."

Three of the four special issues were based on papers presented at symposia sponsored by the Agricultural History Society and other groups. The Society has also reprinted three of the four special issues as books: *The Structure of the Cotton Economy of the Antebellum South*, edited by William N. Parker, (Washington, 1970); *Farming in the New Nation: Interpreting American Agriculture, 1790-1840*, edited by Darwin P. Kelsey (Washington, 1972); and the volume reviewed here, *Farming in the Midwest 1840-1900*.

Perhaps the most striking feature of much recent research and writing in agricultural history is the extent to which it is interdisciplinary, with economists, geographers, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials, and even an occasional agronomist, joining historians in the attempt to reconstruct the history of the American farmer. Nine historians, five economists, two USDA officials, one agronomist, and one person with a joint appointment in history and in economics contributed to *Farming in the Midwest*.

The interdisciplinary aspects of the new agricultural history

are also apparent in the extent to which historians working in this area have borrowed approaches and methodologies from economists and other social or behavioral scientists. Perhaps the best example of historians' increased use of social science approaches and techniques is the only article in the collection which focuses exclusively on Iowa, Donald L. Winters' examination of "Tenant Farming in Iowa, 1860-1900: A Study of the Terms of Rental Leases." Because this article is the most-oriented in the volume, most of the remainder of this review will concentrate on it.

While Winters' study should prove to be the most useful for Iowans, readers of the *Annals* may also wish to look at other contributions, particularly Robert E. Ankli's reconsideration of a subject Clarence Danhoff first studied in 1941, "Farm Making Costs in the 1850's," in which Ankli studies both Iowa and Illinois. However, another article which includes material on Iowa, Larry McFarland's "British Investment in Midwestern Farm Mortgages and Land, 1875-1900: A Comparison of Iowa and Kansas," is a disappointment as the author fails to rise above the level of uninspired narrative, with none of the careful analysis which makes Winters' study so useful.

Winters, a native of Fort Dodge, a B.A. and M.A. graduate of UNI, and a former professor of history at his alma mater, has continued his interest in Iowa agricultural history since joining the history department at Vanderbilt University in 1969. That school's generous support of his research allowed Winters to spend two summers studying the farm lease contracts recorded in ten Iowa counties (Adair, Audubon, Black Hawk, Clay, Clayton, Des Moines, Henry, Jasper, Mitchell, and Webster) in an attempt to recover as much as possible of the history of farm tenancy in Iowa during a period in which the proportion of owner-operated farms decreased rapidly in the United States. Winters reports his conclusions clearly in twenty-one pages, including a map showing the location of the ten counties he studied, and seven easy-to-read tables which present the statistical data in a convenient form and allow the author to use the prose sections of his article to explore some of the implications of the patterns and trends in late nineteenth century Iowa farm tenancy which are revealed by the data in the tables.

Winters demonstrates that cash rental leases far outnumbered

all other types combined (share, cash/share, and improvement leases) between 1880 and 1900, in sharp contrast with the preceding twenty years. Whereas fewer than half of all 1860-1879 farm rental leases were stated in terms of cash payments, three-fourths of all 1880-1889 leases, and five-sixths of the 1890-1900 agreements, called for renters to pay only cash to their landlords. Winters also shows that the residence of the landlord bore little apparent relationship to either the type of farm lease or the length of rental agreements, as landlords living in the county where the farm was located, landlords living elsewhere in Iowa, and landlords living outside the states all negotiated similar types of leases. Other conclusions including a striking revelation that rental costs to tenants, as a percentage of the value per acre of rented land, fell over 40% between 1875 and 1895, and that the average cash rent per acre in the ten counties studied not only fell, from \$3.86 in the 1870's to \$2.72 in the 1890's, but also became more uniform in the ten counties as all counties approached a more nearly equal level of agricultural and economic maturity in the 1890s.

It is to be hoped that Winters' future work in this area will include attention to several other factors which may have been related to the types of farm tenancy practiced in various areas of the state between 1860 and 1900. These include the amount of farm tenancy in each of the ten counties and the type of farming which predominated in each county. By the early twentieth century, a period which this reviewer knows better than the period Winters emphasizes, Iowa counties, including a number of those Winters has analyzed, exhibited wide differences in such matters as the prevalence of tenancy and the type of farming operation which predominated. In line with the emphasis of the "new" political history on the role of ethnicity in midwestern political life in the last half of the nineteenth century, Winters' future investigations could also attempt to determine whether the several ethnic groups in the ten counties he has studied, e.g., the Danes in Audubon County, the Swedes in Webster County, the Germans in Clayton County, and the native Americans in Jasper County, demonstrated as much variety in the types of farm lease arrangements they preferred as they did in their political party preferences.

Winters' article, and his continued research in this area, com-

bine with such other recent studies of Iowa agriculture as Robert P. Swierenga's *Pioneers and Profits: Land Speculation on the Iowa Frontier* (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1968) and Allan G. Bogue's *From Prairie to Cornbelt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) to offer hope that the sophisticated specialized studies of various aspects of Iowa history which Leland L. Sage has recently called for will be forthcoming, and will some day help make possible the modern five- or six-volume history of the state that we so urgently need, but which must await the completion of dozens of new studies of particular aspects of the Iowa experience.

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During its 1974 session the Iowa legislature passed a law, effective July 1974, establishing a State Historical Department with three divisions: State Historical Society, Historic Preservation (both located in Iowa City), and Historical Museum and Archives (located in the Historical Building in Des Moines).

The Department is governed by a State Historical Board of twelve persons, six appointed by the governor and six elected by the members of the Historical Society.

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