This volume presents an interesting and readable account of the development of some key areas of Michigan law, and is particularly useful in its comparison and contrast of Michigan’s legal history with that of surrounding states. But further interstate comparisons would have been welcome, as would a more detailed, contemporary analysis of criminal law, labor law, and civil rights legislation. The extensive notes provided at the end of each chapter are particularly useful for scholars interested in pursuing those topics on their own.


British Buckeyes
The English, Scots, and Welsh in Ohio, 1700-1900
By William E. Van Vugt
(Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2006. Pp. xiii, 295. Photographs, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. $55.00.)

This interesting and informative book focuses on the role played by British settlers in the development of Ohio, mainly in the nineteenth century. Some individuals helped to open the area before 1800 and immigration increased hugely after 1815, but the British still represented only twenty percent of foreign-born immigrants in 1850 and sixteen percent in 1880. The British struggled to adjust to the unfamiliar agricultural conditions they found in Ohio, but by mid-century they were introducing scientific methods and improving agricultural practice. Overall, they came from a broad spectrum of occupational backgrounds and possessed skills that ensured they would contribute disproportionately to the industrialization of Ohio, as well as enriching its educational and cultural attainments. These contributions were facilitated by the similarity of their language and cultural heritage to those of most Americans, which ensured that they would integrate more quickly and easily than other immigrant groups.

Of course not all Britons were the same. The author spells out how the Welsh formed tight, inward-looking communities and retained their language, religion, and distinctive cultural identity, though the picture could be considerably enriched by using the many revealing letters home, written mainly in Welsh, now in the National Library of Wales. Similar separateness was certainly displayed by people from the Isle of Man.
and Guernsey, but other Britons, too, tried to maintain communal identi-
ties based on old local attachments. The Scots of Scotch Settlement, in Columbiana County, thought of Aberdeenshire as their “country” (p. 119), while East Liverpool represented a transplantation of the English Potteries, memorably described in the novels of Arnold Bennett. And the English from Lancashire and Yorkshire would have united (for once) in denouncing an author who links those counties with the “North Midlands” (p. 51)!

Many English immigrants found more difficulty in adjusting and assimilating than we are led to believe by Van Vugt. The Courtauld family, who attempted to settle in Athens County in the 1820s, chose to return home partly because they felt that Anglophobe antagonism deprived them of opportunities and fair treat-
ment. Van Vugt shows the difficulties faced by Bible Christians from Devon and Cornwall in the 1830s, while Anglophobe prejudice disrupted the Methodist church in Lorain County after the Civil War, despite the sup-
posed similarity of the church’s evangelical outlook with that of other sects in the area. And let it not be forgotten that English settlers who partici-
pated in politics frequently suffered abuse because of their origins.

In the face of such perceived hos-
tility, many English felt more need to sustain institutions than immigration historians have often supposed. As Kevin Watson has recently demon-
strated, the Primitive Methodists pro-
vided essential cultural and commu-
nal support for their working-class members at the same time as they eased assimilation. This was part of a pattern that saw many Ohio mining areas in the late nineteenth century follow the English pattern in which miners from Welsh, Scottish, and English mining regions formed vigorous communities marked by dissenting churches, unionism, and class-conscious politics.

Van Vugt devotes much of his book to presenting brief biographies diligently retrieved from the huge compendia of undigested information found in the many county histories produced between 1880 and 1920. While this anecdotal approach enables the author to tell good stories about colorful characters, he seems at times too concerned with multiply-
ing examples to maintain a clear argu-
ment. Moreover, the old-fashioned “contributions” theme stands in the way of more interesting questions, such as those the author tackled in his absorbing Britain to America: Mid-
Nineteenth-Century Immigrants to the United States (1999). And, in any case, how can we measure the distinctive-
ness of a particular ethnic “contribution” without evidence of the contributions of others?

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Native Soil
A History of the DeKalb County Farm Bureau
By Eric Mogren

In Native Soil, Eric Mogren describes how farsighted Illinois community leaders and farmers organized to improve agricultural techniques in an effort to raise rural standards of living and increase the prosperity of small-town businesses. Formed in 1912, the DeKalb Soil Improvement Association (SIA) hired a full-time farm advisor to assist local farmers in enhancing and preserving the quality of their soil. While many communities created such organizations to sponsor demonstration agents, Mogren contends that the SIA—renamed the DeKalb County Farm Bureau in 1916—was unique. Pre-dating the 1914 Smith-Lever Act, which provided matching federal funds to hire state and county agricultural agents, the association established a tradition of local control missing from many of the groups that organized after the passage of that legislation. Ultimately, the men responsible for DeKalb’s Farm Bureau did a remarkable job of serving their constituents, making a series of intelligent business decisions that gave the group a firm financial foundation.

As Mogren shows, Farm Bureau leaders confronted and met a wide range of challenges during the organization’s first seventy years. After raising an initial $10,000, the group struggled financially. They reluctantly applied for federal funds in 1914 but retained autonomy.

The association’s first advisor, William Eckhardt, gained county acceptance thanks to his extensive knowledge and strong interpersonal skills. Eckhardt tested soil samples and prescribed seeding clover and applying lime to combat yield-limiting acidic soils. He arranged for annual cooperative bulk purchases of both substances, answered myriad inquiries from farmers, wrote columns for local newspapers, and published a newsletter. His successors continued and expanded his work, forming livestock and dairy marketing programs, youth clubs, and home management programs, as well as lobbying for property tax relief. The business arm of the DeKalb Farm Bureau, the DeKalb Agricultural Association, established an oil cooperative, a hybrid seed company, and local meat lockers.