

the frontier. It also serves as a reminder of the significance of the young men and women from humble backgrounds who helped settle and transform the prairies and forests of this part of the country.

*Servants of the Land: God, Family and Farm, The Trinity of Belgian Economic Folkways in Southwestern Minnesota*, by Joseph A. Amato. Marshall, MN: Crossings Press, 1990. vii, 69 pp. Illustrations, graphs, maps, tables, notes, bibliography.

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As his title indicates, Joseph Amato's short description of a Belgian farming community in southwestern Minnesota touches on important intertwining themes of religion, ethnicity, families, and land. Drawn from the stories of families who live there today, Amato's narrative outlines the years of change as Belgian immigrants jostled for space with other immigrant groups and with the American-born farmers who preceded them.

Amato argues that Belgian families were particularly well-suited to make a remarkable adaptation to an increasingly capitalistic mid-western farming environment. Instead of retarding movement, their Old World ethnic values of work, land, religion, and family pushed them to the top of the local socioeconomic hierarchy. Sticking to the land, rejecting individual opportunities and happiness for the sake of the community good, the Belgians capitalized on the fusion of family and religion.

To the student of midwestern rural change, Amato tells an interesting story. However, his tendency to make sweeping general statements about ethnicity and religion leaves the impression that such forces were monolithic and omnipotent. By focusing on only one Belgian family, Amato runs the risk of overgeneralizing from a narrow body of evidence. His important characterization of the Belgians as "peasant-capitalists" (9) does offer an interesting insight into the "transition to capitalism" debate. However, Amato supports his argument mostly with anecdotes; local lore substitutes too often for empirical data. Many of Amato's general statements appear to have elements of truth but are seldom verified with equally general evidence. Stylistically, the choppy prose and the abrupt thematic shifts would have benefited from a thorough editing. The book blazes no new theoretical trails but it might have.

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