H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Bruce E. Johansen, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Native American Economic History.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999. xviii + 301 pp. $85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-30623-5.

Reviewed by David M. Wishart (Department of Economics, Wittenberg University)
Published on EH.Net (June, 1999)

Compiling any sort of volume on Native Americans with "Encyclopedia" in the title is a daunting task given the diversity of Native American cultures and experiences. Johansen is the Robert T. Reilly Professor of Communication and Native American Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and would seem to be a good choice for editing a work such as this one. He has written extensively about topics related to Native Americans over the last two decades, including five books (three co-authored), one of them titled *The Encyclopedia of Native American Biography* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997). Contributors to *The Encyclopedia of Native American Economic History* include Donald Grinde, Jr., Fred Leroy, Barbara A. Mann, Jerry Stubben, and Michael Tate. Grinde, Mann, and Tate are historians, Stubben is a professor of political science, and Leroy is chairman of the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska. Unfortunately, there are no economists among the contributors and it shows in the product. If good economic history consists of a combination of history and economic theory on every page, as McCloskey has suggested, then this book falls short of the mark by quite a distance.

The absence of any attempt at an analytical treatment of the economic history of Native Americans is glaring. One could convincingly argue that the title of the book should be simply *The Encyclopedia of Native American History*. The history that is presented is as much social, political, military, environmental, demographic, and epidemiological as it is economic. Certainly, the types of history covered in this volume represent important lines of inquiry for students of Native American history and economic history. But a proper synthesis of economic theory, quantitative analysis, and Native American history remains to be presented.

Johansen's volume begins with the all-too-short entry (four pages) "Agriculture, Native American" and continues through the alphabet with just under two hundred entries contained in three hundred pages including a bibliography and index. Each entry is followed by a list of several references. This approach could work. However, with few exceptions, the entries are too short to offer anything but a cursory introduction to the topic discussed. In many cases, important works are left out of the list of references. For example, R. Douglas Hurt's excellent book, *Indian Agriculture in America: Prehistory to Present* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), is absent from the first entry on agriculture. Theda Perdue's work, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society: 1540-1866* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979), is missing for the Cherokee economy entry. The Slavery and Native Americans entry contains no reference to the enslavement of African Americans by Native Americans in the southeastern United States, surely an important issue in the economic history of Native Americans. No mention is made of Mary Young's classic volume, *Redskins, Ruffleshirts and Rednecks: Indian Allotments in Alabama and Mississippi, 1830-1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), in the history of land allotments to Native Americans that is presented.

These criticisms aside, some of the entries are quite good. For example, the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) economy receives more detailed treatment over fourteen pages and comes the closest of any of the entries in the book to representing an analytical approach to Native American economic history. The entry stresses gendered production in its explanation of Iroquois women's agriculture and men's forest husbandry. The view presented is that gendered production should not be interpreted as stemming from male domination, but rather from a theory of cosmic balance, the "principle of the Twins," that undergirds Iroquois institutions. This essay is especially engaging because it provides an explanation of Native American economic behavior in the context of Native American institutions. Judging from contemporary reports, the Iroquois institutions were highly successful at organizing the production of substantial surpluses of food to support prosperous and powerful communities.

The gambling entry provides considerable informa-

tion on an important contemporary economic topic in Native American society. With the exception of the Akwesasne Mohawks of St. Regis in Upstate New York, where violence erupted between supporters and opponents of gambling, the portrayal of gambling operations on Native American reservations is largely positive. Communities previously mired in poverty have seen astounding increases in their incomes as a result of casino gambling. The operations are typically associated with significant expansion of employment opportunities.

Despite the wide diversity of experience among Native American people, commonality exists, so there is, understandably, considerable overlap in the topics discussed in many of the entries. For example, all communities had first contact experiences with whites. Typically, these first contacts involved trade, which for an economic historian, sets the stage for consideration of attitudes toward exchange among Native Americans and Europeans. Exchange was usually followed by the introduction of disease to Native Americans and warfare between Native American and European communities, again setting up an opportunity for an economic historian to consider the impact of huge losses of human capital and land on Native Americans. Succumbing to the depredations of disease and warfare, most Native Americans have more recently accepted removal to reservation lands followed by attempts at rebuilding their cultures often with the involvement of the federal government. Here, the challenge for economic historians is to describe the political economy of interaction between Native Americans and the federal government.

Rather than attempt to present an introduction to Native American economic history via an encyclopedia, it may be more fruitful to pursue an approach that emphasizes these common experiences. A fuller, more coherent presentation of Native American economic institutions and their performance prior to and after contact with Europeans would be possible with the discussion arranged around economic processes such as exchange, gains and losses of human and physical capital, and the political economy of relations between Native Americans and the federal government.

While Johansen's volume fails to fully satisfy the need for an economic history of Native Americans, it does bring together a wide array of accounts and sources that will no doubt be a part of future work in the field. In doing so, this book will prove useful to many students of Native American economic history.

Copyright (c) 1999 by EH.NET and H-Net. All rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational uses if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact the EH.NET Administrator (administrator@eh.net; Telephone: 513-529-2850; Fax: 513-529-3308).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: David M. Wishart. Review of Johansen, Bruce E., ed., *The Encyclopedia of Native American Economic History*. EH.Net, H-Net Reviews. June, 1999.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=3198

Copyright © 1999, EH.Net and H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission questions, please contact the EH.NET Administrator (administrator@eh.net; Telephone: 513-529-2850; Fax: 513-529-3309). Published by EH.NET.