

*Becoming German: The 1709 Palatine Migration to New York.* By PHILIP OTTERNESS. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004. 256 pages. \$39.95 (cloth).

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The long trek of the 1709 Palatine migrants from the Rhineland to the Hudson and Mohawk valleys is one of the great stories in the history of immigration to colonial America, and one that Philip Otterness tells with alacrity and depth. Indeed, the history of the Palatines includes many stock elements of immigration myths: a group of destitute refugees tossed about Western Europe and the British Atlantic by false promises, haughty German princes, insensitive British officials, and the elusive dream of a better life in the New World. One can see how easily a retelling of this story could slide into cliché, yet Otterness generally succeeds in breaking down tenacious stereotypes that were coined by the Palatines' contemporaries and sometimes manipulated by the immigrants themselves. Most notably, the immigrants originated not only in the Palatinate proper but also in a diverse array of principalities in the German southwest; further, they did not flee popish persecution as British Protestants believed. In fact many of the immigrants were Catholics and interdenominational marriages were common. Unfortunately, Otterness rejoins the myth makers at the end of his story. By following the paradigm of resistance and assimilation that is so common in studies of minority groups in America, he perpetuates the myth of a vanishing German immigrant culture. Otterness fails to assess the Palatines' influence on the development of colonial North America; thus, his study gravitates toward the elegiac conclusion that "the 1710 immigrants largely faded from American memory" (165).

*Becoming German* is an event-driven book whose basic story deserves considerable attention. At the end of the seventeenth century, peasants and artisans in the German southwest had been predisposed toward emigration by repeated warfare, the persistence of feudal obligations, and "long-term economic instability" (23). When recent emigrant Joshua Kocherthal reported in a widely circulated book that Queen Anne granted German immigrants free passage and land in the Carolinas, he triggered a mass exodus of almost fifteen thousand men, women, and children. After traveling to Rotterdam in the spring and summer of 1709, Palatine migrants petitioned English officials for passage to London. In England the Whig government favored a liberal immigration policy and welcomed thousands of Germans whom they had neither encouraged nor expected. The English government placed the Palatines in camps outside London but soon became bogged down in a debate over the proper mode and place of settling the immigrants. Initially, the English population championed the so-called poor Palatines as hard-working Protestant refugees fleeing French persecution. Londoners even traveled to witness the spectacle of the German camps outside their city. Eventually, the recognition that the Palatines were seeking fortunes rather than freedom of conscience turned the immigrants into nuisances in the minds of their English benefactors.

The story turns ugly at this point. Violent threats against the migrants urged a quick solution to the German problem. Thousands of Catholics refusing to convert were shipped back to Rotterdam. The commission in charge of settling the remaining Protestant Palatines sent about a quarter to Ireland and several hundred to New Bern, North Carolina. Over half the Carolina settlers perished during the voyage and many others died in conflicts with Tuscarora Indians. Finally, the Board of Trade in conjunction with New York governor Robert Hunter hatched a plan for employing the remaining three thousand Palatines to produce tar and pitch in the Hudson valley, giving only vague assurances of free land in the province. In late 1710 Hunter and the Germans entered a tug and pull war of intimidation and resistance. Feeling betrayed by British authorities, the Germans only agreed to work on the naval stores project after several demonstrations of force by Hunter.

Unable to manage an uncertain financial future and the recalcitrance of his German workers, Hunter abandoned the project only two years after its inception. He told the Germans to shift for themselves but stay within arm's reach of the provincial government. Relatively unencumbered by outside control, the New York immigrants began to disperse. Otterness follows the most coherent group to the Schoharie region in central New York. Attracted by rumors that Hunter had originally reserved this area for German settlement, Palatine families established their farms without legal title but with explicit invitation from the neighboring Mohawk. Suspicious of the Germans' extralegal acquisition of land and their friendly relations with the Indians, Hunter granted the Schoharie lands to several English investors who ultimately succeeded in expelling the Germans or selling them the land at high prices. Under Hunter's successor the displaced groups gained proper titles for lands along the upper Mohawk, where they established permanent settlements such as Burnetsfield and Stone Arabia. In these independent towns, Otterness argues, the Palatine immigrants vehemently resisted outside interference until the upheavals of the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. Forced to defend their new homes, the Palatines largely abandoned a German identity they had forged only during the previous generation and became citizens of the American Republic.

Though tracing a sad story of hope, loss, and suffering, Otterness describes the dehumanizing effects of the migration on the Palatines without turning them into silent victims. He relies on German sources as much as possible and pays attention to oral or folk histories circulating among the descendants of the 1709 Palatine settlers. The book succeeds in uncovering the agency immigrants retained despite overwhelming obstacles. Otterness analyzes, for instance, how Palatines redeployed stereotypes forced on them to gain leverage among English authorities. To complicate the blanket label Palatine, he assembled an extensive database from various censuses, lists, and the works of Henry Z. Jones (whose genealogical research over the last two decades has traced most of the New York Palatines back to their places of origin). Thus, Otterness fleshes out the lives of immigrants with a specificity that eluded contemporary observers. He argues that the Palatines developed a common *German* identity through the process of migration, marginalization, resistance, and settlement. Having little in common other than the German language (spoken in various regional dialects), the Palatines fused their shared migration experience with the prejudices and misconceptions they encountered into a new identity.

To make this point, however, Otterness exaggerates the significance of differences among the Palatines. After all, similar social conditions as well as the promises of a single promotional book, Kocherthal's *Ausführlich, und Umständlicher Bericht von der berühmten Landschaft Carolina* (1706, 1709), were able to motivate large numbers of Palatines to leave their homes. Otterness also seems to overreach in calling the Palatines' process of developing such an identity as "becoming German." Nothing in his book substantiates the assumption that the immigrants in New York developed a national consciousness that was still lacking among "family and friends they left behind in the disparate principalities of the Holy Roman Empire" (2). What Otterness actually describes is the process of becoming *German American*, no matter how much he follows a dichotomy of resistance and assimilation that seems to preclude hybrid identities.