

a national federation of parish mutual aid societies. The gradual Americanization of the membership, the dropping of German for English, the strains of World War I on people of multiple loyalties, and the changes in society produced by steady industrialization and growth of city life, all seriously affected the character of the Central-Verein as can be seen in its publication, the *Central-Blatt*. Membership figures—125,000 in 1916 to some 86,000 in 1930 and then to 311 men in 1966—indicate the decline of the Central-Verein and the weakening of German-American Catholic ethnic consciousness, evident by the mid-1920's. An account of the leaders of the organization, their programs and social ideas are essential elements in Gleason's account.

The author explicitly states that he has undertaken "an organizational and ideological analysis of the evolution of the German-American Catholic group" (p. 258). He has done a good job. The writing is clear, forceful, and always to the point. Gleason has supplied a valuable annotated bibliography which contains some references, incidentally, to materials on Polish, Lithuanian, French-Canadian, and Slovak immigrants in America who all have had strong Catholic loyalties. There is a good index.

The author did not aim at an explanation of the roots of German-American Catholic self-awareness, the sense of "peoplehood." But, for the reader who does not belong to this group, a short digression might have been a welcome introduction to the distinctive dialects, cooking, music, family celebrations of Christmas, wedding customs, picnics, parades, and festivals which, along with religious affiliation, created a sense of community. Among the German-American Catholics these things deserve a place somewhere in the historical record because they formed the foundation of the Central-Verein; and when they ceased to be, the Central-Verein disappeared with them. Gleason asserts that "to the degree that it is a structured body rather than a formless collectivity of individuals, ethnic organizations actually constitute the group" (p. 217). This carefully phrased assertion places too much emphasis, I believe, on the role of organizations in society, for ethnic organizations can not survive in a vacuum without individuals who share a common culture and a desire to perpetuate it.

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The Centennial Years: A Political and Economic History of America from the Late 1870s to the Early 1890s. By Fred A. Shannon. Edited by Robert Huhn Jones. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967. Pp. xx, 362. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$6.95.)

The manuscript for this volume was unfinished at the time of Fred Shannon's death; but with the cooperation of the Shannon family, Robert H. Jones, his former student, completed it for publication. Some of the chapters had gone through several drafts, others were only in rough draft when the editor began his work. Some materials were deleted, others relegated to foot-

notes by the editor. But the editor attempted to preserve Shannon's style and organization as much as possible.

Shannon knew more about the American past than any other historian this reviewer has encountered. And as one who had great respect for Shannon as a historian, he regrets that the book was published. The reviewer is confident that Shannon would never have submitted the volume to his publishers until it had been greatly improved over the version which has now been published. It is with great pain that the volume is assessed for it clearly is not characteristic of the work which Shannon produced during his distinguished career.

The basic weakness of the volume is its inadequate conceptual framework. It covers essentially the years between 1876 and 1892, but there is no adequate conceptual explanation provided as to why these years constitute a significant period of American history. A consequence of the book's weak conceptualization is its encyclopedic nature.

The best sections of the volume deal with agriculture. But very little is presented that was not originally in Shannon's excellent volume *The Farmer's Last Frontier*. Indeed, the basic tragedy of this volume, apart from its inadequate conceptualization, is that very little new information or interpretation is presented. The focus is primarily on politics and economics. Because this was a period when the nation's economic and political systems were undergoing significant changes, it is unfortunate that there is no adequate attempt to explain systematically the changes of the political and economic structures of the period. The political analysis is too much confined to presidential politics, and not enough emphasis is placed on other levels of political activity—particularly at the state and local levels. For all practical purposes, the emerging bureaucratization of politics at the local and state levels is ignored. And for this reviewer's tastes, the economic analysis is overly moralistic, with not enough explanation as to why and how new economic structures were emerging in American society.

Even so, there are few general histories of the late nineteenth century, and this one, despite its inadequacies, does provide a useful synthesis of the period for the general reader. But this reviewer is confident that many who knew Fred Shannon will share the conclusion that this is not the book that he would have published.

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