

From the Hornet's Nest to Custer's Last Stand: The Immigrant Story of Norwegian Sergeant Olaus Hansen, by Ozzie Sollien. Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2013. 312 pp. Illustrations, bibliography. \$18.07 paperback.

Reviewer Paul Fessler is professor of history at Dordt College. His research interests include Dutch and German immigrant history as well as American military history. He reviewed this book jointly with Justin Vos, a Dordt College upperclassman from Lynnville, who will be attending graduate school in history.

Painting an interesting tale that stretches from the remnants of feudal Norway to the plains of the Dakota Territories, Ozzie Sollien details the life of Olaus Hansen, a Norwegian immigrant who settled in Iowa in the mid-nineteenth century, served in the 12th Iowa Infantry during the Civil War, played a part in Reconstruction, and was involved in Custer's Last Stand at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. As Sollien admits, much of the detail in this work is of his own invention based on historical evidence, although without any footnotes or citations, it is impossible to discern where facts end and Sollien's imagination begins.

Sollien's focus on Olaus Hansen provides an interesting view of the troubles that Norwegian immigrants faced in nineteenth-century America. This is seen especially in the first few chapters, where Sollien lays out the journey that Hansen had to endure in order to reach America and then to settle a homestead in Winneshiek County, Iowa. A large portion of the book follows Hansen's experience as part of the 12th Iowa Infantry Regiment during the Civil War. Sollien provides extensive detail regarding the movements and engagements of the 12th Iowa. With the end of the war, Hansen continued his military career. Sollien touches on life in the South during Reconstruction and ends with Hansen's adventures in the Dakota Territories as part of the 7th U.S. Cavalry. This first half of the book addresses topics most relevant to readers interested in Iowa history, especially those interested in the history of European immigration and the Civil War.

Despite Sollien's lively writing, readers should not accept the work's historical accuracy without question. Although Sollien's bibliography shows that he consulted many works about the 12th Iowa, he admits that Hansen left no letters or diaries. The lack of footnotes leaves readers in the dark as to which parts of the story are based on historical fact and which are figments of Sollien's imagination. He notes at the start of the narrative that Hansen's "thoughts and actions are my own invention, based on historical fact" (10). For example, knowing that Hansen was both a Norwegian and a member of the 12th Iowa, which was present at the battle of Fort Donelson in February 1862, Sollien imagines, "Olaus and Hans shook their heads. In-

credible! Now what? How long were they going to be stuck in this ice box? Olaus pulled out his pipe with hands numb from the cold and managed to light it." Throughout the work, Sollien, based on regimental histories or letter collections, imagines how Hansen would have likely reacted and creates imaginary discussions and scenarios. Such imaginings might serve well in a work of historical fiction. In fact, reading this book as if it were historical fiction might be the best way to glean insight from the author's research. However, as a work of historical nonfiction, such use of imagination without citations or evidence creates serious problems. In addition, the work would have benefited from an examination of immigration historiography to contextualize Hansen's immigrant experience. Most notably, the bibliography does not cite works from the late Jon Gjerde, the most important historian of Norwegian immigration to the United States (*From Peasants to Farmers: The Migration from Belestrand, Norway, to the Upper Middle West* and *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Revolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917*). Sollien's work addresses an important and overlooked topic. One may hope that it provides the impetus for more in-depth studies of Norwegian Americans, their place in Iowa history, and their role in the U.S. military during the Civil War and afterwards.

Almost Pioneers: One Couple's Homesteading Adventure in the West, by Laura Gibson Smith, edited by John J. Fry. Guilford, CT: TwoDot, imprint of Globe Pequot Press, 2013. xv, 215 pp. Maps, photographs, notes, appendix, index. \$16.95 paperback.

Reviewer Dee Garceau is professor of history at Rhodes College. She is the author of *The Important Things of Life: Women, Work, and Family in Sweetwater County, Wyoming, 1880-1929* (1997).

Western writer William Kittredge once said, "We tell stories so we can inhabit them." *Almost Pioneers* speaks to our need to make meaning out of choices we have left behind. Laura Gibson Smith homesteaded barely three years in Chugwater, Wyoming, yet she flagged this experience as significant and wrote about it, even after returning to Iowa for most of her adult life. "There is a fascination about the vastness of the western plains," she wrote, "the uncertainty of the horizon, the crispness and clarity of the air . . . that captures the imagination of anyone who comes to Wyoming"(1). Not only was Smith moved by the high plains landscape, but the subsistence life of homesteading framed the first years of her marriage, adding romance to the daily business of working out domestic routines. Her memoir reads like trimmings in a scrapbook that make an ordinary life exceptional.