

Across the Deep Blue Sea: The Saga of Early Norwegian Immigrants

Daron W. Olson
Indiana University East

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 2016 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

Olson, Daron W. "Across the Deep Blue Sea: The Saga of Early Norwegian Immigrants." *The Annals of Iowa* 75 (2016), 75-77.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.12264>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

firmly into an Iowa and American context. Use of these documents by scholars will undoubtedly advance the interpretation of Amana and Iowa history. Furthermore, this work hints at the vastness and richness of the archival resources still undiscovered in the Amana Church and Amana Heritage Society collections. As a shining tip of the iceberg, these volumes also should stimulate other researchers to look further beneath the surface.

Finally, given the vastness and value of this collection, the publisher's choice of distribution and price is lamentable. Apparently targeting a specialized market of big-budget research libraries, it offers no wholesale price and retails the set at \$495. Some online sellers have taken this price as wholesale and offer it at a cool \$900, though some vendors now list it at just over \$400. (We can wonder whether books as a vehicle for the dissemination of knowledge to the general public are a thing of the past.) The recent acquisition of Pickering and Chatto by Routledge further obscures this title. Ironically, although these sources are now available, they might not be any more accessible. We can only hope that this marvelous collection does not turn out to be the Inspirationists' best-kept secret.

Across the Deep Blue Sea: The Saga of Early Norwegian Immigrants, by Odd S. Lovoll. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2015. 211 pp. Maps, tables, illustrations, notes, index. \$19.95 paperback.

Reviewer Daron W. Olson is assistant professor of history at Indiana University East. He is the author of *Vikings across the Atlantic: Emigration and the Building of a Greater Norway, 1860–1945* (2013).

Much has been written on the subject of Norwegian immigration to the United States, but the story of Norwegian migration into Canada remains an understudied one. Odd S. Lovoll's latest study addresses that imbalance by seeking "to include aspects of the overseas exodus frequently overlooked in historical accounts; it treats the growth of a transportation system of sailing ships, the impact on coastal communities, and the composition and experience of the crew, including crew members who abandoned ship" (5). As Lovoll notes, the shift from restrictive trade to free trade provided the opportunity for Norwegian sailing ships to engage in the lucrative transport of timber from Canada to ports on the British Isles. In turn, the focus of early Norwegian immigration to North America shifted as Quebec City and other seaports in the Quebec province replaced New York as the point of entry for Norwegian immigrants from 1850 until the late 1860s. Competition

from steamships proved the undoing of the sailing ships as transporters of emigrants. Ultimately, they reestablished New York as the port of entry for immigrants from Norway.

Because the primary mission of the sailing ships was to transport cargo, not passenger traffic, these transatlantic voyages, often lasting from six to eight weeks, involved an ordeal for the immigrants, as the steerage conditions were primitive and cramped. Lovoll is careful to point out that the causes of immigration can be found in macro dimensions, but one must not “disregard the human factor and the many individual motives and circumstances that influenced people to seek their fortunes outside the homeland” (50). Yet in general he observes that the districts of Norway that had new industry and livelihoods or those that had possibilities for income in other regions within Norway had relatively small numbers of emigrants, which suggests that economic privation was a major factor in the emigration during that time frame. The desire among many Norwegians to cross the Atlantic permanently created an additional opportunity for the sailing ship industry. Ship owners and captains took an active role in recruiting passengers, often employing Norwegian immigrants to recruit for them in Norway. Furthermore, many Norwegians who took positions on board the sailing ships ultimately deserted, using their brief employment as a means to emigrate to North America (124).

Canada, though, did not profit greatly from promoting immigration, because most immigrants aimed to settle in the United States. By the mid-1850s, however, Canada’s recruitment efforts became more aggressive. The results meant that the province of Quebec had two Norwegian immigrant communities. The first was the Bury Settlement. Lovoll describes how the first 90 settlers arrived there in 1853 and 1854. For the most part, the settlement was a failure, as most of the settlers moved on to the United States or to Canada’s western provinces. A better-known Norwegian colony arose along the Gaspé Peninsula. The Canadian government set aside three townships there exclusively for Norwegian settlement. The colony depended on fishing for livelihood, yet the three townships did not have water access, which proved a long-term hindrance to greater development.

In the long run, Canada, and especially Quebec, was a stepping stone in the history of Norwegian immigration to North America. The United States remained the ultimate destination for most immigrants during this early period. Only later in the nineteenth century, when the vast Canadian prairie provinces were opened up to settlement, would large numbers of Norwegians see Canada as a destination rather than a transition point. Yet without Quebec—“the Gateway,” as

Lovoll stresses—Norwegian settlement of the upper American Midwest would not have played out as it did.

Therein lies the significance of Lovoll's work. Most histories of Norwegian immigration have focused almost exclusively on the final destination. While important, there were other aspects to the process. For instance, I have argued for paying greater attention to the homeland when writing the history of Norwegian immigration. Now Lovoll, the sage historian of Norwegian immigration, has pointed to another neglected aspect of that history: the stepping stones or transition points along the way. Moreover, he has shown how a confluence of factors—the development of the Canadian timber trade, Norway's expertise in sailing ships, the motivation among Norwegian farmers and laborers to emigrate, and recruitment efforts by U.S. states in the upper Midwest—created a unique window of opportunity for about 20 years, which helps to explain why the American upper Midwest ultimately became such a haven for Norwegian settlers.

Across the Deep Blue Sea is thus another valuable contribution to our understanding of Norwegian immigration history. The book has delved into a hitherto largely unexplored side of that history, and it invites further exploration of this fascinating history.

Defining Duty in the Civil War: Personal Choice, Popular Culture, and the Union Home Front, by J. Matthew Gallman. Civil War America Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. 336 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Wallace Hettle is professor of history at the University of Northern Iowa. He is the author of *Stonewall Jackson: A Civil War Hero in History and Memory* (2011) and *The Peculiar Democracy: Southern Democrats in Peace and War* (2001).

In *Defining Duty in the Civil War*, J. Matthew Gallman provides a lavishly illustrated, persuasively argued treatment of Northern popular culture during the Civil War. He focuses on how Americans shaped expectations of citizens' duties during the war through print culture. On the home front, Americans built a sense of community and responsibility based on a shared set of principles.

Gallman draws on the abundant print culture of the North during the war. He examined leading magazines such as *Vanity Fair*, *Harper's Weekly*, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated*, and *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine* and also consulted popular novels, local and national newspapers, soldiers' letters, and abolitionist newspapers such as *The Liberator*.

The book is organized thematically around a variety of appeals to duty on the part of Union citizens. It begins with satire, as patriots