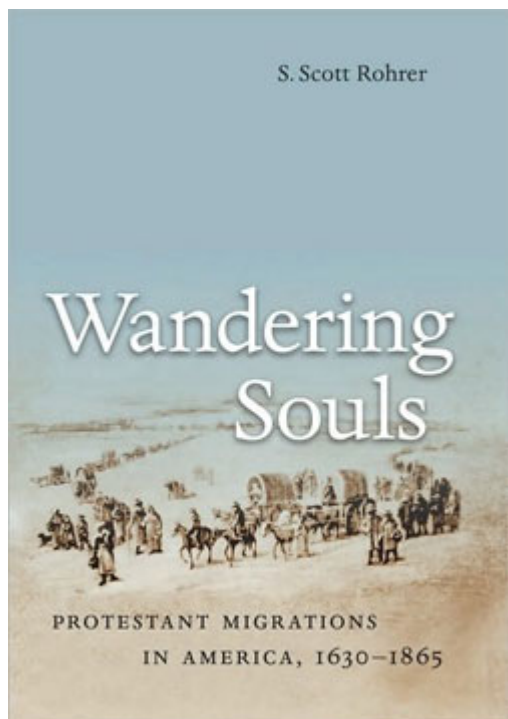
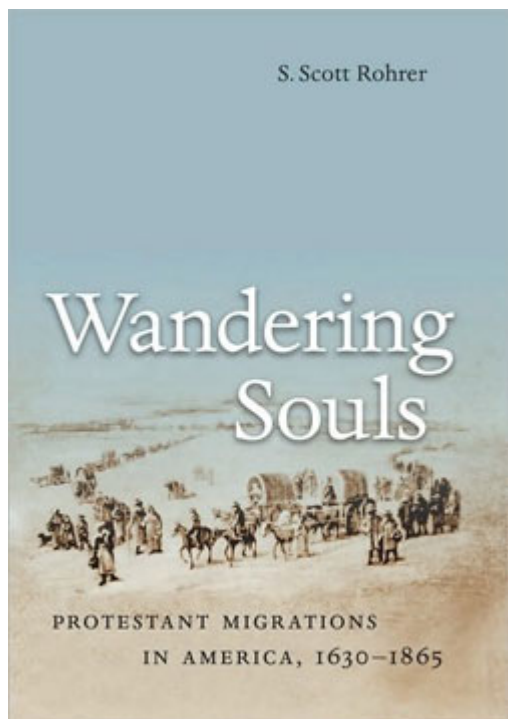


On Borrowed Time



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In *Wandering Souls*, S. Scott Rohrer seeks to understand the relationship between Protestantism and migration in America over the course of almost two and a half centuries. His ambitious project spans place as well as time, as he ranges from Puritans in New England, to Anglicans in the South, to Inspirationists and Mormons in the West, among others. In covering such broad

swathes of time and space, Rohrer hopes to answer one fundamental question: "what was it about Protestantism and America's dissenting culture that made Protestants so restless?" (14)

To answer this question, Rohrer uses eight Protestant groups as case studies. His first chapter introduces Thomas Hooker and the Puritans, whose story he uses to illuminate key themes he will return to in later chapters. He divides the other seven Protestant groups into two categories. First, he claims to focus primarily on individuals and families looking for "some kind of spiritual and economic fulfillment" (9). In this section he includes Anglicans, Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, Moravians, and Methodists. The second category he classifies as group migrations led by a church, congregation, or minister. This section covers Baptists, Inspirationists, and Mormons.

While these categories seem clear in the introduction, in reality there is much overlap. In the section on families and individuals, for example, Rohrer includes the movement of groups of Presbyterians to Maine and Virginia, and a family migration of Moravians that occurred within the context of the establishment of a large new Moravian community in North Carolina. These would, it appears, fit as well in the second category as the first.

It seems that motivations for migration mark the real difference between the two categories in Rohrer's new migration "model." The first type of migrants moved for a variety of reasons relating to personal fulfillment: some sought a "new birth," others wanted to raise their children in godly communities, and still others sought societies bound together by ethnicity as well as religion.

The second type of migration occurred when people moved as part of a group seeking a better environment to practice their religion. Some escaped persecution, as in the case of the Mormons, while others hoped to create godly societies or to mitigate internal conflict, as in the case of Inspirationists and Baptists. All three groups moved for unique reasons, but in a broad sense all three groups sought better living conditions for the religious group as a whole.

Rohrer hopes his book will challenge the traditional migration narrative in which "secularly motivated migrants are lured to the frontier by the promise of cheap and plentiful land" (247). *Wandering Souls* certainly adds a layer of complexity to this traditional narrative. Some of Rohrer's wandering souls undoubtedly chose to move for religious reasons. Yet, as Rohrer himself concedes at several points, the lure of land tempted Protestants as much as it did secular settlers. While Protestantism might have informed migrants' decisions to move, the availability of relatively cheap and fertile land determined where and when they went. In this sense, Rohrer's new model of migration complements, but does not replace, older ones that emphasize the importance of land.

If all the migrants shared a desire for more or better or cheaper land (or at

least expanded economic opportunities promised by the frontier), Rohrer also sees similarities in the otherwise diverse religious motivations for migration. According to Rohrer, the eight case studies in his book provide four related answers to his core question about the relationship between Protestantism and migration. Protestants were "so restless" because they were "searching for salvation, Christian community, or reform—and sometimes for all three" (244). He also argues that America's "dissenting culture" encouraged Protestant wanderings.

Yet of these four factors, the search for personal salvation through a "new birth" is the only one unique to Protestantism. Jews and Catholics, for example, also sought community and reform. Ethnic groups settled together for the sake of community, and moved together as well. Members of wagon trains heading west often shared language, culture, ethnicity, or religion, all of which undoubtedly enhanced a sense of community. Similarly, Protestants would not have been the only Americans "[i]mbued with republican notions of freedom" (168). The search for community or reform and the influence of a dissenting tradition did not distinguish Protestants from other groups during the period covered by *Wandering Souls*.

The search for a "new birth" as the path to salvation was a Protestant longing, but Rohrer fails to convincingly link this search to migration. Devereaux Jarratt, the Virginia Anglican Rohrer profiles in chapter two, comes closest to fitting this model, but even his story doesn't clearly indicate that a desire for salvation led to Protestant migration. In Jarratt's case, in fact, his desire for salvation was an effect, rather than a cause, of his peregrinations. A relatively poor teenager living in colonial Virginia with his brother, Jarratt first moved in 1752 because he was offered a position as a schoolmaster. In the course of his search for a stable job, he eventually landed in the home of an evangelical Christian and began pondering matters of the soul. After several years of contemplation mixed with backsliding, Jarratt experienced the "new birth" that led him to become an itinerant Anglican preacher. Had he not wandered, he might never have been saved, but he wasn't searching for salvation when he started. Rohrer also cites the Methodist Alfred Brunson as an example of this motivation. Yet for Brunson as for Devereaux Jarratt, material concerns mixed with spiritual ones in the decision to move. His desire for salvation in Ohio after the War of 1812 was combined with a hope that he could make a better living there as a lawyer or minister because of the opportunities presented by the frontier.

Rohrer does not establish a convincing causal link between a shared set of motives and Protestant "restlessness." Yet *Wandering Souls* still achieves a great deal. In particular, Rohrer argues that "religion's role in migration and the settlement process was far more important than has been recognized" (247). His case studies of Protestant migrants reveal the importance of religion on many levels to people who migrated in the two and a half centuries covered by his book. The availability of land factored into the decision to move but religious motives clearly influenced migrations as well. Rohrer's serious

treatment of religion is a refreshing addition to a body of scholarship that often ignores its powerful psychological and social power.

In a story that covers so much time and space, perhaps it is unfair to ask for more. But Rohrer does leave one wondering how the Indians fit into his story of migration. He mentions Indians at several points—they threaten the Connecticut settlements of Thomas Hooker, for example, and their defeat at the Battle of Fallen Timbers opens up Ohio territory for eager Methodists. But in a story about migration, where so much depends upon available land, the Indians who lived on much of that land seem unusually absent.

In particular, what role did Protestant Indians play? The literal and figurative migration of the Conestogas in colonial Pennsylvania to a new land and a new culture, for example, failed to protect them from Rohrer's wandering white Protestants, despite a shared faith. Anglican Joseph Brant also remained true to his Protestant faith in his extensive wanderings as he attempted to form an independent Indian nation in Canada after the Revolution.

Or for that matter, what about Protestant black Americans, who also wandered—some as preachers, some as escaped slaves, others as abolitionists arguing for freedom and equality?

No book can do everything, but Rohrer's provocative study might have been enriched by including the perspective of other Protestants who also wandered, albeit for very different reasons. Perhaps future studies can take up where Rohrer left off to examine the place of religion in the movements of a more diverse set of individuals and groups. As it stands, *Wandering Souls* makes an important contribution to the scholarly narrative on migration by insisting that religion plays a role in understanding why people moved so much in America during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.