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William Henry Harrison and the Conquest of the Ohio Country
by David Curtis Skaggs (review)

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David Curtis Skaggs, *William Henry Harrison and the Conquest of the Ohio Country*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. 303 pp. \$44.95.

A professor emeritus at Bowling Green State University, the author is a distinguished scholar of the Old Northwest. The present book provides a valuable look at the role Harrison played in the War of 1812 on the Ohio River—Great Lakes frontier. Skaggs emphasizes the significance of Harrison's use of mounted Kentuckians in his invasion of Canada and the crucial role of logistics in the successful conduct of any military campaign. He has an extensive knowledge of the period, and his forty some pages of footnotes cover most of the relevant primary and secondary sources.

The opening two chapters are the weakest. Here the author tends to paint with too broad a brush instead of focusing on significant events that are more relevant to his thesis. The central theme of the book is the role of the militia in fighting Indians. The "well-regulated militia" of the Constitution was an exercise in wishful thinking. In reality, the militia were notoriously "ill-equipped, ill-led, and ill-disciplined." The author's brief references to Harmar's Defeat in October of 1790 and St. Clair's Defeat on November 4, 1791, leave out the behavior of the militia in those battles, which resulted in 180 and 650 deaths respectively. Instead he cites Charles Scott's "devastating raids on native villages" as Harrison's model. Scott led a single raid in 1791 against Wea and Kickapoo villages on the Wabash, claiming to have killed thirty-eight warriors; in truth, the dead were old men, women, and children. James Wilkinson attacked the Miami on the Eel River later that summer. These raids did demonstrate how quickly Kentuckians could ride into northern Indiana and destroy villages, but in neither case did they engage a significant number of warriors in a real battle. Harrison also admired Anthony Wayne, who held the militia in low regard and used them as little as possible. Nonetheless, Harrison was indeed convinced that mounted Kentuckians could play a significant role on the frontier.

The second chapter focuses on events leading up to the battle of Tippecanoe. Here again more detail would be helpful. The author praises Harrison's "talent for negotiations" with the Indians, but never looks closely at his suspect tactics, especially in the all-important Fort Wayne Treaty of 1809, where he deliberately kept the Shawnees away and used Potawatomi warriors as leverage. (Robert M. Owens's *Mr. Jefferson's Hammer* takes a more critical look at Harrison's conduct.) Neither does Skaggs discuss sec-

retary of war Henry Knox's faulty Indian policy and the unfair treaties that led up to President Washington's costly Indian war in the 1790s. The result is that few of the just grievances of the Indians are presented. The author assumes Native Americans were "doomed" by demographics regardless of what the United States did or didn't do. Harrison's complex relationship to the Shawnee Prophet and his brother Tecumseh is too sketchy, as is the sequence of events that led up to Tippecanoe. We need a better sense of how Harrison outmaneuvered President Madison in order to provoke a battle.

Although the causes of the War of 1812 are underplayed, once hostilities begin the book gains momentum. Harrison's initial "campaign" to win command of the army from James Winchester is covered in telling detail. The greatest drawback in this part is that the book jumps around in time, thus losing narrative sequence. The siege of Fort Wayne, Hull's surrender of Detroit, Indian raids on the frontier, and so forth are discussed in several places. There are also factual errors: in the battle of Fort Dearborn some ninety-five citizens and soldiers were involved, not two hundred; most of them, including William Wells, were killed during the fight, not afterwards. On the other hand, the author rightly stresses Robert Dickson's role in keeping the Lake Indians on the British side as well as the strategic importance of water transportation: "Victory on land and sea depends on three components: logistics, logistics, logistics. A tried- and-true army adage holds that 'amateurs talk tactics, professionals talk logistics.'" Skaggs backs up this statement with close attention to logistical matters in the conduct of the war.

The book is especially useful in its depiction of the key battles—Frenchtown, the sieges of Fort Meigs and Fort Stephenson, and the crucial victory at the battle of the Thames in which Tecumseh was killed—as well as the serious setbacks: the slaughter of the prisoners at River Raisin, and the disastrous defeat of Dudley during the first siege of Fort Meigs. The author's discussion of the remarkable cooperation between Oliver Hazard Perry and Harrison is very convincing, noting that "theirs was the most complex, sophisticated, and integrated joint operation in the brief history of American warfare." Skaggs demonstrates why Perry's victory on Lake Erie was the key to Harrison's subsequent triumph on the Thames. Seeing that the British and Indians were vulnerable, Harrison ordered Richard M. Johnson and his one thousand mounted men to attack. "Charge them, my brave Kentuckians!" he cried, and in a matter of minutes the battle was over. Certainly in this victory Harrison's belief in the abilities of mounted

Kentuckians was fully justified. Whether in the process they validated the Constitution's quaint faith in the militia remains doubtful—but perhaps our present Supreme Court should have ruled that every American citizen should not only own guns but also maintain a horse!

Skaggs establishes that Harrison was a more accomplished military leader than is generally assumed. The irony is that following his victory on the battlefield he was defeated by bureaucratic infighting and resigned from the army. A stronger conclusion would have emphasized the significance of Tecumseh and provided more information on the fate of the Indians. We learn that Harrison negotiated with them following his victory, but are given no details. Nonetheless, the author has skillfully updated Harrison's major role in the War of 1812 in the Old Northwest. Scholars and general readers alike will benefit from his impressive knowledge of military operations. *William Henry Harrison and the Conquest of the Ohio Country* is a long overdue and insightful reinterpretation of an important chapter in the history of the Midwest.

William Heath

MOUNT SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY

Emmitsburg, Maryland

Jane Smiley, *Some Luck: A Novel*. New York: Knopf, 2014. 395 pp. \$26.95.

The year 2014 might have been a banner year for scholars of the Midwest, with the launch of this journal and the Midwestern History Association, but it was also a banner year for the Midwest in literary fiction. There might never have been a novel more explicitly devoted to celebrating the Midwest than Nickolas Butler's well-loved *Shotgun Lovesongs*, set in rural and small town Wisconsin, near Eau Claire. (As the reviewer for this journal declared, "*Shotgun Lovesongs* seems to be, well, a bit of a love song to the rolling midwestern landscape, to the stalwart midwestern character.") Two other top-notch writers at the top of their game set novels in rural and small town Iowa that have secured national attention and awards. *Lila*, the third volume in Marilynne Robinson's Gilead trilogy, was a finalist for the National Book Award and won the National Book Critics Circle Award; and *Some Luck*, Jane Smiley's first volume in a projected trilogy about a farm family in central Iowa, was longlisted for the National Book Award. Both appeared on multiple high profile "Best of 2014" book lists.