

Book Reviews

Indiana Letters: Abstracts of Letters from Missionaries on the Indiana Frontier to the American Home Missionary Society, 1824-1893. 3 volumes. By L. C. Rudolph, W. W. Wimberly, and Thomas W. Clayton, with the collaboration of June L. Conger. (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1979. Pp. ix, 1244. Index to abstracts. Clothbound, 8½" x 11", \$74.50, 6" x 9", \$71.50; paperbound, 6" x 11", \$56.50.)

In the field of American studies no chapter is potentially more interesting and revealing than the story of religious development on the early frontier. As the territories which became Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin were settled, Christians in the East intensely wished to have ministers working fulltime as soon as possible in the newly formed western communities. To this end they formed the American Home Missionary Society (AHMS) in 1826 as a merger of several voluntary groups concerned about the religious needs of the American West. Between 1824 and 1893 there ensued an extended correspondence between those persons working as agents in the field and the home office in New York City.

An abstract of the Indiana letters—that portion of the correspondence involving missionaries and ministers in pioneer communities and settlements in Indiana—is now available. In 1975 the Microfilming Corporation of America published in complete form all of the original letters in the American Home Missionary Society Archives. The bulk of this publication is quite large. To make the material more accessible this present project was conceived and carried forward. These abstracts provide a handy tool to assist the serious scholar. In the lengthy, sometimes tedious, and often verbose correspondence of dedicated church leaders working with the AHMS one can often find important descriptions of methods, personalities, and methods in primitive community life on the frontier.

These abstracts are a joint effort between Indiana University and a number of agencies, including the Amistad Research Center, University Microfilms International, and the Indiana Committee for Humanities. Under the general direction of L. C. Rudolph abstracts of the Indiana letters have been prepared. They are succinct, well done, and useful. Abstracts 1-758 are by W. W. Wimberly; 759-2538 by L. C. Rudolph; 2539-3886 by Thomas W. Clayton; and 3887-5046 by June L. Conger. Rudolph and Conger prepared the index.

While the serious scholar will still find it necessary to turn to the letters themselves, the abstracts and index will serve as a valuable tool and will save many hours of research time. In some ways it may seem an unnecessary digression to refer to an abstract only in turn to be directed to the original source. However, when one considers the great volume of correspondence involved—hundreds of letters were written between 1824 and 1893—it can be seen clearly that in this instance “the long way home is the shortest in the end.”

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The Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775-1850. By Malcolm J. Rohrbough. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978. Pp. xiv, 444. Maps, notes, tables, bibliography, index. \$17.50.)

Like C. Wright Mills or William H. Whyte describing the lives of the “white-collar people” who pioneered suburbia, Malcolm J. Rohrbough suggests that the social history of the trans-Appalachian frontier was a history without events. The individual lives of early settlers were filled with anecdote, to be sure, but even these may be subsumed under general patterns dictated by the cycle of the seasons in a society and an economy based on agriculture. “Life for most of the settlers on the first frontier [of the 1780s and 1790s] was basic and close to nature; its unifying characteristic was physical labor” (p. 62), but so it was also for the pioneers of the Old Northwest, the Old Southwest, the Trans-Mississippi West, and of those “enduring frontiers” in Michigan, Florida, and Arkansas. The endless cycle of work, turn the soil, plant, harvest, and survive—or starve—thus provided the settlers with an experience more potent, Rohrbough suggests, than the alienation consequent to emigration that Oscar Handlin saw as the origin of American individualism and cooperation. Although alienation and emigration were also part of the life of these native-born, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant westering migrants, theirs was an experience which was no experience, in that it taught them to do only what they already knew how to do so that life on a new farm and life on an old farm were often indistinguishable.

The result in personal behavior—which is what scholars test conceptions of national character against—was the creation of a distinct society of non-yeoman farmers in the Ohio and Mississippi valleys, lumpen landowners, self-sufficient depen-