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Spring 1999

**Review of *Many Danes, Some Norwegians: Karen Miller's Diary, 1894* Edited by John W. Nielsen**

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LeGreid, Ann Marie, "Review of *Many Danes, Some Norwegians: Karen Miller's Diary, 1894* Edited by John W. Nielsen" (1999). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1550.

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*Many Danes, Some Norwegians: Karen Miller's Diary, 1894.* Edited by John W. Nielsen. Translated by Ninna Engskow. Blair, Nebraska: Lur Publications, Danish Immigrant Archives, 1997. Illustrations, preface, editor's notes, index. xviii + 173 pp. \$14.95 paper.

Letters, diaries, and other amateur writings provide an important prospect on the immigrant experience in America. Literary expressions of this kind are valuable; while mundane and archaic-sounding, they inform us of the lives of immigrants, their perceptions, their everyday encounters with a larger world. *Many Danes, Some Norwegians* is the diary of Karen Miller (Møller), a Danish immigrant who wrote from her home at Elko, Scott County, rural Minnesota, in 1894, a year before her death. The original manuscript was translated by Olaf M. Norlie in 1952, then mimeographed and bound. The current version was translated by Ninna Engskow using the Norlie transcription and retaining the Norlie translations of poems and hymns. Following thoughtful introductions by Solveig Zempel and John Nielsen, both well-versed in manuscript collections, the entries are laid out chronologically, month by month, each month's entries preceded by general reflections. The text is interspersed with sketch maps and well-chosen photographs.

The Miller diary transports the reader through a year of work and leisure, sadness

and celebration. It paints a vivid picture of farm life in nineteenth-century Minnesota, repetitive and ordinary, dominated by the details of farm and household production. "I am baking graham and white bread, cake and biscuits," she writes. The Miller home is a revolving door of visitors; neighbors join in threshing rings, road crews, and church socials. We come to know Karen Miller quite well through these passages of intriguing self-portraiture as a hardworking, devoted woman sustained by extraordinary faith. The passages are rich in spirituality, an interweaving of "life and faith," at times eloquently: "I close the day and go to rest in Jesus." There is loneliness and loss, but the general tenor is one of acceptance and contentment. "Thanks be to God for all that is good."

The purpose of the diary is unclear. Sensitive to her own mortality, often tired and ill, she uses the diary as a conduit in her conversations with God. She may have intended it as a legacy to her children, too, a means of imparting her Christian ideals to the next generation. A Danish church had been built, Immanuel Lutheran of Hazelwood, thus bringing Danes together for worship for the first time in their mother tongue. Happily she writes, "many Danes and a few Norwegians."

Commonness is the most important quality of the diary—ordinary immigrants faced with daily routines and ongoing challenges. If there is a blemish, it is minor: Karen's story might well be enhanced by being placed in the macro-perspective of Nordic migration. A collection of this type is neither comprehensive nor definitive, yet it is important. In its brevity and simplicity it sifts out the common strands of life in an American immigrant community, engenders pride in a Nordic heritage, and offers a panorama of detail for the curious researcher. Its audience is naturally broad.

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