

book is less a critical narrative than a gathering of historical data about an individual and his local social context.

The book begins with an introduction that provides background on Stone; thereafter, the chapters are organized by year. Curiously, there is no discussion of when Eber was born. Most of the documents presented fall into two groups: Eber's boosterish reports, and letters from relatives outside of Iowa. Background is provided, but analysis is uneven, at best. At times, it is not clear what the connection is between the historical background provided and Eber's life and thought. Moreover, the author's familiarity with Iowa, frontier, and American Indian historiography is thin and outdated (there is no bibliography). Among other things, this leads to an unreliable summary of Inkpaduta and the Spirit Lake Massacre, for which MacKinlay Kantor's 1961 novel *Spirit Lake* is cited as "the most detailed" historical account (66).

The author seems to assume that Eber Stone's historical significance — "one pioneer as presented in documents" (xi) — can be taken for granted. Historians, however, must be advocates for the dead; that is, a case must be made for historical significance by constructing narratives that revivify in some fashion the elusive past. Neither Eber Stone nor early Humboldt County society and culture come to life in this book. Nevertheless, an index makes this volume of some reference value for Humboldt County history.

*Norwegians on the Prairie: Ethnicity and the Development of the Country Town*, by Odd S. Lovoll. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press in cooperation with the Norwegian-American Historical Association, 2006. xvii, 321 pp. Maps, chart, tables, illustrations, notes, index. \$32.95 cloth.

Reviewer Dag Blanck is director of the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Augustana College, Rock Island, Illinois, and also teaches at Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden. He has written extensively about Scandinavian immigrants to the United States.

For many years, Odd Lovoll has been the leading historian of Norwegian American history. His magisterial two-volume set, *The Promise of America: A History of the Norwegian-American People* (1984; rev. ed., 1999) and *The Promise Fulfilled: A Portrait of Norwegian Americans Today* (1998), is a unique history of a European immigrant group in that it focuses not only on the history of Norwegian immigration to the United States during the classic immigration era in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also deals with subsequent developments in the Norwegian American community until the end of the twentieth century.

Lovoll's latest book, *Norwegians on the Prairie*, also breaks new ground in the field of Norwegian and Scandinavian American history in its focus on immigrant experiences in small urban communities in western Minnesota. Norwegian Americans were one of the least urbanized immigrant groups in the United States by the end of the immigration era in 1920, as a majority of both first- and second-generation Norwegian Americans lived in rural areas at that time. A majority of Swedish and German Americans, in contrast, had become urbanites by that time. Other scholars have recognized this "basic rural orientation" of Norwegian Americans, as Lovoll calls it, but his focus on the role of small towns and their interplay with the surrounding farming areas adds significantly to our understanding of this important aspect of Norwegian American history.

Three small towns in western Minnesota form the nucleus of Lovoll's discussion: Benson in Swift County, Starbuck in Pope County, and Madison in Lac qui Parle County. They were all towns (or villages) where Norwegian Americans of the first and second generations dominated among the immigrant population, ranging from 43 to 66 percent in 1900. In all three localities, Swedes formed a distant second-largest group, with a scattering of Irish, German, British, Danish, and Canadian immigrants completing the ethnic picture.

Lovoll provides an in-depth social and demographic analysis of these towns based on a variety of sources, such as census and church records, local newspapers, official county records, and interviews. The discussion of Benson is particularly thorough. Lovoll recreates the history of this small village, the development of which was closely tied to the coming of the railroad in 1870. Its population grew quickly but leveled off and held steady between 2,000 and 3,000 during the first half of the twentieth century. Benson was heavily shaped by immigration, with a large number of immigrants — primarily Norwegians, followed by Swedes and Irish.

In terms of social relations in the village, Lovoll shows that a quarter of the village's residents were general laborers in 1880. A relatively low share of the Norwegian Americans were professionally trained, a situation that prevailed over the years to come. Yankees dominated in those categories. However, Lovoll very interestingly shows that a working-class mentality or solidarity was much less noticeable in Benson than in Norwegian settlements in larger urban areas. The size of the community, he argues, explains this difference, as it also influenced the degree to which ethnic and religious identities were factors of mobilization.

Religious strife has always been an important part of Norwegian American history. Norwegians in America started no fewer than 14

different Lutheran church bodies or synods between 1846 and 1900. The two Norwegian American Lutheran churches in Benson represented different approaches among Norwegian Lutherans in the United States. Lovoll's detailed analysis of the history of the two congregations does much to shed light on a complicated process.

The book's two final chapters provide an interesting and nuanced discussion of the ways Norwegian Americans in Benson, Starbuck, and Madison became part of what Lovoll calls "the American matrix." Here, the level of analysis shifts from the ethnic community to American society at large, and the discussions deal with the ways Norwegians participated in the educational, political, and cultural life of their communities. The section on Norwegian Americans and politics provides a particularly interesting discussion. Lovoll's treatment of the various reform movements, such as Populism, the Nonpartisan League, and temperance, helps to further our understanding of these complex issues. The final chapter, "The Persistence of Ethnicity," brings the story up to the present time. As in his earlier work on contemporary patterns of Norwegian American ethnicity, Lovoll shows how a sense of "Norwegianness" has survived up until the present time, but also how its development has followed its own, at times, quite particular trajectory.

In conclusion, Odd Lovoll has written a highly interesting and readable book on a dimension of Norwegian American history that so far has gone unexplored. It is recommended for anyone interested in Norwegian American history, American immigration history in general, or the history of the upper Midwest.

*Plain Diversity: Amish Cultures and Identities*, by Steven M. Nolt and Thomas J. Meyers. Young Center Books in Anabaptist and Pietist Studies. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. x, 241 pp. Tables, maps, illustrations, appendix, references, index. \$48.00 cloth.

Reviewer Beth E. Graybill is director of the Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society. Her recently completed Ph.D. dissertation is "Amish Women, Business Sense: Old Order Women Entrepreneurs in the Lancaster County [Pennsylvania] Tourist Marketplace."

Two respected scholars of the Amish have united to explore the diversity of Amish experience through the lens of the 20 distinct Amish settlements in Indiana. Nolt, a historian, and Meyers, a sociologist, base their study on five years of interviews, fieldwork, and archival research. They attempt to paint a larger picture of the Amish that will be applicable beyond their state's borders by exploring three markers of difference: ethnicity (Swiss versus Pennsylvania German dialect and folk-