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Review of *Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation of the Rural North, 1870-1930* by Hal S. Barron

Craig Miner
Wichita State University

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Mixed Harvest: The Second Great Transformation of the Rural North, 1870-1930. By Hal S. Barron. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. Illustrations, notes, sources, index. xi + 301 pp. \$49.95 cloth, \$18.95 paper.

Mixed Harvest is a good title for a book that documents the complexity of interests involved in twentieth-century farming. A broad swipe at characterization too often substitutes in histories for a more careful analysis in which surface affinities fall apart. Barron uses case studies from selected counties of the battles fought across the East and Midwest over roads, consolidated schools, farmers' grain elevators, and mail-order buying to probe a "second transformation" of American society following the initial spread of industrial capitalism early in the nineteenth century. This "transformation"

was marked by centralization of the economy, expansion of state power and professional expertise, and the rise of an urban consumer culture. The story of its effect on farmers and their response to it is a nuanced one.

Often the result was compromise: farmers drove cars, but they were Model Ts, not those status symbols favored by city folks. They purchased from mail-order houses, but at first from Montgomery Wards, which marketed through the Grange and expressed sympathy with rural values. And puns and stories about "Monkey Ward" and "Rears and Soreback," as well as occasional small town catalog burnings, suggested less than whole-hearted endorsement of the new ways. Farmers' grain elevators started as a local response to centralized corporations, but, ironically, became much like the enemy. Radio was accepted, but movies for a time were strictly for the younger generation.

A major theme of the book is the attempt to preserve local culture and local control amidst a trend toward centralization. This was most prominent in the battles over local control of schools and the replacement of the one-room school house with the consolidated school. Rural families complained about the long buggy rides to the consolidated schools, the low morals in the larger towns, the physical education and hygiene requirements, and the high taxes needed to support an urban "edifice complex." Many, however, realized well enough that the quality of teachers in their rural schools was poor.

In short, the organizational society that planners wished to clamp onto traditional ways had both attractions and horrors for farmers. Rural life had many "inefficiencies," but some of them were of a type rural people loved. The tensions of an important change in process at the local level where they were played out daily are well-documented in Barron's excellent book.

CRAIG MINER
Department of History
Wichita State University