

## Reviews and Notices

*The Pioneer Merchant in Mid-America.* By Lewis E. Atherton. The University of Missouri *Studies*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, Columbia, 1939. Pp. 135, \$1.25.

During the past four years Dr. Atherton has been publishing numerous articles on early day business activities in the middle American west. It is now gratifying to observe that in the present book he has presented an excellent analysis of the entire subject of wholesale and retail business enterprise in an area which embraces the states of Iowa, Illinois, and Missouri for the years 1820 to the Civil War. The study is divided into four major topics: (1) the pioneer merchant; (2) the western store; (3) wholesale markets; (4) business organization and methods.

In the first of these, Dr. Atherton has portrayed the merchant as a distinct frontier personality—a person who not only sold groceries, dry goods, and patent medicines, but who as one contemporary phrased it was “the agent of everybody.” He was the character so admirably portrayed in Harold Sinclair’s recent novel, *Prairie Years*. Not only was the frontier merchant expected to be the purveyor of the news, the community postal clerk, and banker, but, not infrequently, he served as a father confessor, a public orator, and the custodian of traditions such as they were. The case of storekeeper William Cornelius of Columbia, Missouri, is an excellent example of the latter, since in one of his Fourth of July appearances he made this toast to the Father of our country: “George Washington: In purity, dignity, glory, he stands alone. Let no future Plutarch dare the iniquity of finding a parallel to his character.” Dr. Atherton has done more than characterize the personality of the merchant. His painstaking scholarship has answered many questions regarding the region from which the merchant class originally came, its political leaning, and origin and extent of mercantile wealth in the West.

In part two Dr. Atherton describes the physical make-up of the western stores which ranged from sutlers’ wagons to well-built and well-stocked log structures. The third part of the book stresses the growing importance of New

Orleans, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York as centers of wholesale trade and the general reliance of the western merchants on eastern firms for goods. While the volume of western trade was relatively small it was nevertheless in a large measure responsible for road and canal building activities in the East during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The concluding section lists and discusses the types of mercantile organization, and it contains a lucid explanation of the complicated western money system such as bills of exchange, currency, credit structures, and the method of handling accounts.

The extensive bibliography and the generous number of footnotes reveal the extent to which Dr. Atherton has made use of mercantile records, personal reminiscences, newspapers, and other documentary materials. While this is essentially a monograph, the book deserves especial praise for its good, easy style and for the fact that this, unlike so many studies in economic history, is anything but dry.

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*The Moravian Mission on White River. Diaries and Letters May 5, 1799, to November 12, 1806.* Edited by Lawrence Henry Gipson. *Indiana Historical Collections*, XXIII, Indiana Historical Bureau, Indianapolis, 1938. Pp. xv, 674, \$2.00.

This volume has been "in the making" for some twenty years. The late Arthur W. Brady of Anderson, Indiana, began even before the World War to collect the Diaries and Mission Letters relating to the Moravian Mission on White River, and made arrangements to have them translated and edited. Mr. Brady died in 1933. His manuscripts, incomplete and unedited, were entrusted to Dr. Christopher B. Coleman of the Indiana Historical Bureau. In looking about for a competent editor, Dr. Coleman naturally turned to Professor Gipson, who, before going to Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, had taught History for several years in Wabash College, Crawfordsville, Indiana. With such a background, in addition to his recognized scholarly and editorial ability, no other person could have been found who could do the job so well. Before undertaking the task of editing these documents, however, Professor Gipson was