

The St. Paul Daily Dirge

OF THE MANY fascinating items in the MNHS collections, this copy of *The St. Paul Daily Dirge*—an original fake newspaper from 1922 created by F. Scott Fitzgerald and his wife, Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald—is one of my absolute favorites. I love the concept of an “original fake.” I often describe this as a spiritual prototype for *The Onion*.

The Fitzgeralds created this newspaper as a joke for a specific event—the Bad Luck Ball, held on Friday, January 13, 1922, at St. Paul’s University Club. Besides the title, other cues that the publication is a joke are embedded in the masthead: the weather report is “Rotten” and the price is “A Sweet Kiss.” The articles feature party attendees, who were given copies as they entered the club by newspaper boys hired for the occasion. That the newspapers were created before the party started makes the banner headline “Cotillion Is Sad Failure” funny, rather than sad. It also likely ensured that the Fitzgeralds were the center of attention all night.

MNHS owns one of only two known extant originals from the 1922 event (Kent State University Library has the other). Eight libraries hold a facsimile of MNHS’s original. (In 1968, the Fitzgerald Newsletter reprinted 200 copies; in 2015, the nonprofit organization Fitzgerald in St. Paul did another reprinting.)

This piece fits perfectly in MNHS’s Fitzgerald collection, which focuses on his early years and connections to St. Paul. Other items in the Fitzgerald collection include some letters he wrote; *St. Paul Academy* magazines containing short stories he penned



The *St. Paul Daily Dirge* was published only once—Friday, Jan. 13, 1922. (JASON ONERHEIM/MNHS)

during his student days there; documents relating to Charles Kalman, family lawyer and friend; several inscription copies of his books; his World War I service records; and one of his schoolbooks containing marginalia.

Why is *The St. Paul Daily Dirge* important? It is evidence of the Fitzgeralds’ cleverness, sense of fun, and willingness to put serious work into a personal passion project. The alliteration of the articles, the corresponding illustrative images, having them printed: it may have been a laugh, but it was an involved one.

More importantly, I think, it provides insight into Fitzgerald’s mindset.

The party attendees name-dropped in the fake paper were the well-heeled folk of Summit Avenue in the Roaring Twenties; Fitzgerald ran with them, but never really felt like he belonged. He was acutely aware they had the money and family names he did not. I think Fitzgerald was making a statement with this incredibly funny, rather strange document. He might not have had the advantages the other partygoers did, but he was cleverer than them. He used this “original fake” to secure his place in society, while gently poking fun at the very people he wanted to be.

—Lori Williamson, MNHS collections and library outreach coordinator



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