

thought about how to handle his rival, Goodrich. He did it exquisitely, by not mentioning his name.

Benjamin D. Rhodes has based his book on the Goodrich papers in the Herbert Hoover Library in West Branch, Iowa, and has done exceedingly well. Goodrich comes alive in this carefully researched and beautifully written account.

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Buckeye Schoolmaster: A Chronicle of Midwestern Rural Life, 1853–1865. Edited by J. Merton England. (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1996. Pp. xiv, 308. Map, illustrations, index. Clothbound, \$49.95; paperbound, \$24.95.)

A farmer, miller, teacher, school director, and essayist in Madison County, Ohio, John M. Roberts (1833–1914) was committed to the Democratic party, free schools, and a free press. An ordinary citizen, he was a talented observer and recorder of the human condition. From a collection of Roberts's diaries and manuscripts, editor J. Merton England selected the material for *Buckeye Schoolmaster*. Beginning on January 17, 1853, and ending on December 31, 1865, Roberts chronicled crucial years in the American experience—those of rising sectionalism and the Civil War, and the editor's well-crafted introductions to each chapter establish the context for the diarist's entries.

The nineteen-year-old Roberts made his initial diary entry when attending the local one-room school, studying spelling, *Ray's Arithmetic*, and grammar. Some of his classmates were as young as five. Already a critic, Roberts found Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* full of "imaginary evil" and his teacher's instruction disconnected. He continually sought knowledge and availed himself of every opportunity for education, attending geography, singing, grammar, and spelling classes in the evening. His plan to attend Farmers College, near Cincinnati, was thwarted because he was needed to stand in for his ailing father on the farm and at the mill. In 1858 Roberts, then twenty-five, attended a short teachers' institute and began his teaching career in a one-room school in Ohio's Palestine–Mt. Sterling area. He earned twenty-five dollars a month, plus board.

A contribution to educational history, *Buckeye Schoolmaster* also provides useful social and political information. Roberts's journal reveals the nineteenth-century Middle West's nativism, particularly the region's antagonism to European immigrants, Catholics, and blacks. Roberts feared the influx of Irish Catholics who he believed sought to take political power. A determined Americanist, he wanted to replace any lingering monarchical sympathies on the part of the immigrants with genuine republicanism. Wed to Manifest Des-

tiny, Roberts portrayed the United States as the world's "great dispenser of knowledge, light & liberty" (p. 77). In America, "the masterpiece of creation," everything reached "its highest extent" (p. 209). Roberts also commented on Ohio's internal improvements, especially railroad building.

A homespun philosopher, the somewhat melancholy Roberts pondered the meaning of life, death, and immortality. Frequently attending revivals and camp meetings, he found that the various denominations offered only incomplete answers to life's basic questions. Rather than hell and damnation, religion should unite the believer with the universal higher power, a benevolent "Supreme Architect."

Writing on the eve of the Civil War in 1859, Roberts revealed strong antiblack and anti-abolitionist prejudices. Believing that blacks should be cleared from the Ohio country, he attacked abolitionism at Oberlin College and in the Republican party. He supported Stephen A. Douglas's popular sovereignty and wanted the Fugitive Slave Law rigorously enforced. During the Civil War Roberts was exempted from service because of ill health. He supported General George B. McClellan against Abraham Lincoln in the election of 1864; however, he strongly denied accusations of being a Copperhead, a southern sympathizer. During Reconstruction he supported President Andrew Johnson against the Radical Republicans.

Recording local people's marriages and births, deaths and funerals, affairs and quarrels, successes and failures, Roberts's diary is a prose version of Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology*. A keen observer of life, Roberts describes the sicknesses that ravaged the frontier—fever, ague, milk sickness, dropsy, consumption, smallpox, and alcoholism. As he records the deaths of relatives, friends, and neighbors, he provides a brief assessment of their character and contributions.

Buckeye Schoolmaster is recommended for readers interested in local, educational, social, and political history.

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An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay's Interviews and Essays. Edited by Michael Burlingame. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996. Pp. xix, 167. Notes, index. \$29.95.)

Michael Burlingame has assembled and edited a handful of oral interviews conducted by President Abraham Lincoln's wartime private secretary, John G. Nicolay, in the 1870s and 1880s in the course of collecting materials for his and John Hay's ten-volume biography of Lincoln. Also included in Burlingame's collection are two essays that