

BOOK REVIEW

Lorraine Esterly Pierce, *Marching Through Immanuel's Ground: the Evangelical Church on the Minnesota Prairie*. East Lansing, MI: RLE Press, 1999. 244 pp. \$19.95.

I met Lorraine Esterly Pierce as she set out to write something, just what was not clear, about the Evangelical Church on the Minnesota prairie. Pierce had spent her early years in the Evangelical parsonage in Wells, a farming community close to the Iowa border. When a teenager, her father expected a new appointment. Two possibilities were suggested, Bellingham, another farming community, near South Dakota, or West St. Paul, a first ring suburb of the state capitol, St. Paul. The Esterly family moved to West St. Paul, leading Lorraine to wonder what her life would have been like had she completed her secondary education in rural Minnesota instead of a large city high school. This personal motivation plus a curiosity as to how her former Evangelical United Brethren colleagues felt 30 years after the EUB/Methodist union led to the writing of *Marching Through Immanuel's Ground: the Evangelical Church on the Minnesota Prairie*.

Pierce studies 22 congregations clustered in three areas on the south central, southwest, and west central borders of Minnesota with Iowa and South Dakota. She places them in the context of Evangelical life from the 1850s on, moving through transitions of: 1) language (German to English); 2) demographics (country to town); 3) mission (town and country to urban); and 4) denomination (mergers with United Brethren, then Methodist).

Pierce cites appropriate primary and secondary sources. Better yet, she interviewed many people, lay and clergy, most of whom became United Methodist through the Evangelical tradition (for the younger folks, the Evangelical United Brethren). She reminds the reader that almost all the interviewees are faithful United Methodists today. She tells their stories: the not always easy transition from the use of German to English; the tension between rural and urban areas after World War II when *conference* officials felt it time to plant new congregations in cities; and the loss of the close-knit EUB connection after the union with the Methodists. Interestingly, at the 1946 denominational merger of the Evangelical and United Brethren Churches in Minnesota, the Evangelical Church was by far the larger of the two, leading to some of the same types of tension found in 1968 as Minnesota EUBs joined the larger Methodist Church.

Although based on experiences of a select group of congregations in only one conference, *Marching Through Immanuel's Ground* is good reading for anyone who values local history as a means to expand understanding. Best of all, Pierce documents a portion of our history in a way that invites thoughtful discussion and comparison rather than recrimination.

THELMA BALLINGER BOEDER
Minneapolis, MN