

shaping Astor's grandiose plans and credits instead the eighteenth-century ventures of Peter Pond, Captain James Cook, Alexander Henry the elder, Duncan McGillivray, and Alexander Mackenzie among others. Finally, unlike most earlier versions of Astoria, Ronda's cast includes a varied assortment of characters reflecting North America's cultural diversity. In his story Hawaiian sailors and Chinook headmen take their places alongside Montreal merchants and American politicians as advance agents of empire.

This is history as it should be written. Anyone with an interest in western history will not want to miss this compelling book.

Pastoral Inventions: Rural Life in Nineteenth-Century American Art and Culture, by Sarah Burns. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989. xi, 377 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$39.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DAVID B. DANBOM, NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Sarah Burns's *Pastoral Inventions* is a provocative, searching, and erudite examination of the artistic, and to a lesser extent the literary, portrayal of rural Americans in the nineteenth century. Burns contends, convincingly I think, that depictions of rural people had much less to do with the reality of their lives than with what artists, authors, and, by extension, their audience thought reality was or ought to be. The target audience for art and literature with rural themes was northeastern, urban, and middle class. As the nineteenth century proceeded, this audience grew in numbers, wealth, and sophistication, forming a swelling market for the prints of Currier and Ives and such polite periodicals as *Harper's Weekly*, and providing a means of sustenance for the American Art-Union, the National Academy of Design, and other organizations supporting native artists and their works.

The consumers of American art knew what they liked, and they liked to have their rural people represented in ways that were reassuring and flattering. Hence, farm life was commonly portrayed as peaceful and idyllic, farm children were characterized as happy and carefree, and their parents were seen as strong, virtuous, and self-sufficient. Rural people were commonly made to represent prototypical Americans with all of the Yankee virtues. The fact that artists' subjects were most often northeastern farmers, rather than southern blacks or midwestern immigrants, underscored the comfortable American image.

Burns correctly notes that this image had little to do with the reality of a complex countryside caught up in commercialization and mechanization. What it did have to do with was reassuring urbanites

anxious about the trends of their materialistic age and the threats to national integrity presented by such varied phenomena as selfishness, corruption, immigration, and urbanization.

But rural images flattered urban patrons of art and literature as well as reassuring them. When rural people were portrayed as hicks, bumpkins, and geezers—sometimes almost as human grotesques—urban people were flattered and their sense of superiority was nourished. As the century proceeded, such negative images became increasingly common, indicating, among other things, a growing desire among the urban middle class to distance itself from rural backgrounds.

Burns makes her points by reference to literature and especially art, 157 illustrations of which are included. While readers are unlikely to agree with Burns's interpretation of every image, they will probably concede that most underscore her points.

I have only two problems with *Pastoral Inventions*, one substantive and the other procedural. First, many of the artists on whom Burns leans most heavily—William Sidney Mount and Winslow Homer, for example—received European training and/or consciously mimicked European styles and themes. In light of that reality, it is an important question whether their work was popular because it touched on American hopes and fears or because it was perceived as "quality"—that is, European—art. Put another way, did patrons' tastes reflect insecurities and the need for reassurance and flattery, or were they shaped by what experts defined as art? Perhaps these impulses are not mutually exclusive, but there is an implicit problem here I would have liked to see Burns explore.

The procedural problem is that the illustrations are grouped together after chapters and are all black and white. The grouping makes reference inconvenient. The decision to print illustrations in black and white, while quite understandable from a cost standpoint, makes it difficult for Burns to make some of her points, especially when she stresses the importance of color in conveying artists' messages.

These should be seen as relatively trivial drawbacks in an otherwise well-conceived and attractively produced book. Much of what Burns says will ring true to Iowans and others with a knowledge of rural life. Those who have watched such programs as "Green Acres" and the "Beverly Hillbillies," or have seen such films as *Country* and *The River*, will recognize that Burns's nineteenth-century images are alive and well, and they will heartily assent to her point that those images are indeed "pastoral inventions," having less to do with rural reality than with what urban cultural producers and consumers want

that reality to be. Perhaps the main change that has taken place over the past century is that rural people have become adroit at manipulating the image urbanites have of them, as even a cursory consideration of the use of the "family farm" image in farm bill debates well illustrates.

Western Rivermen, 1763-1861: Ohio and Mississippi Boatmen and the Myth of the Alligator Horse, by Michael Allen. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990. xiii, 261 pp. Illustrations, appendix, glossary, bibliographical essay, index. \$25.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JEFFREY S. ADLER, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

In an interesting and well-written book, Michael Allen explores the world of western flatboat and keelboat workers during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Allen also analyzes the mythology that surrounded rivermen. He is particularly interested in the myth of the "Alligator Horse," in which rugged rivermen were portrayed as fierce, powerful animals—half alligator, half horse.

Allen's description of life on the western rivers is excellent. Drawing on travel accounts and diaries, he explores the rigors of riverboat work in the pre-steamboat era. Although he is sensitive to the lore associated with the western rivers, he emphasizes the physical demands and the rough-hewn conditions endured by early flatboat workers, explaining that the work was dirty, dangerous, and generally unglamorous.

Allen places the early rivermen in the context of the frontier. He concludes, for example, that the rugged conditions of the West shaped the character of these workers. "Most of the early boatmen," Allen argues, "smoked, swore, gambled, drank to excess, fought, and bought whores, and many of them were deserters, petty criminals, or worse" (135). Living far from "civilization," according to Allen, "it is no wonder, then, that they lived and behaved as they did" (136).

The rise of the steamboat, according to Allen, transformed flatboating, flatboat workers, and attitudes toward river life, particularly after the 1820s. As the steamboat and industrial society invaded the West, these workers became more civilized. River life became safer, and rivermen became "more intelligent," temperate, stable, and law-abiding. But just when the staid rhythms of industrialization redefined river life, writers celebrated the tough, barbaric world that was disappearing. Allen argues that Americans, confronting the complex and regimented society born of industrialization, longed for the

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.