freed the British regular for military operations. Supplies also came from another direction. The activities of frontier merchants in New York and Vermont can either be termed entrepreneurship or smuggling depending upon one's tastes. Higher prices paid by the Commissariat Department of the British Army appealed to those transporting goods by sleigh across the frozen St. Lawrence.

The author's use of government documents—particularly those from the public archives of Canada—is impressive and reveals gaps in earlier scholarship. Yet the vast and scattered diaries and personal letters might have been drawn upon to complement the cold numbers of prisoners captured or the fire power of various ships. Better omitted are such quotations as the first verse of the national anthem written during the British bombardment of Baltimore (p. 212). On a brighter note, the detailed maps and carefully selected illustrations are of the highest quality and provide a welcome contrast to other recent works on the War of 1812.

Indiana University

George Chalou


This is the second installment of a massive three-volume biography of Polk. In the nine years since the appearance of the first volume a number of writers have argued about the relative greatness of American presidents, Polk included. Sellers is naturally inclined to bet on his man. He lays some stress on the legislative and diplomatic accomplishments of Polk's first fifteen months in office, but he avoids final judgment. This is just as well, for Polk still has the Mexican War to fight.

Sellers' greatest accomplishments in this volume are the examination and digestion of a staggering mass of public and personal papers. These record the fine Italian maneuverings of the Democratic and Whig parties through the presidential campaign of 1844, the final agonies of Texas annexation, the tedious Oregon debate, and the involvement with Mexico which ended in hostilities. If Sellers has missed any substantial collection of political correspondence, this reader is unaware of it. He knows his way around the smoke-filled rooms of the mid-forties as well as James Reston or Joseph Alsop today. For example, his account of how Polk used half-promises about cabinet posts to obtain Senate votes for the joint resolution on Texas goes far to clear up a problem hitherto explained almost entirely by speculation. Here and elsewhere Sellers balances admiration for Polk's deftness, persistence, and luck with regret that he had to incur suspicions of treachery and widen the breach between North and South.

Polk was less perceptive as a diplomat than as a politician; appropriately, Sellers loses some sureness of touch when he turns from domestic to foreign affairs, which occupy about half of the book. Even
here he introduces new materials, such as a hitherto unknown set of letters by Louis McLane to his son about the Oregon negotiations in London and McLane’s political ambitions. Also Sellers has the advantage of much earlier research in the British archives by Frederick Merk and others. Unfortunately, however, he has failed to use the very revealing dispatches of the British minister to the United States, Sir Richard Pakenham. In assessing cause and effect he has not always been careful to allow for the slow communications of the 1840’s. Thus he reproves McLane for his disloyal letters of January 2 and 3, 1846, in which McLane informed John C. Calhoun of conciliatory spirit in England and “unwittingly encouraged” the latter’s peace movement in Congress (p. 383). Calhoun could not have received the letters much before January 26, when McLane’s official dispatch of January 3 arrived in Washington; and by Sellers’ own account the peace bloc was in full operation by January 12 (p. 368). McLane may not have been wholly loyal to his superiors, but his information came too late to have decisive effect.

The account of the coming of the Mexican War sheds little new light on the Mexican background, being based primarily on American diplomatic correspondence and a few standard secondary accounts. By implication, however, this emphasis suggests how limited was Polk’s knowledge of Mexican character and institutions, and the American political aspects of the declaration of war are well handled. Sellers has chosen an unfortunate title for the chapter dealing with Mexican negotiation: “A Hard War Averted—and an Easy War Gained.” The term “easy” as applied to the Mexican War is probably intended to represent Polk’s attitude, but this should be made clear. In any case, as the author will surely demonstrate in his final volume, the Mexican War proved to be far from easy and its hidden cost to the American people dismayingly high.

The abundance of Sellers’ materials and the complexity of the problems with which he deals make for a crowded, sometimes opaque style and slow reading. Nevertheless, he has written an impressive, scholarly account of national politics at one of the critical points in American political history.

Indiana University

David M. Fletcher


This book, based on an impressive amount of research, is concerned with the founding of the University of Chicago and its first sixteen years under the aggressive leadership of its initial president, William Rainey Harper. In making this study Storr had free access to the extensive records of the university and also to the relevant material in the Rockefeller archives—which records seem to cover almost every aspect of the founding and early history of the institution. Moreover,