

## Book Reviews

*Lincoln, Land, and Labor, 1809–1860*, by Olivier Frayssé; translated by Sylvia Neely. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994. 249 pp. Notes, index. \$29.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY JAMES W. OBERLY, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-EAU CLAIRE

Make room on your Lincoln shelf for yet another addition to the literature on the Railsplitter. *Lincoln, Land, and Labor, 1809–1860* is an interpretive essay that mixes biography and rural history. It was written by a historian at the Sorbonne, first published in French in 1988, and translated with a sure feel for academic French and frontier English by Sylvia Neely of Saint Louis University.

Olivier Frayssé is primarily interested in Lincoln's experience as a farm laborer and how that shaped his subsequent maturer views on agriculture and rural life. He finds that the young Abraham Lincoln hated working in the fields for his father, Thomas, and schemed throughout his adolescence and young manhood to escape a life of toil tied to the plow and scythe. His choice of adult profession, the law, also signifies his attitude toward the land: it could be surveyed, mastered, and understood as an abstract commodity. This attitude toward the land also explains, in Frayssé's view, why Lincoln and others like him found the rectangular survey of the public land system in the Old Northwest far superior to the metes and bounds surveys of Kentucky, with their resulting confusion of land titles.

These insights into the frontier experiences of Lincoln and his family are extended throughout Lincoln's career in Illinois politics in fresh and provocative ways. For example, Frayssé reads Lincoln's 1847 "Spot Resolutions" against the Mexican War as little more than a country lawyer's attempt to argue a surveying case on the circuit, bereft of any moral indignation about one republic making war on another. Later, in the 1850s, Lincoln came to take a keen interest in farm machinery precisely because it held the promise of eliminating the drudge labor he had so disliked as a young man.

Frayssé has read closely in several different branches of literature. He has mastered the lengthy biographical literature on Lincoln, with a preference for Albert Beveridge's writings, and he has not neglected Lincoln's writings, showing a clear familiarity with the *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. He has not read as much of the newer social and cultural history of the settlement of Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois.

The greatest American interpretive influence on Frayssé seems to have been the writings of Paul W. Gates in the 1930s and 1940s on the history of land speculation in the Midwest. *Lincoln, Land, and Labor*, represents a firmly populist, or Gatesian, approach to the history of land dealings in Illinois. Frayssé has carefully compared Lincoln's list of friends and partners with the lists of "speculators" that Gates assembled from the manuscript records of the General Land Office. Although not himself a buyer of public land for quick resale, Frayssé's Lincoln is very much a water-carrier for the Whig land-kings, cattling-kings, and money-kings of Illinois.

So how did Lincoln emerge from the obscurity of country lawyer and servant to the exploiting class? The great accomplishment of Lincoln and his Republican Party, in Frayssé's view, was to have convinced the "rural masses" of Illinois, and eventually the rest of the North, that the slaveholders of the South (and not the capitalist market) were the principal threat to order and stability in the Union. Frayssé sees this as nothing less than a struggle to reorient the Midwest toward the urban, commercial, capitalist values of New England and away from the relaxed pre-market values of the upper South. Only a person raised amidst the humanity of the rural North could so effectively lead its people on that path of transformation.

*Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States, 1850-1930*, edited by Herbert J. Brinks. Documents in American Social History. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995. xvi, 480 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, appendixes, bibliography, indexes. \$35.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY BRIAN W. BELTMAN, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Historians of immigration depend on primary documents such as emigrant and immigrant rolls, ships' passenger lists, manuscript census data, newspapers, land records, city directories, diaries, and letters. In particular, descriptive accounts in the latter two textual sources, as opposed to other, more "faceless" records, give personality and character to the migrants.

Herbert J. Brinks has assembled a collection of letters by Dutch-American immigrants. Their correspondence formed part of the wealth of "American letters" that served as important catalysts in the decision-making processes of thousands of immigrants to the United States. This compendium is but a sample from the Dutch Immigrant Letter Collection at Calvin College Library Archives, where Brinks is curator. This collection of at least eight thousand items is of inestimable value to students of immigrant history. Brinks's book comprises twenty-three

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