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Paul Salstrom. *From Pioneering to Persevering: Family Farming in Indiana to 1880.* West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007. xi + 208 pp. $23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55753-453-8.

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Hoosier Heyday: The Rise and Fall of Indiana's Family Farming Ethos

In his 1862 State of the Union address, President Abraham Lincoln boasted that "the great interior region bounded east by the Alleghanies, north by the British dominions, west by the Rocky Mountains, and south by the line along which the culture of corn and cotton meets, ... is naturally one of the most important in the world." At the heart of this vibrant region and its dynamic agrarian ethos, according to historian Paul Salstrom, was the state of Lincoln's youth, Indiana. Situated just to the north of "the line along which the culture of corn and cotton" met, Hoosier farmers' embrace of corn-livestock farming, a cultural attribute of their upland southern roots, simultaneously spawned Indiana's prominence as an agricultural dynamo and ensured that its farm families would, to a remarkable degree, be able to remain self-sufficient well into the post-Civil War era.

This relatively unique pairing of commercial success and stable self-sufficient family farming, Salstrom argues, was the product of a number of interconnected factors. Among the most important were the inherently stable, yet flexible and complimentary nature of corn-livestock farming (both products can be consumed, traded, or sold); the relative ease with which Indiana pioneers were able to establish farms throughout the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century due to the availability of inexpensive land and cheap tools; and a solid profit margin, the result of both rising prices and Indiana farmers' ability to reap the bulk of the profit generated by the sale of the surplus commodities that they grew and sold (a function of the highly competitive nature of the transportation industry in the state prior to the Civil War as well as the aforementioned flexibility of the corn-livestock system). In brief, Salstrom contends, this "golden era" of family farming, of rising profits in spite of dramatically rising production, can be attributed to the simple fact that Indiana "farmers did not have to raise food for commercial markets" (p. 79). Having paid next to nothing for some of the most productive cropland in the world, Hoosier farmers could easily "live bountifully in virtual self-sufficiency, especially with the help of their neighborly reciprocity," or they could live "even better" by marketing what they produced (p. 79). To create incentives for the latter, however, it was necessary for shippers and merchants to pay farmers "enough to motivate them to mass-produce food" (p. 80).

The post-Civil War years witnessed the rapid demise of this prosperity as the railroad buried other forms of transport competition and, in turn, became heavily concentrated in the hands of a few monopoly interests run by professional managers. Combined with falling prices for corn and livestock–driven in large part by the continuation of easy entry farming on the western prairies and a mounting agricultural surplus–and poor soil management and conservation, the consequences for Indiana's farm families were devastating and resulted in a desperate struggle to persevere in the face of unbridled capitalism, thus paving the way for the virtual extinction of the family farm.

Salstrom's slim volume has much to recommend it. It is engagingly written, it is thoroughly researched and grounded in current historiography, and its argument is a timely one as we witness the impact of globalization on traditional forms of family farming around the world. The book does, however, overreach to some degree. The first two chapters of the work, for instance, are devoted to recounting the evolution of Native American agricultural traditions in the Indiana region. Salstrom's attempt to connect this material to his broader discussion, however, seems a bit contrived and, from this reader's perspective, does not add anything to the book's main argument. Additionally, Salstrom's discussion of the end of prosperity in the post-Civil War era does not fully address the obvious question: what happened to the option for self-sufficiency? Relatedly, it is vital also to consider the fact that even during the antebellum heyday, some Hoosier farmers became ensnared in the cash nexus as they found

their ability to rely on neighborly reciprocity dramatically curtailed as neighbor after neighbor opted for more sustained market contact and thus removed themselves from this traditional system, leaving a void that could not readily be replaced.

Perhaps even more important, *From Pioneering to Persevering* misses a tremendous opportunity to link the history of early Indiana agriculture with the state's and nation's antebellum political cultures. The book does offer a brief description of the Jeffersonian idyll of agrarian democracy and its connection to the values of Hoosier pioneers (and, a brief mention of the postwar Granger and Populist protest movements), but it fails to draw the important connection between Indiana farmers' antebellum reality and the blissful free soil utopia of autonomous, upwardly mobile farmers that populated the Republican imagination of Lincoln and the majority of antebellum Northerners. Given Lincoln's youthful exposure to the prosperity described by Salstrom, it is no wonder that he embraced the free soil doctrine's unmitigated commitment to furthering and perpetuating this ethos, without interference from slavery, in the western territories, or that he became such a forceful and articulate defender of this article of faith. This is one of the greatest strengths of this book, but it is relegated to inference made by reading between the lines.

In spite of this void, Salstrom's *From Pioneering to Persevering*, when taken as a whole, stands as a very useful and readily accessible overview of the early agricultural history of Indiana, and by extension, the Old Northwest. Scholars, students, and general readers alike will find the book's treatment of its subject matter to be informative, thought provoking, and (especially in light of the contemporary farm "crisis") instructive.

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