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Saltillo, 1770-1810: Town and Region in the Mexican North. By Leslie S. Offutt. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001. ix + 277 pp. Maps, tables, glossary, notes, bibliography, index. \$50.00 cloth.)

In the late eighteenth century, Saltillo, Coahuila, became an important center in the northeastern frontier of New Spain. Its population grew to more than eleven thousand in a civil community with a complex society and development as a "major trading center for northeastern New Spain" (p. 3). In this work, Leslie Offutt examines two generations of Saltillo's elite merchants and landowners prior to the independence period.

According to Offutt, "trade defined late-colonial Saltillo" (p. 12) and "merchants were among the wealthiest members of Saltillo society, actively engaged in a growing regional economy as traders, and in some instances producers (as major landowners)..." (p. 152). To prove her thesis, she undertook a vast amount of original research in the Archivo Municipal de Saltillo, Archivo de la Parroquia de San Esteban en Saltillo (microfilm, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints [JCLDS]); Archivo de la Parroquia de Sagrario Metropolitano de Saltillo (microfilm, JCLDS); and the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin. In addition to these commendable sources, she also shows extensive knowledge of published primary and secondary sources.

The text consists of six chapters following an introduction that places Saltillo in perspective. Useful appendices include sixty-eight pages of chapter notes, a classified bibliography titled "References," two maps, and six tables. The author's topical organization enables her to focus upon three major subjects: Saltillo merchants, complex landholdings, and officeholdings. In all three areas she emphasizes the merchants—who they were, their origins, and their trade relations, especially with other regions of New Spain, such as Nuevo Santander, San Luis Potosí, and Texas. However, she concentrates almost exclusively upon the elite upper-level *peinsulares* and *criollos* of Saltillo, with only limited attention paid to the annual *ferias* and none to the small merchants of the town or the prosperous *sarape* trade, which she does not mention.

Offutt's examination of landholding patterns from hacienda to rancho and *estancia* is thorough, accurate, and appropriate to her criticism and revision of works, such as that of François Chevalier, for example. Using statistical materials to support her views, the author notes that "merchants were major economic players in the landed sector" (p. 111). She contends that there were three types of *hacendados*—unitary, multiple, and small property holders—in all of which merchants were a significant presence. According to the author, water availability, rather than size, constituted the major factor of ownership, and haciendas did not exist in a static, insular environment. Indeed, Offutt notes that they were "powered by the motor of

economic development" and became a fluctuating rural component that suggests "a diversified rural sector" (p. 54).

Finally, Offutt discusses the dominance of merchants among office-holders, especially in membership and positions in the Saltillo *cabildo*, where there was a strong presence of *peninsulares* with almost equal participation of *criollos*. Unlike their divisiveness in Mexico City and nuclear New Spain, and contrary to Juan Agustín Morfi's comments about hostility between the two Saltillo upper classes, Offutt's examination of Saltillo's merchant community "turned up no evidence of such hostility along the lines of origin." She concludes that "by the late eighteenth century Saltillo's elite was an integrated elite [in which] birthplace mattered little...[and] wealth mattered far more..." (p. 153).

Certainly Offutt proves her thesis with a prodigious amount of primary sources and thoughtful observations. While this book is not a complete study of society in late-colonial Saltillo, it addresses an important sector of the economic and social history of this region of northeastern New Spain. The book will be of primary interest to scholars, though not necessarily to lay persons, casual readers, or students.

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