

German-Bohemians: the Quiet Immigrants

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German-Bohemians: The Quiet Immigrants, by LaVern J. Rippley with Robert J. Paulson. Northfield, MN: St. Olaf College Press, 1995. xx, 279 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index.

REVIEWED BY SUSANNE M. SCHICK, MESSIAH COLLEGE

In 1991 the citizens of New Ulm, Minnesota, dedicated a monument to commemorate the lives and contributions of immigrants from German-speaking Bohemia. So begins LaVern Rippley and Robert Paulson's instructive overview and analysis of a previously understudied element of mass Germanic migration during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The authors provide a sound background in the turbulent history of Bohemia, with its ethnic, religious, political, and economic struggles over the centuries. A desire for economic stability and advancement encouraged most would-be émigrés to leave their homeland. Most who departed shared certain characteristics, traits that would affect the lifestyle choices and the culture that they would transplant to Minnesota. Virtually all were Roman Catholic farming families whose "chain migration" and shared faith eased the transition to a new country.

German-Bohemians began arriving in Minnesota in the 1850s, settling in rural areas surrounding an existing German enclave. New Ulm had been founded by the Turners, a clique of radical freethinkers. Anticlerical and urbane, these "Forty-eighters" expressed little sympathy for their devout, uneducated Bohemian peasant neighbors. Records indicate that the Turners dominated political, cultural, and social life in the town of New Ulm, an imbalance the hard-working, family-minded Bohemians do not seem to have challenged.

Although snubbed socially, German-Bohemians were considered essential to the economic well-being of the area. They preferred farm life, yet many new arrivals found work as laborers in businesses such as breweries, brickyards, quarries, and flour mills. They also continued "old world" traditions such as geese herding and clamming. Industriousness did not translate into upward social or economic mobility, however. Virtually all Bohemians retained a lower social status and reported modest economic progress.

Dubbed "the quiet immigrants" by the authors, the German-Bohemians appear to have been that only insofar as the surviving written record of their goals and accomplishments. Rippley and Paulson demonstrate that in spite of their docility in public, German-Bohemians claimed a private culture that was rich and boisterous. Disdaining intermarriage and assimilation, Bohemians retained their language and folkways well into the twentieth century. Three chapters are devoted to exploring aspects of the Bohemian heritage and

the ways in which these rituals, crafts, and celebrations were incorporated into life in Minnesota.

The vivid descriptions of folk life and work culture are perhaps the most informative portions of the book. It would be interesting to know more about the political life and activities of the Bohemians. Their attitudes toward and interaction with their Turner compatriots could also be explored in greater depth. Finally, the chapter dealing with the centrality of music and the proliferation of brass bands, while impressive, seems somewhat lengthy and less connected with the remainder of the book.

German-Bohemians: The Quiet Immigrants is an important contribution to the study of immigration in the Midwest. It highlights, in an engaging yet authoritative manner, the experiences of a group that has been overshadowed by its illustrious, politically adept neighbors. Those interested in state and local history will welcome this community study. Well documented and filled with scores of fascinating photographs and informative maps, the work will attract a popular as well as scholarly audience.

The Civil War in Popular Culture: A Reusable Past, by Jim Cullen. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995. 253 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95 cloth.

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The Civil War in Popular Culture represents an ambitious attempt to reimagine what it might mean to "do" history. Seeking to focus a series of far-ranging speculations about the relationship between popular culture and representations of the past, the book devotes separate chapters to specific texts about the Civil War: Carl Sandburg's popular biography of Abraham Lincoln (1927-28), the film *Glory* (1989), *Gone With the Wind* (novel in 1936, film in 1939), rock songs by southern-born musicians such as Randy Newman and Tom Petty, and the historical pageants created by people who lovingly reenact the battles of the 1860s. Because even people interested in popular history have their favorites, one of the virtues of *The Civil War in Popular Culture* is its eclecticism. Thus readers who wish to ignore (or perhaps forget) the rebel rock of Lynyrd Skynyrd or the Allman Brothers can turn to Cullen's analyses of the racial politics of *Glory* or the curious appeal of *Gone with the Wind*.

In celebrating recent attempts, particularly in the increasingly broad field called cultural history, to acknowledge the power of individual and collective "memory," this study seeks to refocus historical

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