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Review of *Prevailing Over Time: Ethnic Adjustment on the Kansas Prairies, 1875-1925* by D. Aidan McQuillan

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Prevailing Over Time: Ethnic Adjustment on the Kansas Prairies, 1875-1925. D. Aidan McQuillan. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990. xix + 292 pp. Figures, tables, appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. \$37.50 cloth.

This monograph thoroughly addresses a topic more narrow than its title implies. Its core is an agricultural history of Swedes, Russian-Mennonites, and French-Canadians in central Kansas from 1875 to 1925.

McQuillan reasons that ethnic groups's value systems can be discerned by studying the outcomes of their everyday decisions. Hence he focuses on the rich Kansas agricultural manuscript census schedules to discern how the three groups of immigrants adapted to the arid, often mercurial physical environment in which they found themselves and to the host culture which threatened to swallow up their ethnic distinctiveness. This, then, is a history of ethnic agriculture and ethnic persistence, both measured largely by agricultural outputs.

A pair of very useful, clear chapters on the immigrants' socio-economic backgrounds and on their early history in Kansas precedes the heart of this book and establishes several themes that McQuillan later returns to. He emphasizes that the Russian Mennonites were the best prepared to farm in arid central Kansas, since they had extensive experience in commercial farming and in growing wheat. They also had a strongly self-conscious group identity. The French-Canadians had the weakest sense of ethnic separateness of the three groups and the most fragmented settlement pattern. Contrary to stereotypes, however, all three ethnic groups proved to be nearly as geographically mobile as their Yankee neighbors.

This book's most detailed and original contributions address ethnic variables in such areas as farm size, farm value, investment in equipment, and crop choices. The author finds that Swedes tended to have the largest farms, Mennonites the most intensively capitalized ones, and, in perhaps the study's most novel finding, that French-Canadian farmers tended to be more successful than Swedish ones, this despite the tradition of agricultural backwardness that had long prevailed in their homeland along the St. Lawrence River. The Mennonites, despite their suspicion of the outside world, adapted most successfully to the twin vagaries of climate and price fluctuations by a timely balancing of crop diversification and crop specialization. This is but a brief sampling of a very detailed and careful set of analyses.

The author is less successful at addressing larger themes. For example, early in the study he describes "Americanization" as "the accumulation of wealth, the

achievement of financial independence through hard work, and the successful management of capital,” as well as adaptation to central Kansas’ harsh physical environment (p. 14). Yet, as his book shows, central Kansas’ most ethnically conservative immigrants most fully realized this definition of acculturation. The subjects of this study no doubt had strong ideas of their own about the nature of ethnicity and success and probably would have defined acculturation differently. But people seldom speak directly in *Prevailing Over Time*; quantitative sources dwarf all other primary ones. Indeed, most of the book’s few descriptive quotations are drawn from mid-twentieth-century secondary histories, not letters, diaries, newspapers, or reminiscences of the time it studies.

Yet this book’s tendency toward narrowness and the loose fit between its finely detailed parts and its much less satisfying interpretive framework do not negate its significant contribution to ethnic and agricultural history. **David Peterson**, *Department of History, University of Oregon*.