

Tenure, Nativity and Age as Factors in Iowa Agriculture, 1850-1880, by Seddie Cogswell, Jr. Ames: Iowa State University Press. 1975. pp. x, 170.

The institution of tenancy in frontier Iowa is finally receiving the thorough analysis that it deserves. Professor Cogswell's detailed study of the social and economic patterns in eastern Iowa among tenant farmers compared to farm owners, together with Professor Donald Winters' current research on the economic determinants and institutional arrangements of farm tenancy throughout Iowa, are providing a clearer picture of frontier tenancy than ever before. Ever since the Federal Census Bureau in 1880 first reported the "startling fact" that one-fourth of the nation's farms were tenant-operated, historians have sought to understand the meaning of this statistic. Scholars in the "Progressive school" of interpretation, such as Frederick Jackson Turner and Paul Wallace Gates, attributed the "deplorable" growth of tenancy to frontier land speculation on the part of eastern capitalists, land companies, and railroad land grants.

Another "school" of historians, notably Merle Curti and Allan and Margaret Bogue, while trained in the Progressive tradition, were more strongly influenced by the rising social science orientation among historians in the 1940s and 1950s. Curti's quantitative census study of Trempealeau County, Wisconsin (1850-1880), and the Bogues's similarly empirical books on Iowa and Illinois prairie farming, were less pejorative and stressed the economic rationality of tenancy and its largely beneficial place in the "agricultural ladder" to farm ownership. It was the research of Curti and Allan Bogue that stimulated Cogswell. He is a former Bogue student and this book, the author's doctoral dissertation at the State University of Iowa, originated in a Bogue seminar. In large part, therefore, the book is a case study of issues raised earlier, although it also opens several major new questions.

Professor Cogswell chose for his area of investigation a bloc of twenty-six contiguous townships spread across six counties in the Mississippi River "bulge" between Dubuque and Davenport. This region was one of the earliest settled parts of Iowa and thus was sufficiently populated by 1850 to warrant detailed study. Given his primary objective of comparing the social, demo-

graphic, and economic differences between tenant and owner operators, Cogswell's nonrandom sample would seem to be adequate. However, in order to measure the *level* of tenancy in Iowa for the census years, 1850-1880, would, as the author rightly notes, require a random township or county sample. As it is, Cogswell's study included 12,400 farmers and he used computers to analyze the population and agricultural census data on nativity, age, property valuation, land, livestock and machinery. Inexplicably, he did not consider crop production in his analysis.

The central question of the book is the perennial Turnerian one: was tenancy the "first or last rung on the agricultural ladder?" (152). And the author's conclusion is the same as that of Curti and the Bogues. In the face of rising capital costs of agriculture in the nineteenth century, tenancy served as a "gateway" through the economic barrier and "with each decade increasing numbers of young farmers passed through it" (153). Thus, concludes Professor Cogswell, tenancy was an institution integral to Iowa agricultural development from the very outset of settlement. In 1850, the first federal farm census after settlement began, 17.6 percent of eastern Iowa farmers were tenants. The level of tenancy remained between 15 and 20 percent until the 1870s, when it climbed to 27.3 percent. *Within* the six sample counties, however, tenancy levels varied considerably from these averages, ranging from a low of 5 percent to a high of 45 percent. Unfortunately, the author failed to explore the factors that might account for these obvious differences. He merely concluded that "there was no consistent pattern of change in the structure of land tenure." But it likely that a thorough determinants analysis would reveal a consistent pattern.

The most interesting part of the book from this reviewer's perspective was Cogswell's analysis of the relation between large scale land speculation and tenancy. The dean of American land historians, Professor Paul Gates, has argued for more than four decades that frontier tenancy resulted from misguided government land policies that enabled absentee landlords to intrude between the government and the actual settler. A decade ago, in my book on land speculation in frontier Iowa, *Pioneers and Profits* (Ames, 1965), I questioned this supposed link because I found no direct evidence to support it. Now, Cogswell, by correlating his data and mine, has built a positive case. In his sample area, at

least, tenancy was *lowest* in counties with the highest incidence of government land speculation and *highest* in the counties with the least speculation. This seeming contradictory pattern, Cogswell explains, was due to the fact that speculators "directly reduced the proportion of tenant farmers by offering land on credit to those with limited financial resources" (27). Given Cogswell's small sample and his crude county-level "correlation" analysis, it seems best to consider his findings to be indicative rather than conclusive evidence.

Two additional insights of this book will be valuable to future scholars. The first is Cogswell's explanation of the so-called "excess farmers," those individuals who in the population census listed their occupation as "farmer" but who were not listed as farm operators in the agricultural census. Previous scholars, Cogswell noted, have struggled with this problem without much success. (The documentation for this assertion was inadvertently omitted from the notes. There is no footnote 11 on page 17!) As many as one half of the "excess farmers" were in fact farm operators, Cogswell argues. They were *new* farmers who census marshals excluded from the listing because they had not harvested a crop valued above the \$100 minimum during the previous crop year.

Cogswell's second insight derived from his seminal analysis of the relationship between three variables—age of farmers, place of birth, and economic condition (59-66). The author discovered a direct relationship between farm size and distance from point of origin. Settlers from New England and the seaboard South were considerably older and they owned larger farms in eastern Iowa than did settlers from the nearby east central states. These "distant" migrants or "rolling stones" in Cogswell's terms (63) had obviously moved several times before settling in Iowa and in the process they had accumulated capital. This correlation between point of origin and agricultural prosperity in Iowa is so pronounced that Cogswell is correct in urging future scholars to explore more fully the "mechanics of migration." The demographic history of the Iowa farm population, it would seem, is essential to an understanding of agricultural development in the state.

This book answers many more old and new questions on frontier tenancy. Its 150 pages, which contain some forty pages of tables, can be read comfortably in a few hours and the style is sur-

prisingly lucid, despite the facts and figures. This book is a "must" for agricultural historians, but it will also fascinate and stimulate anyone interested in farming. Iowa State University Press is to be commended for making this important manuscript widely available in its *Replica Edition* series.

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Confederate Women, by Bell Irvin Wiley. Greenwood Press, 1975. Notes and index. pp. xv, 204. \$10.95.

Bell I. Wiley has a long and solid reputation as an historian of the Civil War. In books like *The Life of Johnny Reb* and *The Life of Billy Yank* he ably demonstrated his skill as a researcher and writer on the Confederate period of American history. Unfortunately, *Confederate Women* is not of the same genre. It is a loosely-tied together collection of essays based on lectures Wiley first presented in 1971 in honor of Andrew David Holt, President Emeritus of the University of Tennessee, and on an article previously published in *American History Illustrated*.

When the reader proceeds beyond the striking title and the equally striking cover design, he/she finds that the bulk of the book is devoted to only three Confederate women: Mary Boykin Chesnut (as "Southern Intellectual"), Virginia Tunstall Clay (as "Alabama Belle"), and Varina Howell Davis (as "First Lady, Wife, and Mother"). Using these women's own letters, diaries, and memoirs, Wiley presents a detailed recounting of their biographical data, social affairs, family relationships, and inner thoughts. One hopes that he will finally reach the stage of analysis; the best offered, however, are some character assessments of their individual strengths and weaknesses.

A central theme of these chapters is the contributions of these women to their respective husbands. This in itself is not objectionable since Southern society of that period did view women as adjuncts of their husbands. But many women's historians would argue that it is desirable for the historian to study sexist society rather than perpetuate it. *Confederate Women* would be far more insightful if it could have cut through male values to female realities in Confederate society. How, for example, does

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