

The Irish in Illinois, by Mathieu W. Billings and Sean Farrell. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2021. 252 pp. Further reading, notes, bibliography, indexes. \$24.50 paperback.

Reviewer Timothy Walch is a member of the Iowa Historical Records Advisory Board, a volunteer at the State Historical Society of Iowa, and the author of *Irish Iowa* (2019).

“Modesty” is the word that came to mind as I read through the opening pages of *The Irish in Illinois*. Mathieu W. Billings and Sean Farrell begin this impressive new study with two pages of acknowledgements and share credit for what they have accomplished.

There is no boasting here. Billings and Farrell are quick to note that they stand on the shoulders of “pioneering scholars” such as Charles Fanning, Lawrence McCaffrey, Kerby Miller, Eileen McMahon, and Ellen Skerrett. It is a “who’s who” list of Illinois Irish studies, and it underscores the fact that this book is a synthesis of excellent work in the field.

Billings and Farrell “have done a magnificent job of combining primary research with a wealth of secondary material to produce an erudite and absorbing portrait,” writes Gillian O’Brien in her endorsement of the book. “*The Irish in Illinois* is a comprehensive and engaging book that should be read by everyone with an interest in Irish America, Illinois, or Chicago.” I could not have said it better myself.

“This short book has been long in the making,” begin the authors. What they might have added is that their work is both substantive and imaginative. Most importantly, this book is a tale of two distinct Irish communities in the state: the Chicago Irish and the downstate Irish. The authors alternate between the two communities from frontier days to the second half of the twentieth century.

The book begins with a general introduction followed by two chapters that trace the Irish on the prairie from about 1750 to the Civil War. The Irish were unquestionably important to the state’s evolution; they were among an ensemble of exiles and politicians who contributed to the prairie’s development.

The rise of the Irish in Illinois began most visibly with the growth of Chicago between 1865 and 1933. Chicago became something of a mecca for multiple ethnic groups, and the Irish stand at the forefront of an evolving political machine. In fact, the growing influence of the Irish in Chicago gave them substantial influence in state government.

It would be wrong, however, to generalize the history of the Irish in Illinois based on the Chicago experience. The fourth chapter of the book goes beyond Chicago and traces the pockets of Irish power and influence in other parts of the state from the end of the Civil War up to

1960. This chapter will be revelatory for readers who only know of the Irish based on the southside of Chicago.

Of course, the authors do provide a fifth chapter on the “southside empire” that was Chicago from the 1930s up to when Irish political power was challenged in the 1980s. This is a narrative that will be familiar to historians of ethnicity and includes a penetrating discussion of the political influence and legacies of Edward Kelly and Richard J. Daley.

The book essentially ends in 1983 with the authors providing a very brief concluding chapter that only touches on the last forty years. If the authors are to be criticized it is for their decision to give such short shrift to the most recent generation of Irish influence in the state. More attention must be paid to Richard M. Daley and Michael Madigan, among others.

In keeping with the intent of this book, the authors do not vary from their stated topic. This is a book about the Irish in Illinois. Readers interested in Irish culture in the Midwest generally, or states adjoining Illinois specifically, should look to the work of David Emmons and other scholars.

Having noted these limitations, the authors do deserve applause for impressive and especially useful features that accompany the narrative. Each chapter has brief “sidebars” that focus on individuals who epitomized the Irish contribution to the history of the state. The guide to further reading and the bibliography are also particularly valuable. For these features as well as for the narrative, *The Irish in Illinois* will be a handy reference guide for years to come.

Grassroots Leviathan: Agricultural Reform and the Rural North in the Slaveholding Republic, by Ariel Ron. Studies in Early American Economy and Society from the Library Company of Philadelphia. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020. 324 pp. Illustrations, maps, graphs, notes, index. \$59.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Kyle B. Carpenter is a history instructor at the University of Arkansas Rich Mountain. His research focuses on economic and transnational history in antebellum America.

In *Grassroots Leviathan*, Ariel Ron recovers rural northern farmers' prominent role in antebellum American state formation. Ron challenges both the Jeffersonian ideal of the yeoman farmer and the declension narrative that the premodern northern American farmer disappeared in the face of the modern urban-industrial center. Instead, he depicts northern farmers as confident and creative actors who formed their own imagined community to pressure legislators to enact policies that would