

Wiggins's innovations and precisely how did they change racing culture? Who emulated them and why were they improvements? Also, how was it possible to create such an interracial culture of male camaraderie at a time of deep racial divisions? Was it simply the result of a shared passion for racing?

Gould argues that a brotherhood of racing transcended racial boundaries, noting especially Wiggins's work with Indy 500 winner "Wild Bill" Cummings. Cummings had been part of "Charlie's Gang" and learned much about racing from the black driver. In fact, Wiggins served on Cummings's pit crew the year he won the 500. Yet, because AAA officials would not allow the use of a black mechanic or pit crew, Cummings hired Charlie Wiggins as a janitor. Only after sweeping the floors, and after officials had left the track was Charlie allowed to help craft the winning car. Amazingly, though perhaps not surprisingly, Cummings never publicly acknowledged or thanked Wiggins for his work. Even so, Gould argues that this story showed that "behind those garage doors, there was no color line, no race, and no barriers to overcome."

I would have interpreted this story differently. Cummings and white drivers clearly benefited from the exceptional skills of black drivers, but that they did so without allowing them into their fraternity speaks volumes. Cummings did not "shatter social norms." Rather, on his way to victory, Cummings exploited a phenomenally talented black American, and then did not recognize his labor or talent. This is the story of African Americans writ large. Like other black Americans, Wiggins battled long odds to shape his sport and attempted to carve out a multi-racial and more equitable world, only to be forgotten because of the entrenched racism of society and racing culture. Fortunately, Todd Gould has brought the story of Charlie Wiggins and the African-American racing circuit to light.

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American Grit

A Woman's Letters from the Ohio Frontier

Edited by Emily Foster

(Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002. Pp. x, 344. Illustrations, notes, appendices, bibliography, index. \$45.00.)

Few published collections of letters capture the heart of an antebellum pioneer family, the essence of their daily

struggles, and the building up of the Midwest more perceptively than *American Grit: A Woman's Letters from the Ohio*

Frontier, edited by Emily Foster. The volume, a title in the University Press of Kentucky's Ohio River Valley series, showcases the richly detailed letters that Anna Briggs Bentley wrote from Ohio to her much beloved kin in Maryland between 1826 and 1858. The letters offer insight on Ohio Quakerism, frontier home medicinal practices, and the roles of women's, family, and community labor in antebellum agricultural societies. They are also notable for their rare references to farming during the Midwest's canal-building era.

In 1826 Joseph and Anna Bentley, their six children, and a black servant named Henry left Maryland to join fellow Quaker pioneer farmers in Columbiana County, Ohio, where they entered a world of unrelenting, "slavish" labor. Anna's letters routinely describe the litany of chores that comprise "a most laborious" day or week, along with their physical efforts upon her, sometimes expressing solace only in the realization that part of her next day's labor can be done while seated. For example, after noting that she had washed, baked, scoured, and cooked, "&c," Bentley remarks that "I have been constantly on my feet; and I feel very tired now and look forward to tomorrow as a treat, for I have a great pile of patching to do that I can set down to" (p. 40). Especially revealing are her characterizations of family and neighbor labor, which formed the most salient feature of pioneer interconnectedness (followed by caring for the sick, grieving with the mourning, and attending to the young). While the divi-

sion of labor tended to be along gender lines, Bentley's letters also document that these lines frequently blurred according to the needs of the moment. Pioneers prized labor for its contribution to the whole while disparaging the "good for nothing"; this is evident whether Anna writes with pride about eight-year-old Maria's capabilities or about her own limitations during her thirteen pregnancies.

The regional landscape of independent farms that Anna's family helped to create was quite dependent upon a western culture of neighborly assistance and obligation. Apparently Bentley was unaccustomed to this form of community labor. Commenting on the scarcity of money that prompted payment in kind, she writes that it is the "custom here in harvest or other busy times to collect as many neighbors as they can, and they will pay back in work" (p. 38). Neighboring women collaborated to provide food for the hands. She notes numerous other labor arrangements such as engaging one man to plow and sow their flax field in return for granting him his own small section, or the employment of a neighbor's teenage daughter for domestic chores in exchange for educational or social instruction. All was not harmonious, however; Anna writes with disgust about those who failed to assist, the family's stolen beehive, and the frequency of lawsuits to obtain a payment of debt.

So much more can be gleaned from these remarkable letters. Given Bentley's own excommunication over a doc-

trinal dispute, they are less about Quakerism than they are about western pioneering—a point Foster, as editor, fails to develop. Conspicuously missing from her bibliography is R. Douglas Hurt's illuminating work *The Ohio Frontier*, which would have provided a broader context for the story of agricultural development during westward expansion. Also absent is the fundamental connection to the increasingly rich historiography of rural women. Still, *American Grit* is a must-read for nineteenth-century scholars and those generally interested in the history of the Midwest.

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Ohio is My Dwelling Place
Schoolgirl Embroideries, 1800-1850
 By Sue Studebaker

(Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002. Pp. xxvi, 310.
 Maps, illustrations, [appendices], notes, bibliography, index.
 Clothbound, \$70.00; paperbound, \$34.95.)

For much of the nation's past, needlework has been an integral part of women's lives. Women used needlework as a way to tell stories, to highlight what was important to them, and to reveal their aesthetic sensibilities and technical prowess. Samplers, a particularly popular form of needlework during the early nineteenth century, are the focus of *Ohio is My Dwelling Place*. Like all documents, samplers can be looked at in many different ways. On a visual level they can be appreciated for their use of color, design, skill, and composition. As heirlooms, they are treasures valued for family ties, for a link to the

past, and for their relative scarcity. As social documents, samplers provide information on opportunities available to young women and on the wider cultural environment at a particular point in time. Sue Studebaker, a needlework connoisseur and researcher, provides a peek into the needlework creations of Ohio's young pioneer women.

This study of samplers in early nineteenth-century Ohio is the result of what has become familiar in the quilt world, a statewide documentation project. Studebaker and a number of other enthusiasts uncovered samplers, researched young needleworkers and