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Spring 1997

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Iversen, David, "Review of *A New Life: Danish Emigration to North America as Described by the Emigrants Themselves in Letters, 1842-1946* By Niels Peter Stilling and Anne Lisbeth Olsen" (1997). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1926.

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A New Life: Danish Emigration to North America as Described by the Emigrants Themselves in Letters, 1842-1946. By Niels Peter Stilling and Anne Lisbeth Olsen. Translated by Karen Veien. Aalborg, Denmark: Danes Worldwide Archives in collaboration with the Danish Society for Emigration History, 1994. Photographs, maps, notes. 215 pp. \$15.00.

According to Henning Bender of the Danes Worldwide Archives, writing in the preface, "This book is a gift from the Archives in Denmark to the [Danish Immigrant M]useum in the United States in commemoration of the official opening [in Elk Horn, Iowa in 1994]." *A New Life* is also a gift to laypeople and scholars interested in the study and preservation of primary source material regarding the history of Danish emigration.

Since the 1970s the authors have studied more than 4000 letters written by Danish emigrants and preserved by their families or friends, analyzing 1000 of these written by fifty correspondents identified alphabetically at the back of the volume. They explain their unconventional approach in their Introduction: "Up until now, most books based on emigrant letters have dealt with one or more life stories, presented in a long series of letters. These letters have normally been reprinted in their entirety, leaving little for the migration historian to say." Stilling and Olsen have chosen instead to organize their book as a series of chapters based on topics, or "interview questions" they "asked" of the emigrants, and to include those portions of the letters that answer the "interview questions." They also supply historical context through their explanation of the distinctive phases of Danish emigration. Aiming to "provide both insights into emigrant thinking and an overview of the story of emigration," the authors succeed on both counts.

Expressed in the emigrants' own words, the book clearly offers insight into why they chose to emigrate, thereby heightening our understanding of the overall emigration story. As translator of short stories by Carl Hansen, a Danish emigrant author who died in 1916,

this reviewer was struck by the similarity between Hansen's fictions and the factual stories related in *A New Life* in their portrayal of the success, failure, toil, hardship, humor, joy, and sadness the emigrants experienced, and the emigrants' belief in the promise of a new life in America. The book is profusely illustrated with photographs, maps, and reproductions complementing the text. Its detailed notes filled with bibliographic references add to the volume's importance as a contribution to both Danish and United States emigration history.

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