

later, nearly all of "the people" have left the land. The process that began with the grim decade of the 1890s continued through the inflation of World War I and the long farm depression of the 1920s and 1930s. It climaxed in the years between 1940 and 1970, when the number of surviving Minnesota farms was cut by half despite sustained prosperity and skyrocketing productivity. That it still goes on, the current farm strike testifies.

Those who want to portray the future of Minnesota agriculture will have some hard questions to deal with. Already the capital required to get a start in farming is out of reach for all but a small segment of the population. If cost-efficiency calls for an ever larger base of operations, how long can we hold off the specter of corporate ownership? A specter of another kind has been raised by the energy crisis. Much of the "green revolution" achieved since World War II is based on the availability of cheap petroleum. How will agriculture be affected by a radical increase in the cost of oil? And while the miracle of food production unfolds in the fertile soil of southern Minnesota and elsewhere, what has happened to it on the grocery shelves? There the price of food threatens to become a nightmare for the average or poor American family.

So what is to be the message of an agricultural interpretive center? Certainly it should not be limited to the political rhetoric of farm protest over the past century, nor should it wallow in nostalgia for the independent farmer, the country store, and the one-room school. All too often farm life in the nineteenth century was an unrelenting round of drudgery and isolation — espe-

cially for women. The industrialization of agriculture has been a two-edged sword. It has driven the majority of people from the land, but it has also made life richer and more rewarding for those who remain. Minnesota agriculture has seen successive waves of technological change — the horsepower revolution in the second half of the nineteenth century, the gasoline-power revolution of the early twentieth century, rural electrification in the 1930s and 1940s, and the chemical and biological revolution of the last three decades. At the same time it has seen the growth of major industries devoted to supplying the technology and to processing and marketing the products of these revolutions. The story is one of absorbing interest and vast importance for all of us.

Nevertheless, simply to praise the excellence of the American farmer and to define success as productivity alone is to tell less than half the story. The visitors to such a center will include many urban dwellers who can remember parents or grandparents who were forced to give up the family farm and seek a livelihood in the city. And there will be tourists who have driven for miles through uniform fields of waving crops broken only by an occasional abandoned farmstead. They will wonder — and they will not be impressed.

Perhaps an agricultural interpretive center should take this very paradox for its central theme. Minnesotans, along with the rest of the country, have lived through the swift transition from an agrarian to an industrial society. We have enjoyed the material benefits; we have suffered the human losses; and together, rural and urban alike, we face an uncertain future.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Minnesota: A Bicentennial History.* By William E. Lass.  
(New York, W. W. Norton, 1977. xv, 240 p. Illustrations. \$8.95.)

THE LENGTH of this book is the source of most of its virtues. William Watts Folwell presented the history of Minnesota in four volumes. Theodore Christianson needed five. With some difficulty, Theodore C. Blegen compressed his materials between the covers of a single book. Lass, who has been teaching Minnesota history at Mankato State University for some years, equals and surpasses this exploit. While Blegen told the story in 597 pages, Lass does it in only 215 (an annotated bibliog-

raphy and an index take up the remaining pages). It is a significant accomplishment, a miracle of compression.

The imposing dimensions of the task confronting Lass when he embarked upon this undertaking can be glimpsed by considering the range of topics to be explored and the quantity of materials available for study.

Lass surveys Minnesota history following paths traced originally by Folwell and Blegen. This means that the narrative moves, for the most part chronologically, along a familiar chain of topics: geography, exploration, fur trade, advancing frontier, statehood, politics, contemporary scene. These subjects have been studied in detail for a long time. After all, Minnesotans established their historical society before they achieved statehood. They have been preserving records and writing about their past ever since. Lass had both to digest prodigious amounts of information and present the history of a state in small compass.

Books and other publications reviewed in *Minnesota History* may be ordered from the MHS Museum Shop and Bookstore, 690 Cedar Street, St. Paul 55101; or phone (612) 296-4694.

He meets this double challenge with disciplined scholarship and superb command of the field. His book is more than Folwell-Blegen condensed, for Lass turns the necessity to be brief into the virtue of concentrating upon essentials. The economy and clarity of his presentation make the basic outline of each subdivision stand in high relief, producing, therefore, a kind of guide or modern map to the older, much more detailed surveys. This does not mean that the need for generalization has stripped all intricate particularities of Minnesota history from the narrative. The analysis and synthesis demanded by a study of this length have the effect of illuminating complexities such as the rune stone debate, fur trade organization, immigration patterns, territorial boundary maneuvers, third party life cycles, and more.

Throughout, the special focus of this book is upon the land; the connection between history and place, environment and human affairs. The opening description of this area's distinctive physical and human geography ranks as a major contribution to Minnesota historical studies. Accounts of the occupation of the frontier, regional population characteristics, and complicated interrelationships in the economic growth of the state are almost as noteworthy. The final chapter portrays Minnesota facing the future with a heritage formed to a considerable extent by intensive use of nonrenewable natural resources.

This stress upon its geographical setting has not produced a parochial interpretation of Minnesota's past, because Lass continually reminds his readers that events in the state reflect and affect developments outside its boundaries. Chapters on the fur trade ("America Asserts Herself"), the demand for territorial status ("Minnesota's Quest for Empire"), and the summative "Minnesota and the Nation" exemplify his concern that the history of the state be considered in the light of that of the nation.

It is appropriate that this book should have this national or American dimension, for *Minnesota: A History* is part of the States and the Nation Series, a bicentennial project of the American Association for State and Local History and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Thanks to Lass, "our" volume in this series is a very good one indeed.

*Reviewed by* NORMAN W. MOEN, *who initiated and teaches aspects of Minnesota studies, a sequence offered in the General College of the University of Minnesota and in the Department of Evening Classes of the university's division of Continuing Education and Extension.*

***Saving Quetico-Superior: A Land Set Apart.* By R. Newell Searle.**

(St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society, 1977. xv, 275 p. Illustrations. Hard cover \$11.50, paper \$5.95.)

THE QUETICO-SUPERIOR country is unique. Lying along the Canadian border between northern Minnesota and western Ontario, it constitutes the last remnant of a vast coniferous forest that once stretched all the way to the coast of Maine. It is a largely roadless area, dotted with countless lakes of every size and shape, rich in wildlife as well as in human history: a canoeist's paradise. Yet more than once since the turn of the century it seemed doomed to become another paradise lost.

That it has survived is due to the efforts of a number of extraordinarily competent and perseverant men, whose accomplishments provide the framework for this fascinating segment of conservation history.

The story is a complex one. Going back to the original sources, Searle has managed to present an enormous amount of documentary material in readable form. His narrative covers seventy-five years, beginning with the farsighted plan of an elderly Minnesota forest commissioner, Christopher C. Andrews, to create an international forest reserve on both sides of the border — an idea realized in 1909 when President Theodore Roosevelt established the Superior National Forest, and Ontario responded by creating the contiguous Quetico Provincial Park. However, the era of road building, which began scarcely more than a decade later, brought inevitable conflict between the local businessmen, who envisioned a tourist mecca fed by national highways, and conservation groups like the Izaak Walton League, whose members believed in the new concept of wilderness areas within the national forests. Fortunately the latter philosophy prevailed. "Looking back," writes Searle, "it is apparent that the road controversy was an early test of the wilderness idea." As Superior Forest went, so, in all likelihood, would go other national forests throughout the country.

Meanwhile, another duel was being fought between "two strong-willed men" representing two opposing principles: Ernest Carl Oberholzer, who recognized the spiritual values of wilderness to man, and Edward Wellington Backus, a shrewd and powerful lumber baron whose ambition was to dam the lakes and build an industrial empire. Eventually Backus failed. A turning point came in 1930 with the passage of the Shipstead-Nolan bill, "the first statute in which Congress explicitly ordered federal land to be retained in its wilderness state."

The latter half of the book deals with the extension of the national forest, the consolidation of roadless areas, the nearly fatal impact of floatplanes that serviced private resorts (stopped by presidential order in 1949), and the tedious negotiations with Canada for a permanent international park — negotiations in which Sigurd F. Olson, whose name has become inseparable from the canoe country, played a prominent part. Finally the author considers the current problems of wilderness management, including increased intrusion of motorboats (now snowmobiles as well), and ceaseless pressure from loggers. Of the equally serious threat of mining, both inside and bordering the area, he makes little mention.

More subtle problems remain. Even if legislation now before Congress should give the area true wilderness status, how does one manage a forest to perpetuate natural conditions when, for example, it is not feasible to let wildfires burn and insect infestations run their course? The dilemma with the sharpest horns, however, concerns neither fires nor insects, but people. How provide the balm of solitude in the most heavily used primitive area in the nation?

Himself a canoeist, a hiker, a lover of wilderness, Searle tells his story with a scholar's objectivity. Skillful sketches of the many personalities involved and occasional accounts of wilderness adventure give life to his narrative. Though scarcely a book for "armchair voyageurs" — in the words of the jacket blurb — *Saving Quetico-Superior* is indispensable to students

of this classic conservation battle. It is also of major interest to anyone concerned with saving the remaining American wilderness. If it is read by a fraction of the hundreds of thousands who enjoy our greatest canoe country, we may all feel more confident of the future.

*Reviewed by* PAUL BROOKS, *editor-in chief of Houghton Mifflin Company for many years and a former director of the Sierra Club. He is the author of Roadless Area, The Pursuit of Wilderness, The House of Life: Rachel Carson at Work, and The View from Lincoln Hill, as well as numerous articles on wilderness and conservation published in national magazines. His home is in Lincoln, Massachusetts.*

***At Home: Domestic Life in the Post-Centennial Era, 1876-1920.* By George Talbot.**

(Madison, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1976. viii, 88 p. Illustrations. Paper \$3.95.)

WE PRAISE some history books because they are full of facts; others because they are full of thoughts. George Talbot's *At Home* (the catalog for an exhibit of the same name produced by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in 1976) stands out among the latter. *At Home* is a remarkable essay and is unlike most exhibit catalogs. Talbot, who is a social scientist and is curator of iconography at the historical society, employs a mode of inquiry that will be new to most historians, and he largely succeeds in his attempt. While there are several weaknesses, some of them significant, *At Home* will surely nudge many readers into reconsidering and perhaps reorganizing their own understandings of domestic life at the turn of the century.

For the exhibit and the catalog, Talbot and Joan Severa, the society's curator of decorative arts, assembled some 600 photographs and objects in an exploration of the social role of taste. Their purpose was not connoisseurship; they made no attempt to explain the specific content or derivations of late nineteenth-century American taste. They are concerned instead to help us understand what our possessions mean. The exhibit and its catalog are offered as a case study in how people have used their possessions to care for their physical needs, to demonstrate their status, and to create the social myths that harmonize their own values with those of the world about them. Talbot presents, in short, a sophisticated ethnographic description of life and belief in America three-quarters of a century ago, based upon Wisconsin's images and material culture. It suggests fruitful directions and demonstrates a powerful methodology for further research.

These directions were suggested 140 years ago by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his famous "American Scholar" address:

What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and gait of the body — show me the ultimate reason of these matters, and the world lies no longer a dull miscellany and lumber-room, but has form and order.

American historical scholars have been slow to accept the

breadth of Emerson's challenge. In the years since he spoke, academic history has been conceived as essentially literary. Historians have concentrated upon "the news of the boat and the ballad in the street," analyzing texts for evidence and recording the results in monographs. History is pursued in museums as well, of course, but curators have generally focused upon little more than the firkins and pans. Emerson's concern for synthesis has gone largely unattended, at least until recent years when social historians have begun borrowing from related disciplines like geography, folklore, psychology, and anthropology to better reconstruct past ways of life and patterns of belief. Historians are gradually acquiring the social anthropologist's interest in the "glance and the gait."

In *At Home*, George Talbot presents to those working to make sense of the past — teachers, curators, and historic site interpreters — a powerful, accessible model for meeting Emerson's challenge. Drawing heavily upon John Collier's *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* (1964), he shows us that historical photographs can also be "read" to help us gain an understanding of rituals, gestures, and artifacts. With sociologist Erving Goffman's example before him, he considers "the glances of the eye" preserved in photographs as a means of studying the presentation of self in the everyday life of the past. With his curatorial collaborators, Talbot "reads" the objects in the collections and in the photographs to understand how furnishings function in relationship to one another and in the context of homes. He draws upon his background as a social scientist to explain how images, objects, and actions are manipulated by individuals and families in what Peter Berger has called "the social construction of reality."

Some historians may be concerned that more familiar sources like newspapers, diaries, novels, and oral histories have largely been ignored in this study. Others may lament the lack of formal documentation. Talbot's intention, I believe, was not to submit a flawless analysis but to demonstrate the potential in new lines of inquiry. In any case, the reader needs finally to ask whether the book intuitively satisfies one's understanding of the period. I find Talbot's account to be largely persuasive.

However, Talbot seems to have several aims which he does not succeed in fulfilling. He pledges, for example, a close regional focus on domestic life in the upper Midwest and particularly in Wisconsin. But except for noting the provenance of the photographs, there is no suggestion of ways in which the region shared in a national culture and the ways it did not. There is little distinction between rural and urban material aspirations or achievements. It is all rather homogenized. Talbot tells us little about the changes that were taking place in the period except for mentioning the introduction of electrical appliances and arts and crafts movement furniture. Most serious, however, is that in this book, which argues articulately and convincingly that objects play important social roles, not a single object used in the exhibit is shown in the catalog. If furnishings and photographs inform each other so powerfully, why have the objects themselves not been shared with catalog readers as well as exhibit-goers?

A word about the photographs themselves: this exhibit and catalog demonstrate that Wisconsin has preserved a truly extraordinary photographic heritage. The images presented are individually and collectively rich. At least within the scope of



this presentation (domestic scenes and activities, 1876–1920), the collection compares quite favorably with that of the Minnesota Historical Society. Unfortunately the photographs have been reproduced in a muddy duotone that diminishes rather than enhances the images.

Nonetheless, the reader should not be discouraged from reading the book, for quietly, unobtrusively, it conveys considerable excitement. The prose is energetic; the images and Talbot's interpretation of them are vivid; and the approach will stimulate new ways of looking at historical photographs and artifacts. I strongly recommend the book to teachers, historic house interpreters, curators, and research historians. Would that more exhibit catalogs were as full of thoughts as they are of facts!

*Reviewed by* NICHOLAS WESTBROOK, *who as co-ordinator of exhibits of the Minnesota Historical Society's educational services division is currently preparing an exhibit on mail-order merchandise in the 1890–1910 period.*

***The Fifties: The Way We Really Were.* By Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak.**

(New York, Doubleday and Company, 1977. Illustrations. viii, 444 p. \$10.95.)

MILLER AND NOWAK identify themselves as historians educated in the 1950s and radicalized in the 1960s. Their book offers an alternative view of the 1950s to that which they see being presented at the moment on television, in the movies, and by "establishment" newspapers. This current image, for them, is of the "Fabulous Fifties," a happy and innocent decade before the turmoil of the 1960s. For Miller and Nowak, however, the years 1948–53 are "The Age of Fear," and they emphasize the way in which the career of Wisconsin's Senator Joseph McCarthy symbolized the commitment of most political leaders of both major parties as well as most cultural leaders to political repression. They also emphasize the experience of school children in learning to live with the terror of atomic attack.

The apparent success of this repression of dissent and cultural creativity leads to the next series of chapters which express, for the authors, "The Era of Conservative Consensus." Nowak and Miller are quick to point out, however, the weaknesses in this consensus. Americans were more religious than ever, but what did religion mean? More Americans were prosperous, but Blacks and women did not get their fair share of that prosperity. And the price of limited prosperity was increasing corporate power over the economy, the government, and the universities. American cultural leaders were sure that woman's place was in the home, but statistics revealed more working women.

These contradictions which are skillfully developed by Miller and Nowak as they analyze political, economic, social, and cultural material lead to the chapters in their final section, "The Time of National Reassessment, 1958–1960." They point to the small but stubborn group of political radicals who never capitulated to the official consensus. They point to an even larger group of dissenting artists, especially the Beat poets. And they point to the subversive nature of the new music

which became popular among teenagers in spite of major efforts by the "establishment" to repress its sexuality and its criticism of the older generation.

A major weakness of the book, one which is shared by much of the historical profession, is organizing historical narrative around a decade or a generation. Miller and Nowak give us a sense of the flow of events out of the 1950s, but any such book as theirs perhaps overemphasizes the novelty of their period, its lack of roots in the past. It is possible, for example, that there has been systematic political repression since World War I. And recent scholarship now dates the development of a segregated youth culture during the formation of high schools and increasing college enrollment, 1890–1920. The poverty of the Black ghetto as well as the confusion of the relationship of middle-class women to the home and to the job market also seem to have their roots in this earlier period. Perhaps we can understand the 1950s as well as the 1970s better from the perspective of a slowly developing crisis of our national cultural identity.

*Reviewed by* DAVID W. NOBLE, *professor of history at the University of Minnesota, who specializes in modern American culture. He is the author of several scholarly books, including* *Historians Against History*, *and* *The Progressive Mind, 1890–1917.*

***Manuscripts Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society: Guide Number 3.* Compiled by Lydia A. Lucas.**

(St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society, 1977. 189 p. Paper \$7.00.)

SCHOLARS who have a professional interest in Minnesota history and other citizens who wish to understand some aspect of their heritage will welcome publication of this guide to manuscripts collections at the Minnesota Historical Society. Two earlier guides, published in 1935 and 1955, described 1,645 collections available for research. This third in the series describes another 1,194 collections, giving basic facts about the size of each collection, the period covered, and whether there are restrictions on use, as well as information about the person or organization central to the collection. The descriptions are arranged alphabetically by the title of the collection, and an index provides name, subject, and geographic access to the collections. The guide was compiled by Lydia Lucas, head of technical services in the society's division of archives and manuscripts, with assistance from other staff members.

The majority of collections described are twentieth-century records and papers or those documenting the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. There is extensive material on railroads, politics, co-operatives, the environment, labor, women, churches, and minority groups, among them Blacks, Jews, and Mexican-Americans. There is also evidence about the lives of many individual Minnesotans, including architect Cass Gilbert, Native American music expert Frances Densmore, and the late Hubert H. Humphrey, who donated a large and rich collection of papers and records. A particular — and commendable — effort was made to use the index to provide access to collections by geographic locale so that someone studying Koochiching County, for example, can find major col-

lections pertaining to the county listed in the index under Koochiching County.

In her introduction state archivist Lucile M. Kane notes that the guide is both a reference tool and a progress report on the Minnesota Historical Society's collecting program. In both respects the guide is praiseworthy: as a reference tool it is technically well done and literate, and as a progress report it demonstrates the responsiveness of the society to new research interests and changing concerns in the state and in the world. Finally, the guide itself is an abbreviated state history. From the papers of Minneapolis attorney Howard Abbott to the records of the Zumbro Baptist Association, it describes Minnesota life and history, at least in so far as that history created records. Modestly priced at \$7.00, the guide would make an excellent gift for amateur or professional historians.

*Reviewed by* ANDREA HINDING, assistant professor and curator of the Social Welfare History Archives of the University of Minnesota.

***The Village Indians of the Upper Missouri: The Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras.*** By Roy W. Meyer. (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1977. xiv, 354 p. Illustrations. \$14.95.)

IN HIS most recent book on the American Indian, Roy W. Meyer examines the village-dwelling horticulturists of the upper Missouri River — the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara tribes of North Dakota. Their ancestors had lived in permanent earth lodge villages along the Missouri for centuries before the white man visited the northern Great Plains region. A relatively stable subsistence pattern was based on crops of corn, beans, and squash and the bison. These traits, plus a rich ceremonial life, set them apart from the more dashing equestrian Sioux tribe who lived in the same general region.

The Sioux had an ambivalent relationship with the villagers and between trading visits to their towns often tried to exterminate them. The villagers, despite their permanent locations, and vulnerability to diseases, held their own until the terrible smallpox epidemic of 1837. Thus, these people provide a refreshing contrast to the stereotyped image that all Plains Indians were bison-hunting, tepee-dwelling nomads who wandered about over the endless grasslands of the Great Plains.

Although a vast assortment of ethnological material has been published on varied aspects of the villagers' culture, the present volume is the first comprehensive study of their history. Properly so, Meyer focuses his attention upon the interaction between these people and the white man. In the century following the visit of the La Vérendryes to the Mandan in 1738, explorers, fur traders, military officers, government Indian agents, missionaries, overland immigrants, and settlers in turn visited these Native Americans and recorded their impressions of a vastly different life-style.

The writer commences his work with a discussion of the prehistoric period along the upper Missouri and does something which is rare for a historian; he utilizes archaeological evidence to reconstruct the vanished past. (This is especially refreshing to this reviewer who happens to be an archaeologist.)

In the succeeding chapters he describes the many Euro-American contacts from the time of the La Vérendryes to the arrival of the artist George Catlin and Prince Maximilian in the 1830s. Even then the aboriginal culture had undergone significant changes. Meyer then diverges from historical continuity to describe the life-style of these people at about 1830. Afterward, he discusses the devastating smallpox epidemic of 1837 which killed nine-tenths of the Mandan tribe and wiped out perhaps one-half of the Hidatsa and Arikara tribes. From then on, the unfortunate villagers were weak and less able to cope with the numerous aggressive Sioux.

About 1845, the surviving Hidatsa and many of the Mandan moved well above the mouth of the Knife River to a bend in the Missouri shaped like a fishhook. Here they founded Like-a-Fishhook village in an effort to regroup. The remaining Mandan joined them over the years, and by 1862 the alien Caddoan-speaking Arikara were forced to share this site in the face of the hostile Sioux.

In the remaining chapters of this volume, the writer chronologically describes the coming of a long line of venal Indian agents, the vanishing of the buffalo, the breakup of the village and scattering of its people onto individual allotments, and the remainder of the nineteenth century during which the United States government attempted to break down tribal structure and to allot lands in severalty. He also deals with the continuing efforts of the federal government to improve health conditions and to educate young Indians. The 1930s and 1940s were eventful with drought, depression, and the departure of young men during World War II. Especially notable is the detailed discussion of the traumatic impact which the Garrison Dam and Reservoir had upon these unfortunate citizens.

This volume is illustrated with many photographs and has useful maps. To be commended are the reference notes for each chapter, a well-organized bibliography, and an index. The writing is of an exceptionally high standard. The book is heartily recommended to anyone who is interested in the meeting of two cultures and the history of the western plains of this country.

*Reviewed by* ALAN R. WOOLWORTH, chief archaeologist of the Minnesota Historical Society, who has directed extensive excavations at Like-a-Fishhook village and has prepared two detailed ethnohistorical studies on its people's history.

***Witching For Water, Oil, Pipes, and Precious Minerals.*** By Walker D. Wyman.

(River Falls, University of Wisconsin-River Falls Press, 1977. 98 p. Illustrations. Cloth \$7.50, Paper \$5.25.)

A SURVEY of the literature on dowsing in America and a profile of the douers is the subject of *Witching For Water, Oil, Pipes, and Precious Minerals*. Wisconsin historian Walker Wyman has written an entertaining as well as instructive introduction to the topic. The book's value to scholars is limited, though, as it lacks both an index and a bibliography. Readers looking for a systematic study of water witching will find *Water Witching U.S.A.* by Evon Z. Vogt and Ray Hyman more valuable. Wyman's sources range from the Bible ("modern dowsers

cite Moses as the first recorded water witch") to the March-April, 1975, issue of *Colorado Outdoors*.

Wyman's book is divided into six categories: origin and distribution of witching, practitioners, employers of dousers, substances sought, various mediums and ways they are used, and beliefs or theories about the tradition. Witches employed by various governmental agencies is one of Wyman's more intriguing topics. The military has used rods to find tunnels and mines. Utility departments have used them to locate buried cables. The majority view of water witching is most often described in terms of results. For example, one believer is quoted, "We dug, we got water, we still have it."

A teacher at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, the author developed an interest in dousing after the students in a pioneer history class looked at folk beliefs that influenced pioneer settlement. He identifies two problems involved in studying dousers. The first is deciding what qualities define a douser and the second is finding accurate information, since knowledge of dousers is part of oral tradition rather than recorded history. The author draws attention to the fact that folk beliefs constitute a valuable area of social history. Illustrations, photographs, and drawings are used effectively.

*Reviewed by* SHIRLEY BORUD, *associate director of the Center for the Study of Minnesota Folklife and president of the Minnesota Folklife Society.*

***The American Farm: A Photographic History.* By Maisie Conrat and Richard Conrat.**

(San Francisco, California Historical Society, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1977. Illustrations. 256 p. Hard cover \$17.50, paper \$9.95.)

THE CONRATS have assembled an impressive book containing 165 photographs, representing the work of eighty photographers, selected (so says the back cover) from over a million images surveyed during visits to more than 100 photo archives across the United States. The photographs are beautifully printed, usually no more than one on each 11-by-8½-inch page. They have been carefully chosen to complement the brief historical summaries and quotations that accompany each chapter. As art the book is a success, especially in the haunting

images of child laborers, displaced tenant farmers, and weary migrant workers.

As history the book is not a success; it is one-sided and incomplete. "This book is an attempt to create a photographic portrait of the American farm in all its diverse aspects," say the authors, but it might be more accurate to call it an attempt to create a portrait of the American farm before mechanization, and to show the social costs of its evolution toward modern capital-, technology-, and energy-intensive agriculture.

The photographs portray farms and farm workers from all sections of the United States. They range in date from 1860 to 1973, but a disproportionate number are from the 1880-1915 period and from the 1930s depression era. They fail to show the diversity of farm life even in its premechanized days, and they are entirely too reliant on nicely composed views of scenery and of people not working. Readers who did not know better might come away from this book thinking that American agriculture consisted mostly of sturdy yeomen with oxen, fatigued slaves and child laborers, pioneer families sitting in front of their soddies waiting for a photographer to happen by, and impoverished tenants and migrants looking gaunt and hopeless.

In both format and content *The American Farm* is an interesting complement to *Beyond the Furrow*, Hiram Drache's book in praise of midwestern, mechanized agriculture (reviewed in the Fall, 1977, *Minnesota History*). Drache's book largely ignores the question of "social costs." Its text is a trifle overlong and its photographs small, jumbled together haphazardly, and poorly printed in a single section in the middle of the book. *The American Farm* contains no hint that some good might have come from machines that helped lift the burden of backbreaking drudgery from the shoulders of both farmers and their hired workers. Its text is concise and skillfully blended with the large, artistically composed photographs. Each tells part of the story, but neither can stand alone as a history of the American farm.

*Reviewed by* JOHN M. WICKRE, *manuscripts cataloger in the Minnesota Historical Society's division of archives and manuscripts, who has conducted extensive research in the history of Minnesota-manufactured agricultural machinery and given slide presentations on the evolution of power equipment on Minnesota farms.*

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## news & notes

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THE PAST two issues of *Minnesota History* — this one and the Winter, 1977, issue — have gone to press under the editorial guidance of Virginia L. Martin, assistant editor in the publications and research division, and Bruce M. White, editorial assistant. They have assumed responsibility for the magazine in the absence of editor Kenneth Carley, who has been recovering from surgery. Carley is

expected to resume editorship of the magazine with the Summer, 1978, issue.

THE NORTHERN PACIFIC's far-flung business interests are reflected in a recently published *Guide to Records of the Northern Pacific Branch Lines, Subsidiaries, and Related Companies in the Minnesota Historical Society*. Compiled by Maureen Joyce Levery, manuscripts

cataloger, and published by the MHS, this thirteen-page booklet, which sells for \$2.00, lists 195 corporations that were related to the Northern Pacific Railway Company.

The records of these companies had been intermingled with other NP records. Catalogers reassembled them into their corporate groups. They are listed alphabetically in the *Guide*, with



the period of time and the size of the collection given. Many are railroad corporations. Others "reflect the nature of the NP as a land-grant railroad and as a firm concerned with raw materials, equipment, services, and related transportation facilities." The enterprises range from oil development to steamships to hotels. Most were located in the Midwest and Canada, but a few were as far away as New York and Texas.

"PRESS PHOTOGRAPHY: MINNESOTA SINCE 1930" was the title of an exhibit on display at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis from December 11, 1977, to January 22, 1978, and is the title of the exhibit catalog which will continue to be available from the Walker Art Center and the MHS bookstore (68 p., paper, \$4.95).

Containing a selection of photographs from newspaper morgues and audio-visual libraries around the state (including the MHS) the exhibit provided an interesting sample of newspaper photographs. However, there were a number of flaws in the exhibit, most of which resulted from the inability or unwillingness of its creators to clearly define what they intended to do.

On the one hand, they suggest (in the foreword to the catalog) that they intended to approach newspaper photographs as "discrete images" (which one takes to mean that they wished to consider them as separated from the informative functions they may have had originally). On the other hand, they intended to "provide visual information about this region over the past 50 years through the means of press photography." In the first they unfortunately succeeded too well. In the second they failed, but mainly for lack of trying.

Because of their desire to consider press photographs as "discrete images," the authors of the exhibit intentionally relegated caption material to small cards in the corners of each panel of photographs (just as they put all the captions in their catalog in a section at the back). Furthermore, the information they gave was so sparse that most of the photographs had little meaning as visual information on Minnesota since 1930, but existed merely as another set of "interesting images" (which if Susan Sontag is to be believed is what the western world will eventually drown in).

Some of the most striking photographs in the exhibit are ones which are dependent in many ways on the knowledge of the viewer. For example, Mike Zerby's photograph of a legless Viet Nam veteran watching Richard Nixon an-

nouncing on television that he would bring the troops home from Viet Nam would lose a great deal of its power were we not to know that the face on the screen was Nixon's (rather than that of a soap opera actor) or were we not to know something of what Nixon was saying that night. Unfortunately, few of the photographs in the exhibit benefited from this amount of viewer knowledge.

But the problem with the exhibit was not merely that the authors did not tell us enough of the historical context of each image. An equally important problem was that they seldom attempted to consider the journalistic context of the photographs. In only one case did they exhibit a newspaper page showing how the particular photograph was finally used. In only one other case (a subsection devoted to the re-enactment photos of accidents often found in newspapers of the 1930s and 1940s) was it clear that the authors of the exhibit had tried to examine press photography in any other but the perfunctory way evidenced by their choice of categories based on the sections of a newspaper (Front Page, Feature, Sports, Family/Home).

One wishes they had gone farther to consider the ways in which the demands of circumstance, the desires of editors, the intelligence of press photographers, and the limits of technology all influence how events and people are recorded visually in newspapers. One wishes they had considered the ways that newspaper photographs and the texts that accompany them may categorize the subjects and the events they record, distorting them in facile and often repetitive ways. These things need to be studied, since the medium, far from being seen by people as a handy source of "discrete images," continues to be depended upon for accurate representations of people and events.

It is impossible to believe that knowing as much as we can about the subject of a particular photograph can in any way mar its beauty or power. Nor can knowledge about the methods of press photography make us denigrate the work of photojournalists. It is time that photographers and lovers of photography stop thinking of words (and contexts) as the enemies of images, but instead seek better ways of integrating them, which will make better documentary photography and better history.

BRUCE M. WHITE

ONE OF THE briefer but more imaginative bicentennial histories produced in recent years is *The Park: A*

*History of St. Louis Park*, published by the city's bicentennial commission and researched and written by Judy Poseley.

"St. Louis Park has always been a little bit different," Poseley begins her fifty-six page narrative. That difference becomes vivid as the story moves along. Its early history and development are told concisely but given dimension with vignettes of first families. Minneapolis lumberman Thomas B. Walker tried to make it a model village. The plans never quite materialized, but they made an impact — as did 1890s booms and busts, the 1930s depression, and World Wars I and II. There are no vague generalizations: rather, the book tells of the closing of a manufacturing plant and subsequent loss of jobs, the volatile liquor issue, a WPA highway cloverleaf, gas rationing, and the anxiety over relatives and friends in military services during the wars.

The postwar "people explosion" was an exhilarating period of growth for some, a "nightmare" for city hall. Sewers, schools, zoning problems, and the structure of government were problems the community faced. Park residents did, and brought them under control. A more stable period followed but brought its own problems, such as the need for better schools and other public services and the lack of a downtown. There were also opportunities: the Park had the state's first antipollution ordinance, the first "latch key" program for children of working mothers, the first Human Relations Commission to ensure open housing for minorities.

Local histories sometimes make their subjects sound like "Anytown, U.S.A." This is not true of *The Park*. This is a very human history that tells us a great deal about the character of St. Louis Park, its dilemmas, and its strengths.

Copies are available for \$2.50 each from the city's administrative offices, 5005 Minnetonka Boulevard, St. Louis Park 55416.

IF THE PAST could speak to us, it might use these words of Walt Whitman:

I bequeath myself to the dirt  
to grow from the grass I love,  
If you want me again,  
look for me under your boot-  
soles.

This, too, is the message of David Weitzman in his book *Underfoot: An Everyday Guide to Exploring the American Past* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976, 191 p., hard cover, \$12.95, paper \$7.95). Says Weitzman: "If our search for roots seems of no avail, it's not because we are not wise enough

or that the paths to what used to be are such mysterious ones, but perhaps because we are looking in the wrong place. Search as we might in the history-book lives of others we don't know, and have never known, sooner or later we will return to find that the answers to who we are and where we've been are nearby, and many of them are underfoot."

In *Underfoot*, Weitzman tells the reader how he or she can recognize, record, photograph, and catalog the history under our feet. He tells of the nearby sources for history, including members of the reader's family, the local library, city records, and the cemetery. Weitzman also suggests the possibilities for discovering the past in more tangible places and things, from historic buildings to historic bottles.

Also available by Weitzman is *My Backyard History Book* (Boston, Little Brown and Co., 1975, 128 p., paper \$4.95). The book is intended for children and contains much of the same information and ideas that are expressed in *Underfoot*, in addition to many others designed to excite the interest of children in history. "There is a lot more to history than memorizing the names of Presidents and war dates and most of it has to do with people who are alive right now. History is what you had for breakfast. That's where it starts. History is a celebration of time passing. That's where it leads. In between, there is a lot of interesting territory."

A GUIDE to the collected materials of the state's largest ethnic minority, the Mexican Americans, has been published by the Minnesota Historical Society. Entitled *Mexican Americans in Minnesota: An Introduction to Historical Resources* (26 p., paper \$1.75), it was compiled by Ramedo J. Saucedo, the director of the 1975-76 Mexican American History Project established in the MHS Public Affairs Center with funds from the Northwest Area Foundation.

Among the materials collected, most of which are housed at the Minnesota Historical Society, are records of churches and civic, fraternal, and cultural organizations. There are descriptions of publications and documents of government agencies, published and unpublished theses, and articles from English-language newspapers and periodicals.

Of special significance are seventy-four taped interviews conducted during the summers of 1975 and 1976 in eleven Minnesota counties by project staff members. A cross-section of Mexican

Americans was interviewed, ranging from the earliest settlers to young activists, from ardent preservers of Hispanic culture to individuals almost totally assimilated into the Anglo environment. The interviews provide information on the pattern of Mexican-American settlement in the state, indicate the impact of Mexican Americans on the labor force and economy, and describe the group's cultural heritage. Although this indexed bibliographic guide was designed primarily for researchers, these interviews provide brief vignettes of the lives of members of this ethnic group.

COMMERCIAL ARTIST, aviation historian, and pilot Noel E. Allard dedicates his book, *Speed: The Biography of Charles Holman* (Chaska, 86 p., \$9.95), to his four young children. "There should be more heroes to look up to," he explains.

Certainly Charles ("Speed") Holman was a hero. He was born and raised in Minneapolis but his fame was of Hollywood proportions. Look-alike Gary Cooper would have been perfectly cast to play the lead in this man's brief but wildly adventurous life story. Allard's book captures the spirit of the man and the excitement of making aviation history in the 1920s.

The story of Speed Holman is the story of pioneering aviation in Minneapolis and St. Paul: the first air-mail flight from the Twin Cities, 1911; the Midwest's first commercial flying field, on Earl Brown farm, in 1918; the Larabee brothers' Speedway spectacles; Clarence Hinck's air shows; the Blackstone and Holman Flying Circus.

A high school dropout and army reject, Holman began his daredevil career by racing motorcycles. He quickly graduated to airplanes. First came parachute drops, then wing-walking, then rope ladder acrobatics. His best-known aerial stunt was looping: he set the world looping record in 1928 (1,433 loops). Holman also enjoyed flying under Twin Cities bridges: St. Paul's High Bridge was one of his favorites.

By the time he was thirty-two, Holman, a good friend of Charles A. Lindbergh, had gained national recognition as a barnstormer and cross-country racer and was managing Northwest Airways, one of the most successful airlines in the country.

Then came the air show in Omaha, May 16, 1931. Pulling out of a power dive, Holman lost control of his airplane. He was killed instantly in the crash. A young reporter for the *Omaha World*

*Herald*, Edward R. Murrow, filed an eyewitness report. Describing the moment just before the crash, Murrow wrote: "The spectators, agonized, wish Holman would abandon this insanity. No man should taunt death like that, to give the crowd a thrill."

*Speed* contains an extensive collection of pictures, many of them action shots. In addition, an appendix offers detailed drawings of ten vintage airplanes. A Twin Cities map showing aviation points of interest also is included.

The book is available from the author, Chaska, Minn. 55318.

HARRY A. BLACKBURN

THE PUBLICATION of a local history has been one of the more popular ways in which a community has observed the bicentennial. These histories range from modest products of small towns and villages to the ambitious fifty-one volumes published in the States and Nations Series (see review of the Minnesota book in this issue).

In this tradition, the Bicentennial Commission of Red Wing has published *Red Wing, Minnesota: The Saga of A River Town* (Minneapolis, 464 p., illustrations, \$10.40). It was written by Madeline Angell, whose roots go deep into the city's history, giving her family lore to draw upon as well as ordinary published historical resources. These informal sources are evident in chapters such as the first, "Red Wing's Character" — which might well have been called "Red Wing's Characters," for it tells stories and anecdotes about unusual and eccentric local people.

The book is clearly the result of a vast amount of more conventional kind of research as well. Its nearly 500 pages include a brief overview of the area's prehistory and early history. It then proceeds to tell in chronological order the story of this river city. Each chapter spans a period — pioneer days, the Civil War decade, depression years — and each chapter is further subdivided into such topics as government and politics; transportation; communication; business, industry, and labor; education, health, and religion; and arts, organizations, and sports. The simple organization provides easy reference, which is further enhanced by a substantial index. There are also a few footnotes, reference notes, and a bibliography. Photographs and other art works add further information.

The book is available from the Goodhue County Historical Society, Red Wing 55066.



Since 1849, when it was chartered by the first territorial legislature, the Minnesota Historical Society has been preserving a record of the state's history. Its outstanding library and its vast collection of manuscripts, newspapers, pictures, and museum objects reflect this activity. The society also interprets Minnesota's past, telling the story of the state and region through publications, museum displays, tours, institutes, and restoration of historic sites. The work of the society is supported in part by the state and in part by private contributions, grants, and membership dues. It is a chartered public institution governed by an executive council of interested citizens and belonging to all who support it through membership and participation in its programs. You are cordially invited to use its resources and to join in its efforts to make Minnesota a community with a sense of strength from the past and purpose for the future.

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