

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Land Title Origins: A Tale of Force and Fraud by Alfred N. Chandler

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Preliminary Checklist for Abingdon, 1807-1876; Number I of the Virginia Imprint Series. Edited by John Cook Wyllie. (Richmond: The Virginia State Library. 1946. Pp. 45. \$1.00.)

This, the first in the projected Virginia imprints series, is only a preliminary checklist. Printing began in Abingdon, Virginia, in 1806. In attempting to collect as many Abingdon products as possible, it has been estimated that perhaps not more than one-fifth of them have been preserved. The ones that have been preserved are widely scattered.

This slender mimeographed volume is in size and format reminiscent of the activities of the Historical Records Survey, from which, as a matter of fact, it stems. It is admittedly an incomplete product incorporating a plea for additional information, although some interesting items are included. It is hoped that the readers of this checklist will search for any Abingdon products prior to 1876, excluding newspapers and blank forms. Any information concerning the existence of such items should be forwarded to John Cook Wyllie, Curator of Rare Books, The University of Virginia.

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Land Title Origins: A Tale of Force and Fraud. By Alfred N. Chandler. (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation. 1945. Pp. xviii, 550. \$3.00.)

A veteran traveler, economist, and land-reformer, the author of the book under review can personally recall how the first railroads of the western plains followed a meandering course so that their promoters could "collect a greater acreage in land grants, and an increased amount of railroad company bonds . . . for each mile of road constructed," and how "some men wept and some attempted suicide at the realization of their financial ruin" during the panic of 1873 (pp. 506, 508). When Henry George published his classic *Progress and Poverty* in 1879, Mr. Chandler had just reached twenty-one. Clearly he is a George disciple, for running through *Land Title Origins* like a refrain is the argument that the earth is the heritage of mankind, that all men have a natural right to land, that population increase and com-

munity enterprise raise land value, that custom foolishly allows privileged individuals to hold unused land for speculative purposes, and that a sufficiently high tax on land value would return unused land to the market and would eliminate the many other taxes on production and consumption.

From this single-tax point of view, then, the author describes the beginning and development of land tenure policies in the United States. His sources are almost entirely secondary, and from them he has culled every possible reference to land, land grants, and land titles. Approximately four-fifths of the work deals with the thirteen colonies. Mr. Chandler reaches the all-too-obvious conclusion that present-day titles rest ultimately upon conquest, dispossession, and speculation—"force and fraud."

As a piece of historical scholarship the book exhibits several shortcomings. Its author appears to place as much reliance upon Bancroft, Fiske, and state histories written a century ago as he does upon modern studies of the land question like those of Thomas P. Abernethy, Benjamin H. Hibbard, and Payson J. Treat. The many pages devoted to familiar general history, the overwhelming amount of superfluous detail, and some repetition make the book much too long. The author's habitual use of the passive voice, and occasionally his awkward sentence structure and phraseology, mar the literary style. Bibliography and index are useful, but there are no footnotes.

Nevertheless, errors of fact seem to be few. One may mention that the European population of Maine could hardly have totaled 1,200 in 1620 (p. 85) if the first permanent settlement of the region did not occur until 1625 or 1626 (p. 89); the Morrill Land-Grant Act became law in 1862, not 1864 (p. 502); the government under the Constitution was inaugurated in 1789, not 1797 (p. 548). More careful checking and proof-reading doubtless would have made consistent the variable spelling of a few proper names and would have corrected a number of misspelled words. In parts of the chapter on "The Carolinas" a more precise designation of "North Carolina" and "South Carolina" would have proved helpful—as in the reference to the establishment of Beaufort (p. 369).

Readers with a legal turn of mind, and lovers of minute and curious Americana, will find much of interest in this work that required a ten-year period of research and three years of writing. Even serious students may discover valuable clues. In the great body of literature on the land question, however, *Land Title Origins* must assume a rank of minor importance.

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The South, Old and New: A History 1820-1947. By Francis Butler Simkins
(New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1947. Pp. xvi, 527. \$6.00.)

Teachers who have been bewailing the lack of a textbook for courses on the New South may now cease their lamentations, for *The South, Old and New* is admirably suited for such a purpose since more than two-thirds of it is devoted to the period following the Civil War. The chapters on the Old South are designed primarily to give the reader a necessary background for the study of the later period. The starting point is set in 1820 because it was in the Missouri controversy of that year that the development of southern sectionalism began. Racial pride, or racial prejudice, was the principal amalgam of southern unity and accordingly becomes with Professor Simkins, as with the late Professor Phillips, the central theme of southern history. In his picture of the southern social system the author rejects both the calumnies of the northern abolitionists and the distortions of southern ancestor-worshippers. With sound scholarship he points out the evils of slavery and also its benefits, especially in lifting the Negro from an African savage into an American workman. He gives considerable attention to the yeoman farmer, the neglect of whom by historians has constituted the greatest misfeasance in southern history. He shows that the Old South was fundamentalist in religion and that it made definite progress in education.

In discussing Lincoln's responsibility for the outbreak of war, the author has had to make his choice between the mythmakers and the scholars. He has chosen the latter, and has shown courage of the highest order in his criticisms of the war Presi-