Tapping the Pines: The Naval Stores Industry in the American South. *By Robert B. Outland III.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004. xii + 352 pp. Index, notes, bibliography, figures, illustrations, maps, photographs. Cloth, $47.95. ISBN: 0-8071-2981-X.

Reviewed by Mark R. Wilson

While the history of turpentine production may not seem on the face of it to be a stimulating subject, this fine book manages to make it relevant and compelling. For decades, naval stores—tar, turpentine, rosin, and pitch—ranked among the more important manufactured products of the American South. In this study, Robert B. Outland III offers a multidimensional analysis, blending together the business, labor, and environmental histories of the work that turned the fluids of pine trees into valuable finished goods.

One of the strengths of the book is its broad chronological scope. Starting with the story of the rapid development of the American naval-stores industry in the early eighteenth century (thanks to changes in British tariff laws), the narrative proceeds into the middle of the twentieth century, when traditional methods of making naval stores from pine resin (or "gum") were displaced by new chemical technologies that used wood pulp. Focused on developments in the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida during the century from the 1830s to the 1930s, the book deliberately situates the industry within the broader histories of the Old and New South.

Like the workers in the naval-stores industry who inflicted small injuries on thousands of trees each season to cause them to bleed valuable resin, Outland manages to glean rich materials from a smattering of modest sources. For instance, the letters of Sarah Hicks Williams, a New York native who became the wife of Dr. Benjamin Williams, a North Carolina naval-stores producer, illustrate the everyday operations of an antebellum plantation that relied on slave labor to make naval stores. Piecing together the stories of Williams and other residents of the Tar Heel State, many of whom moved southward in pursuit of fresh pine stands, Outland builds a story of entrepreneurial

migration, in which many of the leading naval-stores families remained the same, even as their operations moved far away from the longleaf pine forests of eastern North Carolina.

With mixed success, the book employs an ambitious interdisciplinary approach. Part business history, it highlights an often overlooked segment of the southern economy. Part labor history, it describes the often isolated, and sometimes brutal, living and working conditions endured by the African American men who made up the bulk of the industry's labor force, first as slaves and then as wage or convict laborers. Part environmental history, it includes several technical asides on the biology of the pine forests. Outland emphasizes the unsustainable environmental practices of most American producers, who—in contrast to their French counterparts—used sap-harvesting methods that destroyed the forests. While examining the development of the industry from these several perspectives has obvious advantages, in some places the discussion is stretched too thin. Some readers, for example, might wish that the book had done more to portray individual workers as active characters; others might regret that Outland did not say more about the economics of American producers' decisions to use destructive harvesting methods.

Perhaps the least successful part of the book is its framing argument, which contends that this was a "prototypical southern industry" (p. 4), more rural and tradition-bound than other industries frequently associated with the New South, such as cotton textile production. Continuity, according to Outland, is the central story of southern economic development before the Second World War. But there is little reason to accept this argument, even on the basis of the evidence presented in this book. Over time, the naval-stores industry accounted for an increasingly smaller fraction of southern economic activity, casting doubt upon its ability to represent a central tendency. While violence and deprivation certainly continued to prevail in the workers' camps well after the end of slavery, government involvement in the labor market, whether as a provider of convict labor or as a regulator, changed significantly over time. Certainly, many aspects of the naval-stores industry, as well as other parts of the southern economy, were characterized by continuity. But rather than joining Outland in embracing the proposition that tradition trumped innovation in the South, many readers will likely conclude that the southern economy has long been characterized by diversity and uneven development.

Despite its apparently narrow focus and underwhelming general thesis, this book deserves a wide audience. Throughout, Outland suggests the many ways in which his story provides important additions or qualifications to broader historical subjects, including antebellum slavery, southern business enterprise, convict labor, and government promotion and regulation of agriculture and industry. Based on careful research that illuminates the forest as well as the trees, *Tapping the Pines* stands out as a superior scholarly monograph.

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