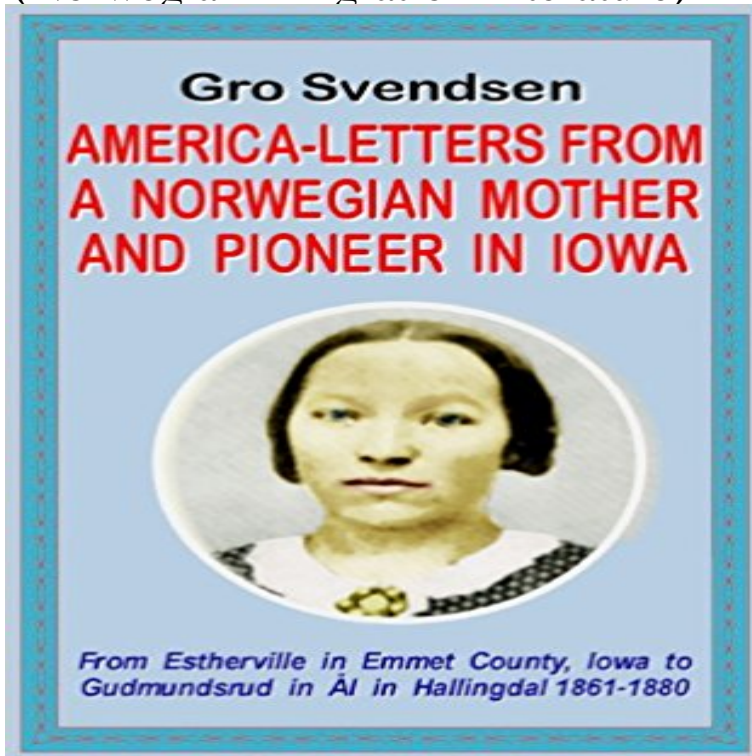


# America-Letters from a Norwegian Mother and Pioneer in Iowa (Norwegian Emigration Literature)



Gro's first America-letter was really a declaration of love and a plea for help. In it she begged one of her suitors, Ole Svendsen, to come quickly to her house. She needed his help to get her parents to let her marry him and emigrate to America with him. This is the story of a intelligent and pretty young lady with many marital offers. But when Ole and his family were about to depart for America she realized it was Ole she wanted. Even though she was emotionally tied to her parents, siblings, the farm, her homeland "all that had kept her back" suddenly she could not think of life without Ole. Gro did get her parents blessing and she and Ole were married in a hastily arranged wedding. The ceremony took place on a Monday, an unheard-of day of the week for a well-to-do family to give their youngest daughter in marriage. Soon afterwards the young couple left for America heading for north-western Iowa. In her numerous letters home Gro often recalled that heart-breaking day when she left home and family, and she was often saddened by the now so distant homeland. The fear she would never see her dear ones again often haunted her. But then Ole cheered her up "and she mellowed: "My husband realizes the sacrifice I made when I left everything near and dear to me, to go with him into the unknown. (...) Every time sad thoughts depress me, he cheers me up (...) and when I have talked with him I always feel much better." She told those at home about their arrival in Quebec and how all the immigrants had gotten

a shockingly rough treatment by the Canadian longshoremen. She was deeply disappointed by their unfriendliness and later, even more so by the many agents and runners who attempted to cheat them or double-cross them on their way west. But her letters also told of all the exciting things she had encountered, and of her new life with Ole, not only in their own modest home with many happy children, but also about the long days of hard work needed to break the soil and make their acres of prairie land into a family farm. Her letters showed her gradual adaptation and transition to life in America, to a new and different society, in which customs and methods of doing things often were quite different. This covered many aspects of life, from learning to speak English and choosing biligual children names to adapting to all the new machinery and agricultural methods so needed to farm the American way. Toughest was the switch from the rather simple and self-sufficient farm life in a Norwegian mountain valley rich with traditions and old ways of doing things, to the new, more impersonal, and heavily specialized and effective American one, in a money-based economy. After giving birth to 10 children, 6 boys and 4 girls, Gro died rather unexpectedly, only 37 years old. Ole sent her parents a lock of her hair and told them she was laid to rest in the Estherville Cemetery. He had put up a white marble headstone, enclosed the plot with a white picket fence, and plnted a shade tree. On the headstone he had put her birth and death dates and the names of all her children. The America-letters from Gro are now

available in the Community Archive in Å...l in Hallingdal. At first they were taken care of by her family, but are now included in the official collections. They represent an unusually rich source of information about the life and struggle of Norwegian immigrants who settled on the American prairies of the Mid-West. They are especially rich about the lives of many â€˜Å...lingerâ€™™ and â€˜HallingdÃ,lerâ€™™ who settled in the north-western part of Iowa and had to endure the many storms, hard winters, and locust swarms that occurred.

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