

*From Pioneering to Persevering
Family Farming in Indiana to 1880*

By Paul Salstrom

(West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2007. Pp. xii, 208. Illustrations, notes, index, bibliography. Paperbound, \$23.95.)

"Hoosiers still care about family farming," asserts Paul Salstrom, author of *From Pioneering to Persevering: Family Farming in Indiana to 1880*. This, despite the fact that notably absent from the historiography of Indiana's past is a book-length study of the history of the state's agricultural development and rural life, particularly as they relate to Indiana's beginnings. Good relevant sub-regional and community studies have been done, including Stephen A. Vincent's *Southern Seed, Northern Soil* (1999) and Richard Nation's *At Home in the Hoosier Hills* (2005). Salstrom hopes that his broadly conceived history of Indiana agriculture will close that gap; however, given the growth and dynamism of the fields of rural and agricultural history and the important connections being made to larger themes and narratives of nineteenth-century history, the project looms as a tall (but not impossible) order to fill.

With few hints to the reader as to its organization and thematic development, *From Pioneering to Persevering* is, quite simply, a very basic story about the considerations that influenced and characterized nineteenth-century family farming in Indiana (and the Midwest, in general). The study ends in 1880 to avoid deal-

ing with the sweeping changes of the twentieth century. The single expressed question that absorbs Salstrom is why family farming was so economically viable in early Indiana; his rather reductionist answer is that the world of family farming disintegrated with "the eventual invention of efficient corn harvesters" (p. 106).

Salstrom's chapters explore Native American agriculture before and after European contact; why settlers came and where they settled; the origins of the Corn Belt; pioneering in central, western, and northern Indiana; agricultural pioneer Solon Robinson; competitive market development; and a final assessment. Topical coverage is overwhelmingly based upon secondary sources, most of which the author accepts uncritically. Salstrom also tends to make some rather outlandish statements, such as the assertion that "Euro-Americans' land hunger certainly went back" to the fall of the Roman Empire (p. 35). The reader is hard-pressed to make that connection—and others in this book, such as links between Midwest agriculture and Thomas Jefferson's role in the Declaration of Independence, and also between the region's farms and Europe's Dark Ages.

Where Salstrom succeeds is in outlining a narrative of the state's

history that precedes Euro-American settlement and that demonstrates the multiple influences asserted by Native Americans, the French, and the British. Histories of farming in the early Midwest need to address the complexities and consequences surrounding native-white relations, including evolving federal Indian and land policies, as they most certainly figured prominently in the pioneering experiences. The model for this type of scholarship is R. Douglas Hurt's *The Ohio Frontier* (1996). Salstrom also provides a very useful bibliography of both early Indiana and

the emerging Midwest. Essentially, those generally interested in Indiana history may be satisfied here; those seeking a more complicated or detailed history of the state's early agriculture will not.

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Triumph at the Falls The Louisville and Portland Canal

By Leland R. Johnson and Charles E. Parrish

(Louisville, Ky.: Department of the Army Corps of Engineers, 2007. Pp. viii, 340. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Free.)

Leland R. Johnson and Charles E. Parrish have succeeded in capturing the story of designing and building the two-mile Louisville and Portland Canal passage around the Falls of the Ohio. Examining the canal's history in fifty-year segments beginning in the early nineteenth century, they present the positive side of the planned obsolescence of these canal structures, built and maintained to ensure safe travel over dangerous rapids and falls that have challenged Indian and pioneer canoes, flatboats and steamboats, and today's improved inland river craft.

The chapters trace the challenges and advancements of five engineer-

ing phases, beginning with Kentucky's victory over Indiana when both were vying to build a canal around the Falls. The authors recount the successive structures on the site, from a series of three locks completed in 1830 to aid in the safe navigation of inland river commerce to the present-day twin locks, measuring 1,200 feet in length, that accommodate towboats maneuvering massive, multiple barges through the canal.

The authors also examine the ideas and leadership which led to the success of the project. Topics include: the work of dedicated citizens; the transfer of responsibility to the U.S.