



Bertha L. Heilbron, 1895-1972

NO PERSON has contributed more to the publication of scholarly yet readable local history in Minnesota than Bertha L. Heilbron of St. Paul who died November 22, 1972, at the age of seventy-seven. She was skilled both as an editor and as a writer, and the main vehicle for her talents for many years was *Minnesota History*. After earning a bachelor of arts degree at the University of Minnesota in 1917 and then teaching at Cannon Falls, Minnesota, High School for two years, she became an editorial assistant on the society's staff in 1919. From then until her retirement at the end of 1960 she had an important hand in all but two of the periodical's first thirty-seven volumes, much of the time as editor. During her more than forty years on the magazine, Miss Heilbron showed not only great stamina and enthusiasm in a demanding field but also proved to be a fair, if exacting, editor for history professionals and amateurs alike who wrote the articles and book reviews she published. She held to high standards and could be a tyrant against shoddiness. Her uncompromising and painstaking efforts, along with those of the late Theodore C. Blegen with whom she worked from 1922 to 1939, helped put *Minnesota History* near the top among state historical journals and continue to be a goad and an inspiration to successors, including the present editor.

Miss Heilbron also served local history well with her own writings, many of which reflect her conviction that new insights into the area's past can be gained through the work of early artists and photographers.

A pioneer in illustrated history for this area, she used the visual approach effectively in her book, The Thirty-Second State: A Pictorial History of Minnesota, published by the society as a state centennial project in 1958. Her other books include skillful editing of works by artists Frank B. Mayer and Henry Lewis. She also wrote many articles for Minnesota History and other publications on a host of local history subjects. Through her high-caliber editing and writing she has left a legacy that will be of inestimable benefit to future generations. To observe her passing, several persons who knew her well were asked to write the following tributes.

Kenneth Carley, EDITOR

DURING AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER World War I, Solon J. Buck, then superintendent of the Minnesota Historical Society, recruited a dozen or so students of history, mostly from the University of Minnesota, for the staff of the society. Most of them remained to develop their professional careers with the institution. The large and enduring legacy of this new generation was the transformation of the Minnesota Historical Society into one of the foremost institutions of its kind. The tools of their trade were university training, a devotion to scholarship, a belief in the importance of state history, and a total dedication to the society.

Individually, none of this generation left a more indelible mark on the future than did Bertha Heilbron. To the craft of editing she brought a strong will, high standards, a rare dedication to historical scholarship, a sense of humor, and a lifelong interest in her col-

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leagues and the authors whose works she prepared for publication. Bertha's contributions are unmistakable in at least three areas. The first is *Minnesota History*, whose development as a quarterly paralleled hers during forty-one of its first forty-five years. The second is her award-winning pictorial history of Minnesota, published in 1958 on the occasion of the state's centennial. The third, with which she became increasingly identified for her pioneering role, is as editor of definitive works on frontier artists—Henry Lewis, Frank B. Mayer, Edwin Whitefield, and others—whose paintings recorded and revealed the people and places of Minnesota and the West. Thanks to her firm editorial hand and discriminating eye, photographs, sketches, and paintings—the visual record of our past so long ignored by contemporary scholars—are increasingly recognized for the rich source of history that they truly are.

Russell W. Fridley, MHS DIRECTOR

A TRULY GREAT LADY died on November 22. Minnesota history as well as her many friends and colleagues are the poorer for her passing. We will miss her wise counsel, her gentle support, her quiet smile. We will continue to treasure and exchange our favorite "Bertie" stories concerning her unique idiosyncrasies—about which she immensely enjoyed being teased. These have their own special niche in the institutional folklore of the Minnesota Historical Society, a niche occupied by Bertie's generation which laid the institution's professional foundations under the leadership of Solon J. Buck. Bertha Heilbron was very much responsible for the sturdy foundation underlying the magazine you are reading. And she did her best to pass on to a new generation the high professional standards and careful policies that still guide the publication. The heritage Bertha left is not dead, nor is her work. It is carried on—as well as we can carry it on—by those of us who were so fortunate as to have benefited by her training and her friendship.

June D. Holmquist, MHS MANAGING EDITOR

I KNEW Bertha L. Heilbron as a close friend and as a colleague for more than four decades. Because of her engaging personality and her astuteness as a painstaking researcher and as an outstanding editor, I not only became increasingly fond of her as a person but also developed great respect for her as a working historian. Possessed of professional integrity, imbued with a tremendous affection for the history of the North Star State, and demonstrating great generosity both as

a friend and co-worker, she, year after year, edited and published a journal which in itself was a distinguished magazine and also helped to place the Minnesota Historical Society among the most prominent state historical societies of the nation. When I complimented her, as I frequently did, upon a particular issue of the magazine, she was quick to open her face in that unique Heilbron smile and say, in one fashion or other, "Well, Buck and Blegen trained me." Then she invariably added, "My authors and book reviewers make the magazine, not I."

Such affirmations only concealed Bertha Heilbron's painstaking search for just the right reviewer for a particular book, masked long hours of vetting a contributor's manuscript, and hid the fact that, time and again, she planted ideas for articles not only among historians of reputation but also among young persons anxious to break into print. Yet she was not soft on sloppy work, whether it be that of the established author or the beginner. But I never knew her—and she talked over many an article with me—to be brusque in her criticism or highhanded or to rewrite a manuscript as she thought it should be without first giving the author every opportunity to follow her suggestions. Perhaps this is among the reasons why so many contributors loved to work with her, perhaps this is why she maintained such excellent and cordial relations with her authors, perhaps this is the reason she, at the annual meetings of the old Mississippi Valley Historical Society, was surrounded so frequently by those who were her regular contributors and those who wished to be. I know, because I witnessed this. As an editor and as an author in her own right, she made a distinguished contribution to Minnesota history. But this is the least of the matter, significant as it is. "Bertie," as she was affectionately known to those close to her, was a warm, sensitive, openhanded, sympathetic, and gentle woman.

Philip D. Jordan

THE PASSING of Bertha Heilbron was a great loss, especially to all who knew her. She had been ill and had been losing strength gradually for a number of years, but her sudden death was a great shock. Bertha and I had been friends for about fifty years, and I had many opportunities to observe her work. I helped her with research on the Henry Lewis book which took her across Europe and America. She had a gift for finding material for corrections and of getting the co-operation of people who had useful knowledge or pertinent books and manuscripts. I am not in a position to judge her as an editor, but I know that she was most meticulous in her work and put all of her strength and knowl-

edge into Minnesota history to which she was completely dedicated.

Bertha was of an artistic nature; she loved and understood good music, and her knowledge and interpretation of the works of early American artists was excellent.

She was a warm person who made many friends. The Minnesota Historical Society was for her not just a place for work—she loved the people around her. Her memory will be a stimulus to all who are interested in the history of Minnesota, but we are mourning the loss of a good friend.

Robert Rosenthal, M.D.

IT SEEMS TO ME that I must have known Bertha Heilbron since my first visit to the Minnesota Histori-

cal Society in the fall of 1928, but my direct association was undoubtedly in connection with my article on the Norwegians of Minnesota which was published in September, 1931. Later, Bertha edited for Theodore Blegen my book on Norwegian settlement. Her total dedication to her profession made her an exacting editor. A great many historians and would-be historians benefited from her searching criticisms. She was an indefatigable worker, a tremendous enthusiast for Minnesota history, and an author of no mean stature. Hers was a unique personality which left indelible impressions on all who dealt with her. She was virtually an "institution" at the Minnesota Historical Society. To paraphrase Thomas Jefferson, she could be succeeded, but she can never be replaced.

Carlton C. Qualey

BOOK REVIEWS

Minnesota's Major Historic Sites: A Guide. By June Drenning Holmquist and Jean A. Brookins.
(St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society, 1972. xv, 191 p. Illustrations. Hard cover \$7.95, paper \$5.95.)

IN YEARS PAST, Americans learned their history from school textbooks and dedicated teachers, from Francis Parkman's epics, or perhaps a Kenneth Roberts novel. Today, more and more of us are learning about Daniel Boone or Davy Crockett from a television series or from visits to such three-dimensional classrooms as Boonesboro, Kentucky, or Crockett's birthplace at Limestone, Tennessee, or the Alamo in Texas. These historic sites have become significant cultural and educational institutions as Americans increasingly develop a mobile, recreation-oriented, physically stimulated culture which seeks to experience and understand both the present and the past.

Minnesotans are especially fortunate that so many aspects of their history are reflected in their historic sites. Museum houses, functioning structures such as the Pillsbury A mill and the Washington County Courthouse, the famous mines, and now-quiet prairie parks are bringing to life the leadership of Alexander Ramsey, Henry H. Sibley, and the Mayos, the careful experiments of Wendelin Grimm, the long winter of Thomas Connor, the furious conflict for the land, and the impatient search for iron.

Minnesota's Major Historic Sites clearly reflects the state's progress in site development over the last decade. There is, for example, a striking contrast between the restored Fort Snelling round tower pictured on the revised edition and the "medieval ruin" which it resembled on the dust cover of the 1963 edition. Similarly, there is no fair comparison of the material found between the covers of the two editions of the *Guide*.

In the completely new and thoroughly updated publication, Russell W. Fridley's thoughtful introduction reviews the past and considers the future of Minnesota's historic sites program. The reader is thereby led into a presentation of selected sites and related historic properties, all carefully organized by geographic regions. Details of location, admission policy, and facilities are included, making the *Guide* useful to the tourist, the group planning a field trip, or the family seeking to bring history into its life.

While the book is attractive as a ready reference, its superbly written text and rich photographic documentation are even more impressive. Mrs. Holmquist and Mrs. Brookins have succeeded in treating each and every entry, ranging from the Sioux Agencies, which are given eleven pages, to the Grand Mound, two pages, without shortchanging any or wasting a word. The result is a comfortable, balanced presentation that deserves high praise.

As a summary and a tribute to the vitality and ongoing preservation of one state's history, *Minnesota's Major His-*



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