Included are the stories of Mary Rowlandson, captured in Massachusetts in 1676; Jonathan Dickinson, Quaker merchant shipwrecked along the Florida coast in 1696; the John Williams family, participants in the Deerfield massacre of 1704; Jemima Howe, taken at Bridgman's Fort, Vermont, in 1775; Mary Jemison, the golden haired Seneca, 1758; Alexander Henry, survivor of the Indian uprising at Michilimackinac in 1763; Daniel Boone, hero of Kentucky, 1778; Frances Slocum, the white rose of the Miami, 1778; Dr. John Knight, a witness of the burning of Colonel William Crawford in Ohio in 1782; Oliver Spencer, stolen near Cincinnati in 1792 by Indians from the Maumee; Matthew Brayton, kidnapped in Ohio in 1825 and held in the Far Northwest for almost thirty-five years, until he had forgotten his origins; the John Parker family, victims of Comanche in 1836; Olive Oatman, seized by Apache in 1851 and later traded to the Mojave; and Fanny Kelly, prisoner of Ogallala Sioux in 1864.

By the elimination of much extraneous material, Mr. Peckham has enhanced the drama and suspense of the originals; at the same time the stories still illuminate the attitude of both races, Indian customs and domestic life, frontier situations and incidents. The book competently fulfills its intended purpose—an introduction to the captivities—and might appeal especially to high school students and to undergraduates, as well as to the general reader.

Indiana University
Frances Krauskopf


For some time now many of us have known that the American saga of the self-made man was a myth rather than an undisputed "fact." Often repeated by many different groups, the "rags to riches" theme became, and long remained, a part of our folk literature. For anyone to question it was heresy, if not downright unpatriotic. Irvin G. Wyllie has attempted to uncover the origins of the myth, to analyze it, and to learn by whom it was most used, for what purposes, and with what effect in relation to its legendary hero, the
American businessman. To a very large extent, he has succeeded in accomplishing this task. Wyllie has written an interesting, balanced, and lucid account of a very important idea in American history. It should be pointed out at once, however, that this is not a study of the occupational origins and environmental conditions of American businessmen, nor is it an attempt to ascertain from what social classes business leaders have been recruited. Wyllie's concern is "not with business history but intellectual history, and specifically with the realm of ideas about self-help under American conditions of opportunity." In no sense, therefore, is this a study of the business elite, though it profits from and contributes to such works. The setting here is much broader, the analysis of the idea and its advocates clearly set forth for the first time, and its relationship to the main currents of American thought carefully delineated. If for no other reason then, this book should appeal to and be read by business and economic historians as well as those primarily interested in the history of ideas.

The foundation upon which the myth was to blossom and flourish in the post-Civil War years was laid down by clergymen, educators, journalists, and others in the 1830's, when the consequences of industrialism first became apparent. The concept of America as the land of limitless opportunity where fame and fortune awaited all men who feared God and worked hard was especially popular in the latter part of the nineteenth century, though the term "self-made man" was, according to Wyllie, "first applied" by Henry Clay to a group of manufacturers in 1832, "while defending the protective tariff. . ." From that time on, a persistent propaganda campaign caused the idea to gain a tenacious hold on the popular mind and to permeate every facet of American life. After the Civil War, the titans of industry became the chief objects of praise and the ones which ambitious young men were told to emulate.

One of the most suggestive parts of Wyllie's study is his analysis of the sources of self-help ideas. The Bible was and remained the primary source, even after the 1880's when Darwinism started to gain respectability in scientific circles. The self-help advocates attributed business success primarily, if not exclusively, to good character, moral rectitude, and such
cultivated traits as frugality, thrift, and industry. Such important environmental economic factors as abundant and unexcelled natural resources and an expanding national market were always relegated to secondary, if not tertiary positions. Only such external forces as being born in the country of poor parents and hard work during the tender years were admitted by the success advocates. Business failure was also explained in terms of the individual rather than economic circumstances. Lack of good character, inexperience, extravagance, and other similar personal shortcomings were the explanations most used. Failure could never result from lack of intelligence, for the cultists were firm in their conviction that no remarkable intelligence or training was required for business success. After 1900, when men like Carnegie maintained that education had a purposeful value in business, the self-aid groups began to reverse their former position and started to advocate training and education for business. To meet the problems of a new day, other success ideas underwent changes too, but neither the Great Depression nor the publications of business and economic historians refuting the self-help idea succeed in discrediting it. The doggerels were changed, but the success propagandists continued to adhere to the idea that good character was the sine qua non of business success. By analyzing and explaining the “rags to riches” myth, Wyllie makes it possible to appraise the role of the idea in American thought and to evaluate its influence in terms of business leadership.

New York University

Vincent P. Carosso


In 1949, the American Association for State and Local History sponsored the publication of a paper-backed quarterly called American Heritage, which was well received by the reading public. While this project was underway, another organization, the Society of American Historians, Inc., obtained pledges totaling a considerable sum of money from some influential Americans for the purpose of exploring the