

free through *Founders Online* or the relevant military manuscripts made available through the *Papers of the War Department, 1784-1800*. These academic critiques aside, Stockwell's book should be well received by those readers interested in the American Revolution, the Northwest Indian War,

and the settlement of the Northwest Territory.

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River, Reaper, Rail: Agriculture and Identity in Ohio's Mad River Valley, 1795-1885

By Timothy H. H. Thoresen

(Akron, Ohio: University of Akron Press, 2018. Pp. xii, 279. Maps, notes, bibliography, index. Paperbound, \$59.95.)

Timothy Thoresen's study of settler society in Ohio's Mad River Valley is a straightforward account of those who made a living on the land and developed the towns, businesses, and industries in the region. An anthropologist and historian, Thoresen describes the changes that Euro-Americans wrought on the land between the 1790s and the 1880s, focusing on adaptation in farming techniques and access to markets via rivers, canals, and railroads. Readers learn about the farming practices settlers brought to what became Champaign County, and how farmers sought new productive techniques, tools, and transportation infrastructure to ensure easy market access. Farmers, in Thoresen's telling, were "fundamentally conservative," and endured change only "to preserve what otherwise would be at risk" (pp. x-xi). This appears to be the lesson

about the identity of agrarian society in the Mad River Valley that the author wishes to convey—although that is not entirely clear. Thoresen engages a wide variety of source material to tell this settler story, ranging from Ohio Board of Agriculture reports to post-Civil War pioneer histories of the region. Most impressive is the author's work utilizing local newspapers to create a detailed account of the changing fortunes of settlers and settlement.

For a book that is so rooted in place, however, the absence of a meaningful map of Champaign County and the Mad River Valley is a serious shortcoming. Thoresen opens the book with a small state map that shows Ohio's major rivers (including the Mad River in west central Ohio), but the towns, railroads, and tributaries that are cited in the text are not located on this map—not even Champaign

County warrants a mention. The author describes settlement patterns across the county and notes numerous towns as well as canals and railroads in the region, leaving readers at a loss for reference points.

Despite the extensive research that went into *River, Reaper, Rail*, the book does not emerge as more than a sum of its parts. In other words, the chapters relate important information about settlement, but the reader is left wondering what the larger point is. The author promises a book about agriculture and identity, suggesting that farmers are fundamentally conservative, but does not deliver enough on the promise. For example, despite the conservatism of farmers, Thoreson explains that settlers were interested in what they labelled improvement, an ethic that encouraged the adoption of mechanical reapers, threshers, ditching, canals, and railroads.

In a suggestive concluding chapter, the author describes the passing of the frontier generation and the sense among contemporaries that things were changing. This is as close as the reader gets to an explicit description of the identity that emerged from the region, although it is more asserted than proven. Readers learn that rivers, reapers, and railroads were important, but there is little explicit connection between those topics and the identity that settlers brought to the region or that emerged there. That said, readers who come to *River, Reaper, Rail* for a detailed and deeply researched record of change in a significant region of the Old Northwest will not be disappointed.

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Memories of Life on the Farm: Through the Lens of Pioneer Photographer J. C. Allen

By Frederick Whitford and Neal Harmeyer

(West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2019. Pp ix, 398. Photographs, notes, selected bibliography, index. Clothbound, \$49.99)

Frederick Whitford and Neal Harmeyer have created an extraordinary book from the life's work of pioneer photographer John C. Allen. The book is ambitious in scope and succeeds magnificently on several fronts. It is primarily a tribute to Allen and his ability to

capture rural life and agricultural history in early and mid-twentieth-century middle America with black-and-white photographs. And while it would find its place on many a coffee table, it is far more than a collection of charming and superbly composed photographs.