

BOOKREVIEWS

Carlotta R. Anderson. *All-American Anarchist: Joseph A. Labadie and the Labor Movement.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998. ISBN 0-8143-2707-9

Carlotta Anderson's monograph on her grandfather Jo Labadie is a work of love. Her devotion and affection for the man and his work are apparent on almost every page. Yet the book is much more. As its title and subtitle indicate, Anderson's book is at once a biography of Joseph A. Labadie, a story of urban America in the late nineteenth century, a study of anarchism in the United States, and a chronicle of the American labor movement in its earliest phases. At times, particularly in the beginning, the sheer complexity of the relationships between Labadie's life, anarchism, and emerging labor organizations like the Knights of Labor is in fact nothing short of bewildering. Yet as Anderson painstakingly outlines the growth and development of each of her subjects, a fuller, clearer picture emerges. By the time Jo Labadie reaches middle age and more familiar characters like Samuel Gompers appear in his life, the reader has gained a greater understanding for and appreciation of both the interrelationships involved and their importance in the development of contemporary urban life in post-industrial America.

Anderson's work is well-researched and capably written. She brings to the task a wealth of personal information, including a fascinating array of pictures culled for the most part from family scrapbooks. In addition, she draws on the impressive resources of the Labadie Collection at the University

of Michigan, a collection constituted initially of her grandfather's papers but augmented significantly over the years from a number of different sources until today it is one of the finest repositories anywhere for primary source materials on the history of the American labor movement and anarchism. And she uses her sources effectively, admirably achieving the goal which she sets herself of bringing "Jo Labadie and his time and place to life in a way that will be of interest to the general reader as well as the scholar" (14).

Anderson deftly steers a path between the detail on organizations, persons, and philosophical points of view that would interest scholars of the labor movement and related historical and sociological phenomena and the personal anecdotes about Jo Labadie and his beloved Sophie, the outspoken social anarchist and his devout Catholic wife, which might claim the attention of the general reader. The undertaking is, of course, not without its dangers; one risks leaving both types of readers unsatisfied.

For the most part, however, Anderson successfully negotiates the terrain. There are moments in the early chapters when the reader looks in vain for more detail on the newly wed Labadies and their young family, and the scholar will likely lament missed opportunities in the portrayal of Terence Powderly, the autocratic and controversial leader of the Knights of Labor, and the notorious Emma Goldman, queen of the anarchists and the leading advocate of free love at the time. Despite the tantalizing detail on Powderly, it is difficult to form a complete picture of the man or even Labadie's opin-

ion of him. With Goldman one notices the discrepancy between Labadie's recollection of certain events involving "red Emma" and Goldman's own account in her autobiography many years later. Yet Anderson, having set the scene for a unique independent appraisal of one of America's most controversial social activists based on the documents and information at her disposal, stops short of a judgment. Once again, it is even difficult to gauge Labadie's own attitude toward Goldman. In large part, however, Anderson succeeds in meeting the dual demands of her readership. Particularly in the later chapters, as the story of Jo Labadie reaches into the twentieth century, Anderson offers up an engrossing tale which will command the attention of any reader.

The physical volume itself is well laid out. Scholars may encounter some difficulty in trying to coordinate the endnotes with the appropriate sections of text as the running chapter heads carry the title of the respective chapter while the notes refer to a chapter by number, which in the text proper only appears at the beginning of each chapter. To be fair, however, the location and identification of the notes will probably not disturb the general reader, who will not have to consult them to understand the text. It is a shame, on the other hand, that it is not more readily apparent that the various verses, mottos, and aphorisms that grace the beginning of each chapter all stem from the hand of Jo Labadie himself.

All in all, Anderson's biography of Joseph A. Labadie, the gentle anarchist, is a thoroughly engaging and informative contribution to the literature. Although Anderson makes no claim to providing more than a long-needed biography of her grandfather for both professional historian and layman alike, she has significantly

advanced our understanding of the philosophical modes of thought and social mechanisms which lay behind the industrialization of the United States.

Antonius Holtmann, ed. *Ferner thue ich euch zu wissen...: Die Briefe des Johann Heinrich zur Oevesfe aus Amerika 1834-1876*. Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1995. ISBN 3-86108-277-2

This is a fascinating if somewhat complex volume. Although on the surface the work purports to be a thoroughly annotated collection of the letters of nineteenth-century German immigrant Johann Heinrich zur Oeveste to relatives back home in Oldenburg, it is, in fact, three separate but integrated pieces. Antonius Holtmann's learned introduction not only details the genesis and development of the project which led to the publication of zur Oeveste's letters but provides an erudite and sweeping review of the history of German emigration during the nineteenth century. The only possible drawback to the introductory section might be the density of Holtmann's prose. His command of the field is sovereign, and his prose style in German masterly, but reading that part of the text may prove a challenge for all but the most knowledgeable, both in their command of German and their knowledge of immigration history.

The second section, on the other hand, will be accessible to a broad cross section of readers. Holtmann promises to let zur Oeveste speak for himself through his letters and delivers on that promise. There are many footnotes, certainly, but the page design is such that the notes complement the letters they annotate rather than complicate the reading process. Johann Oeveste's style is simple and straightforward. The text is riddled with quaint and antiquated spellings, failed attempts at rendering English

names phonetically, and many downright mistakes, yet all of that seems only to add to the charm. The reader is fascinated by the tale of one family's history in its new homeland.

The third section is basically a glossary of terms which elucidate the social, political, and economic circumstances both in the adoptive American and the native European homeland. Taken together with the notes, this section provides a wealth of informa-

tion on the immigration to the United States from German-speaking lands.

In all, this volume has much to offer. With a modicum of training in German and a small portion of historical awareness any reader will find zur Oeveste's letters an entrancing read. For those willing and able to venture further, the introduction, notes, and glossary provide their own reward in the sheer volume of useful information they supply.

— Randall Donaldson
Loyola College in Maryland

