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## ***The Haymakers: A Chronicle of Five Farm Families* by Steven R. Hoffbeck (Review)**

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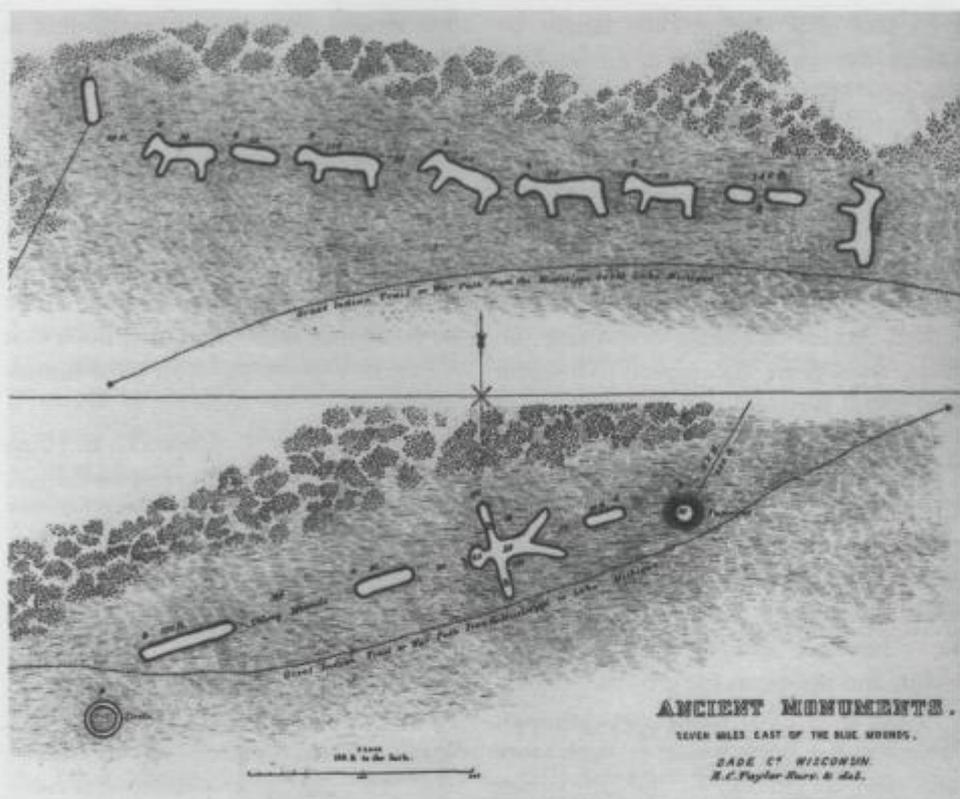
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WHS Archives, Classified File 91; WHI (X3) 23684

In 1848 Epbraim Squire and Edwin H. Davis published these diagrams of Indian effigy mounds located just east of Blue Mounds.

Although the mounds were used as burial sites, they were also considerably more than that, and *Indian Mounds of Wisconsin* “emphasizes their function as ceremonial centers” (p. 186). They were a gathering place for social celebrations, economic activities, and religious events that “helped reinforce human bonds” (p. 186).

The authors arrange all the bits and pieces of knowledge gathered over the years into a comprehensive chronological order. The book explains any archaeological jargon and is easy for the layperson to read.

An appendix lists mound sites that are open to the public with addresses, dates, and contact phone numbers. This is a good book to carry, as this amateur archaeologist will, when traveling the state on a quest to view the artwork of the mound builders.

BETTY J. STEELE  
Black River Falls

## The Haymakers: A Chronicle of Five Farm Families

BY STEVEN R. HOFFBECK



(Minnesota Historical Society Press, St. Paul, MN, 2000. Pp. 213. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 0-87351-394-0, \$24.95, cloth.)

Steven R. Hoffbeck’s study of five families and over one hundred years of farming in Minnesota is no Currier and Ives portrait of rural life; the costs, dangers, and losses are as palpable as the sweat and toil of haymaking. Hoffbeck is a gifted storyteller who weaves together intensely personal stories and details of everyday life gleaned from journals, photographs, and news-

papers, as well as from local histories, interviews, and his own memory. Satisfaction and pleasure are as evident as the heat, humidity, grit, and aching muscles.

Hoffbeck recognizes that seasonal rhythms and commonplace tools such as the scythe—pronounced “sigh” by Minnesotans, “as if the instrument itself were a deep breath of weariness or concern”—suffused the lives of farm families. A family might migrate several times, but they would often use the same plow, laboriously pulled through the soil by a team of oxen, and the same scythe to cut the hay. Year in and year out, the same muscles ached and generations of hands showed the same “deep cracks and calluses.”

Hoffbeck’s account reflects another underlying and familiar pattern. These are the stories of the men who made the hay and operated the farm. We rarely see the women as central characters in the haymaking story. Women work in the fields and care for the house and family; men are anxious for their pregnant wives or dependent on their shared labor. Hoffbeck too often neglects the insights and contributions of farmwomen but at times depends on their poignancy. In describing the aftermath of his brother’s death, Hoffbeck turns to his mother’s journal: three days afterwards, on Tuesday, she wrote, “So many decisions to make” and on Thursday, “got the beans combined at Wendy’s and the hay made.”

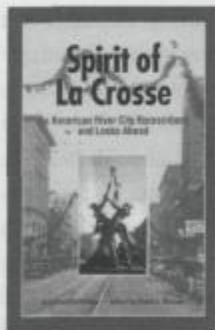
Hoffbeck’s lyrical description of the fields of alfalfa, grass, and clover as well as the rhythms and routines of farm work is countered by his tales of the relentless work and the risks. The accidents that, Hoffbeck writes, “wound around my memories of summers haying with my dad and my brothers are deeper threads of mourning. Danger, both natural and mechanical, is woven into the fabric of farmwork.” Cautionary tales warn of lightning strikes, overturned tractors, reaper blades, enraged

bulls, the crushing weight of equipment, falls from silos, and the terror of farm machinery—"Its whirling knuckles grabbed him and fatally embraced him." Close calls and premonitions of danger intensified with the battering pressure of farm debt in the 1980s. By then, the Hoffbecks were no longer working for themselves; they were farming to meet the demands of the banker.

Hoffbeck documents the fabric of an ever changing and now vanishing way of life, underscored by his own need to escape the farm: "Farmwork had to come first, I figured, and for most of my upbringing, I resented that fact." Although not one of Hoffbeck's brothers and sisters is a farmer today, the family holds onto the 110 acres that remain of the farm as dearly as if it were the family itself.

MARJORIE L. MCLELLAN  
*Wright State University*

**Spirit of La Crosse: An American River City Remembers and Looks Ahead, A Grassroots History**  
EDITED BY DAVID MARCOU



*(Speranza Publishing, La Crosse, WI, 2000. Pp. xviii, 222. Illustrations, bibliography. ISBN 0-9674740-1-9, \$19.95, paperbound.)*

One outgrowth of the increasing interest in genealogy and regional history is the number of histories produced by local writers. *Spirit of La Crosse* is an example of this trend. This collection of vignettes helps illuminate dim spots in La Crosse's history. The book, which covers such topics as settlers and immigrants, education, government, business and industry, transportation, and the arts,

grew out of a writing class taught by David Marcou, the editor of the book, at Western Wisconsin Technical College. Other writers were invited to contribute articles.

To evaluate all the vignettes here is not possible, but some vignettes stand out for their fresh, well-supported views and their contribution to local history. These include accounts describing the Depression years, the growth of medical and social services, post-World War II immigration and immigrants' contributions, and the diversity of social activities. One vignette, written by La Crosse's mayor and the city planner, presents views of the city's future. This "look ahead" discusses downtown revitalization, business and industrial development, and prospects for growth.

To be a complement to other histories, however, the book would require more attention to citation of the supporting evidence. The title states that this is a "grassroots history"; this should not be a caveat to defend the absence of footnotes and a full bibliography. When direct quotations are used, one expects them to be clearly referenced. Footnotes and a bibliography would not interfere with smooth reading and would guide researchers to the sources used.

As often happens with a book written by a group, there is an overlap of basic information. A stronger editorial hand would have given the book more focus by reducing this repetition, especially in the opening vignettes, as well as by providing continuity to draw the vignettes into a more structured story. Careful proofreading would have caught errors such as referring to the former Green Bay Packer receiver as "Don Hudson" instead of Hutson or stating that Hixon house was built in the "1880s" instead of c. 1858 (as is printed on the large sign on the building's front lawn). The La Crosse (city) Historic Commission is called the "City Historic Sites Commission," confusing it with the La Crosse (county) Historic Sites Preservation Commission. A

less serious, although amusing, error is the identification of the Hixon memorial window in Christ Episcopal Church as a "Nixon" window! (Members of the Hixon family may not find it amusing.)

Although these errors seem minor, histories are expected to be carefully researched and clearly documented. But in spite of these weak spots, *Spirit of La Crosse* is an interesting book that deserves a place on one's local history bookshelf.

CHARLES E. HAAS  
*Professor Emeritus,  
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse*

**Fishing the Great Lakes: An Environmental History, 1783-1933**

BY MARGARET BEATTIE BOGUE



*(University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI, 2000. Pp. xix, 444. Illustrations, notes, maps, bibliography, index. ISBN 0-299-16764-X, \$27.95, paper.)*

The history of the Great Lakes commercial fishing industry provides an unparalleled case study of the interplay between humans and nature. The development, decline, and limited recovery of the Great Lakes fishery reveal a broad range of interactions between resource and harvester. Overfishing, pollution, and the introduction of exotic species have taken their toll on fish stocks, but cultural, economic, and even diplomatic issues have also played crucial roles. At the same time, the Great Lakes region's discrete boundaries allow sharp focus on each element of this drama. The Great Lakes provide a stage large enough for many plots and subplots but limited enough to encourage close examination of each character and