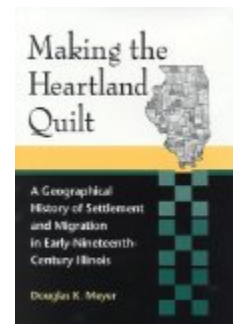


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Douglas K. Meyer. *Making the Heartland Quilt: A Geographical History of Settlement and Migration in Early-Nineteenth-Century Illinois*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000. xvii + 332 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8093-2289-3.

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The delimitation of culture areas, the analysis of ethnic space and place, and the description of regional character have long occupied a central place in the literature of American historical and cultural geography. Douglas K. Meyer's new book, in essence a study of the historical settlement geography of Illinois from the late eighteenth century until 1850, follows in the footsteps of this long tradition. The author's principal concern here is with the spatial patterns and processes associated with the early settlement of the state by a cadre of different Euro-American migrant and European immigrant groups. As the reader learns, the first fifty or sixty years of Euro-American and immigrant settlement saw various groups cluster together in particular places and regions of the state. By 1850 a three-tiered cultural imprint had emerged in Illinois comprised of Upland Southern settlers in the southern, Mid-Atlantic settlers in the central, and New England settlers in the northern part of the state. This mosaic was supplemented by a variety of European immigrant settlement islands (especially German). The balance of the book recounts this settlement history, focusing especially on the historical and geographical processes leading to observed patterns: Where did various population groups settle in early Illinois, and what factors led them to settle there? These are the two primary questions the book seeks to answer.

The monograph is logically organized, each chapter representing one piece of a puzzle that is neatly assembled into a cohesive whole in the concluding chapter. The study can be divided into two different parts. The first, comprised of chapters one through five, is concerned with settlement processes; the second, chapters six through nine, with settlement patterns. Chapter one discusses place imagery and mental maps constructed es-

pecially by boosters in descriptions and advertisements in pamphlets and gazetteers.

Chapter two recounts how Illinois settlement geography was affected by processes operating at various levels, from the local to the global. Relying primarily on federal land district sales, Meyer describes and maps settlement conditions at ten-year intervals from 1800 to 1850 and finds that the most rapid period of development, as measured by the quantity of land sales, occurred during the 1840s and 1850s, coinciding with brisk agricultural and manufacturing development. Chapter three maps and analyzes how the emergence of early transportation networks affected the direction and flow of migrants. Concurrent with the development and expansion of a dense transportation network (roads, canal, railroads) there emerged an urban hierarchy of regional, sub-regional, and lower-level nodes connected via this network. Chapter four focuses on the role of waterways in directing and influencing migrant flows, the importance of flatboating in the movement of produce from early agricultural centers, especially the lower Illinois Valley, and the emergence of St. Louis as the most important early transportation and transshipment hub. Meyer concludes that access to markets via fixed waterways influenced the emergence of particular places as agricultural centers.

By 1850 the shift from self-sufficiency to commercial market-oriented agricultural in Illinois had taken place, and four distinctive agricultural zones had emerged: mixed farming in the south, corn-livestock in the west, wheat in the north, and livestock raising in the east. Chapter five effectively sums up the findings of chapters two, three, and four by delimiting stages of settle-

ment and distinctive regional settlement patterns. This is achieved with the use of maps showing the distribution of settlement at ten-year intervals from 1800 to 1850. Meyer defines five frontier types which correspond to population density: occupance (less than two people per square mile), settlement, incipient agriculture, commercial agriculture, and urbanization (forty-five to ninety people per square mile). This chapter impressively illustrates just how rapidly the settlement of Illinois took place, arguing that the state became almost fully integrated into the national economy in a span of only fifty years.

Chapters six through nine rely almost wholly on 1850 census data to delineate and map the settlement of four population groups (Upland South, New England, and Midland-Midwest migrants, and foreign-born immigrants, respectively) during the formative early settlement period between 1800 and 1850. Each chapter maps the locations of settlers in 1850 born in states and countries from each region and ends with a map of Upland South, New England, Midland-Midwest, and foreign-born culture regions. Meyer employs geographer Donald Meinig's familiar core-domain-sphere descriptive in producing tri-level maps of each group's zones of cultural influence, though without defining what exactly constitutes each of these levels. Meyer concludes in chapter ten with a discussion of the delimitation of sub-culture regional boundaries in Illinois by previous geographers and argues that, based on his research, these previous boundaries need to be revised. This he does with a map that shows a three-tiered (Southern, Midland, and Yankee) cultural imprint in Illinois in 1850.

Overall, my opinion is that Meyer's book represents a

very good effort, but that many readers of this forum will be left wanting for a deeper and more insightful analysis of the subject. Accordingly, I have mixed feelings about this work. There are many positives: the book is smartly and logically organized, it is generally well written, it is attractively packaged, and the cartography is clean and crisp. I found only a few editorial or semantic problems, such as the confusion of migrants and immigrants (Upland South, Mid-Atlantic, and New England settlers are referred to as the latter, when in fact they should be considered migrants). Within the context of this tradition it is very good geography, but of the old-school type. Following in the best traditions of this methodology, this book is wonderful in terms of the synthesis it achieves, relying as it does on an exhaustive array of secondary historical sources. But social historians and humanistic cultural geographers who are increasingly concerned with the roles that issues such as gender and class and ethnicity played in such processes will likely find fault with a traditional landscape interpretation such as this. The book admirably achieves the goal of mapping out the early settlement landscape of Illinois and delimiting its sub-culture regions. What is lacking is a more insightful and deeper analysis of these sub-culture landscapes. It represents a good work of synthesis of existing literature, but those looking for new ideas or formulations that will help us to clarify American frontier settlement processes will, I surmise, be left wanting more.

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