

America-America Letters: a Norwegian-American Family Correspondence

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mass-produced for a public eager for romanticized escapades of heroic cowboys, distressed damsels, and nefarious Indians. Eventually those novels provided plots for countless Hollywood "oat operas" and early television shows.

What makes Beadle's western diary of interest today is its descriptions of the western reality of choking dust clouds, lynch law, homesickness, and hot days when the arrival of a steamboat was the height of entertainment. One can only guess how much of Beadle's real-life experiences found their way into the idealized West he would help create.

America–America Letters: A Norwegian-American Family Correspondence, compiled and edited by Bjorn Gunnar Ostgard. Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 2001. xxxii, 161 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95 cloth.

Reviewer James S. Hamre is emeritus professor of religion and philosophy at Waldorf College. His research and publications have dealt with religious and educational developments among Norwegian immigrants.

With this volume, the Norwegian-American Historical Association (NAHA) introduces a third category in its treatment of the genre of immigrant letters. It distinguishes "America–America letters" from the earlier "America letters" (correspondence sent by immigrants to persons in Norway) and "Norway letters" (letters flowing from Norway to America). The category of "America–America letters" refers to the correspondence carried on by immigrants among themselves in their new homeland. The publication under consideration grew out of recent efforts by the NAHA to compile and organize such letters.

The book focuses on the letters of one family, that of Knud S. and Mary L. Aaker, who emigrated to America in 1845 and settled initially in Dane County, Wisconsin, before establishing a more permanent residence in Goodhue County, Minnesota. The 78 letters in the volume, which have been translated into English and briefly annotated, are arranged in three chapters. Chapter one contains 10 exchanges, from 1847 to 1869, between Knud Aaker and several of his children. Chapter two, containing 42 letters written during the Civil War period (1861–1865), consists primarily of correspondence between Anne, the widowed daughter-in-law of Knud and Mary Aaker, and two of her children: Andreas, a student at Luther College in Decorah who later enlisted in the Union army and died of disease in Tennessee; and Mari, a daughter who worked in Red Wing, Minnesota, for a while. Chapter three, 26 letters from the years 1859–1894, includes the correspondence

of Lars Aaker, one of Knud's sons who also served in the Union army and was a Minnesota legislator for a time.

Many of the letters are personal, private exchanges dealing with such things as births, marriages, deaths, diseases, jobs, farm conditions, religious concerns, schools, and the like. Although some readers might desire a broader perspective than that of one family, the letters do relate to a period of important developments in the upper Midwest, and they provide insights into "the process of immigration and immigrant life and activities in the 'Promised Land'" (viii). The book includes a helpful introduction by a retired member of the Aaker family.

While God Is Marching On: The Religious World of Civil War Soldiers, by Steven E. Woodworth. Modern War Studies. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001. xii, 394 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr. is a lecturer in the history of Christianity at Andover Newton Theological School and the author of *A Shield and Hiding Place: The Religious Life of the Civil War Armies* (1987). His research focuses on religion and American culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

At the beginning of the Civil War, the citizens of many American towns equipped their sons for the rigors of military service by arming them not only with rifles, revolvers, and bayonets, but also with Bibles, pocket editions of the New Testament, and other forms of inspirational literature. Despite these efforts, many of the soldiers soon wondered whether the books they carried were sufficient to overcome, not the physical terrors of combat, but the more insidious influences of everyday life in camp. Cyrus Boyd of the Fifteenth Iowa regiment, for example, was appalled by the irreligious tone and general wickedness he witnessed in the Union army. Drinking, swearing, and card playing were commonplace, he claimed, while prostitutes appeared to outnumber chaplains in most brigades. "There seems to be no God here," he observed with dismay, "but more than the average amount of . . . Devil" (179).

In this informative study of the ideas of Union and Confederate soldiers, military historian Steven Woodworth examines the thinking of several hundred men who, like Boyd, expressed strong religious beliefs during the war. Woodworth stresses, on the one hand, that he is interested in the views of ordinary men rather than in religious organizations or formal theological doctrines. As a result, he disregards the extensive writings of chaplains and civilian clergy in favor of the less polished spiritual musings of common soldiers. On the other hand, Woodworth adheres to Stonewall Jackson's pious wish that the army

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