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Virginia E. McCormick, Robert W. McCormick. *New Englanders on the Ohio Frontier: The Migration and Settlement of Worthington.* Kent, Oh.: Kent State University Press, 1988. xi + 356 pp. $39.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87338-586-2.

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A generation ago, colonial historians pioneered the use of the community study to elaborate themes in United States history. Historians such as John Demos, Kenneth A. Lockridge, Darrett B. and Anita H. Rutman, and Robert Gross found rich meaning in the textures of colonial life. John Mack Faragher's study of Sugar Creek, Illinois brought such techniques to the study of the antebellum frontier and, most recently, Alan Taylor has examined the class and political tensions of the Federalist era.[1]

These works have proven that community studies need not be the tedious genealogical works or unexamined celebrations of progress and its virtuous rightness often produced by earlier generations of antiquarian chroniclers. Virginia E. McCormick and Robert W. McCormick have produced a community study of early Worthington, Ohio that lies considerably closer to the modern standard of historical scholarship but that does not quite find the links to wider issues that would make it a work that will be of interest to scholars outside fields in Ohio or Midwestern history.

McCormick and McCormick do not claim great significance for Worthington's history but offer their work "simply as a case study of one community that provides a perspective from which historians might better understand the process of westward migration and frontier settlement" (p. 4). They further elaborate that this particular process, as it affected Worthington, was the New England model, which "became the American ideal of small-town life" (p. 2).

Worthington's founder, a Connecticut merchant named James Kilbourn, organized a company to settle that portion of the Northwest Territory that is now Ohio. Although the company sent explorers, including Kilbourn, to look over the Congress lands in southeastern Ohio, it selected other lands to the north, purchasing them from the owners. With political finesse, however, they named the town after Thomas Worthington, one of the most influential Jeffersonian Republicans in territorial Ohio.

In the settling of early Worthington, the authors find some of the typical New England traits of these pioneers. "It was the opportunity to acquire significant land holdings that drew these families westward," they write. Landed property offered a "type of independence" and family settlement the mode of pioneering. The McCormicks claim these to be part of the "persistent New England values regarding land, family, and religion," yet these values were shared by non-New England pioneers on many different frontiers (p. 36). Throughout the nineteenth-century, Americans went westward seeking the independence offered by owning land and they went as families. It is difficult to see what is uniquely New English about the process.

The Worthington pioneers came as young families, headed by men in their thirties, with limited possessions. Most had been farmers and artisans of comfortable but not wealthy circumstances on the New England backcountry. They set about the immediate business of creating the amenities of civilization: roads, a sawmill, a tavern, a school, a church, a library, a Masonic Lodge. As with many frontier settlements, the map often guided one to a town that did not exist. For some time after the drawing of lots to select townsites, fallen trees obstructed Worthington's public square. When the authors describe the "typical New England optimism" (p. 59) of early toasts abut the town's future it is unclear why this optimism differs from the optimism of the boosters of any other frontier settlement.

Despite that optimism, early Worthington's residents suffered the hazards and inconveniences typical of frontier life. In addition to wild animals, malarial illnesses such as the "ague," and lack of cash, the War of 1812 brought considerable panic although little actual damage to early Ohio from threatened raids by the British and Indians.

Later chapters explore the development of Worthington's early institutions. The McCormicks follow Kil-

bourn's erratic business and political career. Never a well-organized man, Kilbourn's terms in Congress were marked with absenteeism and his business affairs, like those of other early Worthington residents, were shattered by the Panic of 1819. Early Worthington was impressive for its plans for intellectual development. Indeed, the McCormicks are closest to making a convincing case about the uniqueness of New England settlement when they discuss the commitment of the town's founders to libraries and academies. Nonetheless, some of the key institutions, the college and medical school, failed to prove enduring.

The McCormicks are scrupulous in detailing almost every facet of life in an Ohio community in the first third of the nineteenth century. One finds everything from the founding of the town's churches, to poor relief, to the prices of goods, and the lobbying for roads. The material on Worthington however often seems not to be extensive enough to provide for fully fleshed out chapters. Many different and disparate topics often seemed collected together as when one chapter begins with a discussion of mortality and ends by describing garbage collection. The intended linkage is health, but the connection of death in childbirth with dead horses in the streets seems incongruous.

By 1820 Worthington had an estimated six hundred people, its high point until the twentieth century. The town's fate, as the McCormicks make clear in their introduction and conclusion, was to become a suburb of Columbus. The authors speculate that the town's founders would be pleased that their creation has retained its New England village model although they would not have intended the secondary role to Columbus that has made that possible.

The McCormicks are to be complimented for preserving a wealth of information in a scholarly and yet readable study. Unlike the chroniclers of town growth of an earlier era, they have made failure, as much as success, an integral part of their story while providing a rich and interesting account of frontier life in early Ohio.

Note

[1]. John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970); Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years, Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York: Norton, 1970); Darrett B. and Anita H. Rutman, *A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750* (New York: Norton, 1984); Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976); John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Random House, 1995).

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