

was transferred to the state in 1863 to become the predecessor of Kansas State University.) According to its charter, the college was to promote “the mental, moral and physical well-being of those who may be trained under its auspices, and thus impart a healthy and vigorous tone to the community” (117). And, Olson writes, that “healthy and vigorous tone” could be seen as late as 1879 in the town’s reaction to a group of destitute Black Exodusters; expelled from nearby Wyandotte City, they were “well received upon their arrival in Manhattan” (181).

Olson argues that, by the time Goodnow died in 1894 and the influence of the founding generation had faded, Manhattan’s tone had “stagnated” (5). At the turn of the century, he writes, the town’s people had maintained their religious values and their support of education, but the progressive traditions of the founders had been replaced by intolerant conservatism. By then, for example, the town’s residents no longer welcomed ethnically diverse newcomers. It appears that Olson is, in part, responding to Thomas Frank’s *What’s the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (1996). Olson’s answer is rooted in Manhattan’s history.

Frontier Manhattan is an interesting examination of one town’s foundations. However, the author makes no attempt to compare Manhattan’s story with that of other towns, either within or without Kansas. Olson writes for a general audience, and his book will be most attractive to readers with direct or historical connections to the town itself; it is filled with information about individuals and families. It is unfortunate, therefore, that there is little discussion of Manhattan’s place in the larger story of the Midwest and the nation. The Midwest has become a popular field, and direct comparisons are increasingly possible. Still, historians of the Midwest should consult Olson’s work for its illustration of a small town’s historical reaction to modernization.

Colonel Baker’s Field: An American Pioneer Story, by Judy Salamacha and Sandy Mittelsteadt, with Chris Brewer; illustrated by Jody Salamacha-Hollier. Exeter, CA: Bear State Books, 2013. xvi, 244 pp. Maps, illustrations, chapter notes, timeline, photography and illustrator notes, bibliography. \$24.95 paperback.

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Thomas Baker’s early life followed the pattern set by many other mid-western pioneers. Born in Ohio in 1810, he moved as a young man to

Iowa (then Wisconsin Territory) and served in the Iowa Territorial Militia (hence “Colonel”) and Territorial Legislative Assembly. He taught himself the law and launched a family of nine children with three successive wives. He engaged in the usual suite of pioneer activities (cabin-building, friendships and altercations with native peoples, political and entrepreneurial projects), then took his family west to California in 1850. His story there, too, resembles the pioneer chronicles of the day. Settling at the southern end of California’s Great Valley, he ultimately established a home on the Kern River. “Baker’s Field” there became a way station and settlement site for later-arriving immigrants, then the name of a town—now California’s ninth-largest city, Bakersfield.

This extravagantly illustrated little book is coauthored by a newspaper columnist (Salamacha, whose daughter created the digital images that enliven the narrative) and educator (Mittelsteadt) from Bakersfield, with help from Baker’s great-great grandson Chris Brewer—also the book’s publisher. Baker’s story is told in dialogue, in chapters alternating between imagined conversations from Baker’s day and reconstructions of Brewer’s contemporary conversations with friends and family about his ancestor. An awkward formula in the best of hands, this style of storytelling, initially intended for middle-schoolers, is frustrating and unsatisfactory for a reader looking for either historical information or a good read. The dialogue is improbable and stilted, the characters impossibly wise and noble—and fundamentally boring. Jumping from made-up family discussions in early nineteenth-century Iowa to equally contrived conversations in twenty-first-century California serves no purpose other than to confuse the reader and derail the story. With the help of addenda—chapter notes summarizing history, a timeline of Baker’s life, and illustrated profiles of all the Central Valley individuals who contributed in some way to this project—a motivated reader can try to track the story. Salamacha-Hollier’s laboriously created illustrations (including photographs Photo-shopped to look like paintings and ersatz letters from pioneers that explore the different possibilities of handwriting-like fonts) are often charming and attractive, works of loving attention. And that can be said for the entire book: a great deal of time, care, and affection went into the making of *Colonel Baker’s Field*; others as passionate about Bakersfield as the authors may enjoy it.

Union Heartland: The Midwestern Home Front during the Civil War, edited by Ginette Aley and J. L. Anderson. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013. xiv, 196 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, index. \$39.50 hardcover.