



In Their Own Words: Letters from Norwegian Immigrants

Zempel

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For most Norwegians in the nineteenth century, America was a remote and exotic place until the first immigrants began to write home. Their letters were among the most valuable, accessible, and reliable sources of information about the new world and the journey to it. For many immigrants, writing letters home was their most cherished opportunity to communicate their thoughts and feelings in their native language.

Through vivid translations of letters written to family and friends between 1870 and 1945, *In Their Own Words* traces the stories of nine Norwegian immigrants: farmer, fisherman, gold miner, politician, unmarried mother, housewife, businessman, railroad worker, contractor. Their common bond was the experience of immigration and acculturation, but their individual experiences were manifested in a wide variety of forms.

Solveig Zempel has thoughtfully selected and translated letters rich in personal description and observation to present each writer's subjective view of historical events. Often focusing on the minutiae of daily life and the feelings of the individual immigrant, the letters form a complex, intimate, and colorful mosaic of the immigrant world.

Solveig Zempel is chair of the Norwegian Department at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota.



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