

helped to create. Yet, in his words, this "does not . . . diminish their achievement" (380). Perhaps studies such as his will contribute to the acceptance of the literature of immigrant cultures as chapters "in the literary history of their chosen home" (380).

Contented among Strangers: Rural German-Speaking Women and Their Families in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest, by Linda Schelbitzki Pickle. Statue of Liberty–Ellis Island Centennial Series. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996. xii, 311 pp. Illustrations, tables, graphs, charts, notes, appendixes, index. \$49.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY SUZANNE SINKE, CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

Contented among Strangers is the first book-length attempt to examine the lives of rural German-speaking women as a whole in the Midwest in the nineteenth century. It draws on a multitude of studies of German-American life, as well as many primary sources by and about women, including letters, diaries, wills, church records, and some quantitative material such as censuses. The focus is on what the author terms "the representative Midwest" (8)—Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska—and on all German speakers, which lumps together Germans from Russia with Swiss Germans and Luxembourgers with Prussians, among others. It is a mixed group to say the least, a diversity that is complicated further by their various religious and political views, from the bourgeois "Latin farmers" of the 1830s to Missouri Synod Lutherans. Add to this the span of the study—the entire nineteenth century, with many comments going into the twentieth as well—and the category "German-speaking," which can encompass several generations, and you have a recipe for disaster. Schelbitzki Pickle manages to avoid the worst pitfalls, and in the process provides other scholars with insights into midwestern life.

The book divides into five chapters. The first chapter gives a brief introduction to life and attitudes prior to migration. It does not go into as much depth as many immigration studies do, but it does give information they generally lack: basic laws regarding women, which were generally far more conservative than in the United States. It also provides some indication of attitudes toward women, using collected proverbs and sayings that are for the most part vividly misogynistic, such as "Women and eggs, the more you beat them the better they get" (24). The next chapter turns to "adaptation," which covers everything from inheritance patterns to aspects of everyday life. The succeeding chapter relates what women thought of migration, often based on their own writings. One chapter on special groups (Germans from

Russia, Saxon Old Lutherans, utopian communities [Amana, Communia, Bethel], and Catholic nuns) provides greater insight into those particular experiences. The author concludes with the implications of the study, followed by appendixes discussing letters as sources and numeric data. Throughout, the writing is clear, and only occasionally does it revert to a language of the initiated. The author also deserves credit for solid translations of her German language sources.

The questions the author covers are both personal—trying to understand why her grandparents acted the way they did—and scholarly: how does this ethnic experience fit into literature about women on the frontier, a genre generally lacking in information on women speaking languages other than English? To a lesser extent it integrates insights into immigration history. For example, German-speaking women are less different from other women on the frontier than she claims. They echo patterns seen among many rural Norwegian and Dutch-American women. Her work closely correlates with studies of later periods by Carol Coburn (*Life at Four Corners*) and Sonya Salamon (*Prairie Patrimony*), whom she cites often. Salamon shows how German-descended women continued to put their individual concerns behind those of the family; Schelbitzki Pickle shows the earlier rendition of that pattern. The fruit of this subordination of women, she says, is ethnic and religious continuity, as well as ongoing family ties. To go one step further, she argues, this has led to a “cultural convergence” (198) of German-speaking with Anglo-American patterns in the region. In other words, you cannot understand the Midwest without understanding these ethnic patterns, particularly for Germans since they are the largest ethnic group in most midwestern states. This argument parallels suggestions by noted immigration historian Kathleen Conzen.

The book's title is sometimes ironic, for while many of the women she describes do seem to be “contented” with their roles, the examples in chapter three, which highlight women's subjective experiences of migration, indicate that quite a few were not. Other evidence is ambiguous: high fertility may indicate women's preference for large families, but it may also result from men's refusal to participate in the birth control methods then available. Likewise, high endogamy may indicate preference for in-group marriage, but it can also result from limited contact with non-German speakers. Information on the enforcement of limits on women's education, women's contacts with outsiders and geographical mobility, and the formation of women's organizations or publications, even within churches, indicate that for many women adaptation took place within very limited parameters. Coburn and Salamon, covering later time periods, indicate that once

these conditions changed, so did German-American women's choices, and women began leaving rural communities or increasingly challenging their subordinate status within them. What Schelbitzki Pickle does provide is a compilation of the factors related to a woman's satisfaction, particularly for new immigrants: "Age at immigration, the presence of family (especially of female relatives), the strength of the ethnic community and its institutions, economic conditions, the affection and support of her husband, and her health and that of her family" (127). Elsewhere the author notes the importance of class background (specifically, those who were well-off prior to migration rarely liked their new setting), though she generally discounts economic factors and explanations. This is particularly notable given the importance of class variables for those who study urban German-American women.

Overall, the work is a tribute to the efforts of many German-speaking women in maintaining and passing on their culture. As a long-awaited work on this topic, it suggests many avenues for further research and contributes to our understanding of the interplay of ethnicity and gender, both in the nineteenth century and today. It provides an added dimension to work on rural women, one with important implications, at least in posing questions others may want to ask.

"And Prairie Dogs Weren't Kosher": Jewish Women in the Upper Midwest since 1855, by Linda Mack Schloff. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1996. x, 243 pp. Illustrations, maps, index. \$29.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY JUDITH E. ENDELMAN, HENRY FORD MUSEUM & GREENFIELD VILLAGE

This book originated from an exhibition, *Unpacking on the Prairie: Jewish Women in the Upper Midwest*, which was organized by the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest and the Minnesota Historical Society and opened in October 1996. The book's focus on Jewish women's lives makes it an unusual contribution to the corpus of regional American Jewish histories. The region covered in the book includes Minnesota, the Dakotas, northern Iowa, and northern Wisconsin, although the emphasis is on the Dakotas and Minnesota.

Most regional Jewish histories are typically organized chronologically around the history of each town or community within a particular region, and usually focus on the rise, growth, and decline of communal institutions such as synagogues, charitable societies, and so forth. How Jewish families lived their lives and, particularly, how

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