

of immigrant adjustment in agriculture and will serve as the baseline against which to measure future research. Hopefully, some scholar will be inspired to try a similar study of Iowa, perhaps including German Lutheran, Irish Catholic, and Dutch Reformed farm colonies. *Prevailing Over Time* highlights the elusive ethnocultural dimension in pioneer farming that is missing in James C. Malin's *Winter Wheat in the Golden Belt of Kansas*.

Settlers' Children: Growing Up on the Great Plains, by Elizabeth Hampsten. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991. xii, 252 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$22.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DEBORAH FINK, AMES, IOWA

Children made up well over half of the population of the plains in the early years of settlement. Now these children are beginning to emerge as proper historical subjects. Good. After all, the experience of children, more than that of any other group, shaped the future of plains society. *Settlers' Children* is a welcome addition to the small body of midwestern history written from the perspective of its youngest and least articulate inhabitants. Centering on the European-American population of North Dakota, Elizabeth Hampsten draws from both historical narratives and interview narratives to reconstruct the world of these children.

Children's history grows out of the interrelated disciplines of family history and women's history. Women's history has deepened our understanding of the family by helping to document its complexity and the significance of economic activity which historical subjects themselves tended to discount. This, together with women's close association with children, links children's and women's history in both theory and substance. Hampsten, already known for her work in women's history, draws this connection.

Going beyond the myths of health and abundance in the fertile West, Hampsten presents a more troubling and more complex picture of overwork, minimal education, and early death. She leaves open the question of whether or to what extent these conditions were peculiar to the plains or whether they merely intensified a pattern existing in prairie states, in eastern states, and in northern Europe. Existing studies of the lives of European and eastern American children may provide the basis for further study and comparison. The subject matter might well be applied to a parallel examination of rural children in Iowa.

Settlers' Children opens and closes with Hampsten's reflections on writing children's history and on the way in which this history created the cultural particularities of North Dakota. The lives of plains settlement children were at the crux of a contradiction, for it was precisely at this time that people had begun to understand childhood as a separate and precious time of life, yet parents depended on child labor for survival and hence on the selective erasure of distinctions between children and adults. For the children at the time and the adults they later became, mediating this contradiction could entail emotional calisthenics. Sorting the strands of memory and historical records is complicated and ambiguous. Hampsten is at her best when she carries us into the middle of a narrative and leads us to probe and sift the fragments that we find.

Three chapters of *Settlers' Children* treat the topics of children's work, their education, and the dangers that the plains posed for them. In the middle of the book the chapter format shifts from discrete topics to a series of narratives that present separate family stories, these being weighted toward German and German-Russian accounts.

Hampsten acknowledges that the records of children's own experience in growing up on the plains are sparse. This becomes painfully obvious in surveying the material she presents. Some of the narratives are stretched precariously thin, leaving us only our imaginations to connect them to the reality of growing up on the plains. The chapter on happy childhoods is perhaps the most poignant example. Not a single vignette is about plains children. Either the settings are elsewhere or the subjects are not children. More needed to be done to connect this chapter—and others—to the subject. Although there are enough good ideas here to write a book, the supporting evidence is weak in places.

With a subject so intriguing and the narratives so sparse, we might brainstorm other sources. What about using demographic data? What about records from schools, courts, churches, or orphanages? Do wills indicate a greater concern with treating children equitably or with preserving farm property? What kinds of laws related to children? Are there findings from such studies as that of the Country Life Commission that shed light on the conditions of children? Were there local or state organizations that addressed child welfare? What was the effect of economic and geographic variables on children? What kinds of records exist on the Child Labor Amendment debate?

Settlers' Children raises questions that can be approached from a variety of perspectives, and I hope that it gets read, discussed, and refined. There is grist for many term papers, theses, articles, and books between the covers.

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