

*Iowa Valor*, by Steve Meyer. Garrison, IA: Meyer Publishing, 1994. xii, 512 pp. Illustrations, tables, references, appendix, indexes. \$37.50 cloth.

REVIEWED BY GLENN L. MCMULLEN, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

*Iowa Valor* is a documentary history of Iowans in the Civil War. As its title indicates, its main focus is on the combat experiences of Iowans; little attention is paid to the home front. The subject is an interesting one, since Iowa had the distinction of having a larger percentage of its military-age males fight for the Union than any other state. Steve Meyer has compiled more than 250 firsthand accounts, including published battle reports, newspaper articles, diaries, and letters, as well as previously unpublished documents in archives and private collections. Short chapter introductions provide background, and documents are accompanied by biographical sketches and photographs. Meyer is thorough in his coverage. Not only does he document where Iowa regiments played a major role—at Shiloh and Vicksburg, for example—but he also includes eyewitness accounts of minor engagements and skirmishes in which Iowa troops were involved.

This is not a scholarly book, nor does it attempt to be one. Meyer says that he wanted to avoid a volume that was "starchy and overly academic" (5). There are no footnotes, though references at the end of each chapter indicate sources used. There is much celebration but little analysis of the claim that Iowans were the "Most Patriotic of the Patriotic" (5). The book could have profited from a closer proofreading of the introductory sections; typographical errors, such as "Manasses" for Manassas (1), are too common. Still, this thick book should find a wide audience. Civil War buffs, readers of popular history, and genealogists will find much here to please them. *Iowa Valor* meets its goal of letting Iowans involved in the nation's most tragic conflict speak for themselves. Their words range from the polished and eloquent to the barely literate, but their voices are equally poignant and their stories are well worth reading.

*Grass of the Earth: Immigrant Life in the Dakota Country*, by Aagot Raaen, with a new introduction by Barbara Handy-Marchello. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1994. xxvii, 238 pp. Photographs, map. \$12.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY APRIL R. SCHULTZ, ILLINOIS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

Originally published by the Norwegian-American History Association in 1950, this fascinating memoir details the life of a Norwegian immi-

grant family in eastern North Dakota in the 1870s and 1880s. One of five children of a hard-working mother and an intellectual, alcoholic father, Aagot Raaen chronicles the family history over two decades after their move from Iowa. She does so from the perspective of her younger sister, Kjersti. From the view of a child and then a young adult, readers learn how pioneers made candles, *lefse*, and cloth; how the family survived a long blizzard; how difficult it was to get an education when the family so desperately needed the children's help to pay off a mortgage. Readers are also treated to wonderful vignettes dealing with the mother's involvement in the local temperance crusade and Raaen's own educational journey into teaching.

This memoir, like others in its genre, is significant on at least two different levels. First, it provides for general readers and for history students marvelous details about life on the prairie. Just the passage about making and dying yarn, then spinning it into cloth, will provide students with a clear sense of the long hours and genuine creativity that went into the making of one small dress. On another level, this memoir reveals a woman in her seventies in 1950 who chooses her memories carefully to present a particular view of pioneer life in the late nineteenth century. What we are left with is a story of strong women who survive a loving but "weak" husband and father.

*Illinois Women Novelists in the Nineteenth Century: An Analysis and Annotated Bibliography*, by Bernice E. Gallagher. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994. 206 pp. Notes. \$39.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY CHERYL ROSE JACOBSEN, WARTBURG COLLEGE

The fifty-eight novels written by Illinois women and published between 1854 and 1893 that constitute Bernice Gallagher's study were originally selected for exhibition in the Woman's Building Library of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Selection committees believed that the authors they identified had "achieved distinction for originality, great moral or religious strength, fine writing, and scholarly research" (2). Gallagher, on the other hand, anticipated that the Illinois writers would "not wander far from the formulaic and derivative" (3). Her analysis bore out her expectation, and is documented in her annotations of the novels. But Gallagher also discovered works of more sophisticated literary and social merit.

The Illinois authors were primarily middle-class, educated, married women with small families or no children. As a consequence, the plots and heroines of their novels reveal middle-class biases and preoccupations. In her brief critical essay, Gallagher identifies these

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