

to rely (whether directly or indirectly is not clear in the text) on Edgar Nelson Transeau's classic conceptualization, "The Prairie Peninsula," published nearly fifty years ago in *Ecology*. Generally, Madson's scientific understanding of the prairie derives from the Nebraska school of plant ecology, which began in the 1890s in Roscoe Pound's and Frederic Clements's work and which reached its natural conclusion in the 1950s in the work of Clements's student, John C. Weaver. Although the later scientists traded metaphorical treatment of the prairie as a single biological organism for treatment of it as a system, Madson reaches back to an earlier generation for most of his scientific work, perhaps because the organismic metaphor resonates with his own Emersonianism.

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Ecology and History: Studies of the Grassland, by James C. Malin. Edited by Robert P. Swierenga. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. xxix, 376 pp. Notes, tables, bibliography, index. \$28.50 cloth, \$13.95 paper.

Once in a while new ideas may spring up on the edges of metropolitan society, away from its garden of fashion and consensus. Germinated in isolation and defiance, they may take on a crabbed, distorted quality, but also may offer a fresh, creative vigor that the metropolis needs. James Malin had such wild ideas, and at least the world is discovering them and taking them more seriously. During his long tenure as a history professor at the University of Kansas, he slipped more and more into obscurity as his work became increasingly bold and imaginative. Students who walked past his office door (as this writer did) may remember him, in Robert Swierenga's phrase, as "the Kansas curmudgeon." He was not popular in the last two decades before his death in 1979; to most students he seemed a fossil, hard and encrusted, and difficult to decipher. Why would anyone spend so much time studying Kansas soils and farm mobility data, they wondered, when German movies were showing on campus and satellites were lofting into outer space? Now this book comes along to show us why and to make the curmudgeon into a seer, a man of some genius.

Malin was born in North Dakota in 1893, the son of frontier parents who eventually settled in western Kansas and opened an implement business. Rejecting that life for himself, he went east to school and took his doctorate at the university in Lawrence. He began to teach there in 1921. For a while he was a conventional nation-cen-

tered historian, until in the thirties he began to look with interest at local and regional materials—at the evolution of rural communities in the prairies and plains. The problem he set for himself was to understand the grassland as an ecological system and the efforts of men and women to make their home within it. Altogether he published thirteen books and more than eighty articles, most of them on that subject. Many of his writings he privately published, out of pique, and they badly needed an editor. Robert Swierenga enters now as that editor; he has selected twenty articles and book excerpts which exemplify Malin's scholarship at its best but also reveal something of his life and biases. The selections appear under three headings: "Ecological Theory and the Grassland," "Environmental Adaptations in the Grassland: Case Studies," and "Quantitative Methods in Grassland Population Studies." They show Malin self-reliantly redefining his field as the study of environmental and social history, as "community" and "cultural" history, and as history "from the bottom up," rather than accepting the prevailing definition of history as essentially the story of national political leaders and their deeds.

"Malin's unique historical concepts," writes Swierenga, "closely resembled those of his contemporary, Marc Bloch, a founding father of the famous French *Annales* tradition" (xv). He is, to a point, right. Like Bloch, Malin immersed himself in the totality of rural life and borrowed from other disciplines—geography, geology, folklore, ecology, anthropology, and demography—whatever he needed to understand that life. He gathered and analyzed statistical data the hard way, by hand not computer, to test locally the broad, airy generalizations about conditions of frontier settlement. Perhaps his most lasting work will be his social mobility studies, in which he examined, through a careful sampling of Kansas communities, the changes in farm population, tenure, and stability from the 1860s to the 1930s. Bloch and his associates were interested mainly in the Middle Ages, but they would have understood and approved of what Malin was trying to do with the modern American West.

There is a difference between Bloch and Malin that Swierenga brushes past too quickly: the ideological uses to which Malin put his history and the content of that ideology. In contrast to the *Annales* school, which was and is strongly influenced by Marxist critiques of capitalism and its effects, Malin was an impassioned defender of the gospel of free enterprise. We miss much of the point of his work if we ignore his distaste for the social planners of the New Deal and what he called its "totalitarian tendencies" (83). All around him in the 1930s, so it seemed, were people alarmed at the Dust Bowl disaster who urged some governmental constraints on plains

farmers, called for an end to the individualistic frontier era, and demanded restoration of the grasslands and resettlement of the displaced population elsewhere. Malin set out to deflate their "propaganda." He tried to show that, contrary to prevailing ecological theory, there was no enduring balance or order in nature which the pioneers had destroyed. He insisted that the region was evolving on its own toward stabilized communities and needed no federal planners. He was, first and last, a fierce believer in the economic culture of the western entrepreneur. No wonder, then, he seems never to have read the foreign historians; possibly he regarded them as he did the New Dealers, as dangerous outsiders. This man of genius was something of a nativist and a provincial, content with the faith of his fathers and with Gopher Prairie.

There were in James Malin and his history, then, some unresolved contradictions. He was an innovator and an experimenter, but not in the economic and political institutions of his region. He talked much about the adaptation of culture to its environment but also about the need to triumph over nature and bring it to market. He explored new methods of doing history, and asked more profound questions than most of his generation, but he gave old answers to them. This book, so ably edited and so revealing of those contradictions, is one that we have sorely needed. It gives this complex man his due presentation at last: he was a brilliant and original figure who never traveled far from home.

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History of Agriculture in Ohio to 1880, by Robert Leslie Jones. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1983. x, 416 pp. Notes, maps, bibliography, index. \$15.00 cloth.

History of Agriculture in Ohio to 1880 is the product of years of careful scholarship by Robert Leslie Jones, professor emeritus of history at Marietta College and distinguished contributor to the field of agricultural history. It provides a good example of both the strengths and weaknesses of agricultural history, and is an important contribution to that specialization. Jones's work is traditional agricultural history, in which rural people perform as economic actors, and only rarely as social beings. Jones is primarily interested in the development of commercial agriculture in Ohio, which he traces from the early days of settlement in the late-eighteenth century to 1880. Despite his contention that 1880 marked an end to the early phase of Ohio agriculture, his terminal date seems arbitrary, especially since so

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