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Review of *The Germans from Russia in Oklahoma* By Douglas Hale

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The Germans from Russia in Oklahoma. By Douglas Hale. Newcomers in a New Land. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980. Illustrations, bibliographical essay, notes, maps. 72 pp. \$2.95.

This small, compact volume is one of the Newcomers to a New Land series, which describes the roles of the major ethnic groups in the settlement and development of Oklahoma. The contribution of the Germans from Russia—Mennonites of Dutch and Swiss ancestry from the Ukraine and Protestant and Catholic Volga Germans—to the social and economic life of the Great Plains is now better known, thanks to the activities of many local historical societies, the publications and collections of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia based in Lincoln, Nebraska, and the efforts of veteran scholars such as Karl Stumpp, Adam Geisinger, Cornelius Krahn, and younger researchers, particularly those associated with the Germans from Russia Study Project at Colorado State University.

Douglas Hale of Oklahoma State University expands this body of knowledge by recording the settlement of these people, mostly by secondary migration from Kansas and Nebraska, on the new open lands of the Indian (Oklahoma) Territory. In the introductory chapter the author skillfully outlines the Russian background but is prone to accept sod house and Turkey wheat myths about initial establishment in America. While the Homestead Act and freedom from conscription are given proper credit for attracting the Germans from Russia, the railroads and their ambitious land agents are barely mentioned.

The two central chapters describe the geographical settlement westward across the territory through individual experiences drawn

largely from little-known published sources, manuscripts, and personal interviews. Though interesting and even emotionally touching in their revelation of the confrontation of man with frontier circumstances, they lead the author into the narrow byways of immigration experience. A resulting emphasis on the religious and missionary work by the Mennonites fails to broach the larger question, that is, why were the Mennonites from Russia in particular so inclined to missionary activity among the Indians? Although the Germans from Russia usually settled as groups, the sense of community dynamics rarely surfaces in this account.

The concluding chapter rhapsodically contrasts the real miseries that befell those who stayed behind in Russia with the achievements of the Oklahoma settlers. Even those readers with a detailed knowledge of Oklahoma geography may be confused by the many references to small town names. The sole Oklahoma map in the book offers little help, since it only outlines county boundaries. Opportunities to compare settlement experience with other ethnic groups, or even between the different religious groups of the Germans from Russia, are missed. The basic foundation is here, however, for arousing interest, provoking questions, and stimulating further research.

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