

# New Mexico Historical Review

---

Volume 24 | Number 2

Article 5

---

4-1-1949

## Book Reviews

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr>

---

### Recommended Citation

. "Book Reviews." *New Mexico Historical Review* 24, 2 (). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol24/iss2/5>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *New Mexico Historical Review* by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [amywinter@unm.edu](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu), [lsloane@salud.unm.edu](mailto:lsloane@salud.unm.edu), [sarahrk@unm.edu](mailto:sarahrk@unm.edu).

## Book Reviews

*The Exchange Media of Colonial Mexico.* Wilbur T. Meek, New York, King's Crown Press, Columbia University, 1948. Pp. 114. \$2.50.

The great significance in general economic theory imputed during the last two decades to monetary and related factors, and the dominant influence in economic fluctuations now attributed to monetary and fiscal policy, naturally has directed economic historians to detailed appraisals of price trends, credit policy, and other monetary and fiscal relations of the past. Mr. Wilbur T. Meek indicates that he intended to make "a comprehensive monetary and economic interpretation of New Spain" when he undertook research upon which he based his study, *The Exchange Media of Colonial Mexico*. The climate of ideas within which men of authority in New Spain viewed their environment, however, was markedly different from our own. Their reports and letters apparently refer only casually to price trends, wage rates, and other relations which modern analysts consider fundamental to an understanding of economic and social developments. Mr. Meek concluded, obviously after painstaking review of many original sources, that "no statistics dealing with the economy of the colony as a whole (were) adequate" to fulfil his original purpose.

Instead, he has provided a detailed description of the various exchange media used in the Spanish-American colonies, along with some discussion of the comparative values of these media, and changes in their functions which accompanied the growth of the colonies. Chapter I, "The Colonial Policy of Spain," describes the colonial administrative units and their functions. Chapters II through VII describe "Native Media of Exchange," "Money Media from the Conquest to the Establishment of the Mint," "The Mexico City Mint," "Spanish Silver Coinage in New Spain," "Spanish Gold and Copper Coinage in New Spain," and "Other Media of Exchange." These chapters reflect laborious review of original

source materials. Their detail constitutes the principal contribution of the study. The short concluding Chapter VIII, "An Appraisal," is commented on hereafter.

I am not a student of the history of the Spanish-American colonies, but on the basis of limited acquaintance with sources in English, I believe the central descriptive chapters of Mr. Meek's study contribute significantly by filling in details concerning media of exchange used in New Spain. There are, however, several deficiencies in analysis and presentation in these chapters. The relative importance of the different exchange media and the areas of New Spain in which they were used are not made clear. The chronology of their use also is indefinite. Trends of prices, variations in quantities of exchange media, and effects of these upon the economy of the colony are not considered adequately. Here, perhaps, sources are too sketchy to permit definitive statistical statements, but generalizations might appropriately have been made. In addition, inadequacies in tabular headings and occasional difficulties in prose structure impair the text.

A more important criticism is that the opportunities of the study are not fully exploited. I believe a cogent interpretation of the interrelations of monetary policy and economic trends in New Spain could have been constructed from the materials which Mr. Meek incorporates in his study, despite their inadequacies. Interrelation of the discussion in Chapter I concerning the administrative procedures in New Spain with the comments elsewhere in the study concerning management of the exchange media, would have established more clearly that the monetary chaos in the colony arose largely from uncertain delegation of powers and from incompetence of administrators. A full appraisal of the relations between New Spain and the mother country, between the policy of the Crown and monetary disorder in the colony, and between monetary conditions and general economic developments would seem to have been feasible and undoubtedly highly profitable, although conclusions necessarily would have been qualified, and perhaps tentative. Chapter VIII, "An Appraisal," performs these functions in part, but much

too briefly, barely sketching the dominant influences and relations in the economy of the colony.

Mr. Meek has, of course, anticipated this criticism. His introduction points out, as I have said, that deficiencies in sources prevented comprehensive appraisal of the colony's monetary and related economic functions. But this seems to me an insufficient excuse. The economic historian discovers almost invariably that available sources do not provide exact data upon which a complete appraisal can be based. His problem, therefore, is to synthesize available information and construct a pattern of relations from which the complex story of the past can be generalized. Mr. Meek has not succeeded in this broad purpose. He has, however, presented information which will assist others in doing so. That itself is a commendable contribution.

Southern Methodist University

RICHARD B. JOHNSON

*Footprints on the Frontier: A History of the Sisters of Saint Joseph* (Concordia, Kansas). Sister M. Evangeline Thomas, C.S.J. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1948. Pp. xiv, 400. Illustrations, appendices, bibliography and index. \$5.00.

In this study Sister M. Evangeline, of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, Concordia, Kansas, presents for the first time an integrated account of the "pioneering effort on the part of five Religious Sisters of the Congregation of Saint Joseph to extend the frontiers of the Kingdom of Christ from New York State into what at the time was the hinterland of Kansas." It is the story of the building and the growth of only one Motherhouse of the Sisters of Saint Joseph and represents only a portion of the history of this Congregation of nearly fifteen thousand members.

Sister Evangeline interprets the term *frontier* of the Turnerian thesis in its broadest sense—as a challenge. Pointing out that the religious phase of the frontier thesis has been neglected, she endeavours to seek out the influences of religion on the frontier and the influence of the frontier

on religion. She does this with creditable success and has produced a volume of merit which could well serve as a model for the study of other religious congregations.

At the conclusion of the preface the author writes: "There will be much attention given, therefore, to historical background and little to the anecdotal and the emotional in this work." However, she places her characters, including the founder of the Congregation, J. P. Medaille, S.J., in Chapter I in front of the richest tapestry of history—that period extending from the religious wars following the Reformation to the end of the French Revolution, a period rich in anecdote and overwhelmingly emotional.

The contents of the book belie the author's statement mentioned above, for in numerous passages in the book there is marked evidence of curious incidents, fragments of interest, brief, detached facts intermingled with the fears, loves, hopes, worries, disappointments and intrigues. All this, when woven together into *Footprints on the Frontier*, produces not only a historical study of this particular Motherhouse of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, but also a warm and vital study of courageous women on the frontier.

This book, outstanding in scholarly approach and documentary evidence, is quite different from Sister Blandina's, *At the End of the Santa Fe Trail*, which, in relating purely human and personal experiences, might also be used as a model in religious orders. To the layman, Sister Evangeline's volume opens new vistas for understanding the challenges which confronted the religious in an unsettled country and the manner in which these challenges were met and conquered.

The book consists of thirteen chapters, organized in two general divisions. Part I consists of chapters on the European and French background, the Mississippi Valley in the early nineteenth century, and Western New York, with specific references to the cities of Canandaigua, Buffalo, and Rochester, New York. The chapters of Part II treat primarily the Administrations of Reverend Mothers Stanislaus Leary, Antoinette Cuff, Mary Rose Waller, and Mary Chry-

sostom Wynn in Kansas in the late nineteenth century and up to the present day. It also includes an excellent chapter on the problems and efforts in securing Papal Approbation.

Sister Evangeline bases her account on manuscript sources, diligently pursued in diocesan archives and in those of the various motherhouses, and on numerous newspapers, books, articles and interviews. The highest standard of scholarship is maintained throughout the book, which is carefully edited, illustrated, and published in an attractive form.

Loretto Heights College  
Loretto, Colorado.

CLIFFORD P. WESTERMEIER