
Book Reviews

Lost Twin Cities.

By Larry Millett.

(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1992. 336 p. Cloth, \$49.95; paper, \$29.95.)

THERE ARE a lot of pitfalls in writing books about old buildings—whether they are buildings that have been razed, rehabilitated, or otherwise reborn. Many studies concentrate only on grand and glorious structures with certified architectural pedigrees. Other writings dissect stylistic detail to an infinite degree but offer none of the context or social history that is often critical in understanding why a building looks like it does. Fortunately, Larry Millett avoided those temptations and established a new interdisciplinary model that re-creates a “lost urban world” by considering buildings from not only an architectural perspective but from the historical and geographical as well.

Lost Twin Cities examines significant St. Paul and Minneapolis structures that have been razed. Through a series of “building profiles,” Millett introduces us to more than seventy-five buildings and neighborhoods, ranging from the Merriam and Washburn mansions to the Bohemian Flats and Swede Hollow; from the West Side flour-milling district to Hamm’s Brewery; and from the Hennepin Avenue suspension bridges to the Selby Avenue streetcar tunnel. While Millett limits his geographic focus to the two downtowns and adjacent neighborhoods, he is careful to resurrect a wide variety of structures.

But *Lost Twin Cities* is not a catalog of building types and styles. The book and its profiles are divided into four sections, each with an introductory essay that provides the context for understanding the era in which the buildings were constructed. This analytical framework integrates the history of both cities rather than relying on the structures alone to tell the story.

The first section is especially important in discussing the impact of the physical development of the land and street patterns on the subsequent growth and economic character of both cities. Millett describes the great topographical changes to the landscape of St. Paul, the cutting and filling that created downtown and transformed the placid Trout Brook valley into the main railroad channel for the Northwest in the nineteenth century. He notes how the “fractured streetscape” of St. Paul has frustrated efficient planning and

transportation, in contrast to Minneapolis’s downtown, which developed with wide streets and a sense of spaciousness that typified most other midwestern cities.

The following sections detail the standard stages of urban development: the frontier cities of wooden false-front buildings and no public improvements; the “coming of age” boom of the 1880s, which brought construction of the first imposing public buildings and some municipal infrastructure; and the maturity of the early twentieth century, as the cities struggled to modernize and create another new architectural face only twenty years after the previous one. For readers unfamiliar with midwestern urban history, these discussions provide a framework for recognizing important milestones in Twin Cities history.

Millett also offers insights into the economic differences between the two cities and the resulting impact on their character. St. Paul developed as an entrepot where steamboats unloaded and the railroads began. Minneapolis, built around the Falls of St. Anthony, established its economy on the products of its hinterland and became the primary agricultural processing center. St. Paul evolved into a transportation, wholesaling, and heavy manufacturing center. The accidents of topography and geography, coupled with landscape decisions made 150 years ago, are still significant in interpreting why Minneapolis and St. Paul work as they do today.

This book is a pleasure to read for several reasons. The chronological organization, including the essays and building profiles, makes it easily accessible. Excellent photos, clearly identified and dated, illustrate each section. Detailed footnotes add substantially to our knowledge, while the index is an additional helpful tool.

A review of *Lost Twin Cities* would be lacking if it did not mention the enjoyment in reading Millett’s descriptive writing. Millett has given us a book for scholars and lay readers alike and has done so without the deadly seriousness that often dooms such works to the back of the bookshelf. His word pictures of “St. Paul’s tradition of combustibility at the inn,” discussing the city’s frequent hotel fires, or the location of the St. Paul Customs House near horse and cow markets as an “olfactory nightmare in summer” give us far more than a purely architectural description ever could.

From an urban planning perspective, *Lost Twin Cities* is refreshing in that it neither indicts all urban change nor condemns the postwar generation for what has been lost. The

author provides perspective by pointing out that the downtowns with which many of us grew up were at least the third generation of construction on the landscape.

At the same time, the building profiles are a powerful tool for explaining some of the strong preservation consciousness in America today. Just as Millett recalled his own feelings in visiting the Metropolitan Building in Minneapolis as a child, we all have "landscapes of memory" that bring us back to places visited or experienced long ago. Old buildings help us retain that sense of connection to our own past and to that of our cities. By calling up these personal memories, Larry Millett has given us a strong incentive for preservation of both the grand and the humble buildings that define our sense of belonging and our connections to the Twin Cities.

Reviewed by GARNETH O. PETERSON, a city planner with the St. Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development. She has an M.A. in history and has written and consulted on urban history and planning in Omaha, where she was a city planner.

Minnesota Collects.

By Jack El-Hai.

(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1992. 118 p. Paper, \$14.95.)

MATERIAL CULTURE is still a fledgling field. History is studied and written primarily from written sources; museums are visited for visual links with our roots. It is difficult to learn what objects can tell us and to know how objects and written sources can build on each other to yield meaning about the past.

In this context, *Minnesota Collects* is a valuable contribution to both general history and the literature of material culture. Most catalogs of the collections of museums and historical societies take one of three approaches. Some follow the "Treasures of the X Museum" format and are composed primarily of captions for photographs of objects chosen for their aesthetic appeal or connections with famous people. A narrow subspecies of this genre results in something like "Furniture from the X Collection." Again composed primarily of photographs and detailed captions, these works are usually arranged by type of item, by date, or by region. The information in the captions is generally about materials, craftsmanship, and history of ownership. A third way of organizing a catalog is "Collections of the X Museum and Library," which views highlights of each division of the organization separately: the library, archives, museum, and historic sites.

Minnesota Collects appears to plow a new furrow in the field of museum catalogs. It examines the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society through a series of themes such as sports, the arts, small-town life, and transportation. Each chapter provides a brief essay on the subject, color and black-and-white photographs from or illustrating the collections, and sidebars that allow Minnesotans to tell their own stories. The 135 color photographs are outstanding, not only for their quality but for the care that was taken to integrate items

from the library, archives, museum, and historic sites. Photo captions not only identify objects but comment on their meaning and historical significance. There are interesting, occasionally inspired juxtapositions of objects. Road maps and automobile seat cushions illuminate two different amenities for early motoring. Telephone directories and church histories, photographed together, offer distinctive but complementary windows on small-town life. Other themes are suggested through the "paper essence" of the rural community: postcards, bank notes, and the tops for milk bottles. The poster stamps that appear in nearly all of the chapters are a unifying device, helping to define each chapter's theme.

The themes chosen should appeal to most readers with a curiosity about their past, and they also show the Minnesota Historical Society's willingness to collect contemporary material—a difficult issue for many such institutions. Readers will not be surprised to see objects once belonging to Scandinavian immigrants, but they may not be expecting to encounter the crafts of recent settlers from Southeast Asia. A slightly jarring note to this reviewer is the experimental "happening" approach of scattering catch phrases from the 1960s and 1970s throughout the chapter on growing up. Even this baby boomer found several of the terms obscure: a friend who is a senior in college was baffled by the approach, which probably is equally perplexing to older readers who did not watch much television in the sixties and seventies. Perhaps phrases chosen to spark growing-up memories in people of all ages would have appealed more to a wider range of readers.

But this is a minor quibble about a catalog that should be read by anyone who is curious about how the past shapes the present in America, not just in Minnesota. Although it stands alone, it should whet readers' appetites to visit the museum exhibits, the library and archives, the historic sites. As an introduction to the resources of the recently opened Minnesota History Center, it is a compelling invitation to learn more about history.

Reviewed by ANNE WOODHOUSE, senior curator at the Missouri Historical Society. Her current projects include an exhibit on St. Louis in the late nineteenth century, a survey of decorative arts and crafts made in Missouri before 1870, and an article about industrial-design pioneer Brooks Stevens.

Homes in the Heartland: Balloon Frame Farmhouses of the Upper Midwest, 1850–1920.

By Fred W. Peterson.

(Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992. 296 p. Cloth, \$35.00.)

SCHOLARS have long known, following the work of geographer John Brinckerhoff Jackson and others from a variety of disciplines, that the house is a central element in the North American cultural landscape. But there is less certainty about *what* a house means and *how* it conveys that meaning. It is to this increasingly lively conversation that Fred Peterson makes his most important contribution.

Peterson's work starts with a description of the balloon frame, its origins, and how it differed from previous methods

of building in wood. Following this account, he sets forth a system of dividing balloon-frame houses into types, which he then analyses in separate chapters. In each, he draws on a wide range of sources from diverse disciplines to explicate the meanings of these ubiquitous structures on the midwestern landscape.

For Peterson, vernacular houses contain clues that make them "a manifestation of the culture that developed during a rapid period of growth." A house is not just an artifact; it contains dimensions of meaning—values, aspirations, status—that go far beyond the utilitarian.

There are a number of good things to say about this book. The author skillfully blends analysis of extant buildings with accounts of plan books and the didactic literature of housing and landscape architecture that was such a big part of the period. The breadth of his knowledge is one of the book's strengths. An art historian by training, Peterson dons the guises of material-culture specialist, geographer, and historian of technology, among others, to develop his analysis. Particularly effective is his use of diaries and other written accounts to refine his arguments about what a house meant to its occupants.

Problems remain, however. The Upper Midwest as he defines it is a big place, comprising all or part of Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. A connection between the form of a farmhouse and the agricultural economy that created that farmhouse surely depends on subregional patterns. Nor does Peterson attend closely to ethnicity as a defining influence. It is true that the houses he studied mark a move toward assimilation and away from the folk cultures and traditions immigrants may have brought with them. Still, the question remains: Did different ethnic groups adopt differing house styles in varying ways?

Other questions are methodological. Peterson did extensive fieldwork in the course of developing this book, but that work is never defined systematically. Geographers in particular would want to see a more thorough account of the sampling strategy or locational choices that governed his analyses. Scholars of vernacular architecture might, likewise, have problems with his choice of determining variables for his analysis of individual houses. His typologies are established on the basis of basic structural shape and floor plan. In contrast, a recent historic-preservation planning document for analysis of vernacular housing establishes three variables to determine house type, with six secondary characteristics.

The fact that other people have different categories of analysis should not obscure the importance of Peterson's work. He is the first scholar to attempt to interpret vernacular rural houses of the Upper Midwest in terms of what they might mean instead of stopping with what they are. It is true that there are sometimes more questions than answers in his work, but that is indicative of a lively book on an important subject. It must be read by the others who will, it is hoped, continue to explore this fruitful terrain.

Reviewed by PATRICK NUNNALLY, who has a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Iowa and is project historian in the archaeology department of the Minnesota Historical Society. His work focuses on historic-preservation issues raised by Minnesota's trunk-highway construction program.

Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains.

By Catherine McNicol Stock.

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992. 305 p. Cloth, \$37.50.)

THE OLD MIDDLE CLASS, comprising the "petty producers," or small businessmen, artisans, professionals, and independent farmers, shared a similar culture and values. Hard work, neighborliness, optimism, individualism, and boosterism are characteristics associated with this group. Satirized and belittled by critics such as Sinclair Lewis, the old middle class is here treated seriously and sympathetically. Confining her study to North and South Dakota, the author reconstructs the story of the small producers during the Great Depression, utilizing extensive diaries, autobiographies, reminiscences, oral histories, newspapers, and fiction. After defining the old middle class and summarizing previous historical and sociological studies, *Main Street in Crisis* depicts the common culture and values of the group in the early twentieth century, narrates the crisis and adjustments it faced during the Great Depression and New Deal, and considers the long-term costs resulting from changes forced upon group members.

The Great Depression severely affected the people of the Dakotas. Dependent on the productivity of the land, the old middle class was especially hard hit. By 1940 one-third of farmers who owned land lost it to foreclosure. Businesses closed due to decreased trade, and professionals departed when customers could no longer afford their services. Social life was disrupted because people had no funds for entertainment, and members of clubs no longer paid their dues. Neighborliness and loyalty were sorely tested as individuals and groups competed for declining revenues. Earlier perceptions of self-worth were undermined when economic conditions caused industrious people suddenly to be as poorly dressed as residents considered shiftless and lazy.

Governmental relief efforts, relates Stock, both helped and hurt the old middle class. While people desperately needed financial support, New Deal programs took away some local autonomy. Hostility was directed toward external administrative "experts" perceived as unfamiliar with local conditions. New Deal regulations, demanding signs of progress to end the depression and prevent its recurrence, were thought to destroy individualism. The crisis was more than economic; people were struggling to maintain an entire way of life. While the old middle class survived, "It has hardly thrived," the author concludes.

Stock utilizes several case studies to clarify her subjects' adjustments to crisis conditions, including the Farm Holiday Association, rural women, North Dakota Freemasons, and the building of the new North Dakota state capitol. The Freemasons, for example, faced declining membership; struggling to maintain earlier elitist standards, they eventually had to enroll persons unwelcome in an earlier time.

Stock's narrative breaks considerable new ground but deals, as she admits, with "extraordinarily complex" relationships and changes. Grappling with difficult definitions of class and values and examining intricate adjustments, the author makes significant assumptions. She takes the experi-

ences of farmers, small businessmen, and professionals to be similar, though important differences between town and country might exist. The implicit problem in definition is evident in the book's title, *Main Street in Crisis*, hardly reflective of the considerable portion of the narrative spent on the farming population.

The experiences of the old middle class are considered to be different from those of other classes in the region, but great similarities to workers' adjustments might exist if comparisons were made. North Dakotans, it is assumed, responded similarly to South Dakotans, though the two states had somewhat different political experiences in earlier decades. The author concludes that adjustments by women were quite different from those of men; if so, class might not be appropriate for the book's thesis. Some of the changes that the old middle class confronted were adjustments made by society as a whole due to commercial and technological progress, hav-

ing little to do with the Great Depression and New Deal programs. Labor-saving machinery and increased involvement in an extensive market economy demanded change; modern bookkeeping was not forced upon farmers solely because of depression and governmental regulations.

Despite these assumptions weakening the author's interpretation, fascinating new material and human interest stories fill the book. There is much that has not previously received sufficient scholarly attention. While the conclusions cannot be considered definitive, this is a provocative, important study worthy of careful attention by scholars and general readers, a compliment to the author's suggestive themes.

Reviewed by JAMES McLAIRD, professor of history at Dakota Wesleyan University, who has published extensively on regional history.

News & Notes

A QUESTION for readers: We are considering offering for sale slipcases that will hold one volume (eight issues) of *Minnesota History*. These handsome, sturdy cases have the look of leather and are open only at the back for maximum protection and ease of storage. They are embossed with the magazine title and come with a gold-foil transfer for marking the year and volume number. Given reader interest, the cases will be available for about \$10.00 in the summer of 1993. If you are interested in purchasing one—or several—please write to the editor or call either (612) 297-3243 or 1-800-647-7827.

GENEALOGISTS will welcome three new publications from Park Genealogical Books. *The Grave Markers of Hennepin County, MN—Vol. 2*, compiled by Alfred J. Dahlquist and members of the NorthWest Territory Canadian and French Heritage Center (1992, 59 p., \$10.00), includes inscriptions for more than eight thousand burials in the townships of Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Champlin, Dayton, and east Osseo. Detailed maps make it easy to locate

the graves. The fully indexed book is a companion to a volume published in 1981 that includes burials in Maple Grove and west Osseo townships (\$6.00).

Early Presbyterian Church Records from Minnesota, 1835-1871, edited by Mary Hawker Bakeman (1992, 32 p., \$10.00), transcribes manuscript material kept by missionaries Gideon and Samuel Pond. It chronicles the development of four churches, including the one at Fort Snelling, with membership rolls and other vital statistics. The fully indexed volume also features the Ponds' descriptions of notables such as Thomas S. Williamson and J. D. Stevens.

A Guide to the Minnesota State Census Microfilm (1992, 15 p., \$4.00) provides the roll numbers—by county, township, or city ward—to the microfilm at the Minnesota Historical Society and the Latter Day Saints Family History Center libraries for the state censuses taken from 1865 through 1905.

All books are available from the publisher, 3601 78th Ave. North, Brooklyn Park, 55443. (Please note the street address, omitted from notice of

A Comprehensive Index to A. T. Andreas' Illustrated Historical Atlas of Minnesota, 1874.) Postage and handling costs are \$1.50 for the first volume and \$.50 for each additional one. Minnesota residents, please add 6.5 percent sales tax.

RETIRED teacher Olive Ireland Theen takes a nostalgic look back in her 1992 publication, *Country School Days*. The forty-five-page book, with sketches by the author, gives readers a look at the schoolhouse, the teacher, students, lessons, and diversions. It may be ordered from the author, 810 10th Ave. South, #201, St. Cloud 56301 for \$8.95 plus 6.5 percent sales tax for Minnesota residents.

MEANT TO SERVE as a history text, Philip Weeks's *Farewell, My Nation: The American Indian and the United States, 1820-1890* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1990, 250 p., \$9.50) is a handy summary of U.S. policy changes and their results. The seventy-year period saw the successive failure of attempts to isolate Indian people in the West, concentrate them all on reservations, and Americanize

them by granting limited personal rights and sending the children off to schools. The book concludes with a useful bibliographical essay.

THE JAMES J. HILL Reference Library will award a number of grants of up to \$2,000 to support research in the James J. Hill and Louis W. Hill papers. The deadline for applications is November 1, 1993, and the awards will be announced in early 1994. For more information, contact W. Thomas White, curator, at the library, 80 West Fourth St., St. Paul 55102.

A NEW LOOK at an old topic offers some fresh insights in *Toward a Social History of the American Civil War: Exploratory Essays*, edited by Maris A. Vinovskis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 201 p., cloth, \$34.50, paper, \$9.95). Seven essays focus on the impact of the conflict on life in the North, beginning with the editor's "Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War?" Along with case studies of New Hampshire towns, municipal government in Chicago, and Philadelphia's Great Central Fair are thoughtful pieces on "The Northern Soldier and His Community" and "American Widows and the Civil War Pension System."

THE HISTORY of the Benedictine community in Duluth receives unusually fine treatment in a well-written and carefully researched narrative, *House of Stone: The Duluth Benedictines* by Mary Richard Boo, O.S.B. (Duluth: St. Scholastica Priory Books, 1991, 253 p., \$15.00). Sister Boo approaches her topic from a surprisingly feminist perspective, candidly discussing the often heavy-handed interference of bishops in the internal affairs of these nuns. Indeed, their origins in 1891 lay with the desires of Bishop James McColrick and his colleague Otto Zardetti of St. Cloud, who told the Benedictines at St. Joseph to divide so that a new group more directly under Duluth's bishop could be established. Later, Bishop Timothy Corbett of Crookston proved even more demanding, but other prelates could be supportive. Boo clearly demonstrates that nuns operated in an institution that assumed male dominance.

But these women lacked neither willpower nor resources. The strong-willed and innovative early leadership

of Mother Scholastica (Catherine Kerst) stemmed not only from her talents but also the generous financial support of her father. Moreover, the sisters could exert some pressure through withdrawing (or threatening to withdraw) from missions. Mother Scholastica and her successors used sophisticated financing techniques, such as buying land, building, and then mortgaging for more capital. The community ambitiously expanded, staffing numerous schools, hospitals, and other institutions. After World War II the expansion slowed, though investment in Duluth's St. Scholastica College increased substantially. This growth occurred at times in the face of divisions, ranging from ethnic separatism among some Polish members early in the century to post-Vatican II splits along liberal/conservative lines. In recent decades the typical problem of declining vocations has led to aging of the community and some constriction of activities or increased use of laypersons, notably in parochial schools.

The author proceeds with confidence and candor to offer insights into this secluded society through copious use of community documents, interviews with elderly nuns, and some outside sources. The focus is consistently on the Duluth community; there are few references to the experience of nuns elsewhere and little use of the developing secondary literature on sisters. But considered on its own terms, as a community history, *House of Stone* is an impressive and often moving story of a remarkable society of religious women.

William J. Galush

"IT'S YOUR MISFORTUNE and None of My Own": A New History of the American West by Richard White (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991, 644 p., \$39.95) focuses on how succeeding groups of settlers have transformed the frontier into a region of complex social and economic relationships. White traces the involvements among racial and ethnic groups and the place they created from the western landscape; he also mines scholarship in gender relations, urban, labor, and minority history. What emerges is a picture of people pursuing short-term benefits without regard to the long-term effects of their actions, either on the settlers who preceded them or on the region itself.

JOHN Radzilowski's *Out on the Wind: Poles and Danes in Lincoln County, Minnesota, 1880-1905* (Marshall: Crossings Press, 1992, 127 p., \$11.95) takes an in-depth look at local settlement history. Radzilowski and researcher Jennifer Mahal focused their study on two townships: Royal (more than 50 percent Polish by the turn of the century) and Hope (heavily Danish). Within this context, they chart the gradual development of community, patterns of agriculture, and degree of cultural retention and assimilation. They also compare the experiences of the two groups over the twenty-five year period.

WINNEBAGO ORATORY: *Great Moments in the Recorded Speech of the Hochungra, 1742-1887* (Rochester, Mn.: Coyote Books, 1991, 106 p., \$16.95) follows compiler Mark Diedrich's similar works on the Ojibway and Dakota. The eloquence of approximately forty different speakers is represented in these pages, which chronicle a long period of turbulence during which the Winnebago people ceded land and were moved from Wisconsin to Iowa, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Nebraska.

THE ONCE-FLOURISHING passenger transportation and freight business on North America's inland seas is the subject of compiler Le Roy Barnett's *Shipping Literature of the Great Lakes. A Catalog of Company Publications, 1852-1990* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1992, 165 p., cloth \$24.95). The author of this ambitious checklist originally sought "to track down and catalog all of the substantive printed items that were ever issued by shipping companies operating on the Great Lakes." Because the material was printed, distributed, and received as ephemera and because repositories tend to keep the material in hard-to-access vertical files and pamphlet collections, Barnett had to content himself with finding an estimated 80 percent of the literature—3,042 entries. Each contains a brief history of the shipping company, the text of its brochure, the date, and the location. Two appendices (maps of Great Lakes shipping ports and ship passengers at selected ports) round out this listing that should be a useful tool for students of navigation history.



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