

## OUR READERS WRITE:

*The cover photo on the Fall 2009 issue, which doubled as the opening image in Steven Penick's article, "A Test of Duty: Stearns County Volunteers in the Spanish-American War," caught the eye of Robert F. Garland of Mendota Heights. Mr. Garland observes that the article "does a great job of telling a story of Minnesota involvement in a part of our country's history of which, in a time of 'counter-insurgency' wars, we perhaps read too little." He then examines the photo, which shows the men of the Thirteenth Minnesota Volunteer Infantry in the trenches before Manila, August 1898.*

"A close look at the rifles with which the men are equipped should, unfortunately, remind us of the regrettable situation in 2003 in which our splendid soldiers were sent to Iraq without enough body armor and equipped with Humvee vehicles that couldn't withstand mines and roadside bombs.

"In 1898, our Minnesota volunteers were evidently sent to the Philippines armed with the single-shot Springfield rifle, basically a muzzle-loading black-powder Civil War weapon adapted to breech loading by a clumsy so-called 'trapdoor' affixed to an opening milled in the butt end of the barrel of the rifle. The regular U.S. Army had, of course, adopted the excellent Krag-Jorgensen high-velocity smokeless-powder repeating rifle six years before, in 1892.

"For the Minnesota soldiers, the famous saying, 'Civilize 'em with a Krag,' must have been altered to 'Better hit 'em first time with the Springfield!'"

■ The Solon J. Buck award for the best article published in *Minnesota History* during 2008 has been won by Colette Hyman for "Survival at Crow Creek, 1863–1866," which appeared in the Winter issue. Based on oral history as well as library and archival material, the article shows how Dakota women drew on all possible resources to sustain their families and community in bitter exile after the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War.

This year's judges were Michael J. Lansing, assistant professor of history, director of the environmental studies program, and a participating member of the women's studies program at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, and Deborah L. Miller, a reference specialist at the Minnesota Historical Society. The award includes a prize of \$600.

■ The Minnesota Historical Society's member newsletter has taken many forms over the years, but one thing has remained constant: its high-quality information and news, written to serve members. With the convergence of environmental concerns, lean financial times, and new online delivery opportunities,

the Society is looking at new ways to improve its communications.

As one step, the revamped newsletter will be included in future issues of *Minnesota History*, beginning in April with the Spring 2010 magazine. To share thoughts about the newsletter or suggest ideas for stories and features, please e-mail [membership@mnhs.org](mailto:membership@mnhs.org).

■ *North Star Rising: Minnesota Politicians on the National Stage* (Lakeville, MN: Pogo Press/Finney, 2008, 97 p., paper, \$16.95) is political journalist Barry Casselman's overview of some luminaries whose careers transcended state boundaries. Written for the statehood sesquicentennial and published just before the 2008 Republican National Convention came to St. Paul, this is, Casselman admits, one man's take on important elected officials. Indeed, readers may quarrel with decisions such as devoting three pages to Governor Jesse Ventura, whose larger contribution was to be a controversial "phenomenon," while omitting other public servants. Yet the sketches of politicians ranging from Alexander Ramsey and William Windom to

Hubert Humphrey, Walter Mondale, and Harold Stassen are a handy introduction to part of the state's political history.

■ Historian and preservationist William Towner Morgan captures the essence of a place he knows well through its built environment and the lives of the people who lived, worked, and played there. *Earth, Wood, Stone: Central Minnesota Lives and Landmarks* (St. Cloud: Sentinel Printing, 2008, 180 p., paper, \$19.95 plus \$2.00 shipping) is a chatty, well-illustrated look at a variety of building techniques and structures (some standing, some altered, some now gone), including homes, saloons, banks, schools, a reformatory, and churches; people, from the well-known Jane Grey Swisshelm to the flamboyant would-be auto magnate Sam Pandolfo; and ethnic groups, including the gypsies who crisscrossed the region between the 1880s and 1930s. Even ghosts are included in the volume, which is a compilation of Morgan's newspaper columns of the past decade. To inquire about ordering, call 320-253-6412 or email [jumorgan@charter.net](mailto:jumorgan@charter.net).

■ The six-foot-ten, broad-shouldered, bespectacled kid caught the eye of DePaul University's basketball coach, Ray Meyer, who knew that "a big man could score more points by accident than a short player could get through hard work." And so began legendary George Mikan's journey to stardom. In *Mr. Basketball: George Mikan, the Minneapolis Lakers, and the Birth of the NBA* (2007; new ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 317 p., paper, \$22.50), Michael Schumacher interweaves the story of the athlete, the team, and the league. The detailed account is based on interviews in addition to library research and captures the flavor as well as the facts of a career and an era when professional basketball was being redefined.

■ Anniversaries are good times to look back and reflect, as communities often do when landmark dates approach. Two recent publications offer a glimpse at the genesis and development of Minnesota

municipalities. *Shoreview Reflections* by John Koblas (Shoreview Historical Society, 2007, 180 p., paper, \$20.00 plus \$4.00 shipping, available from the publisher) reviews 50 years of people, places, and institutions in the village that became a St. Paul suburb. Similarly, *McGrath, Minnesota, Centennial 1908–2008* collects the stories and photos of the Aitkin County community that owes its beginnings to logs and the railroad. The spiral-bound paperback (about 180 pages; not consecutively paginated) is available from the McGrath Historical Committee, P.O. Box 216, McGrath MN, 56350, for \$15.00.

A more personal take is Bernie “Spike” Woods’s illustrated book, *Ranier, Minnesota: My Hometown* (Virginia, MN: W. A. Fisher, 2008, 70 p., cloth, \$55.00, plus \$7.00 shipping and \$3.58 tax for Minnesota residents). Subtitled *A Journey Back to Childhood*, the book presents the author’s full-color drawings of the small town’s buildings, waterfront, railroad bridge, homes, and other scenes accompanied by short essays, drawn mostly from his memory. The book is available

at [www.ranierbookandprints.com](http://www.ranierbookandprints.com) or by check from the author: 3477 Duluth St., Ranier MN, 56668.

■ Entering the fur trade just as it was declining, Henry A. Boller of Philadelphia first arrived at Fort Atkinson, in present-day North Dakota, in 1858. He would leave and return several times over the next four years before heading to the gold fields in Montana in 1863. His journals and letters from this era, presented in *Twilight of the Upper Missouri Fur Trade: The Journals of Henry Boller* (Bismarck: State Historical Society of North Dakota, 2008, 276 p., paper, \$21.95) not only document the final years of the trade but also provide sympathetic, first-hand accounts of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara just before they were removed to reservations. Seamless editing and an excellent introduction by W. Raymond Wood, longtime scholar of the history and archaeology of the Upper Missouri, further enhance this valuable work.

■ In the nineteenth century, America’s heartland became the center of utopian

experiments. Whether religious or secular, these communities brought together self-selected members “committed to holding property in common, to selfless living for the benefit of the community, and to developing new roles for women and different ways to treat children.” Robert P. Sutton offers a comprehensive examination of the most important heartland utopian communities, from the Shakers to the Hutterites and from Indiana’s New Harmony to Chicago-area utopian societies to historical communities still in existence today, in *Heartland Utopias* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009, 230 p., cloth, \$32.00).

■ In 1987 two young Duluthians set out to accomplish their dream: following in the paddle strokes of Eric Sevareid’s epic journey, described in *Canoeing with the Cree*. Scott Anderson recounts his and his friend Steve Baker’s adventures with humor and verve in *Distant Fires: Duluth to Hudson Bay* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 156 p., paper, \$15.95). There is adventure aplenty in this slim book, first published in 1990. Unfortunately, the author’s death in 1999 means that this edition has no new introduction, reflections on the journey, or further adventures to chronicle.

## MINNESOTA HISTORY

Editor, Anne R. Kaplan  
Design and Typsetting, Percolator

*Minnesota History* is published quarterly and copyright 2009 by the Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. West, St. Paul, MN 55102-1906; [www.mnhs.org](http://www.mnhs.org). Membership in the Society includes a subscription to *Minnesota History*. Basic individual memberships are \$50.00; for more information, write the Membership Office at the address above or at [membership@mnhs.org](mailto:membership@mnhs.org) or call 651-259-3131. Subscriptions to *Minnesota History* are \$20.00 per year. Back issues are \$5.00 each plus tax and \$2.75 postage; add 50¢ for each additional copy; call 651-259-3202 or 1-800-647-7827. Magazine text is available in alternative format from the editor.

*Minnesota History* welcomes the submission of articles and edited documents dealing with the social economic, political, intellectual, and cultural history of the state and the surrounding region.

The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

The Code below indicates that copying beyond that permitted by Section 107 or 108 of the U.S. Copyright Laws requires the copier to pay the stated per copy fee through the Copyright Clearance Center, Danvers, MA, 978-750-8400 or [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com). This consent does not extend to other kinds of copying, such as copying for general distribution, for advertising or promotional purposes, for creating new collective works, or for resale. ISSN 0026-5497-09/0016-\$0+\$1.00.

Periodicals postage paid at St. Paul, MN. Postmaster: Send address changes to Membership Office, 345 Kellogg Blvd. West, St. Paul, MN 55102-1906. Publication number 351660.

Printed on recycled paper with soy ink.



**OFFICERS** William R. Stoeri, *President*; Sharon Avent, *Vice President*; Ram Gada, *Vice President*; Kathy Tunheim, *Vice President*; Paul Verret, *Vice President*; Nina M. Archabal, *Secretary*; Missy Staples Thompson, *Treasurer*

**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL** Abbot G. Apter, Nina M. Archabal, Sharon Avent, Brenda Child, Judith S. Corson, Mark Davis, Michael L. Davis, Luz Maria Frias, Ram Gada, Phyllis Rawls Goff, James T. Hale, Ruth S. Huss, Martha Kaemmer, Elliot S. Kaplan, David M. Larson, Charles Mahar, Susan B. McCarthy, Bob Nelson, Dean M. Nelson, Richard Nicholson, Peter Reis, Simon Stevens, William R. Stoeri, Edward C. Stringer, Missy Staples Thompson, Kathy Tunheim, Paul Verret, Eleanor Winston

**EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS** Tim Pawlenty, *Governor*; Carol Molnau, *Lieutenant Governor*; Mark Ritchie, *Secretary of State*; Lori Swanson, *Attorney General*; Rebecca Otto, *State Auditor*

### Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

Publication title, Minnesota History; publication number, 0035-1660; filing date, September 21, 2009; frequency, quarterly; issues published annually, 4; annual subscription price, \$20.00; publisher, Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul, MN 55102-1906; editor, Anne R. Kaplan, address as above; owner, Minnesota Historical Society.

Copies issued nearest filing date, 19,900; paid outside-county mail subscriptions, 19,539; paid distribution outside USPS, 35; other classes mailed USPS, 68; total paid circulation, 19,642. Free distribution by mail, 12; frees mailed at other classes, 47; free nonmail distribution, 55; total free distribution, 114. Total distribution, 19,756. Copies not distributed, 144. Percent paid circulation, 99%.

Average copies preceding 12 months, 19,938; paid outside-county mail subscriptions, 19,240; paid distribution outside USPS, 131; other classes mailed USPS, 66; total paid circulation, 19,437. Free distribution by mail, 12; frees mailed at other classes, 36, free nonmail distribution, 61; total free distribution, 109. Total distribution, 19,546. Copies not distributed, 392. Percent paid circulation, 99%.





WILFORD (BILLY) H. FAWCETT returned to Minnesota from World War I with a footlocker full of dirty jokes. On a slow night in 1920, while working at the *Minneapolis Tribune*, he sorted through the jokes and compiled a pamphlet he titled *Capt. Billy's Whiz Bang*, “whiz bang” being the sound artillery shells made. The jokes were juvenile, sexist, racist, and anti-Semitic, and they haven’t aged well.

Fawcett found a printer and enlisted his sons to distribute copies in Minneapolis at baseball games and on consignment to drugstores and local hotels, where the blue-humor pamphlets were held under the counter. Word of mouth fueled sales. The magazine went from an initial press run of 5,000 to half a million after Fawcett created a distribution network that revolutionized the industry. Soon the *Whiz Bang* was sold on newsstands and trains and in hotels all over the country.

*Captain Billy Fawcett and his wife, Claire Fawcett, at their Breezy Point resort lodge, 1926*

By the end of the decade, Fawcett had 12 magazines. *True Confessions* came next, followed by titles like *Screen Play* and *Modern Mechanics* (which was sued by *Popular Mechanics*). Other family members joined the business, and much of the work during summers was conducted at Fawcett’s Breezy Point Lodge on Pelican Lake.

Fawcett Publications eventually moved to Greenwich, Connecticut, where it began producing *Whiz Comics*, starring Captain Marvel, and a line of original paperback books under the Gold Medal imprint, which retained *Whiz Bang* sensibilities. The books editor in 1964 stated

that the company was trying to blend the “shoot ’em up sex novel” with a helping of good literature.

It is hard to understate the impact, for better or worse, that Fawcett had on American culture. By the mid-1960s, the Fawcett brothers presided over a \$75 million empire with 200,000 million units in annual sales. CBS bought the company for \$50 million in cash in 1977 (\$160 million in 2009 dollars).

The Minnesota Historical Society library has a nearly complete run of *Capt. Billy's Whiz Bang* and has microfilmed it for posterity.

—Patrick Coleman,  
acquisitions librarian



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).