



on Gjerde, *From Peasants to Farmers. The Migration from Balestrand, Norway to the Upper Middle West*. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Modern History. Ed. by Robert Fogel and Stephan Thernstrom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. 319 pp. \$32.50.

This book is a milestone within the history of emigration. Jon Gjerde has written a comprehensive, but economic study on emigration as a process of transatlantic community transfer. A number equal to its 1845 population left Balestrand, a fogderi (bailiwick) at Sognefjorden in Norway between 1844 and 1904 for Norway Grove, Dane Co., Wisconsin, and two Minnesotan settlements. Gjerde gives Frank Thistlethwaite's call for a modern emigration history at the Stockholm history conference in 1960 as his inspiration for constructing this study, but the idea could be traced back to Marcus Lee Hansen, a pioneer for a scholarly approach to immigration history in the U.S. In recent decades, historical geographers like Robert Ostergren and John Rice have produced several articles on the importance of old world backgrounds for settlers on the prairie. One has to go to a couple of similar works on Italian emigration, however, to find anything as penetrating and exhaustive as Gjerde's book.

Gjerde has devoted most space to the Norwegian background that determined the patterns of assimilation which in Gjerde's own words were "a curious mixture of tradition and change." Chapters 2 to 5 deal, in sequence, with the general Norwegian geographical and historical background of emigration, the socio-economic structure of Balestrand, the economic development 1800-1865, and the social consequences of demographic growth. The emigration structure itself is given only brief treatment in chapter 6.

With support from recent revisionist tendencies in Norwegian agricultural history, Gjerde claims that the system of intensively cultivated infields of grain supplied by extensively cultivated outfields for grazing and hay was adjusted to the population increase that had occurred since the late eighteenth century. But only at the cost of a growing labor-to-land ratio. New land was gained, production grew, fishing increased, even wages grew as the small community entered the market economy – but still young people read the "Mene tekel" on the wall. The farms could not be divided, and there was little room for expansion in this mountainous area. In Gjerde's view they would not have starved had they stayed at home. Emigration was foremost a move towards securing or improving social status.

Among the social traits transferred to the U.S., Gjerde has selected the practice of night courting, described with disapproval by the pioneer of empirical sociology, Eilert Sundt. As the old tradition that a couple should have a farm at hand before marrying grew more and more illusory, the sexual morals of the lower class youth slackened. The bundling together of many servants in small rooms over stables and barns with little supervision led to an increasing number of premarital sexual contacts. There was nothing to wait for. If the girl became pregnant a marriage was arranged hastily and the young family embarked on a worker's existence.

Night courting moved with the emigrants to America, where it met with strong condemnation from all sides. It disappeared, however, probably because the system of middle-sized family farms did not allow much opportunity for illegal contacts as they used only little external labor and depended on their larger average families for the daily work. New middle class ideals that kept wives and daughters inside the home also curbed the "excesses."

Among Gjerde's important observations is the fact that assimilation to Ameri-

can farm life not only meant adaptation to new cultural and linguistic norms, but also a rise to middle class status – which was somewhat paralleled in Balestrand some decades later. Otherwise, assimilation happened at different levels at different times. Gjerde restricts himself to a few key themes in the last three chapters devoted to, in order, settlement patterns, agricultural practices, and social and cultural aspects of immigrant life. A tradition would know that Norwegian immigrants were more devoted to their land than their yankee neighbors. Gjerde's structural analysis proves that this was clearly the case, if not for love of the land itself. There was a significant coherence and ethnic solidarity within the Norwegian communities meant to secure mutual support. A good deal of the second generation left Norway Grove for the two Minnesotan outliers. Ethnic clustering was not total, but enough for the Norwegians to dominate three townships – and to allow splits between state church Lutherans and dissenters' groups.

The first compelling adaptation was that of getting acquainted with American farming practices. Another old presumption that immigrants often stuck to their old country crops and methods proved partially true for the initial stages. Agricultural censuses show an initial overweight for oats, barley, and potatoes – crops known from Balestrand – but the Norwegians soon began to grow more wheat than their neighbors. Wheat demanded the least work effort in the difficult first years. That they later acquired relatively much livestock could have shown old preferences, but was rather a sign of diversification and a turn to fodder crops following the general trend. The Norwegians thus rather quickly became rationally calculating American farmers.

It is not possible to do full justice to Gjerde's stimulating book here. Though it may not seem to present sensational results, it is a great accomplishment that puts a series of more or less presumed theories to the empirical test. The writing of this book has demanded much work, methodological skill, and the double trouble of becoming acquainted with both Norwegian and American research within agricultural and social history, sociology, and anthropology. One can only hope that Gjerde will inspire more of the same kind.