

parallels with midwestern protest traditions. Not all of the essays escape the social history pitfall of relying on anecdotes rather than substantive analysis, but enough of them do to make this a good book.

The Web of Southern Social Relations leads into a myriad of topics that different readers will want to pursue in greater detail. Although I see unresolved sticking points in some of the essays, I recommend this book for careful and critical reading.

AMES, IOWA

DEBORAH FINK

The Breckinridges of Kentucky, 1760-1981, by James C. Klotter. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1986. ix, 393 pp. Illustrations, notes, tables, genealogy chart, bibliographical note, index. \$35.00 cloth.

Few American families can boast of a relatively unbroken line of notable public figures, one that stretches from the late eighteenth century to the present era. Outside the East Coast states, particularly New England with its Adamses and Lowells, the phenomenon is especially rare. For this reason and others, James C. Klotter's history of the Breckinridges of Kentucky is an important contribution to our understanding of national elite lineages. Klotter, state historian and general editor of publications at the Kentucky Historical Society, has mined the voluminous records of the Breckinridges to reconstruct an exceptional and highly readable, even dramatic, account of public endurance and achievement. How this clan managed to produce a continuity of state and national leaders is the core concern of the book. In treating this primary question, Klotter avoids the extremes of uncritical antiquarianism and mere number crunching. He skillfully integrates traditional narrative description with modern social theory and methodology. With these tools he directs attention to political mindsets, to social and racial attitudes, and to intrafamily relationships, as those dimensions crucial to any explanation of the family's longevity in the limelight.

The book explores the lives of eight Breckinridge men and women chosen for special study because they carried the surname and concentrated their activity in Kentucky. Sixteen other family members are singled out for more than mention. A useful "Cast of Characters" in the book's front matter furnishes brief biographies of these two dozen individuals. The founder of the clan in America was Alexander Breckinridge, who migrated to America in the 1720s and eventually settled in Virginia. His son Robert substantially enlarged the family's landholdings and through an advantageous marriage and minor civil

Book Reviews

posts lifted the Breckinridge name to a patrician standing. The idea of political responsibility was being implanted in the family's consciousness, and John Breckinridge, Robert's son, gave it full play after moving, over his wife's objections, to Kentucky in 1793. There he garnered land, slaves, and horses and rapidly moved up in the new state's society. A Jeffersonian Republican, he captured the leadership of the party in Kentucky, serving as the state's attorney general and speaker of the house. He introduced the Kentucky Resolutions in 1898, and went on to become a U.S. Senator and Jefferson's attorney general. John's early death at age forty-six robbed the family of perhaps its greatest light, but he bequeathed to his descendants an unforgettable standard of personal attainment. Generations following built outstanding careers on that memory: Robert Jefferson Breckinridge, state legislator, Presbyterian minister, leader of his denomination, pioneer of Kentucky's public school system; John Cabell Breckinridge, perhaps the most famous of the family, vice-president under Buchanan, presidential candidate, U.S. senator, Confederate general and secretary of war, a Burlington, Iowa, resident for two years; W. C. P. Breckinridge, Lexington newspaper editor and congressman; Sophonisba Preston Breckinridge, attorney, Ph.D. and J.D. from the University of Chicago, reformer, author of a dozen books; Desha Breckinridge, attorney, newspaper owner, state progressive leader, nationally renowned horseman; Mary Breckinridge, founder of the pathbreaking Frontier Nursing Service in the rugged mountains of eastern Kentucky; John Bayne Breckinridge, attorney, state legislator, and congressman. There were others, top state officials, college presidents and teachers, generals, reformers, cabinet secretaries, diplomats, Olympians.

Despite the advantage of the family name, scaling to heights of professional acclaim was rarely a smooth climb. Klotter details the dilemmas and disappointments that accompanied such striving. He reveals the private tragedies, the public scandals and criticism, the shifting political loyalties, and the squabbling and divisiveness among family and kin that give his subjects believability and character. Whatever the adversities, the family overcame them, and Klotter in his last chapter takes up at some length his original question about the reasons for the family's sustained success. Despite the limitations imposed by a lack of an ancient homestead and even average longevity, the Breckinridges achieved influence and affluence in large part because the family took advantage of favorable conditions, such as the region's deference to its old and established families, and consciously inculcated in its progeny a sense of family tradition and a guiding philosophy. That philosophy, repeated generation after generation, stressed reform, progress, and optimism; its qualification by a healthy dose of pessi-

mism and conservatism only served to energize the family's efforts to construct a better future.

The book is almost flawless in its internal consistency, but there are times when the author seems to contradict himself. Had Robert J. Breckinridge "found" (61) Danville Theological School or had he "virtually found it" (62)? Was Sophonisba Breckinridge "the first woman admitted to the Kentucky bar" (189), or was she "apparently the first of her sex so honored in Kentucky" (199)? These quibbles are so glaring simply because one is so engaged in the unfolding story.

This book is probably not the last word on the Breckinridges. Klotter's analysis and interpretation of the political orientations and power of several of the members should elicit reinterpretations and more research. Nevertheless as a collective biography of interconnecting lives of one of this nation's great families it will be hard to surpass.

INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ROBERT M. TAYLOR, JR.

Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution, by T. H. Breen. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985. xvi, 216 pp. Notes, illustrations, index. \$19.95 cloth.

Why review in the *Annals of Iowa* a book about Tidewater Virginia in the colonial era, long before Euro-Americans began to settle in Iowa? Because, quite simply, it suggests a fresh way of looking at important aspects of the history of Iowa.

Most of us are accustomed to thinking of eighteenth-century Virginia as a world inhabited by lawyers, statesmen, and political philosophers. In *Tobacco Culture* T. H. Breen shows us a world inhabited by planters who "spent most of their working hours thinking about crops and livestock" (40-41, 1). Not adequately classified as intellectual, economic, or agricultural history, or as a merely revised rehash of the reductionist Beardian analysis that ascribes revolutionary impulses to motives of economic self-interest, the book reflects Breen's use of anthropological tools to shed light on planters' ideas about the world they inhabited. The distinction between his approach and that of more traditional intellectual history lies in his discussion of those ideas, not by tracing a chain of intellectual debts, but by linking together the planting cycle, the psychology of the planters, and a political ideology.

Breen shows first how patterns of human relationships were influenced by patterns of tobacco production and trade. Then he analyzes the psychological and cultural effects of the transformation of those relationships as planters who prized their autonomy grew increasingly indebted to British merchants who did not honor local codes

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.