

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 lark, 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



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 users or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission: [contact us](#).

Individuals may print or download articles for personal use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#). Include the author's name and article title in the body of your message. But first--

If you think you may need permission, here are some guidelines:

Students and researchers

- You **do not** need permission to quote or paraphrase portions of an article, as long as your work falls within the fair use provision of copyright law. Using information from an article to develop an argument is fair use. Quoting brief pieces of text in an unpublished paper or thesis is fair use. Even quoting in a work to be published can be fair use, depending on the amount quoted. Read about fair use here: <http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html>
- You **should**, however, always credit the article as a source for your work.

Teachers

- You **do not** need permission to incorporate parts of an article into a lesson.
- You **do** need permission to assign an article, either by downloading multiple copies or by sending students to the online pdf. There is a small per-copy use fee for assigned reading. [Contact us](#) for more information.

About Illustrations

- **Minnesota History** credits the sources for illustrations at the end of each article. **Minnesota History** itself does not hold copyright on images and therefore cannot grant permission to reproduce them.
- For information on using illustrations owned by the Minnesota Historical Society, see [MHS Library FAQ](#).