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Kim M. Gruenwald. *River of Enterprise: The Commercial Origins of Regional Identity in the Ohio Valley, 1790-1850.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002. xvi + 214 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-34132-7.

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Networking in the Ohio Valley

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Kim Gruenwald's *River of Enterprise* makes an important addition to our knowledge of mercantile activity in the early nineteenth-century Midwest, or, as she astutely notes, what was once called the Western Country and subsequently the Old Northwest. Her larger arguments about regional identity, however, seem speculative in a study that focuses on Marietta, Ohio, but that speculation does not detract from the larger merits of the study, which will demand the attention of every serious scholar of the region.

Gruenwald's *River of Enterprise* is extraordinary in its presentation of the mercantile networks of the early Ohio Valley. Focusing on Dudley Woodbridge and his son, Dudley Woodbridge, Jr., Gruenwald reveals the broad dimensions of these networks and details their slow shifts. The historical legwork itself is stunning, drawing on a variety of archives from Marietta itself to Morgantown, Columbus, Cincinnati, Louisville, Detroit, Harvard University, and Connecticut (where the Woodbridges originated) as well as printed sources, to piece together the businesses of Woodbridge father and son. Gruenwald's argument is substantiated by short examples from other merchants in the Western Country, illustrating that the story of the Woodbridges and Marietta was not unique. But the central figure in the narrative is not the Woodbridges as much as it is the Ohio River, which initially knits the Western Country together with its ease of transportation and only later becomes a border separating North and South.

The story begins with the Woodbridges' 1789 move to the Ohio Company's main settlement at Marietta, on the Ohio River. The elder Woodbridge was drawn to the commercial possibilities of the region, and he quickly set up shop. While the father was more than just a shopkeeper, it was Dudley Jr. who held a broader vision than his father of what a merchant could and should do. Nevertheless, Dudley Jr. had the advantage of his father's wide circle of friends and acquaintances in Ohio and back East. When the younger Woodbridge ascended to prominence in Marietta's mercantile community, he built on his father's networks in the East and extended relationships throughout the Ohio Valley with producers of goods, helping to build the common Western Country through the buying and selling of goods produced in the region.

The younger Woodbridge's Marietta store was not his sole business activity (nor was it his father's), and it was not the place where all the goods he purchased were to be sold. Dudley Jr. opened branch stores in the hinterlands of Marietta and he sold goods to other shopkeepers in those hinterlands, becoming a middleman. These efforts lead Gruenwald to argue that Woodbridge helped make Marietta a subregional hub, the middle order of towns in the three part scheme she borrows from Edward K. Muller.[1] In this scheme, the first order of towns were small communities with just a general store. Subregional hubs like Marietta supplied the goods to these general stores, serving as a middleman between them and the producers of these goods. The third order of towns–or rather cities–were the "entrepots" of the region, whose merchants "supplied settlers with what they needed as they made the last leg of the journey to their new homes" (p. 42). This last definition seems most problematic, since clearly such towns–Louisville, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati–served as both manufacturing and mercantile centers serving the sub-regional hubs, but mer-

chants in those hubs such as Woodbridge often bypassed them, buying many of their goods directly from eastern sources. One of the most enlightening points for me in Gruenwald's book is the extent to which Woodbridge father and son depended on Philadelphia merchants for many of their wares from the beginning.

Reinforcing Gruenwald's argument that the Ohio River united the region is the evidence that in the early days of settlement, the Ohio provided Virginia residents with easy access to Marietta and Woodbridge's store. Both Woodbridges were partners with Harman Blennerhasset, a slaveholder who lived on an island officially in Virginia. Blennerhasset would be a co-conspirator in the Burr conspiracy, and Dudley Jr. would testify at his trial, a tantalizing episode that enlivens this narrative. Over time, though, those on the Virginia side of the river interacted less with Marietta, and, unless I missed one, none of Woodbridge son's branch stores was on the Virginia side. This shift is emblematic to Gruenwald of the shifting role of the Ohio, which by mid-century would become a border between North and South.

Gruenwald's book leaves little doubt that early in the nineteenth century, the Ohio Valley held a common regional identity (although I am skeptical that it was synonymous with the Western Country–Tennessean Andrew Jackson rose to the Presidency as a "westerner," and Carolyn Kirkland subtitled one of her narratives of life in early Michigan "Glimpses of Western Life"[2]). Likewise, there is little doubt that by mid-century, the Ohio River had become more of a border. Gruenwald moreover is certainly correct to place the emphasis on the Transportation Revolution. Yet the story may be more complicated than her book puts forth. The most important paradox in the story of regional identity that Gruenwald reveals but might explore in greater depth is how the rise of state identity led to identification with a more broadly conceived North. Those on the North bank of the Ohio River turned toward a narrower definition of their identity in becoming "Buckeyes," while at the same time they embraced a common identity with other non-slaveholding states.

According to Gruenwald, the Transportation Revolution helped to create the identity as Buckeyes through the agency of the Ohio canal system. The canals helped to speed the development of the interior of the state, and they served to tie the state together. Moreover, the canal system linked the state more closely to Lake Erie, thus the Erie Canal, and thus the East, connecting Ohioans to other non-slaveholding states. Marietta served as a terminus for one of the legs of the canal–actually just improvements to the Muskingum River–but this leg was a later addition and the flow of commerce had gone elsewhere.

I am uncomfortable giving too much transformative power to the Ohio canals. While they certainly played a role in the development of Ohio, far more so than in Indiana, their record was not the sterling success of the Erie Canal's in New York.[3] The Indiana counterexample is useful: even though few modern internal improvements reached the central third of the state until the latter half of the 1840s, the region was well developed by 1850, with about 15 percent greater population than the earlier-settled southern third. Marietta could have been a jumping-off point for entry into the central portion of Ohio, but the Muskingum River was not the most direct route. Both the Great Miami and the Scioto Valleys offered more development possibilities along their routes, whereas the Muskingum did not lead through or into particularly fertile territories. (As Gruenwald notes, the hinterlands of Marietta had limited agricultural potential (p. 141), and this limitation alone may explain much about why Marietta stagnated.) Another reason that many chose not to enter the central part of the state via Marietta was that there was a simpler route, the National Road west from Wheeling. It was the National Road as much as anything that helped develop central Indiana.

Better roads may be more important than canals, or for that matter, railroads. The Woodbridges' goods were brought west over roads, the National Road helped open the interior of Ohio and Indiana, and better roads developed earlier than canals and certainly railroads. The Baltimore and Ohio and Pennsylvania railroad lines across the mountains were only completed in the early 1850s, after many of the shifts in regional identity had taken place. Railroads had already been built in the Old Northwest, but they still depended on some form of water transportation to get products to distant markets. It was with the opening of the trans-Appalachian rail lines that transshipment points like Marietta lost importance, as goods could interchange (well, once standardization of gauge took place) on boxcars without merchants to oversee their transfer.

With railroads, Gruenwald's broad picture seems on target–the integrative role of the railroads–but the specific story for Marietta is more complex and later than her book implies. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad arrived in Parkersburg in 1857; although it was an obvi-

ous route, politics insured that the first Baltimore and Ohio line ended at Wheeling.[4] Parkersburg had risen in importance before the railroad, thanks to the completion of two turnpikes connecting it to Winchester and Staunton.[5] On the Ohio side, Marietta made efforts to integrate itself into the Baltimore and Ohio system. Led by William P. Cutler, grandson of Marietta founder Manasseh Cutler (and son of Ephraim Cutler, credited by local legend as the 1806 founder of the Underground Railroad in the region[6]), Marietta supported the building of the Marietta and Cincinnati Railroad to link with the Baltimore and Ohio at Parkersburg. The Marietta and Cincinnati was also completed in 1857, leaving thirteen miles of the Ohio River between Marietta and Parkersburg that was traversed in good weather by ferries. The situation was improved with a line being built to Belpre, opposite Parkersburg, but that solution took Marietta out of the east-west flow of goods, a fate sealed when the Baltimore and Ohio built a bridge across the Ohio in the early 1870s, with a cut-off to Athens, Ohio.[7] Several other railroads would be built into Marietta after the Civil War, but none had the promise of the Marietta and Cincinnati of keeping Marietta a mercantile center; most probably just interchanged their cars with the Baltimore and Ohio at Belpre, requiring few hands and no mercantile structure.

Even when it ended at Parkersburg, the Baltimore and Ohio had served the good people of western Virginia with a link to the East, thus replicating the efforts of men like the Woodbridges on the north bank. And before the Transportation Revolution, Woodbridge father and son used their mercantile activity to tie Marietta to the East. What really changed with the coming of better modes of transportation? Perhaps it was the direction of outbound goods, which no longer all went down the Ohio and Mississippi to New Orleans, but some of which headed directly east. Tracing the changes in how the surplus produce of the Ohio Valley was marketed might be a good place to finish this story, but the Woodbridges might not be the best source for such insight; as Gruenwald notes, Dudley Jr. did not do much bartering (p. 100). I am, though, uncertain about arguing for a change in the direction of the flow of goods. In southern Indiana, most goods, or at least those marketed directly by farmers, still went south as late as 1860.

Southern Indiana did not secede, even though there was scattered talk that its economic relationships were with the Confederacy, and Kentucky did not, either. As Gruenwald concludes, "The ties that bound residents of the Ohio Valley together to form the Western Country had been so strong that they could only be severed completely by the most destructive of all human conflict–war" (p. 154). Yet in that very war, many western Virginians voted against secession and eventually rejoined the union as West Virginia. The ties that Gruenwald describes may have even been more powerful than war.

More attention to developments on the West Virginia bank of the Ohio would strengthen Gruenwald's larger contentions about regional identity. Yet her detailed study of mercantile activities in the early Western Country is so stunning in its insights that I am not much concerned about the book's shortcomings. In addition, her prose is light, especially for such material. Indiana readers will not find much information in this book about the actual Hoosier experience, but once again we find that one of our neighboring states is the subject of a book that can guide us to a fresh understanding of Indiana life in the nineteenth century.

Notes

[1]. Edward K. Muller, "Selective Urban Growth in the Middle Ohio Valley, 1800-1860," *Geographical Review* 66 (April 1976).

[2]. Caroline M. Kirkland, *A New Home–Who'll Follow? or, Glimpses of Western Life*, by Mrs. Mary Clavers [pseud.] (New York: C. S. Francis, 1839).

[3]. Harry Scheiber, *Ohio Canal Era: A Case Study of Government and the Economy, 1820-1861*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1968).

[4]. L. Diane Barnes, "Booster Ethos: Community, Image, and Profit in Early Clarksburg," *West Virginia History* 56 (1997), available at <`http://www.wvculture.org/history/journal_wvh/wvh56-2.html$>$`, accessed 11 January 2003. A non-scholarly source suggests that the Muskingum River Improvements were undertaken in order to induce the Baltimore and Ohio to build to opposite Marietta. See "Cincinnati to Belpre or Marietta? ," <`http://members.aol.com/vernacon/rrbelpre.htm$>$`, accessed 11 January 2003.

[5]. See "West Virginia History. A Tenuous Trek: A Visual Journey Across The Mountain State," <`http://www.wvculture.org/history/journal_wvh/wvh51-6.html$>$`, accessed 11 January 2003.

[6]. See "Judge Ephraim Cutler," <`http://oak.cats.ohiou.edu/~{}deanr/ephraim_c.htm$>$`, accessed 11 January 2003. Gruenwald suggests the central role of slavery in making the Ohio a border.

[7]. John E. Pixton, Jr., "Faith vs. Economics: The Marietta and Cincinnati Railroad, 1845-1883," *Ohio Historical Quarterly* 66 (1957), available through <http://publications.ohiohistory.org/ohstemplate.cfm?~action=index&letter =P>, accessed 11 January 2003. See also "Tales of St. Ambrose Parish," <http://members.aol.com/vernacon/rrintro.htm$>$, accessed 11 January 2003.

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