

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

JONATHAN WAGNER, *A History of Migration from Germany to Canada 1850-1939*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006, 262 p., index.

Wagner's study of the factual aspects of German migration to Canada across nine decades and the political and economic factors which influenced this process provides an interesting contribution to both historical and migration studies. The focus on countervailing dynamics which promoted and discouraged migration, factors that influenced the choice of destination between Canada and the United States, and the use of historical materials drawn from both German and Canadian sources make the book unique. For Wagner, analysis ends at the destination border while other texts tend to pick up the story at that point and trace the efforts of these immigrants to find employment or land to cultivate, the welcome received, and the procedure involved in becoming part of a new social community. However, the deliberate decision to avoid discussion of such social factors by Wagner allows for a more in-depth study of the migration process itself and does not detract from the value of this work.

From the outset Wagner catches the reader's interest with his suggestion that migration patterns between Germany and North America may be best analyzed by way of comparative study of political and economic conditions in the two regions. Revelations respecting similarities and differences in levels of economic activity and industrial development, political goals and policies, and the relative degree of perceived attractiveness between different destination areas make it clear that migration between the old and new worlds did not occur in a steady progression. Rather, Wagner identifies four periods during which distinct differences in migration flows existed and provides convincing facts and arguments to lead the reader to the conclusion that these dissimilarities were the result of the economic and political influences he identifies. This comparative analysis of shifting conditions during the study period provides a common pattern and unifying thread for his work.

In identifying the four periods to be studied, Wagner notes that early migration between 1850 and 1860 was destined primarily for the United States whether the initial entry to the continent was made through Canada or an American port. Germany was entering a period of political consolidation and industrialization and was thus in transition between traditional agricultural production and widespread factory employment. The disruption of traditional farming activity created a large pool of migrants attracted by promises of land, security and freedom but the

glorification of the frontier by writers and negative perceptions of Canada as a frozen wasteland acted to push people to migrate to southern destinations. The lack of a stable national government in Canada that would work to encourage entry limited the ability of Canada to compete for settlers. From this inauspicious beginning, the author traces the rise in migration to Canada as the nationalist influence of Bismark in the German political scene, rapid industrialization, and the destabilization of the position of ethnic Germans residing in Poland, the Ukraine and other countries prompted people to move toward a source of stability and economic promise. The establishment of a truly national government in Canada, civil war in the United States, technological advances that made travel less burdensome and expensive, and the opening of the west to settlement acted to pull many of these migrants into the new frontier between 1860 and 1890. Periods of global economic downturn slowed the flow of people to North America but free land policies, the active encouragement of advertising and propaganda by the Canadian government to attract immigrants to settle the west to protect it from American expansionism, and the completion of railways across the continent eventually overcame this lull and encouraged the movement of hundreds of thousands of Germans into the land rich prairies from 1890 until the start of WWI. This flood of German and other European migrants changed the face of Canada by reducing the level of English domination, bringing fresh and industrious people into the Canadian economy, and stimulating the growth of industry while expanding the flow of agricultural products. A similar analysis of the post-war period is also provided by Wagner.

Weaving such factors into a theory of migration based on the push and pull influences of political and economic policy and technological change between departure and destination countries provides insight that helps to explain shifting patterns of travel. This is not an original idea but Wagner's study contributes support for this theory while adding to our understanding of Canadian history. Historians, who study the impact of political policy, economic change, and the impact of technological advances, and scholars intrigued by migration flows will all find something of value in this book.

If this book may be said to have any shortcomings, they are self-confessed deficiencies. Wagner advises us from the outset that he has no intention of dealing with social issues or the fate of those which politics and economics brought to Canadian shores and he does not disappoint in that regard. Statistics and broad discussions of macro influences on migration are the staple of this text. While some may prefer to see more depth in his study, through the use of stories from individual migrants that would personalize the process, the author does not lead the reader to expect this sort of detail. Rather, he provides a clear picture of conflicting factors which drive migration, supports his theoretical position, and provides a study that may be used by others with differing interests as a starting point for additional study.

For those interested in exploring the more personal, sociological, and local political and economic aspects of the settlement process, a large number of

excellent books exist. With content ranging from stories of individual pioneering efforts, the economic shifts that influenced population movements within Canada, and the influence of continuing technological advances on settlement and subsequent population moves from rural to urban centres, every intellect may be satisfied. However, Wagner's study identifies the foundation on which such studies are built; the political, economic, and technological factors that pushed and pulled people from established cultures and nations to take part in the exploitation of a new territory and thus deserves a place on the shelves of anyone attracted by these themes.

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