

Van Vugt begins his study in the eighteenth century, when what would become the state of Ohio was a contested border zone between the British and French empires. He shows how even after American independence, Britons remained interested in the region for its commercial and agricultural opportunities. Van Vugt effectively weaves British history and local Ohio history together to explain the “push” and “pull” factors that brought English, Welsh, and Scottish men and women to new lives in America. Like nearly all immigrants, the British Buckeyes confronted terrible hardships, but they also demonstrated remarkable resilience. One great strength of Van Vugt’s analysis lies in the way he describes ethnic differences among the British rather than overgeneralizing about the diverse people and cultures of the British Isles; his discussions of emigrants from Guernsey and the Isle of Man are especially intriguing.

Van Vugt unquestionably proves his main argument, namely that “Ohio’s long and rich history cannot be fully understood and appreciated without knowing the British Buckeyes” (ix). To support that claim, he particularly relies on the capsule biographies in the turn-of-the-century county histories familiar to many researchers of midwestern communities. At times, *British Buckeyes* seems to falter and lose momentum under the burden of including so many individual stories, interesting though they are. Some additional context and analysis might have strengthened some of these more lengthy sections of biographical summary.

Readers interested in comparing the experiences of the British in Ohio to those of other parts of the Midwest will receive little assistance from Van Vugt, who keeps his focus determinedly on Ohio alone. However, in his recovery of these long-overlooked stories, Van Vugt shows us that the “invisible immigrants” should be revealed anew to contemporary researchers in local history.

*Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History*, by Lee Shai Weissbach. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005. x, 436 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$45.00 cloth.

Reviewer Nora Faires is professor of history at Western Michigan University. Her many published works include *Jewish Life in the Industrial Promised Land, 1855–2005* (2005).

Lee Shai Weissbach’s thoughtful history contributes substantially to two historiographies rarely joined — the study of American small-town life and the evolution of Jewish experience in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *Jewish Life in Small-*

*Town America* demonstrates unequivocally how this dual focus enriches both subjects. Weissbach delineates precisely what communities he has in mind: the 490 U.S. towns with "triple-digit" Jewish populations during these decades, that is, those urban places with more than 99 but fewer than 1,000 Jewish residents. Organized thematically and designed primarily for a scholarly audience, this is a systematic and rigorous study. But Weissbach's lively prose and well-chosen examples render his narrative accessible to a broad readership.

Moreover, the book's bibliographical essay, index, tables, and methodological discussions should prove very helpful to others interested in Jewish America. A brief section titled "Reading the Manuscript Census" is particularly useful, constituting a welcome guide to the possibilities and pitfalls of investigating the histories of Jewish-American communities. Weissbach traces his painstaking labors to reconstruct the entire Jewish populations of 12 small towns. He describes his use of the federal population censuses of 1880 and 1920, then outlines his efforts to link names from those sources, which do not list religion, to organizational lists and histories of synagogues in order to confirm religious identity. Weissbach is scrupulous in revealing how he may have undercounted or overcounted the towns' Jewish populations and is candid in admitting that he omitted from his inventories "those descendants of Jewish settlers who were known to have disassociated themselves from their Jewish past" (319), a decision that limits the scope of his study. That he is so forthcoming about his methodology adds to the value of the book.

Of the 12 towns Weissbach examined intensively, none is in Iowa, but three are in the Midwest: Appleton, Wisconsin; Lafayette, Indiana; and Hamilton, Ohio. Of the 490 towns whose overall patterns he sketches, ten are in Iowa: Burlington, Cedar Rapids, Council Bluffs, Davenport, Dubuque, Fort Dodge, Iowa City, Marshalltown, Muscatine, and Waterloo. In all, nearly a quarter (117) of all the communities are in midwestern states. Those interested particularly in that region, however, will need to piece together information from the narrative and accompanying tables, because Weissbach, attentive to distinctions between North and South, does not address the Midwest directly as a site of Jewish American life.

Indeed, this book argues for the salience of geography, but by "place" Weissbach means chiefly size rather than physical location. He sees more similarities than differences among small-town Jewish communities and in turn distinguishes their experience, taken as a whole, from that of Jewish life in large urban places, especially New York but also Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, and the host of U.S. cities in

which the Jewish population numbered in the thousands rather than the hundreds. In “triple-digit towns” distant from prominent centers of Jewish-American life, Weissbach contends, Jews were fairly isolated and their organizational life was attenuated. Community life was built around kin connections, with most members pursuing mercantile enterprises and few laboring at the working-class jobs more common for Jews in large cities. According to Weissbach, small-town settings tended to discourage the most virulent forms of anti-Semitism and foster cooperation among Jews across liturgical lines. He concludes, “For tens of thousands of American Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the very fact of living in a smaller Jewish community in a small town surpassed other cultural and environmental factors, including regional location, as an influence on the contours of their lives.”

This sweeping and provocative conclusion should prompt considerable debate. Yet most scholars will agree that Weissbach has provided the definitive study of a topic important to modern American life. Those interested especially in the history of Iowa will glean gems from this book: stories of institutions, like the cemetery established by Iowa City’s German Jews, then sold as the community dwindled; tales of politics, including that of two brothers who served as aldermen in Muscatine; accounts of settlements seeking to sustain traditions, such as the appeal for a kosher butcher to settle in Davenport; and personal reflections on life at the turn of the twentieth century — one immigrant complaining of conditions in Cedar Rapids, another grateful for a new beginning in Dubuque. Such glimpses of individual lives and community experiences greatly enhance Weissbach’s comprehensive study of Jewish life in small-town America.

*A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan*, by Michael Kazin. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006. xxi, 374 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$30.00 cloth.

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According to Michael Kazin, William Jennings Bryan helped transform the Democratic Party “from a bulwark of laissez-faire into the citadel of liberalism we identify with Franklin D. Roosevelt” (xix). The author’s attempt “to gain a measure of respect for Bryan and his people” (xviii) succeeds remarkably well.

Bryan commenced his career as a lawyer, but his stint as a congressman from 1891 to 1895 propelled him to national prominence as