

## **Paddlewheels on the Upper Mississippi, 1823–1854: How Steamboats Promoted Commerce and Settlement in the West**

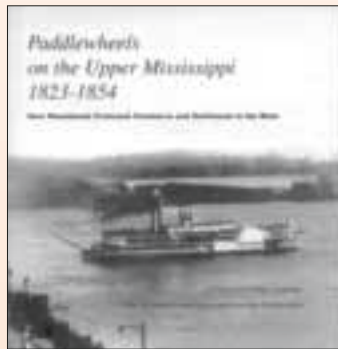
**By Nancy and Robert Goodman**

*(Stillwater, MN: Washington County Historical Society/History Network of Washington County, 2003. 155 p. Paper, \$18.00.)*

IN 1854 AN ENTERPRISING RAILROAD company organized the “Great Western Excursion” to promote the extension of tracks from Chicago to Rock Island. From there, 1,200 travelers transferred to lavishly appointed steamboats and chugged upriver to the Twin Cities. Guests such as former president Millard Fillmore, the governors of Connecticut, Illinois, and Michigan, and numerous journalists ate sumptuous meals and danced late into the night. Nancy and Robert Goodman effectively use this episode to dramatize the rise and fall of steamboats on the upper Mississippi River. While riverboats had tremendous romantic appeal to travelers, they could not compete with the railroads. The penetration of trains into the Upper Midwest virtually ended the steamboat age in the years immediately prior to the Civil War.

The Goodmans chart the influence of steamboats on the society and culture of the upper Mississippi River valley between their advent in 1823 and the 1854 excursion. This important topic has been surprisingly neglected by historians. In a richly illustrated and interesting book, the authors give readers a good sense of what it was like to work and travel on an antebellum steamboat. Although ostensibly about the area between Galena, Illinois, and the Falls of St. Anthony in present-day Minneapolis, the book focuses on Minnesota.

Steamboats were initially used to move troops and supplies along the frontier. The first steamboat arrived at Fort Snelling in 1832 and ushered in a stampede of traders and settlers to the region. As settlement took shape, the demand for riverboats increased. A brisk tourist trade developed when Americans learned they could pay five dollars to enjoy a weeklong outing on the upper Mississippi River. The highlight of such excursions was a visit to the Falls of St. Anthony, a feat usually accomplished only at the end of a bumpy wagon ride. Unwary travelers might be victimized by “wild” steamers, boats that “lacked punctuality, regularity, and reliability.” Travelers might find themselves suddenly



abandoned on a sandbar or forced to pay exorbitant fees to continue the journey. A regular trade did develop, however, and steamboats brought a steady stream of commodities and settlers to Minnesota.

If the book’s subtitle is taken at face value, then the authors’ reach exceeds their grasp. While they are quite good at describing life on steamboats, they are less successful at explaining how the vessels promoted commerce and settlement. Their importance is assumed but not proven, as there are no extended discussions of economic or demographic changes. The book’s organization is also somewhat curious. Chapter 3 describes steamboats and what it was like to travel on the river. Not until chapter 10 do readers learn about the officers and crew. A more natural presentation would have grouped this information together so that life on a steamboat was more readily understood. Readers wanting to learn about the dangers that beset riverboats must wait until the Afterword, which could also have provided a more extended discussion of snags, fires, and explosions. While such catastrophes were relatively infrequent, they exerted a powerful effect on the nation’s psyche. The hint of danger was part of the steamers’ attraction.

These criticisms should be taken in stride, however, as the book is intended for a general audience and is a useful introduction to steamboat life on the Mississippi River. The illustrations are splendid and the sidebars fascinating. The book is simply enjoyable. It would be an excellent addition to public libraries and deserves a wide readership for those interested in Minnesota history.

*Reviewed by Robert Gudmestad, assistant professor of history at the University of Memphis and the author of A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade (2004). He is currently writing a book about the influence of steamboats on the Cotton Kingdom.*

## **Brackett’s Battalion: Minnesota Cavalry in the Civil War and Dakota War**

**By Kurt D. Bergemann**

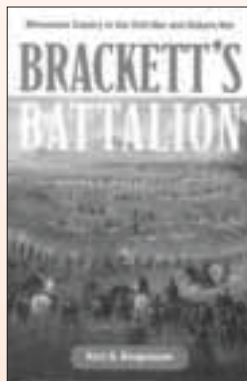
*(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2004. 196 p. Paper, \$15.95.)*

PERHAPS LUCKILY FOR THEM, a majority of the men who fought in the Civil War never participated in a great battle such as Shiloh, Antietam, Gettysburg, or Chickamauga. Instead, they soldiered under less glamorous circumstances, fighting an occasional skirmish and performing their vital but onerous duties amid a hostile or indifferent populace

while enduring hardship, boredom, and homesickness. Such was the service of the Minnesotans of Major Alfred B. Brackett's battalion of cavalry. When its three companies were recruited in the fall of 1861, Union authorities did not know quite what to do with them. Sent south to St. Louis sans horses and weapons, the Minnesotans ended up in a mixed regiment of Iowans, Nebraskans, and Missourians dubbed the "Curtis Horse," after General Samuel R. Curtis, commander of the District of Southwestern Missouri.

Ironically, the regiment never served under its namesake but, instead, in February 1862 joined General Ulysses S. Grant's offensive into Tennessee. Operating primarily in the northwestern portion of the state, often in small detachments, the Curtis Horse protected the critical line of communication against Confederate guerrillas and occasional forays by regular cavalry. Hampered by inadequate training and poor-quality weapons, the Minnesotans took their lumps as they learned the trade of horse soldier. In June 1862 their regiment, to their disgust, became the Fifth Iowa Cavalry because a few more men hailed from there than elsewhere. A year later the regiment took to the field in exhilaration in General William S. Rosecran's Army of the Cumberland that swept the enemy through Chattanooga and beyond into Georgia. But while the Fifth Iowa reluctantly resumed its rear-area patrolling, the defeat at Chickamauga in September 1863 rolled Rosecran's battered army back into Chattanooga. That fall the regiment worked hard to keep its Rebel counterparts from swarming into central Tennessee.

In January 1864 the Minnesotans gratefully returned home on veteran furlough, where circumstances changed dramatically. Instead of returning to the Fifth Iowa, they now formed Brackett's Battalion of Minnesota Volunteer Cavalry, destined for service on the frontier. Ever since the Dakota War of August 1862, much of Minnesota's military manpower had remained behind to deal with the threat of more fighting. In 1863 troops had gone into Dakota Territory to break up the Indian bands. Now, in May 1864 Brackett's battalion joined General Alfred Sully's expedition to the upper Missouri River and Montana Territory. When fighting the Plains Indians, things never turned out as planned, but in July Sully did overtake and destroy a huge Dakota village at Kildeer Mountain. There, Brackett's battalion executed a dramatic mounted charge against warriors including Sitting Bull himself. Following a hard summer on the plains and



in the Dakota badlands, the unit wintered in Minnesota. In 1865, while their former comrades in the Fifth Iowa witnessed the end of the Confederacy, Brackett's men returned to the Upper Missouri, where the summer Indian campaign saw much marching but little fighting. Not mustered out until June 1866, Brackett's battalion was among the longest serving volunteer units of the Civil War.

Kurt D. Bergemann, a direct descendant of one of Brackett's Minnesotans, has written a fine book that amply fulfills the two main obligations of good unit history. The first is to tell significant parts of the story from the viewpoint of actual participants, ideally in their own words. Having conducted extensive research, Bergemann employs numerous key original accounts, most notably Eugene Marshall's superb diary, that help bring his narrative to life. There are wonderful anecdotes both of service in the field and back at home. A good regimental history must also place its particular unit within the proper context by detailing its contribution to the greater effort. There Bergemann succeeds as well, keeping the reader informed of the changing mission of the Fifth Iowa Cavalry and Brackett's battalion and explaining what the Minnesotans were doing and why. Oddly enough, this reviewer also had an ancestor who served under Brackett. In telling the fascinating and unique story of this fighting unit, Kurt Bergemann's book offers a fitting tribute to both his forebear and mine.

*Reviewed by John B. Lundstrom, curator of American and military history at the Milwaukee Public Museum. He is the author of five books on the war in the Pacific and is currently writing a study of the Ninth Minnesota in the Civil War.*

## **Profiting from the Plains: The Great Northern Railway and Corporate Development of the American West**

**By Claire Strom**

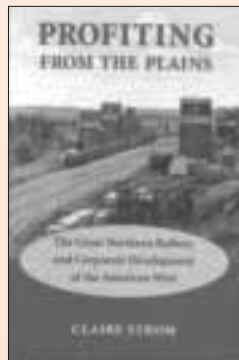
*(Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003. 228 p. Cloth, \$35.00.)*

PROFITABLE RAILROAD BUILDING in the late-nineteenth-century American West depended on a predictable and reliable infrastructure of extractive industries sufficient to support a sustainable volume of freight. Among the railroad capitalists of the time, James J. Hill proved a master at amassing financial resources, attracting settlers to the northern West, constructing exceptionally well-built railroads with gentle grades and curves, and operating with first-rate equipment. After piecing together a small fortune

in St. Paul, the Canadian-born Hill purchased the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad in 1878 with land grants in Minnesota and North Dakota. He reorganized the business as the Great Northern Railway in 1889 and began a calculated push to Puget Sound without the benefit of an additional federal land subsidy. To assure the future profitability of the Great Northern, Hill adopted a number of shifting strategies to promote agriculture in the northern-tier states.

Hill's schemes to advance production and viable agricultural settlements along his lines were far-reaching, including a well-publicized effort to portray himself as an agricultural expert. Although his policies and programs were often at cross purposes with state and federal agricultural agendas, the Great Northern executive was a firm believer in diversified farming, developing improved breeds of cattle, and promoting both dryland farming and irrigated agriculture. Where it suited his interests, he stood his ground, denying the credibility of agricultural experts. Hill successfully used "point men," local boosters and promoters who willingly advanced the Great Northern's interests in agricultural diversification and change. In the end, though, Strom argues, Hill "influenced only those with the money, interest, and knowledge to invest in agricultural improvements."

From the great Dakota land boom of the 1880s to the attractions of the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909, the Great Northern's corporate executives tirelessly exploited every opportunity to promote settlement through the semi-arid areas of the northern West. Between 1909 and 1915 the railroad supported the Dry-Farming Congress to attract farmers to the region. Attendees included governors, may-



ors, county commissioners, and railroad and Chamber of Commerce representatives—nearly everyone, the author points out, except farmers. Combining boosterism and quasi-scientific arguments, the Dry-Farming Congress shamelessly promoted farming enterprises in eastern Montana's marginal agricultural lands. Ultimately, under the direction of Hill's son Louis, the Great Northern withdrew its support from the Congress when the organization refused to do the railroad's bidding.

*Profiting from the Plains* is not without shortcomings. Although the bibliography lists most of the relevant and recent scholarship, many of the citations in the endnotes refer to dated sources. The book also suffers from stylistic lapses, redundancies, and the author's curious strategy of highlighting James J. Hill's failure to gain high-level support to advance his agricultural vision. Arguing that the Hills' "attempts to influence agricultural development in the northern tier states by political lobbying, direct media attack, and appeals to presidents persistently failed," Strom concludes that the Great Northern's influence in agriculture was seriously eroded. She never effectively explains why the Great Northern was so financially robust and why the Hills were so wealthy.

To be fair, the author properly points out that Hill's dream of a densely populated countryside of small yeoman farmers succumbed to economic realities and technological advances that transformed agriculture to large-scale enterprises. Hill's notion of peopling the region with small farmers failed because he muddled "economic pragmatism with Jeffersonian idealism."

*Reviewed by William G. Robbins, Emeritus Distinguished Professor of History, Oregon State University, Corvallis. His most recent book is Landscapes of Conflict: The Oregon Story, 1940–2000 (2004).*

■ *Our Readers Write: In response to Laura Weber's article, "The House that Bullard Built" (Spring 2004), Steve Goodell of Minneapolis sent the following information about a Bullard contemporary on the other side of the Mississippi:*

"I was quite interested in your article on Casville Bullard and the houses he built in St. Paul. I was surprised to learn that he was a member of building-trades unions in both Memphis and St. Paul. Historically the building-trades unions almost everywhere in the United States have been segregated from before the Civil War until very recently.

"I would like to draw your attention to the house at 3904 Clinton Avenue in South Minneapolis. Aside from it being a charming-looking house . . . it was inhabited, possibly built, by Van Artis Spence in the 1920s. He was a member of the Minneapolis Fire Department, according to his obituary, possibly the first African American fireman in Minneapolis. The MFD remained racially integrated until the late 1940s, at which time it became resegregated . . . until the 1970s.

"Spence, according to his obituary, died in 1928 and is buried at Hillside Cemetery. His father was the sole African American member of the Grand Army of the Republic Frank Daggett Post in Litchfield. The elder Mr. Spence had obtained his freedom by joining the Union Army during the Civil War. He had made his way to Litchfield by the 1870s. . . . The African American community never grew much beyond Mr. Spence's family, and the Spence family eventually moved to Minneapolis."

*Boxing enthusiasts and other readers intrigued by Anne Allen's article on Fred Fulton of Rochester (Spring 2004) may welcome the chance to pursue the topic a bit farther. John Wikre offers the following tips:*

"I ran across a few items related to Fred Fulton at the Library of Congress American Memory website: <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/mdbquery.html>. There are four small images from the *Chicago Daily News*, circa 1916, and more than a half-dozen items from *Stars*

and *Stripes*, 1918–19. Searching for 'Fulton boxing' will pull up more references than the six-or-so caught by searching on 'Fred Fulton.' There is much more, of course, in the Library of Congress and other sources on Willard, Moran, Miske, and Dempsey, as well as the legal and promotional aspects of boxing.

"On a somewhat related subject, the Great Northern Railway president's subject files (in the Minnesota Historical Society's archives) include material on a Gibbons-Dempsey fight held in Shelby, Montana, in 1923. . . . The fight was supposed to promote Shelby, on the railroad route in the center of the newly discovered Kevin-Sunburst oilfield. Instead, it resulted in the demise of two banks and the near bankruptcy of the town. The event featured a 'drunken and surly' crowd, 10,000 or more gate-crashers, and a long delay when the referee refused to enter the ring until he had been paid."

*Reader Charles Gorder questioned whether Mrs. Koenig, featured in the Spring 2004 issue's "EyeWitness" was, indeed, wearing a Hoover apron. This editor's quick research turned up varying descriptions of the apron and its era. Although garments by that name were worn at least through the Great Depression, no one would contest Mr. Gorder's information on their earlier origins—or his personal experience of them:*

"It is way too late (1950), I'm pretty sure, for 'Hoover aprons.' They were a phenomenon of the early twenties and, I seem to remember, had a connection to Herbert Hoover's Belgian Relief program immediately after World War I.

"As a small child I remember both my mother and my aunt wearing them and, as I recall, they were white, ankle-length cover-all kind of garments (possibly wrap-arounds).

"I have no idea how these garments made the transition from Belgian Relief to my mother and aunt. War surplus, perhaps?"

■ "In our family, I was the pet, the spoiled darling, the royal favorite." So begins *Memoirs of Grace Flandrau*, ably edited and introduced by Georgia Ray

and published in 2003 by Knochloe Beg Press of St. Paul (123 p., hardback, \$24.95, paper, \$14.95). Largely forgotten today, Flandrau was well known in the 1930s and '40s for her keen eye and sparkling essays in *Scribner's*, the *New Yorker*, and *Harper's* magazines. This engaging volume, covering Flandrau's childhood in St. Paul, teen years in a French boarding school, and just-married era on her husband's Mexican coffee plantation, shows us why her prose was so popular. Biographer Georgia Ray found drafts of the unpublished memoir in Flandrau's papers; in assembling this book, Ray undoubtedly enhanced her understanding of her secretive subject. Equally important, she has brought to light writing from a St. Paul author that vividly evokes people, places, and an era.

■ *In For the Public Record: A Documentary History of the League of Women Voters* (St. Paul: Pogo Press, 2003, 311 p., paper, \$19.95), Minnesota author and former LWV board member and UNESCO representative Barbara Stuhler has compiled legislation, photos, written accounts, and other documents to create a composite historical sketch of the organization. The author suggests that this book serve as a complement to Louise M. Young's *In the Public Interest: The League of Women Voters, 1920-1970* in order to give a more complete picture of the broad accomplishments of this dynamic association.

■ The Norwegian-American Historical Association has put together a collection of eight essays entitled *Crossings*, centered on "Norwegian-American Lutheranism as a Transatlantic Tradition" (Northfield: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 2003, 180 p., cloth, \$24.95). This compilation's timely release coincides with the 175th anniversary of the beginnings of large-scale Norwegian immigration to the United States. Edited by Todd W. Nichol, the volume contains full-color prints and offers an informative and thorough approach to the origins and future of Norwegian Lutheranism in America.



■ In *They Took My Father: Finnish Americans in Stalin's Russia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, 190 p., paper, \$16.95), Mayme Sevander, with Laurie Hertzler, tells the shocking and poignant story of thousands of Finnish families, including her own, that left their homes in the Midwest in order to establish Socialist communities in Stalinist Russia during the 1930s. Instead of being welcomed for their Socialist ideals, however, these families fell victim to the purges that swept through Russia under Stalin and found their dreams and loved ones violently scattered. Sevander's survivor tale of her family's courageous journey offers a well-written perspective on a Scandinavian story that is not often told.

■ Minneapolis's John Osander offers

a view of 1930s St. Paul in his second novel, *Call Me Kick!* (Edina: Beaver's Pond Press, 2002, 237 p., paper, \$16.95). Narrator and protagonist 20-year-old Kathryn (Kick), one of only five fictional characters in the historical novel, takes the reader through the back alleyways of upper-class Minnesota, through her experiences with gangster kidnappings, primitive mental-health practices, what she calls the "big 'D'" and "little 'D'" depressions, and her close relationship with her uncle, Nick Carraway (immortalized in Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*). Those well versed in the trials and times of the depression era will find this solidly research-based tour de force especially enticing and will recognize familiar scenes and characters with a smart and thrilling new take. As the forwardness of the title suggests, Kick

is a narrator whose audacious and engaging tone makes this a book particularly difficult to ignore.

■ Like many in the recent stream of memoirs, John T. Shepherd's *Inside the Mayo Clinic* regales us with stories and anecdotes of his childhood, young adulthood, education and upbringing; the difference is where these experiences lead him. Perhaps the world's best-known medical institution, the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, had humble beginnings during the Civil War but grew steadily due to the dedication of its staff and supporters. Dr. Shepherd's memoir recounts the clinic's growth over the last 50 years, from the beginning of his involvement there as a Fulbright scholar on sabbatical from Queen's University to his eventual role as a leading researcher in cardiovascular disease, dean of the medical school, board member, trustee—and the list goes on. With a foreword by Walter Mondale and 50 black-and-white illustrations, this clothbound, 233-page book published in 2003 by Afton Historical Society Press costs \$28.—*Mariesa Bus*

■ James C. Waugh's *20 Good Reasons to Study the Civil War* (Abilene, TX: McWhitney Foundation Press, 2004, 96 p., paper, \$12.95) is a short primer on the historical importance of the American Civil War. The broad range of topics includes political, military, technological, and cultural developments that the war spawned or accelerated. Though superficial in its brevity, the book succeeds in providing fascinating perspectives for readers who, perhaps, have a nascent interest in the Civil War or whose interests have had a single focus such as military matters or local history. The absence of an overall narrative of the war is an inducement to the reader to explore the vast and rich literature on the conflict.—*Mitchell Rubinstein*

## MINNESOTA HISTORY

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