MacFadyen's "Flax on the Northern Great Plains and Prairies, 1889–1930," Tisa M. Anders and Rosa Elia Cobos's "The *Beatabeleras* of Western Nebraska: Gender Labor, and the Beet Sugar Industry," Jason McCollom's, "'We Are Tied Together . . . in a Hundred Different Ways': Farmers and Farm Organizations across the Forty-Ninth Parallel, 1905–1915," Thomas D. Isern and Suzzanne Kelley's "'Done for Another Year': The Resilience of Canadian Custom Harvesters on the North American Plains," along with a passing nod to the region in Sterling Evans's "Dependent Harvests: Grain Production on the American and Canadian Plains and the Double Dependency with Mexico, 1880–1950." The authors of the previously published essays apparently did not have the opportunity to update their secondary sources.

Overall, Evans has provided a useful collection of essays that deal with the agricultural history of the North American West in a transnational context. Scholars will find it a ready reference and a good introduction to specific topics. Most of the essays are synthesized based on secondary sources. Evans's call for primary research is justified for this expansive, new approach to the agricultural history of the North American West. Anyone interested in this field of historical inquiry will find Evans's essay collection a useful read and an important guide for future research.

The Perfect Fence: Untangling the Meanings of Barbed Wire, by Lyn Ellen Bennett and Scott Abbott. Connecting the Great West Series. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2017. xxiv, 269 pp. Illustrations, graph, notes, bibliography, index. $42.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Wayne Franklin is professor of English, American Studies, and Environmental Studies at the University of Connecticut, Storrs. In addition to publishing several books on James Fenimore Cooper, he is the author of *A Rural Carpenter's World: The Craft in a Nineteenth-Century New York Township* (1990).

At the start of the 1962 film *Lonely Are the Brave*, modern cowboy Jack Burns encounters a barbed wire fence while riding his horse, Whiskey, across the New Mexico landscape. Dismounting, Burns (played by Kirk Douglas) snips the wire, opening the closed range and allowing him to proceed. The film, directed by David Miller from a script written by the once blacklisted Dalton Trumbo, was based on the second novel (*The Lonely Cowboy*, 1957) by a rising star of western literature, Edward Abbey. Here is how Abbey himself set up the fence-cutting episode: "[Burns] came eventually to a barbed-wire fence, gleaming new wire stretched with vibrant tautness between steel stakes driven into the

sand and rock, reinforced between stakes with wire staves. The man looked for a gate but could see only the fence itself extended north and south to a pair of vanishing points, an unbroken thin stiff line of geometric exactitude scored with a bizarre, mechanical precision over the face of the rolling earth." This fence is no ordinary obstacle. In a story that will end with the displaced cowboy run down on a rainy highway by a truck laden with toilet fixtures, the fence represents both the insistent demarcations of a modern, bounded world and the near ubiquity of industrial products that promise convenience but are capable of delivering confinement and at last death.

The Perfect Fence is a smart study of the tangles of meaning caught in the barbed wire fence. Fences had long been a staple of rural landscapes in North America when the first weaponized wire fences came onto the market following the Civil War. Fences kept animals out of crops during open range periods in American history, then kept them in once most of the range was closed. The first fences tended to be improvised from uprooted stumps and lopped-off tree branches. Then they were built in various forms from posts and boards. In areas of abundant stone outcroppings, as along much of the East Coast, rocks brought to the surface by continuing tillage eventually provided a more durable substitute, resulting in the distinctive stone walls of New England, New York, and even the Kentucky Bluegrass. Once European settlement passed from the area of heavy forest and geological riches and onto the prairie, where neither extensive woodlands nor much surface rock appeared, erecting enclosures became a challenge.

Into the gap came, eventually, an array of alternatives. Some use was made of hedging plants, most notably the Osage Orange, of which remnant examples survive to this day in several midwestern areas. Woven wire fence was tried, first of iron and later steel, but proved ineffective with regard to larger animals, which could simply push through it. In the 1870s various inventors affixed to wire fencing an array of sharp pronged attachments intended to repel any stock that came in contact. Although these innovations had considerable effect, they also generated various kinds of concern. It is in regard to this particular subject that the work of Lyn Ellen Bennett and Scott Abbott is particularly valuable. Earlier scholars, including Earl W. Hayter and Henry and Frances McCallum chronicled various technical aspects of the story of barbed wire. Bennett and Abbott, after briefly treating that subject, pass on to a consideration of the rich and diverse cultural meanings of barbed wire fencing. Following the lead of other researchers, they reflect on the inherent violence of the invention, which, after all, uses bodily pain as a means, as one 1885 comment had it, of

keeping "the 'ins' from being 'outs'" and "the 'outs' from being 'ins.'" Because as early as the Spanish American War and the Second Boer War barbed wire was applied to the battlefield, the technology of pain as a deterrent to movement across boundaries soon became a subject of much reflection in a variety of practical and moral contexts. Worse applications of the agricultural invention to human or, rather, inhuman purposes followed in the twentieth century, from the trenches of World War I to the concentration camps of World War II.

The authors do a great job of illustrating the many strands of this story with appropriately chosen graphic materials and, in an especially fresh fifth chapter, modern American literary texts, including Abbey's novel and the writings of Wyoming poet and prose writer and rancher James Galvin. This is, all in all, a nice example of how much we can learn from material culture studies undertaken in a spirit of genuine interdisciplinary inquiry.

Birth of the American Dream: Four Immigrant Families, Nine Generations, The Middle-Class Struggle, by Steven C. Hull. Yorba Linda, CA: Rock Bluff Press, 2017. xx, 428 pp. Appendixes, notes. $14.99 paperback, $5.99 Kindle edition.

Reviewer Bruce Curtis, a native of Wapello County, Iowa, is Professor Emeritus of Michigan State University. He is the author of *Like Ordinary People: An Illustrated Iowa Social Biography of Josephine Mae Teeter Curtis and Her Times, 1903–2007* (2008) and articles in the *Iowa History Journal* and *Our Iowa*.

There is gold here, for those who choose to dig, nuggets to be found. In the front matter of this self-published work, Steven C. Hull remarks, "I did not write an academic history. This book is a compilation of biography, history and memoir." In explicating the book's subtitle, Hull focuses on his English and Polish ancestors' origins and how they made their way to America, ultimately to southeastern Iowa, some to Jefferson County, but particularly to Wapello County, more particularly to Ottumwa and vicinity.

As the subtitle suggests, Hull views his ancestors as having engaged for generations, whether in Europe or America, in a struggle to rise and cling to "middle class" status. Although the term is not defined, their struggle is presented as involving enduring and generally unsuccessful attempts to become landowners in an era of booming population growth, rising prices for increasingly limited land, and agricultural markets over which they had no control. In specific instances, as strapped tenant farmers, they turned to low-paying and insecure employment in the area's new industries.