rural advocates discovered affinities with countercultural, disaffected environmentalism. The story of that convergence is not in *Baptized with the Soil*, but part of its background is.


Gilson Waldkoenig
*Gettysburg Seminary*


This detailed, articulate institutional history examines one hundred eighty years of technology on Hawaiian sugarcane plantations. The authors, botanist C. Allan Jones and agronomist Robert V. Osgood, both with professional experience in the Hawaiian sugar industry, argue that “economic pressures forced the industry to reduce labor costs with labor-saving technologies, ultimately resulting in one of the most mechanized sugar industries in the world” (x). Duty-free access to the US market (gained in 1876) and then full economic protection as a domestic American agricultural product (1898), made Hawaiian sugar profitable, but the high cost of labor and other economic obstacles pushed cane planters to invest in scientific research and new technologies. Innovation, however, could not keep pace with market forces. As capital investment requirements increased, economies of scale impelled amalgamation among Hawai‘i’s plantations. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, only one commercial sugar mill remains active in Hawai‘i.

Planters sought to control everything, from the chemical composition of soils, to the amount of water cane received, to the social lives of their employ-
ees. Sugarcane researchers and plantation managers bred new varieties of sugarcane, developed new irrigation methods, and built new harvesting and milling equipment. As a result, Hawai‘i became the greatest producer of sugar both per acre of cane and per plantation worker. The term “factories in the field” hardly does justice to the extent that Hawaiian planters tried to systematize their operations.

This book contributes to the interdisciplinary space between history and the sciences. Its grounding in the materiality of sugar production helps readers see how capital investment in expensive new equipment encouraged planters to increase efficiency at all costs. The insider’s view of technological innovation offered here reminds readers that actions within the industry were based on incrementally evolving knowledge of what fields and mills were capable of doing and that quick changes in economic, social, or political conditions were balanced with the continuities of long research programs and planting strategies.

This approach sacrifices a strong argument over what it all means for Hawai‘i. The authors excel in their description but at the expense of historical analysis. Jones and Osgood present an anthropomorphized view of the sugar industry but few individual actors. The reader is left to ponder how those in charge of the sugar industry came to have so much power and how the push to maximize efficiency influenced Hawaiian society.

Still, with its focus on plantation operations, this book offers new insights that complement other histories of sugarcane planting in Hawai‘i and helps differentiate the history of sugar in Hawai‘i from that of other regions. Scholars interested in the history of plantation agriculture and agribusiness may find the book useful for its clear demonstration of the significance of technology for the survival of the Hawaiian plantation system.

Lawrence H. Kessler
Temple University


In his newest book, Life in a Corner, Robert McPherson has produced a valuable history of a resilient people in an often forgotten corner of the West and during an often forgotten period of time. Life in a Corner is a people’s history of southeastern Utah at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth cen-