



Book Reviews

Robert Owen's American Legacy: Proceedings of the Robert Owen Bicentennial Conference. Edited by Donald E. Pitzer. (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1972. Pp. 88. Illustration, notes. Paperbound, \$1.50.)

Two communitarian experiments of the early nineteenth century left their mark on New Harmony, making that small town in the southwestern corner of Indiana one of the state's finest historical resources. The architectural environment of the village is in large measure a legacy of the German Harmonist followers of the stern, patriarchal Georg Rapp, but in the town's spiritual atmosphere the outsider can detect something of the vision, the conflict, and perhaps even the eccentricity that were part of the effort by Robert Owen to establish an intellectual oasis in the Indiana backwoods.

In so well endowed a setting, it should not have been expected that the observance of the bicentenary of Owen's birth would be attended with the fol-de-rol and hoopla that often accompany "historical" festivals. Directed by Professor Donald E. Pitzer of Indiana State University, Evansville, the organizers of the Robert Owen Bicentennial Conference, held at New Harmony on October 15 and 16, 1971, were evidently determined that the event should reflect something of Owen's own dedication to intellectualism. They were successful. In the words of one of the participants in the conference, Owen was not merely commemorated, he was reconsidered (p. 71).

The approachable but very perceptive address by former Governor Roger D. Branigin, "presented not as history but rather as the remarks of a friendly observer" (p. 14), was an excellent prelude to the presentation of four scholarly papers which attempted to place Owen in the context of his period. In "Robert Owen's Quest for the New Moral World in America," John F. C. Harrison of the University of Sussex, England, who is certainly "the foremost contemporary historian of Robert Owen and the Owenite tradition" (p. 29), dis-

cusses Owen's approach to the problems of his time, with emphasis on the origins and significance of the concepts of community and education through which he sought to bring about his envisioned new state of society. The other papers—"Robert Owen and the Millennialist Tradition" by Robert G. Clouse of Indiana State University, "Robert Owen in American Thought" by Merle Curti of the University of Wisconsin, and "Robert Owen and Philosophy" by Robert Ginsberg of the Delaware County campus of Pennsylvania State University—focus on other important aspects of Owen's thought and take Owen himself very seriously indeed.

Uncontaminated by irrelevant anecdotes of misfits in the wilderness or the sly intimations of sexual misconduct which characterize so much of the writing on the Owenite movement, these papers are not light reading, nor could their content have been easily absorbed aurally. That the conferees were equal to the task is demonstrated in the panel discussion which is produced *almost* verbatim in this volume. The papers are real contributions to Owenite scholarship. Those who arranged their presentation and now their preservation in published form are to be commended.

Indiana University, Bloomington

Donald E. Baker

Indiana Canals. By Paul Fatout. (West Lafayette: Purdue University Studies, 1972. Pp. ix, 216. Map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$10.50.)

Paul Fatout's book on Hoosier canals is the first modern work dealing with the subject at length, and it will be welcomed by students of Indiana history and transportation. The author provides a narrative account of Indiana's canal era, beginning with the agitation for a canal around the falls of the Ohio River at Jeffersonville in the early nineteenth century and continuing through the efforts to construct the mammoth internal improvements system of the 1830s, the actual completion of the Wabash and Erie Canal and parts of the Central and Whitewater canals, and, finally, the abandonment of the remnants of the system by about the 1870s.

The author's forte is his writing style. Fatout is an ex-