

ment. Also, Margulies does not explain how the volatile domestic setting created a highly charged partisan environment in which moderate and conservative Republicans were determined to defeat Wilson. As Arno J. Mayer indicated more than twenty years ago, these groups worried more about the progressive domestic implications of a Wilson treaty victory than they did about American participation in the League itself. Ultimately, class and partisan concerns triumphed, as is evidenced by the Mild Reservationists' loyalty to Lodge.

Zig-Zag-and-Swirl: Alfred W. Lawson's Quest for Greatness, by Lyell D. Henry, Jr. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991. xix, 336 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95 cloth.

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Few Americans now remember the versatile career of Alfred W. Lawson (1869-1954), although more might recall him had he exploited several opportunities for greatness. Born in England but raised in Detroit, Lawson left home as a teenager and soon entered the burgeoning world of professional baseball. He failed to establish himself as a player in the major leagues, but he achieved modest fame as manager of minor-league teams and early organizer of barnstorming trips to Cuba.

Lawson next turned to journalism and aviation. In 1904 he wrote a utopian novel, *Born Again*, in which he glorified the wonders of a technologically advanced society. But rather than launch a perfect society, Lawson became infatuated with the commercial possibilities of aviation. He started two trade journals and after World War I built an airplane for carrying large numbers of passengers. Even though his test craft performed well, the endeavor collapsed financially. Lawson seemingly possessed the knack for failing when success might have been within reach. By the time of Lawson's aviation phase, those who knew him realized that he was a talented albeit odd individual. One associate aptly called him a "cross between a crackpot and a genius."

Lawson's crackpot inclinations became apparent during the 1930s. Concerned about the plight of victims of the Great Depression, Lawson was one of the first to see the need for a crusade to uplift the troubled. This he did with his Direct Credits Society, based in Detroit and centered mostly in the Midwest. Lawson's blueprint for a better America involved his "perfect economic plan"; he wanted abolition of the gold standard and a cheap-money monetary policy. At the heart of his scheme was the idea of interest-free loans from the federal government. Even though thousands of hard-pressed Americans gravi-

tated to Lawson's Direct Credits Society, he won surprisingly little national attention.

When Lawson moved into his bizarre quasireligious "Lawsonomy" phase by the late 1930s, his impact on the country lessened dramatically. What Lawson did was to create a metaphysical, perfectionist faith, based on his extensive and peculiar writings, which led to a commune-like experiment in Des Moines. Lawson and his supporters acquired the campus of the small, defunct Des Moines University in 1943 and converted it into the "Des Moines University of Lawsonomy" (DMUL). But the scheme proved to be less successful than the Direct Credits Society. Growing financial problems, tensions with the outside community, and Lawson's dictatorial tendencies caused DMUL to decline by the late 1940s; Lawson's death in 1954 ended the Iowa utopia. Nevertheless, some loyal followers continued the sect. They considered Lawson superhuman and accepted the Lawsonomy "laws" of "maneuverability, penetrability, and zig-zag-and-swirl."

Lyell D. Henry, Jr., has written an important and entertaining book. Lawson deserves recognition, and Henry has placed him under a microscope. Yet this good book could have been better. All too often Lawson is discussed in a vacuum. For one thing, Henry missed the opportunity (in the tradition of his subject) to show how Lawson represents a "type." There were contemporary promoters "who dare to plan," in the words of Charles W. Caryl, a successful inventor turned utopian writer and builder. Lawson should be viewed in the larger setting. He was not unique; individuals like Caryl, Henry Olerich, Albert K. Owen, and Arthur E. Stilwell came from the same mold. Similarly, Henry could have profitably examined the remnants of the Lawson church, and indicated that sects often do not disappear with the death of the founder-leader. This is the important point made in Timothy Miller's recently edited book, *When Prophets Die*. There is another shortcoming to the Lawson study. Henry should have explored more historical repositories and contacted more people associated with Lawsonomy. Admittedly he tried, but his efforts appear inadequate. Amazingly, there is nothing said about Lawson's wife (he married late in life) and their two children. This book is further weakened by the lack of traditional documentation, poor quality illustrations, and Henry's often chatty prose style. Nonetheless, Lawson is a fascinating man, and Henry skillfully conveys that notion.

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