

Book Reviews

on the subject or to works that employ a similar methodology. In addition, he sometimes suggests questions that the work raises for historians in other areas of specialization. Through these introductions, Schlereth provides a disciplined approach to what might otherwise have been an interesting but unrelated collection of articles. The final part of the book is a bibliography of useful works in the field.

Ordinary People is a useful reference guide to the field of social history. As a survey of recent trends in historical studies, though, it will necessarily become a dated work within a decade. Because it includes a large section of historical monographs, *Material Culture* will have a more lasting appeal. Nevertheless, both works clearly demonstrate that the study of "ordinary people and everyday life" has much to contribute to our understanding of the American experience.

LIVING HISTORY FARMS

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Gentlemen on the Prairie, by Curtis Harnack. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1985. viii, 254 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$16.95 cloth.

Charlotte Erickson's seminal book *Invisible Immigrants* (1972) indicates that the American rural frontier of the 1800s attracted naive middle-class Britons who were unprepared and unsuited for farming. Curtis Harnack's well-written case study of the Le Mars colony in northwestern Iowa for younger sons of upper-class British families extends Erickson's finding into the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Harnack, who was raised on a farm near the site of the old colony, is a specialist in American studies and author of several fiction and nonfiction works. In *Gentlemen on the Prairie* he uses new information he has gathered over the last thirty years in the United States and United Kingdom and synthesizes much of the extant literature about the topic.

In 1877 William B. Close, joined by his brothers Frederick and James and later by other partners, began investing in raw land in Iowa and Minnesota; the firm also was land sales agent for railroads in the district. In an effort to attract British and other settlers, the Closes rented out and sold ready-made farms with minimal improvements and arranged for young recruits to board locally as apprentice farmers ("pupils"). By the mid-1880s the land sales and colony were thriving, but by then word had spread back to Britain that the work was too hard for the young alien dudes and that American land ownership did not carry the high status that prevailed in the home islands. Meanwhile, the young settlers brought to Iowa their clothing, servants, diet and drinking habits, and sports. Unaware of the Turner thesis that the fron-

tier was supposed to Americanize foreigners, the colonists grew bored and drifted back to England or to other futures elsewhere. Though the colony declined, most of the Closes' investments were profitable into the early 1900s. By then, however, the two surviving brothers had already permanently returned to Britain.

There are several important issues that Harnack's work neglects. He does not analyze the Closes' role as agricultural innovators and land speculators and thus fails to relate his study to previous research (such as that by Paul Gates, Allan Bogue, Robert Swierenga, and James Reed) on these general topics. In 1888 the Iowa General Assembly passed a law to regulate alien land ownership; Harnack ignores that legislation and its relation to investments of the Closes and other foreigners. Also, the Le Mars colony was only one of a number of British colonies primarily for remittance men in the American Midwest. Harnack seems unaware that other similar colonies existed, though he does draw an interesting comparison with Rugby, Tennessee, and briefly mentions Victoria, Kansas. Why was the problem of "second sons" so pronounced in the late nineteenth century for upper-class British families, and how did the experience of the Le Mars colony compare with that of similar settlements elsewhere in mid-America? How widespread and successful was the practice of boarding and training "farm pupils" in the United Kingdom and United States? Previous students of the Close enterprises have described the private partnership of Close Brothers and Company. Harnack, however, introduces a new name: Close Brothers, Ltd. If indeed the Closes founded a public joint stock company, then there exists in the British government's Public Record Office an important file of the firm's records which scholars have failed to use.

Despite these unresolved questions *Gentlemen on the Prairie* is the best published study to date of the Close brothers' ventures and the Le Mars colony. Future researchers on this and other groups of settlers will need to develop a collective biography of each and compare their respective backgrounds, behavior, and later careers. Such scholars will need to consult Harnack's important book.

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