

abandonment at the scene by wagon mates, and of being betrayed by a presumed friend" (191). Idealism had its limits.

This is a work of a mature scholar. Soike brings to this study a wealth of knowledge amassed over 36 years as a historian at the State Historical Society of Iowa. By recentering the Kansas imbroglio away from Congress and out from the territory, he has made an important contribution to understanding the way the territorial issue transformed Iowans who thought of themselves as westerners into partisans of the Free-State movement and participants in a sectional conflict that issued in and was resolved by the Civil War and more than 640,000 deaths.

*Necessary Evil: Settling Missouri with a Rope and a Gun*, by Joe Johnston. St. Louis: Missouri History Museum, 2014; distributed by the University of Chicago Press. 336 pp. Maps, illustrations, bibliography, index. \$24.95 paperback.

Reviewer Catherine McNicol Stock is the Barbara Zaccheo Kohn '72 Professor of History and director of the American Studies Program at Connecticut College. She is the author of *Rural Radicals: Righteous Rage in the American Grain* (1996); and *Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains* (1992).

*Necessary Evil* is not intended as an academic history of vigilante violence in Missouri in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It includes no overview of books on similar topics, no footnotes, and only a brief bibliography. The author freely admits that he "created" and "added" some of the details in his descriptions of events (12). Similarly, Johnston asserts that "the level of vigilante activity . . . of this length and depth of depredation, happened only in Missouri" without providing specific data to back up the statement (8). For readers in Iowa, this is particularly disappointing, because one of the frontier areas that Johnston claims did not fall into the habit of solving every problem through vigilante justice was Iowa. It would be interesting to know more about how different parts of the Midwest came to develop so differently.

For a non-academic audience, *Necessary Evil* proves a literally unforgettable read – full of violent deaths, torture, revenge, all in the name of what Johnston calls justice. Each chapter concerns a different saga of vigilantism, beginning with the "Mormon wars" and including the regulator movement, Wyatt Earp, the Bald Knobbers, and other infamous and anonymous vigilantes. As his title reveals, Johnston believes that this carnage was a "necessary evil," a stage of society on the way to a more regulated community. He even suggests that we can turn our horror at the pain and suffering of the victims into "love" for the perpetrators and ap-

preciation of their dedication to justice (324). Readers can even imagine, he says, that "maybe there's a hint of vigilante heritage in all of us" (324).

Even if Johnston does not pretend to be an academic, it is still inconceivable to me that he could so thoroughly romanticize the vengeance and terror in our past. We live in a world where the extralegal use of violence is making justice impossible to achieve in many places both close to home and far away. Indeed, Johnston can only create such a romantic story about vigilantism by leaving a major part of the story out. He "avoided stories of racism" and all examples of "racially motivated violence, especially leading to lynchings" (11). But why did he do so? And how are racially motivated lynchings different from those he describes and glorifies? In each case, people in power use extralegal violence to terrorize the community's "others" or "outsiders"—some perfectly innocent of the charges, if there were any—and to maintain their power in society. But with stories of black bodies hanging from trees included in the narrative, Johnston's entire premise would fall apart. With racially motivated lynchings included, Johnston could not reasonably conclude that Americans "love the democracy" of the vigilante story (323). Nor could he assert that "the overriding story of Missouri's vigilantes is the story of good people in good families, yearning for happiness and peace" (11). The violence in our past needs not to be romanticized but interrogated and reconciled, now more than ever.

*Pioneer Girl: The Annotated Autobiography*, by Laura Ingalls Wilder; edited by Pamela Smith Hill. Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2014. lxix, 400 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 hardcover.

Reviewer John J. Fry is professor of history at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illinois. An authority on the life and works of Laura Ingalls Wilder, he is also the editor of *Almost Pioneers: One Couple's Homesteading Adventure in the West* (2013).

Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House novels have delighted young and old readers ever since they were first published during the 1930s and '40s. Based on Wilder's own childhood, the books feature clear descriptions of pioneer life in multiple locations in Wisconsin, Kansas, Minnesota, and South Dakota from the point of view of a fictional girl who grows from a toddler into a young woman.

Before gaining fame for writing autobiographical children's fiction, however, Wilder was a columnist for a Missouri farm newspaper from 1911 to 1925. She also had several articles published in national magazines. She then retired from journalism to compose a memoir titled "Pioneer