

## Still Turning: A History of Aeromotor Windmills

Derek Oden  
*Del Mar College*

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the original Weitz Company – began to have trouble, “dragged down by the deep recession that began in 2007” (xviii). Finally, in 2012, the general construction division of the Weitz Company was sold to a multinational corporation based in Egypt. The retirement community division of the company continues to thrive.

Friedricks writes in a style that is informative and reader-friendly. His sources include interviews with Weitz officials and family members, company documents, and construction industry publications. Dozens of black-and-white photos document some of the Weitz company’s project outcomes and their impact on Des Moines’s built environment, as well as the range of its domestic and international activity. Overall, *Constructing a Legacy* is an excellent company history, focusing on a fascinating family story that will appeal to specialists and general readers alike.

*Still Turning: A History of Aeromotor Windmills*, by Christopher C. Gillis. Tarleton State University Southwestern Studies in the Humanities Series. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2015. xviii, 274 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. \$35.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Derek Oden is associate professor of history at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas. He is the author of “Perils of Production: Farm Hazards, Family Farming, and the Mechanization of the Corn Belt, 1940–1980” (*Annals of Iowa*, 2014).

Christopher Gillis’s interest in windmills reaches back decades, and his vast knowledge is clearly evident throughout his outstanding book, *Still Turning*, which tells the story of Aeromotor, one of the industry’s best-known names. Those looking for an expansive treatment of the many dimensions of windmill technology might find the book unsatisfying. However, readers will discover that *Still Turning* is meticulously researched and an exceedingly worthwhile company history.

Gillis begins by discussing the inventive ways people employed windmills to drain wetlands, obtain salt, and pump ground water. Such efforts eventually led to developing “water-pumping windmills” that were “relatively easy to erect, durable, and able to run with minimal maintenance” (16). He then examines the company’s origins in the late 1880s and its rise as a major windmill manufacturer. He also chronicles the many challenges company leaders overcame throughout the corporation’s history. Today, Aeromotor is the only surviving U.S.-based company that manufactures a “mechanical water-pumping windmill” (196). In 1919, however, there were 31 such companies (101). Gillis’s work fully explains the many factors that led to the industry’s present state.

Readers will find much to admire in this work. Gillis provides impressively reasoned technical descriptions and wisely chosen visuals. He also offers rich discussions of a host of people who shaped the company's history through rapid technological change, war, and economic stress. By the 1890s, Aeromotor was exporting windmills to Argentina, England, and even as far afield as Australia. By the mid-twentieth century, however, the company was selling windmills that had been assembled in Argentina and exited domestic manufacturing of the device for a time (146).

A particularly important theme woven throughout the work involves how "self-governing water-pumping windmill" manufacturers faced competition from other water extraction methods (16). Aeromotor responded to such threats by entering many diverse and related fields such as gasoline-pumping engines and electric pumps (77, 138). Nevertheless, by the 1940s, the large-scale dissemination of electrical power into the countryside had become particularly disruptive for the windmill industry. Thus, Aeromotor intensified its efforts to become more than a "windmill company and to embrace the sales opportunities of electric water pumps" (132). Today, rural residents enjoy even more water extraction options with the advent of "solar-powered water pumps" for remote water-pumping needs (190). Nevertheless, the company endures, as evidenced by its present 40,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in San Angelo, Texas (186). Gillis has honored the rich legacy of the Aeromotor Company by telling the story of a company whose name graces windmills scattered across the nation and world.

*How Iowa Conquered the World: The Story of a Small Farm State's Journey to Global Dominance*, by Michael Rank. Kansas City: Five Minute Books, 2014. xi, 163 pp. Bibliography. \$9.99 paperback; \$2.99 e-book.

Reviewer Zachary Michael Jack is a seventh-generation Iowan, associate professor of English at North Central College, board member of the Midwestern History Association, and the author of *Iowa: The Definitive Collection*, among others.

Michael Rank's compelling book *How Iowa Conquered the World* reads more as public writing or journalism than it does as traditional, primary source-derived historiography, although it qualifies strictly as neither, and that's okay.

The author—a native Iowan from Knoxville, a doctoral candidate in Middle Eastern history, and a former journalist—leads with his thesis: "The goal of this book is to make an extremely difficult argument. I will attempt to convince you why Iowa is the greatest cultural force in the world. Not in the Midwest or the United States, but in the world" (3).