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Dutch Farmer in the Missouri Valley: The Life and Letters of Ulbe Eringa, 1866-1950. By Brian W. Beltman. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996. Plates, illustrations, maps, index. xv + 284 pp. \$27.95.

How large should an immigrant community be to shed light effectively on the wider immigrant experience? This is a subject of frequent debate. Here is an excellent study of immigration to the American Midwest based on a single person, a Dutch farmer, Ulbe Eringa. And for the better part of the book, Eringa himself speaks through memoir and letter, translated from the Dutch by a daughter.

The narration and reproduced texts recreate Eringa's life story. It begins with his birth in 1866 to a dairy farming family in western Friesland and continues through his early formative years in Calvinist schools and his pitiful teenaged years as an orphaned servant. In 1892, at twenty-six, he migrated to the United States, joining the Dutch farm community of Sioux County, Iowa. Within a year he moved on to better fortune in Bon Homme County, Dakota. Here in 1899 he and his wife, Maaïke Rypstra, a fellow lower-class Frisian, became land owners. They also became central players in the community, assisting Frisian chain migrants and supporting the local Dutch Reformed church. Over the next thirty years the Eringas raised six children, increased their land holdings to 640 acres, secured a college education for several of their daughters, and passed the farm on to their only son, Pier. In 1926 the

Eringas returned to Iowa to settle in a town, and here in 1949 Ulbe wrote his last known letter. He died a year later.

Dutch Farmer, however, is much more than a biography of an immigrant. Brian Beltman has placed Ulbe Eringa's life within a dynamic Dutch immigrant community. Further, he has situated the story within the context of scholarly debates on the nature of immigration and adaptation. He achieves his promise to engage the "contemporary generation of scholars" who have discovered "that immigrant rural folk were less assimilated into the national mainstream than once thought." But Beltman goes far beyond documenting transplanted ethnic traits; there are no windmills, wooden shoes, and tulips in this story. Instead there is a complex and often contradictory dynamic between Old and New world cultures: a triumphalist acceptance of American capitalism, but also a deeply-felt set of transoceanic kinship ties; a heart-felt Dutch pietism, but a full acceptance of the American missionary movement; linguistic assimilation and exogamy, but always a strong sense of ethnic boundary; secularization amongst the third generation, but an embrace of symbolic ethnicity for the author, a grandson of Ulbe Eringa. And through all of this Beltman speaks authoritatively about sending societies, acculturation, gender roles, chain migration, religious culture, literary mechanisms, the farm household, labor migration, family networks, and inheritance patterns. And he does it without resorting to jargon.

This book vividly portrays the immigrant experience of a historical actor and contextualizes it with reference to the public record and the scholarly debate. If there is a weakness in this approach it lies in the author's tendency to assume the voice of the actor. Eringa is as convinced of America's promise as he is of the Netherlands' technologically primitive, socially differentiated, and myopic inertia. At places it seems that Beltman assumes something of this dichotomous perspective too. He speaks sensitively of the letters' filtering processes, but sees them nevertheless as evi-

dences of "ethnic persistence" rather than as mechanisms of ethnic invention, the reordering of a world that pits the Dutch-American against both homeland and host society. Beltman speaks of "ancient" and "long-established" land holding culture in Friesland without considering the possibility that Frisian partible inheritance in centuries past led to both lost and regained farming opportunities, an enduring sense of recoverable status, and sudden surges of mass emigration. The 1921 Immigration Law is illustrated as ending Frisian emigration without considering Frank Thistlethwaite's argument that emigration from the continent had slowed of its own accord as Europe itself was buoyed by new economic opportunity.

These observations aside, *Dutch Farmer* is a sprightly, well-written, empathetic, and nuanced portrayal of one immigrant's experience which adds a meaningful voice to the wider scholarship on American rural immigration.

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