

# The Minnesota School and Immigration History at Midwestern Land Grant Universities, 1890–2005

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## Abstract

This article offers an alternative genealogy for American immigration history. It traces the origins of the methods and analytical interests of the new social historians of immigration in the 1960s and 1970s to the early work of immigration historians at midwestern land grant universities. At the University of Minnesota, historian Theodore Blegen introduced a long-term legacy of 'history from the bottom up,' privileging the building of archives and the building of collaborations among first and second generation academics, ethnic communities and scholarly research.

## Keywords

immigration – USA – Blegen – Minnesota – history from the bottom up

Given the scholarly interests of the aging but sizeable cohort of 'new' social historians of the United States, it is perhaps no surprise that genealogies of US immigration history typically begin with Harvard University historian Oscar Handlin (1915–2011). In his Pulitzer-prize winning 1951 book *The uprooted*, Handlin analysed the European immigrants whose adaptation to urban and industrial America had first fascinated sociologists at the University of Chicago three decades earlier and who would continue to fascinate the new

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social historians of the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps paradoxically, however, the new social historians' 'bottom-up' methods and analytical interests in ethnic communities little resembled Handlin's; instead they rather closely replicated and extended to urban immigrants the work of a less well-known and earlier group of immigration historians that I will call the 'Minnesota School'.<sup>2</sup>

In 1999 Jon Gjerde (1953–2008) included several early Minnesota historians of immigration among the group he labelled 'ethnic Turnerians'.<sup>3</sup> As Gjerde's label suggested, the ethnic Turnerians were historians of the Midwest and of rural immigration; most had either studied with Frederick Jackson Turner (1861–1932) or had written dissertations later under the supervision of Turner's earliest PhD students, many of whom found positions at the rapidly expanding public universities of the Midwest between 1900 and 1930. This paper explores the vision and long-term legacy – stretching into our own times – of immigration historians whose distinctive ideas and approaches to scholarship found their fullest institutionalisation at the University of Minnesota.<sup>4</sup> At Minnesota, and to a lesser extent other large public universities of the middle west, histories of immigration differed from both the accounts of assimilation written by the sociologists at the University of Chicago and from the poetic tale of marginality, alienation and loss that accompanied peasant immigrants' confrontation with modern, urban American society as told by Oscar Handlin. Evidence even suggests that historians of the Minnesota School were aware of their distinctive approach and also, on occasion at least, expressed frustration at not gaining recognition as founders and builders of the scholarly field.

This essay asks readers to consider how the land grant mission of public universities shaped the Minnesota School's vision of immigration history. Under the

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1 In an obituary, the *Washington Post* declared Handlin the 'father of immigration studies', 22 September 2011: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/historian-oscar-handlin-was-considered-the-father-of-immigration-study/2011/09/22/gIQAhMHXOK\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/historian-oscar-handlin-was-considered-the-father-of-immigration-study/2011/09/22/gIQAhMHXOK_story.html) (accessed 18 July 2015). See also the Special Issue on Handlin and his influence, *Journal of American Ethnic History* 32:3 (Spring 2013) 6–77.

2 I want to acknowledge that the Minnesota School may have still deeper roots in the work of such historians as the University of Wisconsin's Albert Bernhardt Faust (1870–1951), the University of Illinois's George Tobias Flom (1871–1960) and Kendrick Charles Babcock (1864–1932) who taught at the Universities of Minnesota and Illinois. All were sons of immigrants. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for calling my attention to these little known scholars.

3 Jon Gjerde, 'New growth on old vines: the state of the field: the social history of immigration to and ethnicity in the United States', *Journal of American Ethnic History* 18:4 (Summer 1999) 40–65.

4 Donna Gabaccia, 'The Minnesota School of immigration and refugee Studies', Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota <http://www.ihrc.umn.edu/publications/pdf/MinnesotaSchool-1.pdf> (accessed 18 July 2015).

Morrill Act of 1862, land grant universities were created not to ignore classical and scientific education as it had been institutionalised in private, eastern universities such as Harvard and Johns Hopkins but rather to extend higher education to include the liberal and practical development of the farmers and workers of each state.<sup>5</sup> This land grant mission – while certainly also creating frustrating obstacles for several generations of researchers, beginning with Frederick Jackson Turner himself – repeatedly brought immigration historians into regular contact with graduate students of non-elite and immigrant backgrounds and into regular collaboration with local communities of recent immigrants and refugees. Already in the 1920s, the Minnesota School's histories of immigration were defined by the use of local, non-English, immigrant-language archives and by a persistent focus on immigrant ethnicity, subjectivity, experience, and community. The immigration history emerging from public universities such as Minnesota historically nurtured a pluralistic immigrant- and ethnicity-centred history of the United States while scholars such as Handlin and the Chicago sociologists more often viewed the transformation of immigrants into Americans as the foundation for writing national histories or creating general theories of urbanization and immigration.

The hegemony of such diverse interpretations within immigration history has of course varied over time; for the past fifty years pluralistic immigrant-centred histories have prevailed without however altering scholars' genealogies of their own scholarly field and without producing greater acknowledgement for the Minnesota School. It seems especially important at the current moment both to recognise and to understand the legacy of immigration histories produced at land grant, public universities. Financial crises and global integration have produced state legislatures that resist fulfilling land grant obligations through taxation to support public education; increasingly, graduate programs, publishing, and research programs at public universities are starved for resources and diminishing in size.<sup>6</sup> Such changes cannot but affect the future evolution of a scholarly field that has thrived in such places.

### Early Immigration History in the Midwest

Examining the lives and writings of the Minnesota School in dialogue with Gjerde's category of ethnic Turnerians creates new perspectives on the origins

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5 Allan Nevins, *The origins of the land-grant colleges and state universities: a brief account of the Morrill Act of 1862 and its results* (Washington D.C. 1962).

6 Eric Kelderman, 'Reaching a milestone, land grant universities examine their mission, in the past and in the future', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 20, 2011 <http://chronicle.com/article/Land-Grant-Universities-to/127959/> (accessed 18 August 2015).

and development of immigration history as a scholarly field, while highlighting the varieties of immigration history that scholars have produced over time. Contrasting the approaches adopted by immigration historians at Minnesota and other Midwestern land grant universities to those of scholars at private, often east coast universities shows obvious differences already in the 1920s. Attention to immigration histories produced by Minnesota School scholars not only extends and deepens Gjerde's analysis of the ethnic Turnerians but also – much like the other essays in this topical issue – contextualises the variety immigration research produced in the United States prior to Handlin's publication of *The Uprooted* in 1951, offering alternative genealogies of a scholarly field.

In 1890, Frederick Jackson Turner, a twenty-nine-year-old Wisconsin native, returned from his studies in the east to create a history graduate program at the University of Wisconsin. Turner had just completed a Johns Hopkins University doctoral dissertation on the Indian fur trade in Wisconsin under the direction of Herbert Baxter Adams (1850–1901). While Turner's mentor had sought the origins of American democracy in the forests of northern Europe (in the so called Teutonic 'germ theory') and in colonial America, Turner – in his famous and still influential (if disputed) paper of 1893 – shifted attention to the making of American democracy on the frontier, emphasising soil over seed.<sup>7</sup> For the next thirty years many of Turner's students pursued their mentor's interests in land and in the European settlement of Midwestern frontiers.

Jon Gjerde was the first historian to suggest that Turner, with his focus on the frontier, played a role – however indirect – in creating immigration history. Turner's intellectual influence may have been less important than the social characteristics of students he attracted. In a development that would continue at land grant and public universities in our own times, a goodly number of Turner's early PhD students – among them, George Stephenson (1883–1953), Carl Wittke (1892–1971) and Marcus Lee Hansen (1892–1938), all of whom eventually also taught at Midwestern land grant universities (respectively Minnesota, Case Western Reserve and Illinois) – were the children of immigrant parents. In service to their states, the universities that employed Turner and many of his students also admitted women: Turner for example trained many women historians at Wisconsin, where women were admitted already in 1863.<sup>8</sup> Turner continued to train historians after

7 Ray Allen Billington, 'How the frontier shaped the American character', *American Heritage, The Magazine of History* 9 (April 1958) 4, 7–9, 86–89.

8 Women's historians have noted the many women frequenting Turner's seminars in Madison, but none has yet acknowledged or written about Kate Apaphine Everest Levi, one of Turner's first students to complete a PhD. Levi was not only the first American women to earn a PhD 'from an organized graduate school' anywhere in the United States she was also the writer of the first American immigration history dissertation, focused on Wisconsin's Germans.

he transferred to Harvard from Wisconsin in 1910 but at that institution far fewer were the children of immigrants and none were women. Many of the identifying characteristics of the Minnesota School emerged from public universities' openness to immigrants and other marginalized groups of students.

In the years preceding and following the First World War, George Stephenson and Theodore C. Blegen (1891–1969) developed immigration history at the University of Minnesota, where both taught and published, into a Minnesota School. The two men were contemporaries of the better-known University of Chicago sociologists (the inventors of assimilation theory) and considerably older than Oscar Handlin. Both were sons of immigrants to the Midwest. Stephenson's parents were Swedish farmers in Iowa and Stephenson was a first generation college graduate.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, Theodore Blegen was the son of well-educated Norwegian immigrants living in Minneapolis, where his father was a professor at Augsburg College.<sup>10</sup> Stephenson earned his BA at Wisconsin but then followed Frederick Jackson Turner to Harvard to complete his PhD. Stephenson's dissertation, which focused on Midwestern land policy, clearly reflected Turner's intellectual influence.<sup>11</sup> Blegen was instead only Turner's 'academic grandchild': his PhD mentor at the University of Minnesota, Solon Buck (1884–1962) had, like Stephenson, completed a PhD (in 1911) after following Turner from Wisconsin to Harvard. (After directing the Minnesota Historical Society, Buck later became the second Archivist for the United States; his intellectual influence on Blegen would prove to be far more profound than Turner's.) Blegen's 1925 dissertation focused on neither the Midwest nor on immigrants

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Like many well-educated women of her generation, Levi did not find a university teaching position after completing her PhD. William Hesseltine and Louis Kaplan, 'Women Doctors of Philosophy in History', *The Journal of Higher Education* 14: 5 (May 1943) 254–299. Although she titled her article 'Frederick Jackson Turner overlooked the ladies', Glenda Riley acknowledges the many female students Turner trained, and includes a picture of Turner surrounded by his students – over half of them women and almost certainly including Levi in the group – at the Wisconsin Historical Library, *Journal of the Early Republic* 13:2 (Summer 1993) 216–230. Thanks to Erika Lee for reminding me about this picture, which is part of the collections of the Wisconsin Historical Society.

- 9 H. Arnold Barton, *Swedish Roots: The legacy of George M. Stephenson, pioneer and patriot* (Swedesburg Iowa 2001). See also Kevin Proescheldt, 'The prolific pen of George M. Stephenson: an annotated bibliography', *Swedish American Historical Quarterly* [http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/ref/collection/npu\\_sahq/id/4788](http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/ref/collection/npu_sahq/id/4788) (accessed 18 August 2015).
- 10 John T. Flanagan, *Theodore C. Blegen: A memoir*, Volume IV, Authors Series of the Norwegian-American Historical Association (Northfield, Minn. 1977). See also Carlton C. Qualey, 'Theodore Blegen', *Norwegian American Studies and Records* 21 (1962) 3–13.
- 11 George M. Stephenson, *The political history of the public lands from 1840 to 1862. From pre-emption to homestead* (Boston, 1917).

but rather on 'Nativism and the American Party'.<sup>12</sup> Well before Blegen finished his dissertation and joined the University of Minnesota History faculty (in 1927), he had published articles on immigration. Stephenson, too, had been teaching and writing about immigration for quite some time by the 1920s.

But so had a fourth Midwestern son of immigrants, the Ohio native Arthur Schlesinger, sr. (1888–1965), whose career and legacy would shape decades of differences between the Minnesota historians and their Harvard oriented colleagues and whom Gjerde does not include among the ethnic Turnerians. In 1925 (like Turner, whom he replaced) Schlesinger left his Midwestern land grant professorships (at first Ohio State and then the University of Iowa) for a position at Harvard, where he taught social and urban history and where he subsequently trained Oscar Handlin.<sup>13</sup> A comparison of the scholarly publications of Blegen, Stephenson and Schlesinger suggests both how diverse immigration history was already thirty years before the publication of *The uprooted* and how immigration historians positioned themselves in relationship to Turner and his influential thesis. Blegen's 'Ole Rynning's true account of America'<sup>14</sup> appeared first in 1917, followed by Schlesinger's 'Significance of immigration in American history' in 1921<sup>15</sup> and Stephenson's *History of American immigration, 1820–1924* in 1926.<sup>16</sup> All three historians wrote in response to the intense national political debates over immigration restriction that bracketed the First World War. Stephenson's book on 'immigration as a factor in American political development', especially seemed structured to inform those debates. Political context mattered more than Turner's thesis although all three arguably differentiated themselves from Turner by suggesting that it was immigration or cities rather than the frontier that shaped American life, character and exceptionalism. Indeed, the word frontier does not appear in Blegen's publication and even Stephenson gives his mentor only a single, brief mention. Schlesinger

12 Oddly, given Blegen's prolific record of publication as a graduate student, his dissertation research was never published. A copy, undated, is in 'Theodore Christian Blegen Papers', University Archives, University of Minnesota.

13 See Schlesinger's autobiography: Arthur Schlesinger, *In retrospect: The history of a historian* (New York 1963). Schlesinger was the son of a Jewish German father and a Catholic Austrian mother; his parents converted and raised him as a Protestant. Schlesinger wrote a dissertation on colonial merchants at Columbia University while teaching at Ohio State University (his alma mater).

14 Theodore C. Blegen, 'Ole Rynning's True Account of America', *Minnesota History Magazine* 2 (1917) 220–269.

15 Schlesinger, 'Significance of American immigration', *American Journal of Sociology* 27:1 (July, 1921) 71–85, 72.

16 George M. Stephenson, *History of American immigration, 1820–1924* (Boston 1926).

addressed Turner most directly when he argued that 'the two grand themes of American history are, properly, the influence upon American life and institutions, and the influence of the American environment, especially the frontier in the early days and the industrial integration of more recent times, upon the ever-changing composite population'. Still, in Schlesinger's view, it was the frontier and industrial integration and not immigration itself that figured among the most active transformative agents of American history. More than the other two historians, furthermore, Blegen seemed mainly interested in understanding how immigrants viewed America; his was by far the most immigrant-centred of the three early publications in immigration history.

Despite their broadly similar focus on immigration, these three early publications illustrated differences in immigration history that would persist in differentiating historical knowledge produced within public and private universities. Blegen began 'Ole Rynning's *True Account*' by calling for 'An intensive study of the separate immigrant groups which have streamed into America'.<sup>17</sup> Stephenson too offered separate chapters on UK, Scandinavian, German, Dutch, Italian, Jewish, Slavic, Chinese, and Japanese immigrants; he told the diverse stories of each group rather than focusing exclusively on nativist reactions to foreigners as a group or on the political activities that united immigrants across ethnic lines. By contrast, Schlesinger's essay privileged the history of colonial America, east coast settlements, and the earliest, largely English-speaking settlers. Devoting far less attention to particular ethnic groups, Schlesinger focused, as had Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur before him, on the mixing or 'interracial' relations among European immigrants, since it was these interactions that, in Schlesinger's view, and not their separate histories, that produced a distinctive American nation.<sup>18</sup>

While all three authors positioned their histories of immigration within a broader geography, they did so in ways that revealed tensions between pluralist and national interpretations of immigration. Blegen documented how Ole Rynning's account was carried back to Norway, and became an important source of information for subsequent chain migrations of Norwegians. Stephenson explored in separate chapters the European and Asian backgrounds that motivated the emigration of particular groups. (His inclusion of both trans-Pacific and trans-Atlantic immigrants and both northern and southern European immigrants within a single volume was a particularly pointed critique of US immigration

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17 Blegen, 'Ole Rynning's *True Account of America*', 221.

18 In fact, when Schlesinger returned to the theme of immigration history in his 1942 address as President of the American Historical Association, he drew on Crèvecoeur's question 'What then is the American, this New Man?' for his title.

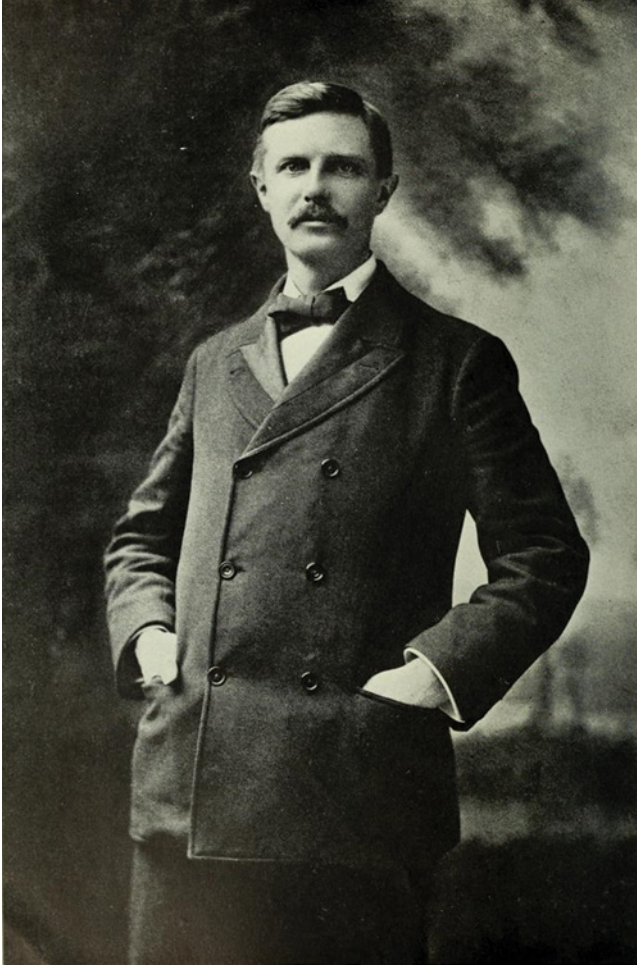


FIGURE 1 *Frederick Jackson Turner*

[HTTPS://UPLOAD.WIKIMEDIA.ORG/WIKIPEDIA/COMMONS/6/6D/  
PICTURE\\_OF\\_FREDERICK\\_JACKSON\\_TURNER.JPG](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/6D/Picture_of_Frederick_Jackson_Turner.jpg)

policies which sharply differentiated the excluded Asians from the welcomed Europeans and that further differentiated restricted southern Europeans from essentially unrestricted, desirable northern Europeans.) By contrast, Schlesinger viewed immigration more as a connection between the American nation and the wider world; immigration appears in his essay as a precursor of a Wilsonian vision of the United States as a global power and influence. Schlesinger even concluded his essay with the warning that “Those who, in the discussions over the proposed League of Nations, are advocating the return of the United States to a position of isolation and irresponsibility have failed to grasp the significance of



immigration in American history'.<sup>19</sup> At an early date, then, Schlesinger at Harvard saw immigration as a major theme of American nation-building – or, as his student Handlin would later, more famously, declare, 'immigrants *were* American history' – while the Minnesotans had begun to write the histories of immigrants as distinctive cultural groups and of the United States as a pluralist society.

Blegen's and Stephenson's early work signalled the attention to local, regional and ethnic particularisms that would continue to define the Minnesota School throughout the twentieth century. Over time, Stephenson proved himself a productive but shyer, more conflict-averse scholar than the professionally savvy Blegen, who enjoyed a long career as an institution-builder.<sup>20</sup> The emphasis of land grant universities on teaching and on practical service to state taxpayers certainly also pushed the two historians toward scholarship that remained open to the world beyond the university, responsive to culturally diverse (and often first-generation) international and immigrant-origin students, and – most importantly – focused on the creation of archives where immigrant voices (like Ole Rynning's) could be collected and preserved, often through transnational and town/gown collaborations. The result of their collaboration was the Minnesota School.

The public commitments of Blegen and Stephenson began early. Unlike Schlesinger at Harvard (who was teaching at Ohio State while writing his dissertation), Stephenson had instead taught high school while in graduate school and Blegen too began his professional life as a high school teacher in Milwaukee and in rural Minnesota. As professors at land grant universities, both remained concerned with service to the public schools of their home state and with pedagogy on campus, too. Blegen first wrote for public school teachers as a graduate student, and he continued to write for them intermittently throughout his life.<sup>21</sup> Stephenson's preface to his *History of American immigration* suggested

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19 Schlesinger, 'Significance of American immigration', 85.

20 The volume published in honour of Blegen at the time of his retirement gives a sense of professional networks. Amherst College (and earlier Columbia University) Professor Henry Steele Commager edited *Immigration and American history: essays in honor of Theodore C. Blegen* (Minneapolis 1961). (Commager had originally studied Danish history but had no other obvious social ties to Blegen. Included in the volume were essays from Oscar Handlin at Harvard, Franklin Scott at Northwestern, and Ingrid Semmingsen (who was soon to be appointed Norway's first female professor of history, at the University of Oslo) but most contributors were students or colleagues of Blegen's from the small liberal arts colleges and public universities of the Midwest.

21 See the pamphlet by Theodore C. Blegen, *The correlation of American and Minnesota history: A syllabus of Minnesota history for high school teachers, with a plan for coordinating national and state history* (St. Paul 1923).

an intended readership of students, perhaps among his own undergraduates for the book's first publisher, Ginn, specialised in the production of textbooks.<sup>22</sup> Blegen served as President of the regionally based Mississippi Valley Historical Association (1942–1943), but in the American Historical Association – dominated by the professoriate of the east coast private research universities – he found a leadership role only within a committee on teaching.<sup>23</sup> Both men worked with international students interested in writing histories of emigration or viewing America from the perspectives of Europe. In the 1930s, Stephenson mentored British Commonwealth Fellowship-holder Frank Thistlethwaite<sup>24</sup> while Blegen – as long-time Dean of Minnesota's Graduate School (1941–1960) – authored a report on the special needs of international students a group that, in Minnesota, would have included the many international students from China who found their lives upended by the war after coming to the University of Minnesota to study.<sup>25</sup>

Blegen continued throughout his career to move easily between research and public engagement with local immigrant and ethnic communities while Stephenson eventually abandoned immigration history in part because of his difficulties in navigating that boundary and juggling the kind of service work expected by scholars at land grant institutions. Despite its extensive documentation, impeccable scholarship, and cautious interpretations, Stephenson's *The religious aspects of Swedish immigration*,<sup>26</sup> riled the sensibilities of some local Swedish faithful, creating public controversy.<sup>27</sup> Stephenson did not immediately abandon the study of Swedish immigrants<sup>28</sup> but by 1940 he had begun to shift his attention toward the study of American religion and to shift his focus eastward toward the study American Puritanism.<sup>29</sup> Blegen too began

22 Stephenson, *History of American immigration*, iii.

23 Box 6, Papers of Theodore Blegen. On tensions between the two professional societies, see Ray Billington, 'Tempest in Clio's teapot: The American Historical Association rebellion of 1915', *American Historical Review* 78 (April 1973) 348–369.

24 Thistlethwaite would later write the opening salvo in what became a long, collective and transatlantic campaign for the writing of less US-centric studies of migration, 'Migration from Europe overseas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', *Rapport*, xi International Congress of Historical Sciences (Stockholm 1960).

25 American Council on Education, Committee on Student Personnel Work, *Counseling foreign students* (Washington 1950).

26 George M. Stephenson, *The religious aspects of Swedish immigration* (Minneapolis 1932).

27 Rudolph J. Vecoli, "Over the years I have encountered the hazards and rewards that await the historian of immigration": George Malcolm Stephenson and the Swedish-American community', *Swedish American Historical Quarterly* 51:2 (April 2000) 130–149.

28 George M. Stephenson, *John Lind of Minnesota* (Minneapolis 1935).

29 George M. Stephenson, *The Puritan Heritage* (New York 1952).

quite early to write for broad if also regional, public audiences<sup>30</sup> but unlike Stephenson, he never ceased to do so. When he took over the directorship of the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) from his mentor Solon Buck in 1931, Blegen gained a platform from which to expand his already considerable public role working with Minnesota's ethnic communities. For many years he productively pursued common interests with the Norwegian American Historical Society and with many smaller and local Minnesota historical associations to collect and preserve documents of immigrant life written in languages other than English. When Blegen ended his Superintendency at MHS in 1939, his colleagues noted and praised 'his ideal of carrying the history of Minnesota to the people of the state'.<sup>31</sup> In the process, Blegen became an historian of Minnesota as a culturally plural state and began to advocate for the methods that would be adopted later by social historians of immigration.

Blegen's 1947 book, *Grass roots history*, provided the strongest testament to his intense commitments to a publically oriented and vaguely populist local history focused on the lives of ordinary people, including immigrants. Indeed, Blegen was almost certainly the first historian to use the phrase – 'history from the bottom up' – that would define the methodology preferred by the social historians of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>32</sup> By the time they began writing histories of urban, industrial immigrants 'from the bottom up', however, Blegen's work – focused as it was on the rural inhabitants of Minnesota – seemed unlikely to attract their attention and very few of them acknowledged or cited *Grass roots history*.

Stephenson and Blegen firmly differentiated their own professional and scholarly research methods, based on deep knowledge of bi-lingual archives, from those of amateurs who would later be dismissed as 'filiopietists' and who wrote to celebrate their own origins and their own ancestors' contributions to American life.<sup>33</sup> Both historians believed that the identification, collection, and assessment of documents in which immigrants spoke in their own voices and wrote in their own words – in short, through the establishment of archives that valued and preserved foreign-language materials – was the only firm foundation for a professional historical scholarship of immigration.

30 For a short list of these publications, see Qualey, 'Theodore Blegen'.

31 Arthur J. Larsen and Bertha L. Heilbrun, 'T.C. Blegen and the Historical Society', *Minnesota History Magazine* 20:3 (1940) 287–295, 295.

32 Theodore C. Blegen, *Grass roots history* (Minneapolis 1947); see 'history from the bottom up', 172.

33 The use of the term filio-pietist seems to have originated with Edward N. Saveth's critique of scholars such as Adams and his germ theory, Turner and the social Darwinist nativists who celebrated their Anglo-Saxon ancestors. See Edward N. Saveth, *American historians and European immigrants, 1875–1925* (New York 1948).

Already in the early 1920s, and starting with his own family's archive,<sup>34</sup> Stephenson began collecting and studying letters exchanged among Swedes, hoping to glimpse immigrant life and religion through their eyes rather than those of English-speaking outsiders.<sup>35</sup> Stephenson continued collecting letters during a Guggenheim sojourn in Sweden in 1927.<sup>36</sup> Blegen became an even more ambitious archive-builder, before, during and after his directorship of the MHS. As a high school teacher in Wisconsin in 1918, Blegen had worried in print over the fate of documents held by small immigrant societies, churches, and sectarian colleges, and had argued that 'the solution of the problem is to centralize these Scandinavian materials in some depository which gives assurance of being a permanent institution'.<sup>37</sup> Blegen helped to build the MHS and the Norwegian American Historical Association into such repositories. Following Stephenson's precedent, Blegen also used a Guggenheim fellowship to travel in 1928 to Norway and there, too, he built strong ties to archivists and collectors. Whether it was the intervention of the two North American scholars or the influence of Scandinavian archivists and folklorists that explain how the national archives of Norway and Sweden became such important pioneers in collecting 'America letters' (letters written by immigrants to their friends and family in Europe) is an issue that still demands study.<sup>38</sup> In 1939, commenting on a conference presentation by Stephenson, Blegen revealed still greater ambitions, asking colleagues to 'join hands and prepare a corpus of twenty or more volumes of the America letters' from all groups; he noted that he had been in

34 'Finding Aid, George Malcolm Stephenson Papers', University Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries.

35 See George M. Stephenson, 'Hemlandet letters', *Yearbook of the Swedish Historical Society* (1922–1923) 56–152.

36 The result was his best-known publication in immigration history, George M. Stephenson, 'When America was the land of Canaan', *Minnesota History* 10 (1929) 237–260.

37 Theodore C. Blegen, 'The historical records of the Scandinavians in America', *Minnesota History Bulletin* 2 (May 1918) 413–418; see also his 'Report on the public archives', *Publications of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin Bulletin of Information* no. 94 (Madison 1918). In later years I often heard Rudi Vecoli make comparable promises to local ethnic community groups, stating that donations to the Immigration History Research Center would guarantee the survival of their precious documents 'in perpetuity.'

38 For Blegen's impact on collecting in Norway, see Orm Overland, 'Listening to immigrant voices: Reflections on completing seven volumes of letters from Norwegian immigrants, 1838–1914', in: Oyvind T. Gulliksen and Harry T. Cleven (eds.), *Norwegian American essays 2011*, special issue 'Transnationalism and the Norwegian-American Experience' (Northfield 2011). See also the reflections on Sweden by folklorist Jennifer Atteberry, 'Peasant letters revisited', *Swedish-American Historical Quarterly* 56: 2–3 (2005) 126–140.

discussion with the American Council of Learned Societies and believed it would 'sponsor this job'.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, Blegen's dream remained unfulfilled; timing alone – the Second World War had already started – may have scuttled the project but perhaps it was Blegen's return to teaching in 1939 and his growing administrative duties at the University that turned his attentions elsewhere.

Shortly before Blegen and Stephenson arrived in Norway and Sweden, Marcus Lee Hansen – another of Gjerde's ethnic Turnerians and like Stephenson a Harvard PhD student of Turners' (who was teaching at the time at Smith College, the elite New England women's college) – was also scouring archives in Europe. Unlike the two Minnesotans, however, he visited national archives in Dublin, London, Geneva, Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen, looking for government documents as he prepared to write his book on European migration to the United States. Hansen's relations to Arthur Schlesinger, on the one hand, and to Blegen and Stephenson, on the other, illustrate how starkly visions for immigration history continued to diverge at Harvard and at Minnesota into the 1930s and 1940s. One of Frederick Jackson Turner's last PhD students at Harvard, Hansen too was a Midwestern son of immigrants – a mixed marriage of a Danish father and a Norwegian mother. Unlike Blegen and Stephenson, Hansen rarely wrote about his parents' groups; his 1927 visit to his father's birthplace in Denmark seems to have been a sentimental, not a scholarly one.<sup>40</sup>

With support for his travels from the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) Hansen aimed to write an immigration history that followed Schlesinger's supposedly grander, national vision of immigration history. (Indeed, Schlesinger had sat on the SSRC Council that had awarded Hansen the grant.)<sup>41</sup> Hansen succinctly expressed the differences of the two visions when he critically reviewed one of Blegen's books in 1932.<sup>42</sup> Hansen acknowledged Blegen's careful, archival research but he nevertheless worried that 'the foresight that gathers and preserves the records, the funds that support research and publication, and the individual persistence that carries through any particular enterprise are largely semipatriotic'. Any patriotism that was not national and American but rather ethnic was, in Hansen's eyes, implicitly provincial or divisive. Even 'semi-patriotism' seemed suspect to Hansen because, he continued, 'the student of

39 'Comments on GMS paper', Box 17, Blegen Papers.

40 C. Frederick Hansen, 'Marcus Lee Hansen – historian of immigration', *Common Ground* (June 1942) 87–94.

41 Kenneth W. Worcester, *Social Science Research Council, 1923–1998*, reprinting *Social Science Research Council: The First Fifty Years* (New York 2001) 26.

42 See the review of Theodore C. Blegen, *Norwegian migration to America, 1825–1860* (Northfield 1931) by Hansen in *The American Historical Review* 37: 3 (April 1932) 572–573.

American history is not interested primarily in nationalities. The significance of [migration] is broader than the experiences of detached groups'. For Hansen, as for Schlesinger, earlier, and for Oscar Handlin, somewhat later, immigration history was to be American, national history, not pluralist, ethnic history.

Despite these intellectual differences and despite his ongoing ties to Harvard, Hansen – much like Blegen and Stephenson – found a permanent position at a public, land grant university – the University of Illinois. But unlike Minnesota's Stephenson (who was also a Harvard graduate and student of Turner's), Hansen's professional relationships and vision for immigration history remained oriented eastward even after he moved west; his closest ties remained to colleagues and mentors at the private, eastern universities. He was not tempted to develop a kind of grass roots history or to build community-based archives of the kind developed in Minnesota despite his work at a large public university. These ties to the east and to Harvard became especially clear after Hansen's very premature death in 1938. Harvard's Arthur Schlesinger promptly edited the younger man's very rough manuscript for publication by Harvard University Press<sup>43</sup> and Hansen's *The Atlantic migration* subsequently won the first Pulitzer Prize awarded to a book on immigration history. A second manuscript Hansen was developing was also published – this time by Yale University Press – after extensive interventions and editing by a Columbia University co-author, John Brebner.<sup>44</sup> Schlesinger also edited a collection of Hansen's essays, for which Oscar Handlin prepared an introduction; again, Harvard University Press published the book.<sup>45</sup> While the Minnesotans published with regional presses in the Midwest or with textbook publishers, the influence of Harvard helped to give immigration history as written by Hansen a nationwide readership and public acclaim.

George Stephenson subsequently reviewed Hansen's posthumous books; reading between the lines one sees in his review a simmering tension between the two groups of historians over their different understandings of the proper focus for immigration history. Of *The Atlantic migration*, Stephenson had much positive to say but he also complained about a misleading title (since the book focused largely on British and German population movements) and about Hansen's lack of interest in 'the souls and minds of the humble men and women', who constituted this great migration. Predictably, Stephenson attributed Hansen's

43 Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Atlantic migration, 1607–1860* (Cambridge, Mass., 1940).

44 *The mingling of the Canadian and American peoples: Vol. 1: Historical* by Marcus Lee Hansen, completed and prepared for publication by John Bartlet Brebner (New Haven 1940).

45 Marcus Lee Hansen, *The immigrant in American history* (Cambridge 1940).

disinterest in the humble to the author's 'reliance on official and more conventional documents'.<sup>46</sup> Hansen, Stephenson seemed to hint, had not consulted the more immigrant-centred archives that he and Blegen had devoted their lives to building.

Later in his life, Blegen's resentments of Hansen could also be sensed in his mild rebuke to a close colleague who had dated the beginning of immigration history to a 1926 review article written by Hansen. He reminded his correspondent that 'George [Stephenson] and I, as you know, were both working in the field long before 1926. I think it perhaps fair to say that neither one of us was particularly influenced by either Schlesinger or Hansen' and added parenthetically 'Just for your eye: George had little regard for Hansen'.<sup>47</sup> Today, historians might well see in Blegen's side comments a good example of the kind of passive aggressive code of positive speaking that locals today term 'Minnesota Nice'. Blegen almost certainly in this case deflected onto Stephenson (who was already dead) his own competition with the also dead, but still much-better-known and celebrated Hansen.

In a far more provocative article written a few years later, the Minnesotan and student of Blegen, Carlton Qualey (1904–1988), dropped all pretence at diplomacy in discussing Hansen and his work. Qualey openly challenged Hansen's scholarly authority and legacy, referring to the posthumous enthusiasm of Hansen's 'promoters' at Harvard, positively quoting Oscar Handlin's reference to Schlesinger's 'creative editing' of Hansen's manuscripts and suggesting that the easterners had routinely and wilfully ignored the intellectual achievements of the Minnesotans. According to Qualey, 'In reply to my inquiry [in 1937, the year before Hansen's death] about the state of his general history of immigration [Hansen] stated firmly that the manuscript was on the shelf indefinitely for complete rewriting'. Marcus Hansen was 'well served by his friends and colleagues', Qualey then concluded somewhat bitterly of the deceased man's east-coast connections to private universities such as Columbia, Yale, and Harvard.<sup>48</sup> Although

46 Stephenson's review appeared in *Minnesota History*, 21:3 (September 1940) 299–300.

47 'June 7, 1962, Letter from Blegen to O. Fritiof Ander', Box 4, General Correspondence, 1962, Blegen Papers. Ander (1903–1978) was an immigrant historian from Sweden who taught at Augustana College.

48 After completing an MA with Blegen at the University of Minnesota, Qualey transferred to Columbia University, where he wrote a dissertation on Norwegian migration under the direction of Allen Nevins. Several east coast academic appointments followed but Qualey soon returned to Minnesota to teach at Carleton College. See Qualey's 'Marcus Hansen' and the gentle riposte, 'Marcus Hansen as an historian', offered by University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee immigration historian Victor Greene, both in *Midcontinent American Studies Journal* 8:2 (Fall 1967); quoted materials 18–19.

Qualey's article catalogued the errors, omissions, and limits of Hansen's work it had no real scholarly impact; Hansen remains the most widely cited of the immigration historian students of Turner (although he, too, is often left aside in contemporary historiographies that continue to see the much younger Handlin as the founder of immigration history). While many graduate students of immigration history today still read Handlin's *The uprooted*, few read Hansen's earlier Pulitzer-prize winner, *The Atlantic migration*.

None of the early immigration historians discussed here ever attributed their competing visions of immigration history to their institutional locations or spatially distinct scholarly networks. Yet all seemed aware enough that a competition for authority and prestige existed between Minnesota and Harvard in the scholarly field of immigration history. In that understated competition between Harvard and Minnesota, furthermore, Hansen, Schlesinger and Schlesinger's student, Oscar Handlin, continuously enjoyed the upper hand. Despite their successes, however, the Harvard historians and their protégé, Hansen, also remained under insistent challenge. That challenge continued with the next generation of immigration historians, who continued to be trained in large numbers both in Wisconsin and Minnesota and at other public universities west of the Appalachian Mountains.

### Consolidating Immigration History at the University of Minnesota

The further development of immigration history at Minnesota after 1960 is a complex and not completely celebratory tale. Immigration history again flourished at Minnesota but neither Stephenson nor Blegen could easily claim responsibility for its successes. The transition from the early Minnesota immigration historians to the new social historians of the 1960s and 1970s demonstrated how particularist studies of ethnic groups and an interest in cultural pluralism could generate problems that Hansen, Schlesinger, and Handlin had failed to observe or anticipate. The ethnic particularism of Blegen, in particular, might easily have terminated his own legacy in the upper Midwest. Nevertheless, the next generation of new social historians of immigration at Minnesota reproduced and extended most elements of their predecessors' vision of immigration history. That they did so reflects not the iron hand or influence of Blegen but rather continuities in the mission of the University of Minnesota as a large, land grant university. Like the early historians of the Minnesota school, the new social historians of immigration at Minnesota continued to work with first-generation college students of recent immigrant origin, to build archives in collaboration with immigrant communities, and to



foster transnational research and collaboration; unlike their predecessors, however, they also succeeded in moving studies of local, ethnic and transnational communities to the centre of immigration history.

The generational transition in immigration history in Minnesota was difficult enough that its successes might not have been predicted in the 1950s. Minnesotan and American Studies scholar David W. Noble (1925–) has claimed that historians such as Frederick Jackson Turner and Charles Beard – the mentors and contemporaries of the first immigration historians at Minnesota – had doubted the capacity of immigrant Jews and Catholics for political autonomy and had therefore also long refused to accept the sons (and increasingly also the daughters) of the turn-of-the-century immigrants from Asia and southern and eastern Europe into their scholarly fields; they succeeded in excluding the alien Jews, and Catholics until, according to Noble, the New Deal ended their ‘ability to repress the existence of the new immigrants.’<sup>49</sup> Noble joined the Minnesota History Department in 1952, so he personally knew Blegen and possibly also Stephenson (who died the next year). Was Noble’s devastating generational assessment equally applicable to Blegen and Stephenson?

Some evidence suggests that the founders of the Minnesota School were more open minded than Turner or Beard, as Noble described them. For example, while Hansen’s brothers and sisters used his Pulitzer Prize money to create a Harvard fund for the purchase of library materials that explicitly excluded collecting documents on ‘Oriental and Negro’ migrations,<sup>50</sup> Stephenson never ignored either the newer immigrants or the non-European immigrants. On the contrary, in 1929 he had even urged an apparently reluctant Blegen to include readings on Chinese immigrants among the younger scholar’s course materials.<sup>51</sup>

Blegen on the other hand preserved among his papers a copy of Turner’s 1901 newspaper series that – as Noble charged – questioned the assimilability of the newer immigrants.<sup>52</sup> As late as the 1950s he also expressed mild disdain for the work of the Slovenian leftist writer and author of the pluralist *A Nation*

49 David W. Noble, *Death of a nation: American culture and the end of exceptionalism* (Minneapolis 2002) 282.

50 ‘The Marcus Lee Hansen Memorial Fund’ [http://hcl.harvard.edu/info/giving/funds/415\\_565262.cfm](http://hcl.harvard.edu/info/giving/funds/415_565262.cfm) (Accessed 18 August 2015).

51 ‘September 18, 1929 letter from Blegen to George Stephenson’, Box 16, Folder ‘Speech-American Immigration and Racial Elements’, Blegen Papers.

52 ‘Turner, Articles on immigration’, 1944–45, Box 26, Blegen Papers. Turner published the articles in the *Chicago Record-Herald*, August–October 1901.

of *Nations*, Louis Adamic (1898–1951).<sup>53</sup> Whether that disdain originated in Blegen's political conservatism or his suspicion of the newer immigrants is not known. Such suspicion was not unknown and Minnesota long enjoyed a reputation nation-wide for anti-Semitism.<sup>54</sup>

Yet in an interview conducted in 1985 by Clarke Chambers (1921–2015) with Hyman Berman (1925–), this Jewish New Yorker with a Columbia PhD (who moved to Minnesota to take a position at the university in 1961) described only a Minnesota history department autocratically dominated by older, full professors.<sup>55</sup> Berman insisted that he did not experience anti-Semitism in Minneapolis; nor did he include Theodore Blegen among the autocratic, insisting instead that Blegen was also only minimally involved in the department by the time he arrived.<sup>56</sup> (In 1961 Blegen was head of Minnesota's Graduate School and also rapidly approaching retirement.) It seems unlikely, then, that Blegen and Stephenson (who died in 1953) actively promoted the hires of the next generation of Minnesota School scholars and it is at least possible that Blegen viewed Berman and other newer immigration historians from a distance if not exactly with disdain.

Despite such hints of a rough generational transition, service to the citizens of Minnesota continued to shape the formation of the newest immigration historians at this land grant university, providing a kind of continuity that had predictable consequences. Chambers and Berman rather quickly found themselves working with Stephenson's replacement as the department's historian of religion, Timothy Smith (1924–1997), on a new immigration history research project not because of Blegen's influence or support but rather because a new University of Minnesota President O. Meredith Wilson (1909–1998) – himself an historian of American education born in Mexico, where his father led a school for the Mormon colony of Chihuahua – had found funding in 1961 to study the immigrant workers of Minnesota's Iron Range mining towns. (Asked

53 Blegen's draft of a speech 'Research opportunities in American cultural history: The immigrant', dated October 20, 1959, to be presented at Washington University, St. Louis, at a conference on 'Research opportunities in American history'. In this document Blegen quotes approvingly from a negative review of Adamic's *Nation of nations* (New York 1945) which presents exactly the kind of pluralist account (e.g. the inclusion of Asians and Negroes) that Stephenson had pioneered in *History of American immigration*.

54 Hyman Berman, 'Political Antisemitism in Minnesota during the Great Depression', *Jewish Social Studies* 38 (Summer-Fall 1976) 247–264.

55 'Interview with Hyman Berman' by Clarke A. Chambers, September 22, 1984: <http://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/48992/1/bermanHyman.pdf> (Accessed 18 August 2015).

56 Donna Gabaccia interview with Hyman Berman, Minneapolis, November 9, 2012 (notes in the author's possession).

in 1962 to join the project's advisory council, Blegen declined to do so, citing health restrictions and work on another project.<sup>57</sup>) While the younger historians leading Minnesota's Iron Range Project never published their research results as a jointly authored article or book, mimeo copies of their conference papers circulated widely, sparking widespread interest in the Minnesota project among the emerging generation of new social historians of immigration.<sup>58</sup> (Timothy Smith subsequently also published a series of very influential articles based on his newfound interest and expertise in immigration history.<sup>59</sup>)

The Iron Range project, with its focus on the Minnesota and its so-called new, industrial immigrants, quickly reproduced another Minnesota School pattern – the building of archives. As the Iron Range project concluded in 1964, Clarke Chambers focused on building what became the University of Minnesota's Social Welfare History Archives,<sup>60</sup> itself a rich repository of materials created by the many social agencies working with immigrants before the Second World War. Because Berman, the son of leftist garment workers and himself a labour historian, shifted his attentions into the building of interdisciplinary Social Science and comparative ethnic studies programs for undergraduate students,<sup>61</sup> Timothy Smith – a former student of Schlesinger's at Harvard – became the somewhat idiosyncratic leader of a new institution – the University of Minnesota's Immigrant Archives and Center for Immigration Studies – which was established to provide a safe home for the massive documentation, in desperate need of preservation, that the three historians had discovered in the homes of workers on the Iron Range. Few might have predicted Smith's transformation into an immigration

57 'April 16, 1962, letter from Harold Deutsch, Chairman of the History Department', Folder – UMN, History Department, 1960–1967, Box 5, Blegen Papers.

58 The University of Minnesota's Immigration History Research Center has digitised some of the conference papers: <http://www.ihrc.umn.edu/research/projects/07-12/IHRC/history/intro.php> (Accessed 18 July 2015).

59 'New approaches to the history of immigration in twentieth-century America', *The American Historical Review* 71:4 (July 1966) 1265–1279; 'Immigrant social aspirations and American education, 1880–1930', *American Quarterly* 21:3 (Autumn 1969) 523–543; 'Religion and ethnicity in America', *The American Historical Review* 83:5 (December 1978) 1155–1185.

60 <https://www.lib.umn.edu/swaha/about> (Accessed 18 August 2015).

61 Berman described to me his decision not to assume leadership of the Immigrant Archives as a very conscious one. He had discussed with University President Wilson the casual anti-Semitism he had encountered on the Iron Range, and he felt it would render him an ineffective leader and an outsider in the communities that could help build the collections. Gabaccia Interview with Hyman Berman.

historian. Born in South Carolina to parents with deep American roots, Smith was a life-long Protestant and preacher in the Nazarene church. In Smith's obituary, Grant Wacker, of Duke University's Divinity School, called Smith 'the first evangelical historian in the US to make it in the secular research university'. Clearly, then, Smith knew what it meant to be an outsider, even if his own roots were not to be found in the newer industrial working class immigrants' experience of exclusion and marginality. Joel Carpenter of Calvin College offered another important insight into Smith's leadership when he recalled in an obituary that Smith 'wanted to appreciate the big ideas held by little people. He had uncommon respect for common people'.<sup>62</sup> In that sense, Smith shared the assumptions of both the older Minnesota School historians and the new social historians of immigration that were beginning to work in the 1960s. Smith too was committed to an immigrant-centred immigration history and to building collections that would facilitate historical scholarship on the southern and eastern Europeans who settled urban and industrial frontiers in the cities and mining districts of Minnesota and other parts of the United States.

Unlike his colleague Clarke Chambers, Timothy Smith had difficulties collaborating effectively with University of Minnesota librarians; apparently he did not regard the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) as a logical partner in developing immigrant archives on the urban, industrial immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Perhaps this reflected Smith's desire to control collecting activities by working on his own with ethnic communities; perhaps instead the problem was the MHS archivists' indifference to the value of writings of non-English speaking and working class immigrants who were so unlike the immigrant pioneers documented in its archives in collections encouraged by Buck and Blegen. Or perhaps the origin of the conflict was simply money – who would get what and how funds were to be raised or how university resources were to be allocated are always contentious, especially in public universities during periods of financial austerity. What is well known and documented are the battles that soon erupted between Smith and the University of Minnesota Librarian, Ned Stanford. When Stanford learned that Smith was travelling the state in search of collections and promising Minnesota's southern and eastern European ethnic communities they would have ethnic-specific rooms (much like the University of Pittsburgh's Nationality Rooms) to house their collections permanently at the University of Minnesota, he 'just

62 'Obituary: historian Smith, 72, dies', *Christianity Today* April 7, 1997: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1997/april7/1997-04-07-obituary-historian-smith-72-dies.html> (Accessed 18 August 2015).

went pyrotechnic<sup>63</sup> or so oral historian Chambers was told in 1994 when he interviewed William Wright (1933–). Wright was a younger Minnesota historian of Austria and of central and Balkan Europe who briefly replaced Smith as director of the Immigrant Archives after this outburst. (Smith soon left the Minnesota faculty or a position at Johns Hopkins University.) Wright noted that Chambers and Berman and most others had ceased working with Smith when the Iron Range Project terminated; according to him the Immigrant Archive under Smith's direction had become 'a pariah'.<sup>64</sup> Influenced by his knowledge of Balkan history and using the language of south-eastern European nationalism, Wright believed that Smith had succumbed to what he viewed as the 'little pettiness' of the separate ethnic groups, 'as if these rooms are a shrine for their little nationality'. Once again at Minnesota, publicly engaged scholarship had revealed its inherent complexity and its power to stir passions in the academy. Even at Minnesota, it seems, immigration historians sometimes struggled to distinguish pluralism from pettiness and provincialism. But a new hire, brought to Minnesota to solve the problems of the Immigrant Archive after Smith's departure, once again committed the Minnesota school to pluralist interpretations of the past and to archive building in collaboration with distinct ethnic communities.

The hiring in 1965 of Rudolph J. Vecoli (1927–2008) – a 1963 PhD from the University of Wisconsin who arrived in Minneapolis after teaching at Illinois and Rutgers – promised at first to end the contention and chaos.<sup>65</sup> Under Vecoli – the son of immigrant Italian parents – the Immigrant Archives and Immigration Studies Center were merged as the Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) and immigration history at the University of Minnesota again began a period of dynamic growth. The institutional imprint of the initial conflict between library and IHRC was never completely overcome, however, and Vecoli's own disputes with librarians over the control and financial support of archival collections became legendary in the archival world.<sup>66</sup> Institutionally and administratively relocated multiple times as University administrators

63 'Interview with William Wright' by Clarke A. Chambers, Sept. 4, 1994 <http://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/50850/1/wrightWilliam.pdf> (Accessed 18 August 2015).

64 Whether or not Smith's religious faith helped to make him a pariah is a possibility that deserves greater attention. I continued to hear gossip about student harassment of Smith even in the twenty-first century.

65 William Grimes, 'Rudolph J. Vecoli, scholar of immigration, is dead at 81', *New York Times*, June 23, 2008: [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/23/us/23vecoli.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/23/us/23vecoli.html?_r=0) (Accessed 18 August 2015)./

66 Susan Grigg, 'A world of repositories, a world of records: redefining the scope of a national subject collection', *The American Archivist* 48: 3 (Summer 1985) 286–295.

tried to find a workable relationship between professional archivists and a charismatic scholar director with close ties to politically active public constituencies, the IHRC for many years was moved off campus to an old coffee warehouse with a leaking roof. Vecoli in turn devoted enormous energies to fundraising and to intermittent mobilisations of ethnic communities in order to bring his centre and its collections into a new on-campus library building in 1999.<sup>67</sup> There, the IHRC remained an institutional anomaly as an interdisciplinary research centre administered by the College of Liberal Arts but physically located among the special collections administered by the Library. (Soon after Vecoli's death, the archives and research centre functions of the IHRC would again be separated administratively.)

Immigration historians of the United States scarcely need an introduction to the IHRC or to Vecoli's leadership and scholarship; the two are generally understood to have given focus to the new social histories of immigration with their trenchant critiques of the assimilation theories of the Chicago School and with Vecoli's own particularly sharp 1964 critique of Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted*.<sup>68</sup> Scholarly conferences held at the IHRC in the 1970s and 1980s complemented Vecoli's vigorous development of archival collections, documenting the lives of 24 immigrant and ethnic groups from Lebanon/Syria and from southern and eastern Europe.<sup>69</sup> Vecoli's collecting efforts focused on groups that had arrived between 1880 and 1930. He also brought together researchers and ethnic communities, although he – like his predecessors – often acknowledged what a complex undertaking this particular type of outreach work could be. Vecoli's research and that of his graduate students helped to keep scholarship on older and newer European migrations in dialogue, while maintaining and building the international connections between sending and receiving regions around the Atlantic that had also earlier been fostered by Blegen and Stephenson. Dirk Hoerder was among a sizeable group of international students and scholars drawn to study and to research at the University of Minnesota. As international as well as US-based researchers flocked to the IHRC in the 1970s and 1980s, the IHRC publication *Spectrum* also pointed community- and library-based researchers to large interdisciplinary themes – language,

67 Nathan Whalen, 'Archives to be moved to Andersen Library, *Minnesota Daily*, September 24, 1999, 4.

68 Rudolph Vecoli, 'Contadini in Chicago: A critique of *The Uprooted*', *The Journal of American History* 51:3 (December 1964) 404–417.

69 Jon Gjerde, 'Rudolph J. Vecoli and the New Social History: An appreciation', *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28:2 (Winter 2009) 6; Donna R. Gabaccia, 'The Immigration History Research Center: out of the past, a promising future', *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25: 5 (Summer 2006) 60–67.

**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**  
**DECLARATION OF INTENTION** No. 572  
 (Invalid for all purposes seven years after the date hereof)

State of Minnesota } In the District Court  
 County of Morrison } of Morrison County Little Falls, Minn.

(1) My full, true, and correct name is Sister Mary Mercita, O. S. F. (Briada Alberta Pipp)  
 (2) My present place of residence is St. Francis Convent, Little Falls, Minnesota  
 (3) My occupation is Sister of Mercy years old. (4) I was born on February 1874  
 in Braschitz, Austria (5) I am Female  
 (6) My personal description is as follows: Sex Female Height 52 inches, weight 120 pounds, color Blue eyes Blue hair Black present nationality Austria  
 (7) I am Not married; the name of my wife or husband is \_\_\_\_\_ we were married on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ he or she was born at \_\_\_\_\_ and entered the United States at \_\_\_\_\_ for permanent residence in the United States, and now resides at \_\_\_\_\_  
 (8) I have \_\_\_\_\_ children; and the name, sex, date and place of birth, and present place of residence of each of said children who is living, are as follows: \_\_\_\_\_  
 (9) My last place of foreign residence was Braschitz, Austria I emigrated to the United States from Austria under the name of Briada Alberta Pipp at February 1890 under the name of Sister Mary Mercita  
 (10) My lawful entry for permanent residence in the United States was on \_\_\_\_\_  
 (11) Since my lawful entry for permanent residence I have \_\_\_\_\_ been absent from the United States, for a period or periods of months or longer, as follows: \_\_\_\_\_  
 DEPARTED FROM THE UNITED STATES \_\_\_\_\_ RETURNED TO THE UNITED STATES \_\_\_\_\_  

PORT	DATE (Month, day, year)	VESSEL OR OTHER MEANS OF CONVEYANCE	PORT	DATE (Month, day, year)	VESSEL OR OTHER MEANS OF CONVEYANCE

(12) I have Not heretofore made declaration of intention: No. \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ District Court.  
 (13) It is my intention in good faith to become a citizen of the United States and to reside permanently therein. (14) I will, before being admitted to citizenship, renounce absolutely and forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which at the time of admission to citizenship, I may be a subject or citizen. (15) I am not an anarchist, nor a believer in the unlawful damage, injury, or destruction of property, or sabotage; nor a disbeliever in or opposed to organized government; nor a member of or affiliated with any organization or body of persons teaching, practiced in or opposition to organized government. (16) I certify that the photograph affixed to the duplicate and triplicate hereof is a likeness of me and was signed by me. I do swear (affirm) that the statements I have made and the intention I have expressed in this declaration of intention subscribed by me are true to the best of my knowledge and belief: SO HELP ME GOD.  
 Signed Sister Mary Mercita  
 Clerk of said Court, at Little Falls, Minn. this 14 day of February, 1918. I hereby certify that Certification No. 14 from the Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, showing the lawful entry for permanent residence of the declarant above named on the date stated in this declaration of intention, has been received by me, and that the photograph affixed to the duplicate and triplicate hereof is a likeness of the declarant.  
 (SEAL) R. S. Meyers Clerk of the District  
 By Thomas M. Stosch Deputy Clerk.  
 FORM N-315 U. S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE (Edition of 11-1-41) 110-12119-1 U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

FIGURE 2 Naturalization Record; <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/282078>. U. S. District Court for the Sixth (Fergus Falls) Division of the District of Minnesota. (04/26/1890). Naturalization Petition and Record Books, 1943-1978. Record Group 21: Records of District Courts of the United States, 1685-2009

autobiography, refugees, the performing arts – to be explored in IHRC collections.<sup>70</sup> At the IHRC, Blegen’s ‘grass roots history’ and collections-building community collaborations again flourished as ‘history from the bottom up’, fulfilling in new ways the University of Minnesota’s land grant mission. Like Blegen,

70 Spectrum was published intermittently from 1975 to 1990.

Vecoli also worked effectively with ethnic communities in Minnesota and travelled and published often in Europe; unlike Blegen, he never moved into university leadership.

Beginning in the 1980s, a new generation of colleagues and students of Vecoli enriched immigration history at the University of Minnesota while continuing what few if any by then recognised as the intellectual and organisational legacy of Blegen and Stephenson.<sup>71</sup> (Even today, Blegen is known mainly as a name affixed to an ugly classroom building on the University of Minnesota campus. Beginning in 1980, a Southeast Asian Refugee Studies project – later transformed into the Center for Refugee Studies under the successive leadership of a linguist (Bruce Downing), an anthropologist (Glenn Hendricks), and an American Studies graduate and former student of Vecoli's (Dan Detzner) – undertook research collaborations and created public programming with the newest immigrant and refugee arrivals to Minnesota. Until disbanded in 1998 during a financial crisis resulting from sharp legislative cuts in university appropriations, this centre numbered among only a handful documenting refugee relocation housed at American universities; true to Minnesota customs, the centre also documented other post-Vietnam refugee movements.<sup>72</sup> Under the leadership of long-term IHRC archivist Joel Wurl, collection of materials on forced migrations and on refugee resettlement after 1945 continued and soon constituted a third of IHRC holdings.

The limits of Vecoli's own ethnic particularism also soon revealed itself, creating the foundation for a second rough transition in leadership. By the 1980s, the scholarly field of migration studies was rapidly changing – driven both by increasing migration from Asia and Latin America and by the emergence of new interpretations of race and immigration, especially in studies the American west and Pacific coast. In his teaching and IHRC programming, Vecoli insisted on the legitimacy of an exclusive focus on the older migrations from Europe, during a circumscribed period of time. While such decisions may have made sense for collections-building they of course ran counter to spreading academic critiques of Eurocentrism. At the same time, however, Vecoli welcomed to Minnesota a second immigration historian, Erika Lee, who had studied Chinese restriction as a student of Vecoli's own student, Jon Gjerde at

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71 When I arrived at Minnesota to replace Vecoli in 2005, I discovered that my colleagues knew the name of Blegen only because it was affixed to a large, rather ugly classroom building on the west bank of the Mississippi River. Stephenson had been completely forgotten by all except the very oldest emeritus faculty, which included Berman and Chambers.

72 <http://archives.ihrc.umn.edu/projects/07-2/RSC/index.php> (Accessed 18 August 2015).



the University of California at Berkeley. Increasingly devoted to fund-raising that might ensure financial stability during recurring university budget cuts in the 1990s, Vecoli continued to work effectively only with the older European-origin ethnic communities of Minnesota, even as the Somali and Asian refugee and Mexican labour migrant populations of Minnesota burgeoned. His relations with his university social science colleagues – who researched the newest immigrant groups from Latin America, Asia and Africa – also atrophied. Nevertheless, in 1999, Vecoli began a successful seminar with American Studies chair David Roediger and in 2000 the IHRC sponsored its last successful conference, 'REM (Race, Ethnicity, Migration)' under Vecoli's leadership.<sup>73</sup>

Vecoli retired in 2005. Three years later he was dead. When I was hired to replace him, the IHRC was under sharp surveillance from the College of Liberal Arts, and a hostile Dean had told me in all-too-familiar language that the IHRC functioned mainly as a 'shrine' for Minnesota's white ethnics, having lost relevance to researchers and to a scholarly field. While he certainly exaggerated in drawing this portrait, his comments suggest how – even after thirty-five years of hegemony in the scholarly field – the pluralist, ethnic-specific, bottom-up, community-based and archives-driven immigration history favoured by the Minnesota School since the 1920s could not escape the kinds of charges that Hansen had levelled against Blegen already in 1932.

### Conclusion

Working at land grant universities in the Midwest, Theodore Blegen and George Stephenson had envisioned immigration history quite differently from their colleagues at the University of Chicago and from the Harvard historians Arthur Schlesinger, sr., and Oscar Handlin, along with Schlesinger's previous protégé, Marcus Hansen. Without ever forming a self-aware or formal school and without ever gaining recognition as innovative 'founding fathers' of the scholarly field of immigration history, the Minnesota School's methods, analytical interests and vision nevertheless found expression and even scholarly hegemony during the second half of the twentieth century. The founders of the Minnesota School may not have fully appreciated the work of the new social historians of immigration, represented here by Chambers, Berman, Smith and, especially, Vecoli, but this younger generation nevertheless adopted most of

73 See the 12 December 1999 REM Call for Papers posted on H-Net: <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-GAGCS&month=9912&week=b&msg=58Ua1dSG/SKrdQzzYrLaGQ&user=&pw=> (Accessed 18 August 2015).

the scholarly preferences of their predecessors. The new social historians, much like Blegen and Stephenson before them, persistently focused on the lives and experiences of immigrants within local and transnational communities; they privileged immigrants' viewpoints and voices over theorisation and over homogenised or national narratives; and they viewed the building of archives as an important way to serve the people of their own states, as land grant universities required. Without completely ignoring the broader themes and analytical frames (settlement, labour migration, race, nation-building, forced migration) that connected the lives of many different groups of migrants, past and present, the new social historians' preference for what Blegen called 'grass roots' or 'bottom-up' approaches helped them and their land grant universities to fulfil their century-old mission of service to students and citizens of their home states.

That the importance of public universities in immigration history has persisted into our own times is easily documented by the lists of the new social historians who provided intellectual and professional leadership for the Immigration and Ethnic History Society. IEHS – originally formed as a working group in 1965 – was named and began to elect officers as the Immigration History Society (IHS) beginning in 1972. During its first 20 years, four of six IHS presidents (Theodore Saloutos, John Higham, Rudolph J. Vecoli, and Kathleen Neils Conzen) had received their PhDs from the University of Wisconsin. (The others were Moses Rischin, who had studied at Harvard with Handlin, and Victor Greene, who had earned his PhD at the University of Pennsylvania.) Three Wisconsin and Minnesota PhD holders also formed a prominent cluster on the list of the IEHS's earliest recipients of Service Awards. Of thirty-three winners of the IEHS's Theodore Saloutos Book Award for the best books published in immigration and ethnic history between 1982 and 2013, nineteen authors had earned their PhDs at land grant universities (with five from Minnesota, four from the University of Michigan and most of the rest from west coast state universities); nine had earned Ivy League PhDs (with five from Harvard alone) and five had completed their doctoral training at other private universities, including Stanford, Johns Hopkins, Boston University, and the University of Chicago. Surely it would be an interesting scholarly exercise to examine whether or not these two clusters of more recent immigration historians have also carried on the conflicting scholarly preferences of earlier generations of scholars at private and public universities.

The prominence of the land grant universities in such rosters of achievement should not blind readers to the structural and financial difficulties that such universities and the scholars they employ have faced in creating new knowledge about immigration and in moving their vision of scholarship to the

centre of the field. The publishers of books winning the Theodore Saloutos Prize, for example, have always included far higher representations of private university presses (alongside national, commercial presses) than state university presses. (The life of Marcus Lee Hansen and the role of his Harvard and Columbia colleagues in assuring the posthumous publication of his unfinished work provide a telling reminder of the gate-keeping functions of the most prestigious private university presses.) After 1990, furthermore, the proportion of IEHS presidents and Saloutos prize-winners who had trained or who were employed and publishing within the financially more secure world of private universities predictably began to rise – a reflection of the tax revolts that were re-making and shrinking public education resources at all levels in the United States. To date, this shift has not resulted in a new hegemony for the kinds of national histories of immigration that Schlesinger and Hansen advocated or for an explosion of immigration histories that ignore the particularism of immigrants' ethnicity, experience or subjectivity or deem them to be provincial, 'semipatriotic', or 'shrines' to filiopietism. Narratives of American nation-building and of ethnic pluralism may continue to offer quite different visions of immigration history but both earn accolades from the IEHS and its Saloutos prize competition. Nevertheless, none of these developments have, until very recently, encouraged historians to consider – as do the essays in this special issue – that immigration history developed along multiple paths rather than as a direct line from the University of Chicago to Oscar Handlin. In that sense, at least, the Minnesota School has still not won the historiographical battles documented here through their archival traces.

Neither the shift toward private universities' growing prominence in training and finding positions for their recent PhD recipients in the humanities nor the fact that publication of immigration history by private university presses is growing should come as a surprise to readers who have attended closely to the biographies of the land grant scholars at public universities described here. The movement of scholars between the two types of institutions of higher education has been frequent enough, both in the 1910s and 1920s and in recent decades. Some of that movement originates in the difficult conditions of intellectual work and employment faced by researchers at land grant universities. Frederick Jackson Turner himself abandoned Wisconsin for Harvard in 1910 because of the difficulties he encountered gaining University of Wisconsin Regents' support for his research. And while Blegen flourished intellectually after bridging the town/gown divide, George Stephenson abandoned immigration history after a series of unpleasant conflicts with the communities he studied. How might Stephenson have fared at a private university where 'out-reach', 'service' and 'public engagement' with local citizens mattered less? We

cannot know. Still, the brief histories presented here of the Refugee Studies Center and the IHRC at the University of Minnesota hint at the negative impact of uneven and diminishing funding, competition over scarce resources for research, heavy teaching and the necessity of private fund-raising on the research agendas of land grant faculty at public universities.

In the absence of dependable income from private endowments, land grant universities have maintained a high profile in immigration history in part because of their access to human resources in the form of smart, creative, local students of recent immigrant origin. As many have observed, most of the names that appear on the rosters of high achievers and activists within the IHS and IEHS suggest recent family histories of immigration. Like the earliest immigration historians of the Minnesota School and their new social historian counterparts in the 1960s, many of today's historians of immigration focus their scholarship on immigrant groups to which they have personal and familial connections (as well as the linguistic facility that allows them to use the methodologies of the Minnesota School). For those reasons alone it is tempting to conclude that the continued influence of land grant universities and the pluralist, immigrant-centred and community-oriented scholarship fostered by the Minnesota School rests in large part on the land grant mission to educate and to serve non-elite and often first generation students and who seek higher education close to their families, communities and – increasingly – jobs. Even the obvious influence of the Minnesota School on the new social historians of immigration has not been able to eliminate charges that this latest generation of scholars too are filiopietistic or divisive if they study people like themselves.<sup>74</sup>

For almost a century, land grant university missions have pushed scholars toward a focus on the particularities of locale and of ethnicity even as other scholars, many of them at private, east-coast universities, have questioned the scholarly value, objectivity, and legitimacy of knowledge produced through town-gown collaborations, including the education of public universities' immigrant neighbours and fellow citizens. At the University of Minnesota, immigration researchers today work with students who are children and grandchildren of refugees and labour migrants from Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central America; it is a local population quite unlike that of New York, Miami, Phoenix, or Los Angeles. Under new Directors, the IHRC began to change its focus after 2005 and to attend to these immigrants, too. The mix of students differs at public universities beyond Minnesota but the relative ease

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74 Paul Spickard, *Almost all aliens: immigration, race, and colonialism in American history and identity* (New York 2007) ch. 1.

of access to higher education public universities provide to populations new to the United States will likely continue to shape the development and direction of immigration history as a scholarly field even when public universities are threatened by dwindling resources and state funding. For the twenty-first century, too, students and their identity-driven desire to know their own groups' histories or 'immigrant stories'<sup>75</sup> and to serve their own communities may be the strongest foundation for the survival of the Minnesota School legacy.

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75 'Immigrant Stories' is the name of a new IHRC project initiated in 2013 by new IHRC Director Erika Lee. See <http://cla.umn.edu/ihrc/research/immigrant-stories/about-project> (Accessed 18 August 2015).