
BOOK REVIEWS

A Canoe Voyage Up the Minnay Sotor. By George W. Featherstonhaugh. New introduction by William E. Lass.

(St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society, 1970. 2 vols., lxx, 788 p. Illustrations, maps. \$20.00.)

GEORGE W. FEATHERSTONHAUGH was a witty man and an entertaining writer. For this alone his account of his extensive travels in the United States in the 1830s, which has long been out of print, is worth a new edition. An opinionated English geologist who publicly detested the vulgar backwoodsmen of the American frontier, Featherstonhaugh and his book, first published in London in 1847, were received in this country with considerable indignation. Today, though his geological importance is still debated, the only really controversial thing about this Tory gentleman is the pronunciation of his name. His jibes at such mannerless creatures as the unfortunate "Dingle" family, whose name he misunderstood and whose baleful influence upon society and government he abhorred, have long been forgotten.

In fact, Featherstonhaugh's work makes much better reading now than the travel books of a fellow English geologist, Sir Charles Lyell, who twice toured the United States and published his impressions. Lyell was a man of sanguine temperament and balanced, liberal sentiments who rigorously "abstained from gossip"; Featherstonhaugh's limitless self-esteem, untiring vitality, sharp eye for detail, and unqualified personal judgments are more appealing to the modern reader. A Spartan who enjoyed his hardships by surmounting them, he returned to the frontier more often than one would expect under such intolerable conditions. He belongs, as Mr. Lass points out in his introduction, with the more popular travel writers of his day who thrived on criticism of the infant republic across the sea.

Featherstonhaugh is unique among them, however, because he traveled beyond the accustomed tourist routes through the Great Lakes states and the South into the unsettled areas, including what is now Minnesota and Wisconsin, and wrote intelligently about the Indians he met. In the wilds he was supremely happy and therefore more likable. Conservationists today will warm to a man who wrote as charming a passage as Featherstonhaugh did about wild geese. Perhaps more intriguing than his treat-

ment of the wilderness, however, are such details as Featherstonhaugh's devotion to his frying pan and his mastery of the art of shaving without a looking glass (for which accomplishment he learned to fetch his own water).

The reader who is unfamiliar with this entertaining gentleman will find Mr. Lass's interpretive introduction readable and thorough. Understandably, the emphasis is upon Featherstonhaugh's American travels, though his career carried him on to other adventures. The scholar is grateful to have bibliographical and historical information brought together in one place. Amusing as Featherstonhaugh's foibles make him seem in the perspective of our times, Mr. Lass's analysis of the geologist's treatment of his assistant, William Mather, suggests that Featherstonhaugh's arrogance toward his fellows was both excessive and significant.

More interesting than these old quarrels, however, is the intellectual excitement of geology in the 1830s. Such excitement is hard to recreate, but Mr. Lass summarizes clearly the theories which brought about what we know today as historical geology and rightly places Featherstonhaugh in the forefront of those who recognized their importance, though as an investigator he was surpassed by many of his fellows.

The Minnesota Historical Society is to be congratulated on this contribution to the growing number of reprints of early travel accounts and the like. *Canoe Voyage* is not annotated, and occasionally one regrets this, but the introduction takes care of most of the points raised in the mind of the modern reader. The original volumes were not dignified by an index, and the index here compiled by the society's staff is an admirable tool, identifying many obscure individuals whom Featherstonhaugh, by way of formal courtesy, identified only by initials. Even the "rude and vulgar" Captain Dingle receives his proper name and is rescued from anonymity by patient and honorable research. One can only urge: read these volumes some long winter evening or while on vacation from the perplexities of the twentieth century.

Reviewed by MARTHA C. BRAY *who has edited the translated journals of another literate traveler, cartographer Joseph N. Nicollet, which were recently published by the Minnesota Historical Society.*

Frontier Law and Order: Ten Essays. By Philip D. Jordan.

(Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1970. x, 182 p. Illustrations. \$6.95.)

THIS BOOK OF ESSAYS discusses certain fields of criminal law in the nineteenth-century frontier states and territories as set out in lawbooks and as annotated by some of the more lurid acts of Black Bart and his kin who made careers of ignoring the law.

Law and lawbreakers on the western frontier, the author finds, were just like law and lawbreakers back East or on other frontiers; when stripped of tall hats, six-shooters, gold dust, and other stage properties, the criminals of western legend were very ordinary crooks. And while the frontier had plenty of formal law, it had little order, since nineteenth-century Americans preferred their law without much enforcement. Professor Jordan's findings about criminal law and criminals on the frontier, while interesting, are not world-beaters, however new they may strike academic minds.

The real gold in this book is in the lively and well-told stories of crimes and criminals which high light the dry legal research. Readers will skim the daintily-set tables of penalties for carrying bowie knives, for instance, but linger over the tales of rascality laid in Vicksburg's gambling hells or Minneapolis' sporting houses.

The author and his burrowers thumbed many lawbooks to find statutes and other legalia which are duly tabled. Like other historians who are not lawyers, Mr. Jordan overplays these materials, which are quite ordinary, and occasionally serves up as a novelty some routine thing like the old form of indictment for felony.

Most of these essays have appeared elsewhere over the years, and the reader must expect echoes and repeats from past articles.

Reviewed by WALTER N. TRENERRY, a St. Paul lawyer who wrote *Murder in Minnesota: A Collection of True Cases*, published in 1962 by the Minnesota Historical Society.

The Great Platte River Road: The Covered Wagon Mainline Via Fort Kearny to Fort Laramie. By Merrill J. Mattes.

(Lincoln, Nebraska State Historical Society, vol. xxv, 1969. xv, 583 p. Illustrations, maps. \$7.95.)

NOTHING in the annals of the history of this country is so well documented with diaries and reminiscences as the trek of the emigrants to the Pacific Coast over the Oregon, California, and Mormon trails. This exodus west, in which over 350,000 souls walked or rode horses or wagons over "one of the best natural roads in the world," is unparalleled in written history. Understandably the personal accounts of the "Argonauts," as some of them were dubbed, and others have fascinated readers ever since the emigration began in the 1830s.

Common to all the trails was the section along the Platte River which Merrill Mattes details in this book. Assembling a thorough selection of excerpts from over seven hundred diaries and accounts, most of which were written on the trail, the author discusses each landmark (such as Ash Hollow or Chimney Rock) as a separate subject, grouping related descriptions or anecdotes there with their source for easy reference. This organization and the book's many maps make it of special interest to "trailhoppers."

This book, however, does not sparkle like some trail diaries or letters or even Irene Paden's *The Wake of the Prairie Schooner*. It reads slowly at first. Its style is more that of a college textbook than a popular book, but the description of the trail and its sites is delightful. The text will make a splendid reference book for trail buffs and students, and it is recommended for school and small-town libraries that do not have a wealth of trail material. It will certainly be with us in our automobile on our next trip west.

Reviewed by RICHARD and JEANNE DUNSWORTH, long-time aficionados of the western trails.

In Pursuit of American History: Research and Training in the United States. By Walter Rundell, Jr.

(Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1970. xv, 445 p. \$7.95.)

IN 1965 the National Historical Publications Commission selected Professor Walter Rundell, Jr., to evaluate the supply and use of source materials in graduate teaching and the study of American history. The project had a two-year deadline. This book summarizes the results of his intensive nationwide inquiry.

Professor Rundell conducted 557 interviews with professors, students, librarians, and archivists from 112 institutions. In general he found the history profession conservative in its method, with a majority clinging to the traditional view that the historian's task is that of sifting evidence, building a framework of fact, and faithfully reconstructing the past. Mr. Rundell finds a widening cleavage, however, between this humanistic approach and that of the emerging social scientists within the profession. He also found a disdain for editing as an inferior employment of a historian's talents, an indifference to museums and three-dimensional objects as sources of history, a feeling of inadequacy about behavioral methods, and a growing estrangement between the archival and teaching members of the profession. While he found teaching historians largely wedded to national topics, he did discover a minority who were enthusiastic about state and local history because of that group's dependence upon and affinity for census schedules and other local sources and its tolerance of other academic disciplines.

Among students he identified numerous problems: growing disenchantment with the crowded classroom and hectic campus experience as a training ground, lack of confidence in their professor's traditional methods in the face of new social science concepts and techniques, and

an unhappiness with pressures of thesis preparation and qualifying exams which make difficult adequate training in research methods. He notes, too, that training in the use of original manuscripts is declining while a preference for the printed source is increasing. As Professor David W. Noble of the University of Minnesota put it in a quotable passage, for students of intellectual history "practically anything printed is an original source."

Among librarians and archivists employed by universities and historical societies, Mr. Rundell heard widespread criticism of professors and students for being ill-prepared to use original sources, unfamiliar with basic bibliographies, and increasingly unwilling to work through large quantities of archival material. At the same time the author feels, with justification, that custodians of collections frequently exaggerate the significance of their holdings. Nevertheless, he believes that faculties and students at universities close to historical societies — Madison, Wisconsin, and Lincoln, Nebraska, for example — benefit greatly from their close proximity to original sources.

In a final chapter, the author analyzes four major needs for better research: (1) improvement in communication between academic and nonacademic historians; (2) more adequate training in research methods; (3) access to original sources that are hamstrung by restrictions, red tape, and fears of photocopying; and (4) publication of up-to-date finding aids, bibliographies, and other research tools. He concludes that these needs are urgent and demand a high priority from government and private philanthropy if "men have hope for understanding the present and meeting the future." This volume is likely to be around for some time as a penetrating inquiry into the condition of research training and methods among the practitioners of American history.

Reviewed by RUSSELL W. FRIDLEY, *director of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

Fort Snelling: Anchor Post of the Northwest. By Marilyn Ziebarth and Alan Ominsky.

(St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society, 1970. 36 p. Illustrations, maps. \$2.00.)

WITHOUT BALDING, red-headed, hard-drinking Josiah Snelling, the 150-year-old fort at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers might have vanished long ago, as did so many other frontier landmarks. Fortunately, in 1820, newly-in-command Colonel Snelling unhesitatingly discarded a plan for a wooden fort and ordered his troops to quarry stone to build a more permanent post. Today the crumbled walls and structures of the monument that bears his name are providing the basis for the restoration-reconstruction of the army post which is introducing twentieth-century visitors to military life on the pre-Civil War frontier.

Fort Snelling: Anchor Post of the Northwest tells the story of the fort and its reconstruction. Using documents left by Snelling and later post residents, as well as the data of archaeologists who spent sixteen months digging, sifting, and evaluating the site, this publication of the Minnesota

Historical Society recounts in clear, careful, somewhat pedestrian language the Fort Snelling history first published in book form by Marcus L. Hansen in 1918. It includes references to equally interesting and meaningful efforts by preservationists to save the site and to restore the buildings which one by one had been sacrificed on the altar of efficiency and progress.

Combining abundant and intelligently selected illustrative material with the text, the authors first discuss the political rationale for constructing an Upper Mississippi post. Familiar names dot the history of the old fort which follows: Zebulon M. Pike, who scouted and selected the site; Major Stephen H. Long, commissioned by Secretary of War John Calhoun to probe the headwaters of the Minnesota and confirm Pike's choice; Lieutenant Colonel Henry Leavenworth (pictured hand-in-tunic à la Bonaparte), whose name becomes more than a Kansas postmark through his quarrels with Snelling; and Zachary Taylor, whose Mexican War service took him to the White House.

There are lesser-known figures too: Nathan Jarvis, a medical officer who found frontier life so empty that he wrote his sister back East to pick him out a wife; Harry Watkins, a fifer who became famous as a "dramatic actor" after beginning his career at the fort where he was small enough to play female roles and wear the clothes of his commander's daughter; and, perhaps most interesting of all, the strong-willed Indian agent, Lawrence Taliaferro, who tried to protect the Sioux from the march of commerce and white civilization.

This handsome publication informs what this reviewer hopes is a growing number of interested readers about a neglected facet of the frontier story — military post life — and encourages them to participate visually and physically in the reconstruction of that experience.

Reviewed by EVAN JONES, *author of Citadel in the Wilderness: The Story of Fort Snelling and the Old Northwest Frontier.*

AN UNUSUAL GUIDE, in that it presents the complete inventories available in the repository rather than abstracts or summaries of them, is *Descriptive Inventories of Collections in the Social Welfare History Archives Center* (Westport, Connecticut, Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1970. viii, 846 p. \$75.00). Inventories of twenty-four collections — approximately one-fourth of the holdings of the center of the University of Minnesota — are included. Each inventory contains an historical identification of the originating individual or group, an explanation of the collections' organization, a statement on access provisions, a folder description, a partial subject index, and the name of the inventory's author.

In an introduction to this indexed volume, Clarke A. Chambers, professor of history at the university and director of the center since its establishment in 1964, says that its objective is "to bring together in one research center the history records of social work, social welfare, and social reform."

LUCILE M. KANE

news & notes

THE MINNESOTA Historical Society has completed a microfilm edition of the papers of Alexander Ramsey — territorial and state governor of Minnesota, United States senator, and secretary of war. Produced under the sponsorship of the National Historical Publications Commission, the edition consists of 70 rolls of film. The society's holdings of Ramsey Papers, dating from 1829 to 1903, fill 57 rolls. Filmed as a supplement are 13 rolls encompassing the Minnesota State Archives holdings for Ramsey's terms as territorial governor (1849–1853) and state governor (1860–1863).

The Ramsey microfilm, which is priced at \$700 for the complete set and at \$12.50 a roll, will be available for sale in February. A maximum of three rolls at a time will be available through interlibrary loan on the same date. A pamphlet guide to the edition is being prepared by Helen McCann White, former associate curator of manuscripts and director of the NHPC project. Its publication will be announced at a later date.

The sixth and last in the series sponsored by the commission, the Ramsey film was preceded by microfilm editions of the papers of Lawrence Taliaferro, Ignatius Donnelly, Henry H. Sibley, James Wickes Taylor, and the National Nonpartisan League.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION was given two Minnesota organizations by the national awards committee of the American Association for State and Local History during deliberations on September 20–22 prior to the thirtieth annual meeting of the AASLH in Kansas City, Missouri.

The Sinclair Lewis Foundation, Inc., of Sauk Centre was voted an award of merit "for restoring the author's boyhood home as nearly as possible to the

appearance it had when Lewis lived there." The Goodhue County Historical Society of Red Wing was awarded a certificate of commendation "for a well-rounded program that includes an interpretative museum, a well-edited and printed newsletter, workshops, tours, and research aids."

PREVIOUSLY UNPUBLISHED data on the excavation of eleven burial mounds in northwestern Minnesota and the adjacent portions of North and South Dakota are brought together in the fifth publication of the society's Minnesota Prehistoric Archaeology Series, *Burial Mounds of the Red River Headwaters* (St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society, 1970. 36 p. \$2.00). Five of the eight sites covered by this report — the Round, K, Blasky, Holtz, and Kallstrom mounds — were excavated by Albert E. Jenks and his crew of students in a flurry of archaeological activity in the Red River Valley during the middle 1930s. Lloyd A. Wilford, author of this pamphlet, was a member of that team and director of the remaining mound group excavations described: the Femco, Lindholm, and McCauleyville mounds. Covering a time span extending from approximately 500 A.D. to the very late prehistoric period, this pamphlet adds understanding to the puzzle of prehistoric life in Minnesota and nearby areas.

AN ARTICLE from the Spring, 1970, issue of *Minnesota History*, "The Burbank-Livingston-Griggs House: Historic Treasure on Summit Avenue," has been reprinted by the society and is now available in booklet form for \$1.25 at the house as well as the historical society. Issued in the Historic Sites Pamphlet Series, the publication has

been expanded with additional photographs taken in the house's many period rooms. Mary Livingston Griggs assembled the rare antiques when she lived in the large limestone villa which was constructed for James C. Burbank in 1862–63. Christina H. Jacobsen's article includes a careful investigation of the colorful inhabitants of this grand old house.

NORWEGIAN NOVELIST Knut Hamsun's autobiographical sketch of a laborer's life in the Red River Valley in the 1860s is available for purchase from the Minnesota Historical Society for 75 cents. "On the Prairie" first appeared in 1903 as part of a collection called *Brushwood*. It was later translated into English by John Christianson for the September, 1961, issue of *Minnesota History*. The poignant sketch tells the story of the rugged and lonely life of the men who hired out to work on the bonanza farms of the Minnesota and Dakota prairies.

IN A BOOKLET entitled *The Angle of Incidents: The Story of Warroad and the Northwest Angle* (Warroad Historical Society, 1970. 52 p. \$1.50), Earl V. Chapin deals interestingly with the history of "the only American port on that vast body of inland water," the Lake of the Woods, and with "that peculiar piece of orphan land" bound to Warroad by boat and air lines.

Mr. Chapin has written a series of readable essays on such subjects as "The Magic Lake," "La Verendrye on Lake of the Woods," "John Tanner, The White Indian," "How the Angle Got That Way," and "John Ka-Ka-Gesick." Father C. J. Cloutier did the title pages, covers, and most of the photography for the attractive booklet.

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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