

specific business cycle fluctuations and their effect on employment (which is what the immigrants write about).

Overall, the work provides a history of Danish immigration to the U.S. that is lively in terms of the characters and their words. The conclusions the authors draw, however, do not always match their evidence. Describing the typical migrant as "rootless" applies well to the pathbreakers and sailors. It does not seem as appropriate for the family migrants or in the context of the later section on Danish churches, societies, and the press, which includes information on the founding of a Danish folk high school in Elk Horn, for example. Moreover, the authors make few comparisons to other groups or to literature on them.

Stilling and Olsen provide useful maps and illustrations, and the translations read well. In an appendix they outline the age, family status, and geographic locations of the writers, though they do not indicate whether these were typical among Danish migrants. In all, *A New Life* brings a new body of sources to light for an English-speaking audience. In trying to combine a letter collection and an immigration history, it is less successful at both than it might have been.

*Rachel Calof's Story: Jewish Homesteader on the Northern Plains*, by Rachel Bella Calof, translated from the Yiddish by Jacob Calof and Molly Shaw, edited by J. Sanford Rikoon. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. xiii, 176 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$20.00 cloth, \$12.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY DONALD M. DOUGLAS, WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Whatever your stereotype of the Jew may be, it is safe to assume that it does not include a farmer, a homesteader breaking the sod of the Great Plains of America. Nonetheless, Jews were there and in significant numbers. One of them was Rachel Bella Calof. Born in the Ukraine in 1876, she came to Devil's Lake, North Dakota, to marry a homesteader she had never met. She had survived a difficult and impoverished childhood, only to find herself thrust into the incredible hardships of pioneer life on the northern plains. A twelve-by-fourteen-foot dirt-floored shack was the first home for Rachel and her husband, Abe, and she was obliged to share that cramped space with Abe's mother, father, and brother through the first few bitter northern plains winters to conserve an inadequate supply of fuel. She would endure droughts, crop failures, hail, and tornadoes. In Rachel's own words, "The most dependable state of affairs I knew . . . was pregnancy" (73), as she bore and reared nine children under harsh and primitive conditions. Although she found herself "very close to the living level of an animal" (26) on her arrival in Devil's Lake, she persevered. She and her

husband, over sixteen years of great hardship and privation, built a prosperous farm many times the size of the original claim. In 1936 she wrote her life story in Yiddish on a five-by-seven-inch "Clover Leaf Linen" writing tablet. That sixty-seven-page manuscript, titled very simply "My Story," translated by her son and a friend, provides the bulk of *Rachel Calof's Story*.

Written in spare, clear, unembellished prose, her story is, nonetheless, truly riveting. I could not put it down unfinished. Rachel Calof was an acute and objective observer. She wrote without exhibiting any sentimentality, and certainly without a shred of self-pity. From her narrative emerges a picture of an articulate and sensitive woman enduring the enormous hardships of frontier life, a life inordinately complicated by the mere fact of being Jewish. Editor J. Sanford Rikoon has provided excellent and necessary explanatory footnotes to help clarify Jewish terms and customs as well as a number of pertinent and well-chosen black-and-white photographs which add much to the text (although I wish that he had not misidentified a buckboard as a sulky in one of them).

Rachel Calof's narrative is followed by an epilogue written by her son and an essay by Rikoon titled "Jewish Farm Settlements in America's Heartland." The volume concludes with an afterword by Elizabeth Jameson. Although Rikoon's chapter does not do justice to the scope and extent of Jewish agricultural settlement on the Great Plains, it is very helpful in putting Rachel Calof's experience in perspective. Jameson's gratuitous and excessively footnoted afterword, titled "Rachel Bella Calof's Life as Collective History," is less so.

The book is a quietly compelling monument to the triumph of the human spirit. It is also primary source material for the serious historian, especially for those who study pioneer agriculture in mid-America and the role that American Jews played therein. They were truly among the "Giants in the Earth."

*Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915*, by John W. Bennett and Seena B. Kohl. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. xii, 289 pp. Illustrations, maps, charts, notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY MEL PREWITT, SCOTT COMMUNITY COLLEGE

During the quarter-century following Frederick Jackson Turner's famous 1893 announcement that the frontier was closed, hundreds of thousands of men and women settled the last great agricultural region to be occupied in North America. They arrived from the farms and small towns of Ontario and the midwestern United States, with many more coming

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