

the transformation of isolated settlements into organized communities.

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Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation in the Rural North, 1870–1930. By Hal S. Barron. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. Pp. xiv, 301. Maps, illustrations, notes, note on sources, index. Clothbound, \$49.95; paperbound, \$18.95.)

Specialists in rural history will find much of what Hal S. Barron says in *Mixed Harvest* familiar, but that does not mean his book is unimportant. Barron offers a deliberate, reasoned, and well-written survey of key topics in what he calls the “second great transformation” of rural life, 1870 to 1930. He breaks considerable new ground and also provides a masterly synthesis of research interpreting changes in farm life during this time.

First he examines two classic arenas of conflict between urban reformers and rural defenders of the status quo—road reform and school reform. The localism inherent in the office of pathmaster and the folkways supported by working out road taxes were unacceptable to city folk, who wanted good roads for bicycles and, later, automobiles. Likewise the local autonomy of school districts was seen as a stumbling block to urban reformers bent on establishing graded schools through consolidation. These were “flash points” that “highlighted the conflict between two competing visions of society” (p. 44). Farmers opposed the reformers because they valued local autonomy and were frugal. Urban reforms, they knew, always cost them money. Federal aid, gas taxes, and their own adoption of the automobile eventually made farmers more favorable to road reform. Schools, however, reflected “culture and ideology” (p. 7), and so consolidation was thwarted.

The second general area examined is farm organization. Barron looks first at dairy organizations in New York and second (with more pertinence to Indiana) at farmers’ grain elevators in the Midwest. Cooperative grain elevators were manifestations of localism too, striving to cut out the middleman, but farmers found that pure localism was not tenable. To overcome obstacles and boycotts initiated by private dealers, the cooperatives had to organize beyond their own communities. Strictly as “a business proposition” (p. 128), they had to become more cosmopolitan.

The third and most interesting area treated is consumer culture, beginning with mail order catalogs and progressing through chain stores, the proliferation of automobiles, movies, radio, and home modernization before the “full flowering of a consumer culture” by the

1920s. Here is an intriguing discussion of how Montgomery Ward established rapport with rural buyers; the importance of parcel post; the rise of chain stores; the reordering of rural geography by the automobile; the custom of Saturday night trading and movie attendance; and the ways farmers and the radio industry affected one another. Farmers bought radios, thus entering consumer culture, but when they did, their listening preferences in turn shaped radio programming. This interchange brought about not the displacement of farm values by urban values but rather "a hybrid rural version of that culture," WLS Barn Dance and so on—a sort of mass rural culture.

Farmers thus reaped a "mixed harvest," one of "resistance and accommodation and of change as well as continuity" (p. 245). Barron's conclusions are particularly refreshing in that he does not consign farmers to the victim culture so fashionable in recent decades. Farmers made their choices, he says, and lived with them.

A final note on Barron's method: it reprises the approach of Earl Hayter a generation ago in *The Troubled Farmer*, drawing general insights from a set of related, topical essays. As opposed to the new social history, which postholes specific topics in a small area, the essay approach follows the connecting strands across the countryside. It is a good method, as well as a readable one, and Barron proves it so in this exemplary work.

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Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform: Mothers' Pensions in Chicago, 1911–1929. By Joanne L. Goodwin. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Pp. xii, 284. Illustrations, tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00.)

Although Joanne L. Goodwin's book joins a long list of works published in the past decade on the Progressive era origins of welfare "as we knew it," her Chicago study is the first to focus on the local implementation of "mothers' pensions," state level programs to aid single-mother families that were adopted by forty states between 1911, when Illinois passed the first law, and 1920. Unfortunately, mothers' pensions case records in Chicago were destroyed; so Goodwin depends principally on institutional reports and contemporary research, much of which was undertaken to justify and bolster the program. Consequently, there are few glimpses of the way the program was administered in specific cases. Instead, Goodwin concentrates on the ideas and interests of the groups promoting and opposing mothers' pensions in Chicago, their struggles for power, and the ways compromises shaped the program.