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Review of *"And Prairie Dogs Weren't Kosher": Jewish Women in the Upper Midwest Since 1855* By Linda Mack Schloff

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"And Prairie Dogs Weren't Kosher": Jewish Women in the Upper Midwest Since 1855. By Linda Mack Schloff. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1996. Photographs, maps, tables, bibliography, index. x + 243 pp. \$29.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

Spanning the experiences of early immigrants to those of contemporary women, Linda Mack Schloff's concise yet comprehensive history of the contributions of Jewish women in the upper Midwest is an important addition to the region's ethnic literature. The author successfully integrates disparate information

from several time periods, enabling the reader to follow a progression of adaptations and social changes. The resulting mosaic displays general trends but also depicts the ways in which individual women worked out distinct solutions to their circumstances. The study relies heavily on first-person accounts or "voices" of both women and men. Excellent photographs enhance and reinforce its overall conclusions.

"Keeping kosher meant subscribing to a vast store of religious laws and customs. But in America—and particularly in the Upper Midwest—location, level of devotion, and financial means dictated a wide range of observance," Schloff explains. Amelia Ullmann, although she shuddered at the idea of eating pork, discarded dietary laws for the sake of maintaining good health. Wives of farmers often had to prepare American foods to feed harvest crews. Each woman in charge of a household was forced to make daily decisions adapting religious customs to life on the prairie and in the small towns and cities of the Midwest.

With the passage of time many Jewish women expanded their roles to allow them to make more diverse contributions to the economic, religious, and community life of their areas. "Women could help earn a living for their families while not violating a long-held Jewish distaste for wives being supervised by other men," the author observes. Traditionally Jewish women had played a secondary role within their synagogues. American synagogues offered new opportunities. In many instances, the custom of segregating women was discarded and families sat together. "Women were encouraged to study with the rabbi, Sunday schools were introduced and utilized women as teachers, and new rites, such as the confirmation service, were introduced," Schloff reports, adding that "women also started forming organizations . . . that were not structurally affiliated with, or beholden to, any male-dominated association or institution."

Scholars and general readers alike wishing to understand more fully the dynamic interac-

tion between ethnic culture and practical adaptation will find this volume useful.

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