

moving accounts suggest that some children bounced back after hardships; others evidently did not.

A New Life: Danish Emigration to North America as Described by the Emigrants Themselves in Letters, 1842–1946, by Niels Peter Stilling and Anne Lisbeth Olsen, translated by Karen Veien. Danes Worldwide Archives in Emigration History, No. 6. Aalborg, Denmark: Danes Worldwide Archives, 1994. [Available in the U.S. through the Danish Immigrant Museum, Elk Horn, Iowa.] 215 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, index. \$15.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY SUZANNE SINKE, CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

A New Life, published originally in Danish in 1985 as *Et Nyt Liv: Den danske udvandring til Nordamerika i billeder og breve* appeared with minor revisions in English in conjunction with the opening of the Danish Immigrant Museum in Elk Horn, Iowa. *A New Life* is actually an odd mixture of a letter collection and a standard history of an immigrant group. Stilling and Olsen highlight nine basic questions or concerns, to each of which they devote a chapter: why people left, the crossing, first impressions of a new world, agriculture, town life, family life, institutional life (including the press), later impressions of America, and assimilation. Out of a group of approximately four thousand letters, the authors chose passages from one thousand, written by fifty individuals. The letters, in contrast to some collections, are primarily personal ones that have not been published previously. The authors made their selections based on how well the letters address their themes, editing down most selections to include only a paragraph or two on that particular topic. In some cases the same writer appears in another chapter on a different topic, but overall there is not much continuity.

Instead, the text takes the form of a standard immigrant history, punctuated often by quotes from the letters, but absent other supporting information in many cases. Nearly all of the chapters cover all five phases of Danish migration outlined at the beginning of the book: 1820–1850, sailors and pathfinders; 1850–1870, family emigration to Wisconsin, Utah (Mormons), and later the plains; 1870–1895, mass migration, especially to Iowa and Nebraska; and finally 1895–1910, migration to cities. This creates some confusion regarding chronology because the authors do not always make the time periods clear within a given selection. When describing work opportunities, for example, the authors describe the period prior to the 1880s as fairly good, and the 1880s and 1890s as generally poor, rather than referring to more

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

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