

Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1993 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

"Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie." *The Annals of Iowa* 52 (1993), 325-326.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.9745>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

Book Reviews

Agriculture and Slavery in Missouri's Little Dixie, by R. Douglas Hurt. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992. xv, 334 pp. Illustrations, tables, maps, appendix, bibliography, index. \$37.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DAVID E. SCHOB, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Missouri's "Little Dixie" has been variously defined in terms of that state's slavery, southern folklore, and culture. R. Douglas Hurt has delved deeply into extensive manuscript collections, census data, and newspaper accounts for his study of that region's involvement with tobacco, hemp, and slavery. He concentrates his analysis in a carefully delineated seven-county area paralleling the mid-Missouri River where farmers relied on the labor of slaves, who represented from 24 to 37 percent of the individual counties' population, to grow the "southern" crops of tobacco and hemp.

The region was heavily settled by pioneers who streamed westward from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia, attracted to the rich soil along the Missouri River. But make no mistake, observes Hurt: "although Little Dixie remained culturally linked to the South, the Missouri River firmly tied its economic fortune to St. Louis" (70). As he describes the economic vicissitudes associated with the region's frontier development, Hurt guides readers through the morass of conflicting land claims and speculative land purchases prior to financial panics in 1819 and 1837.

Tobacco contributed heavily to Little Dixie's image, with its reliance on slavery. Hurt's description of tobacco's evolution in Missouri stresses the importance of commission agents who urged farmers to raise tobacco; the methods of producing, processing, pricing, and shipping the commodity; and the eventual downside—the exhaustion of the soil by the 1850s. As the higher cost of slaves squeezed profit margins for Missouri tobacco raisers in the decade before the Civil War, the farmers of Little Dixie turned to the more stable markets of corn, wheat, hogs, horses, and mules, which they raised for eastern markets and the western provisions trade.

The other major "southern" crop in Little Dixie was hemp, which was even more labor intensive in an unpleasant way than tobacco cultivation and processing. Its hard and dirty work, which

was shunned by white laborers, reenforced heavier dependence on slavery than tobacco raising had. Hurt's description of the details of hemp raising and processing is comprehensive and includes a sophisticated analysis of pre-Civil War tariff policies. By the late 1850s, with declining prices, Little Dixie farmers switched from hemp into more traditionally midwestern cattle raising. Despite hemp and tobacco raising, commercial livestock raising always remained important and prevailed in the long run by the time of the Civil War.

Hurt rounds out his analysis with chapters on the sociological and political importance of Little Dixie's exposure to slave ownership. Although slaveholding in Missouri was never as extensive as in the Deep South, outside professional slave traders purchased surplus slaves in Little Dixie for shipment to the Deep South. Slavery's impact on Missouri created a contradiction for Little Dixie, which wanted to retain both slavery and attachment to the Union. But the Civil War destroyed slavery, hemp, and tobacco, and emancipation gave rise to racial hostility as Little Dixie farmers faced massive property losses. The war forced them to look toward standard agricultural commodities like those of their midwestern neighbors.

Hurt's study of Missouri's Little Dixie defines the region clearly, concisely, and comprehensively. It may well be the best volume published in agricultural history in 1992.

Over the Earth I Come: The Great Sioux Uprising of 1862, by Duane Schultz. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. x, 307 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$21.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY WILLIAM E. LASS, MANKATO STATE UNIVERSITY

As the best known topic in Minnesota's history, the Sioux Uprising (called the Dakota Conflict by some recent revisionists) was the subject of a half-dozen books before the publication of Kenneth Carley's *The Sioux Uprising of 1862* in 1961 (rev. ed., 1976). Because of the previous extensive historical literature on the war, readers might logically expect Schultz's history to provide new information or fresh perspectives. Instead, they will find that this work is nothing more than a rehashing of material from published works.

Schultz covers the major episodes of the war, ranging from the initial killings in Meeker County on August 17 to the hanging of thirty-eight Sioux at Mankato on December 26. Like all previous historians, he notes that the Indian offensive, highlighted by the seizure of the Lower Sioux and Upper Sioux agencies and futile

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.