

## Insane Sisters: Or, the Price Paid for Challenging a Company Town

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Scholars have established with some degree of certainty that one of these, Iowa immigrant farmer Carl Wiedow, was the primary inspiration for Swehn. Be that as it may, the letters give a lively and convincing picture of German-speakers' experience as immigrants in the rural Midwest.

The book's scholarly and historical value resides in precisely the representative aspect of Swehn's epistolary narrative. As he uses his letters to sum up his life after several decades in America, Swehn also offers a portrait of the commonsensical German peasant *cum* midwestern farmer who relishes the freedom of thought and the economic opportunities of the new world. The particular conditions of frontier life and society, often centered in the rural immigrant church, are interesting in themselves. But they are also occasions to record timelessly amusing and fascinating human frailties.

In his translation, Trost communicates the sometimes coarse but always humorously down-to-earth and slyly ironic quality of the original text. He also succeeds in approximating the tone and texture of the original's mixture of dialect and standard German as he attempts to reinvent "that old-timey farm talk" (xv) that he knew from his own youth among the descendants of immigrants. Trost has given the wider American public access to an endearing book, one that contains significant insights into both the general immigrant experience and that of a particular group of a certain time and place.

*Insane Sisters: Or, the Price Paid for Challenging a Company Town*, by Gregg Andrews. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999. xii, 262 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer (Margaret) Dorsey Phelps is an independent scholar from Iowa City, Iowa. Her dissertation was "The Political Economy of Prison Labor during Depressions in Chicago, 1871-1897" (University of Iowa, 1992).

*Insane Sisters* is a story about a dispute over a 26-acre tract of land in Ilasco, an unincorporated industrial town in Ralls County, Missouri. The contest for control of land adjacent to the Atlas Portland Cement Company plant went on for 17 years, 1910-1927, and involved an extended series of court cases as well as a complex cast of colorful characters. Although Andrews suggests, both by the title and in the text, that the two sisters at the center of this story contested the ownership of this property in order to prevent the company from dominating life in Ilasco, in truth, their purpose was much more self-interested—they were out to protect property (even from each other if need be) that

offered the possibility of providing them with economic security—and the company was only one of several contestants they confronted.

Andrews has interesting analytical hunches about the significance of this story, particularly with regard to the motives of his characters, and he attempts to tie the local story to broader issues of social control, gender, and politics. Unfortunately, however, despite his zealous reporting of every detail of clue and character no matter how minor, he cannot corroborate these hunches with hard evidence. This is particularly true with regard to his labored efforts to make the conflict into one about Missouri's antebellum Republican and Democratic politics, when, from the data he presents, it is certain only that the conflict was about the economic exigencies of the American middle class in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The story of that economic struggle and the litigiousness of the people who waged it among themselves in this small midwestern town is in itself worth telling.

*Quinine and Quarantine: Missouri Medicine through the Years*, by Loren Humphrey. Missouri Heritage Readers Series. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000. xi, 128 pp. Illustrations, tables, index. \$9.95 paper.

Reviewer Philip L. Frana is NSF Software History Project Manager at the Charles Babbage Institute for the History of Information Processing. His dissertation was "Coordinating the Experts and the Masses: The Professions of Health and the Creation of American Community Health, 1915-1940" (Iowa State University, 1999).

*Quinine and Quarantine* is a brief popular history of Missouri medicine from aboriginal times to the Managed Care Reform Bill of 1997. The book, written in narrative style, traces the development of medical practice from "argument" to "action." The author, Loren Humphrey, professor emeritus at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and former chair of surgery there, describes the use of showy milkweed, foxglove, and ginseng by the pioneers. He touches on several devastating cholera epidemics in the nineteenth century and the poor state of surgery during the Civil War. Humphrey also recites a number of accomplishments of Missouri medical men in the twentieth century, including the isolation of aureomycin, diagnostic tests for gallbladder disease, and the discovery of the mechanism for glycogen's conversion into sugar by the body. The book ends abruptly with a comment that history is a tool for resolving current ethical dilemmas in medicine.

*Quinine and Quarantine* is part of the Missouri Heritage Readers series for "adult new readers" and incorporates substantial quantities of undocumented "informal literature." By design, the book also in-

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