MINNESOTA folklore enthusiasts will find no Davy Crockett or Johnny Appleseed about whom a vast legendry has accreted. Minnesota has no Mrs. O'Leary's cow, no Salt Lake sea gulls, no indigenous spirituals or blues, no half-horse, half-alligator braves, and only rare Yankee peddlers distributing notions and gossip. Variants of such old ballads as "Barbara Allen" are seldom recorded by field workers, and no Gopher bard has so far arisen to give imperishable form to the tall tales of rivers or woods. Nevertheless, the North Star State is not deficient in folk traditions and folk culture.

If Minnesota has no Blarney stone hallowed by romantic lovers, it has a Kensington stone which has provoked as much discussion. The raid on the Northfield bank by the brothers James and Younger links the commonwealth with the traditions of the western bad men. The art of taxidermy has preserved in the lobby of the Duluth Hotel an ursine interloper which is locally as famous as the wolf which suckled Romulus. Instead of the lore of the Negro and the backwoodsman, there is the Indian tradition with a mass of Chippewa and Sioux legends lingering around places and peoples. Minnesotans did not invent Paul Bunyan, but the state at least provided many a scene and deed for his saga, and Gopher lumberjack lore is now inextricably linked with the most synthetic of American folk heroes. Exotic place names dot the map of the state, some genuine, some contrived, and one of the most famous, Itasca, is actually a Latin hybrid. Local tradition still preserves the famous agreement whereby the penitentiary, the capitol, and the university were distributed among the

MAIDEN Rock on the east shore of Lake Pepin

FOLKLORE in Minnesota Literature

JOHN T. FLANAGAN

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state’s principal cities, and the historian is familiar with many rivalries between villages aspiring to become county seats. Minnesota is less homogeneous populationwise than, for example, North Carolina or Indiana, and the North Star State’s widely divergent racial groups account for a fascinating variety of beliefs and customs. The Finnish sauna and knifeman ballads, Norwegian immigrant songs, Swedish lutefisk and the smörgåsbord, German Weihnachtslieder, Mexican folk dancing, and Irish wakes suggest the diversity of folk traditions still current. As Glanville Smith wrote some twenty years ago: "In remoter German parishes the male dancers show their strength, in robust Old Country style, by whirling with a girl seated on each bent forearm; the tune will probably be ‘Immer noch ein Tröpfchen’ squeezed out of a panting accordion. The Scandinavians meanwhile drink Christmas glögg and sing ‘Gubben Noah’ (Father Noah).” With such a rich and attractive heritage available, it would be strange indeed if the literature about Minnesota failed to include some of the area’s folk material.

Actually, of course, authors have not neglected these riches. Folklore has informed fiction, biography, poetry, and history. Legends have been recorded by travelers like Giacomo C. Beltrami, Henry R. Schoolcraft, Jonathan Carver, Frederick Marryat, and Fredrika Bremer. J. G. Kohl observed the customs of the Lake Superior Indians and attempted to interpret their symbols and picture writing. Pioneer figures like Judge Charles E. Flandrau collected and preserved anecdotes and tales. Temporary residents like William Joseph Snelling and Mrs. Seth Eastman provided narrative embellishment for local themes. And native-born writers like Sinclair Lewis and F. Scott Fitzgerald have not been unaware of folk traditions, although they have used such materials more sparingly than might have been expected.

Indeed, Minnesota folklore appears in novels and poems and chronicles so frequently that in a short paper one can only hope to point out examples and trends. But the brevity of the treatment should not be allowed to detract from the significance of the theme.

WITH A CENTURY of statehood behind him, the contemporary writer will probably seek more sophisticated subjects than those which Indian primitivism can supply, but the early storytellers did not neglect this rich lode of folk material. The myths and legends of the Chippewa or Ojibway and the Sioux or Dakota found their way into many a volume. Probably the richest of all in this respect is Mrs. Eastman’s Dahcotah (1849), based on the author’s seven-year residence at Fort Snelling and her success in getting details from various Indian informants. Mrs. Eastman disliked the Sioux and branded them as liars, thieves, and boasters; she also had the zeal of the evangelist in trying to supplant their paganism with a literal Christianity. She was, however, eager to learn about their beliefs and superstitions, for which she often provided an interesting narrative framework.

There is the story, for example, of the water god Unktahe and the Thunder Bird, and the effect of these deities on the life of the Indian maiden Harpstenah. Her father had told an old medicine man that he could have the girl for his wife, despite a great discrepancy in age and the unsavory nature of the suitor. Harpstenah, overcome with grief and frustration, was visited by a spirit of the waters who told her to kill the medicine man, since he had leagued in the past with the Thunder Bird against Unktahe.

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1An example is the rivalry between Lake City and Wabasha in Wabasha County. Edward Eggleston used a similar feud, the rivalry between Perritaut and Metropolisville, in his novel of Minnesota in 1857, The Mystery of Metropolisville (New York, 1878).


3See Kohl, Kitchi-Gami: Wanderings Round Lake Superior (London, 1860), and Flandrau, The History of Minnesota and Tales of the Frontier (St. Paul, 1900).
Emboldened by the apparition, Harpstenah murdered her aged suitor and vanished with a young lover. But eventually the evil forces of the Thunder Bird demanded expiation, and Harpstenah was left old, husbandless, and childless. Here, certainly, is an example of folk superstition motivating domestic tragedy.

In another story, "Oeche-Monesah; The Wanderer," Mrs. Eastman skilfully narrated the adventures of the hunter Chaské, who journeyed into another world and took to wife successively a beaver woman and a bear woman. But as he found the society of beasts uncomfortable and dangerous, he eventually returned to his Dakota village crestfallen and aged, an Indian Rip Van Winkle. Chaské's experiences conform clearly to ancient Indian traditions about men who found animal mates and hunters who departed from the familiar earth world for long periods, but returned to tell of their adventures. In such myths, the realistic and the supernatural are adeptly fused.

Similar events are given memorable literary form in Longfellow's Song of Hiawatha (1855), substantially derived from the Ojibway legends collected and transcribed by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft. Not all the contents of the poem relate even vaguely to Minnesota, but no reader of the Nokomis-Minnehaha section can deny the importance of Minnesota geography to the framework of the plot. When Hiawatha returned from his epic struggle in the mountains with Mudjekeewis, he stopped to visit the arrow maker's daughter, who bore the same name as the falls. Subsequently he killed the king of the sturgeons in Lake Superior, and as an Indian Prometheus he wrestled with Mondamin in order to take the life-sustaining corn plant to his people, the Ojibway. It was in Lake Superior, too, that Hiawatha's friend Chibiabos was drowned and dragged to the deepest abyss by that sinister water spirit Unktahe. Nor can one forget that the poem opens with a scene at the red pipestone quarry, in what is now southwestern Minnesota, where the greatest of the manitos, the "Master of Life," smoked the calumet with the assembled tribes.

Minor Indian folk themes have been touched upon by various writers.* Mark Twain introduced a legendary account of the naming of White Bear Lake into the final chapter of Life on the Mississippi (1883), mostly to ridicule the story of an Indian brave rescuing his beloved from the grasp of a polar bear. But the author also devoted a twelve-page appendix to one of the exploits of Mudjekeewis. Walter O'Meara makes some use of the secret medicine charms of the Ojibway in Minnesota Gothic (1956), his novel of a northern lumbering town called Mokoman (probably Cloquet). His introduction of the midewiwin theme is, however, late and relatively minor.

* Dietrich Lange wrote a number of books for younger readers into which he introduced Indian lore. A typical example is The Silver Island of the Chippewa (Boston, 1913), which deals with the Indian tradition of an island in Lake Superior containing a rich lode of silver.
There are passing references to Indian mythology in Sinclair Lewis’ *The God-Seeker* (1949). Allusions are made to the god of thunder, to the deity of the waters (there spelled “Unkteri”), to the giant He-yoka, who symbolizes contrariety, and to the spirit who loves the pleasures of the table, Iya. Lewis also described the antics of the medicine man, the “wakan,” and cited the savage belief that one can heal the sick by shaking gourds, prancing around maniacally, and sucking the poison out of the patient’s chest. But all this material is atmospheric and has no integral part in the story. Lewis was interested primarily in satirizing the dogmatism and stupidity of evangelism on the frontier. In *Early Candlelight* (1929), Maud Hart Lovelace dealt with the Fort Snelling life of the 1830s and was meticulous in her details of dress and housekeeping, but she limited her use of Indian folklore to an occasional reference to the Sioux thunderbird. More attention to the Indian society of the time and a slight change of focus might have produced a novel as richly authentic as Iola Fuller’s *The Loon Feather* (1940).

The best known of the local Indian legends, however, and those most frequently utilized by writers concern the suicides of two women. As early as 1829 James Athearn Jones told the story of Ampato Sapa, the Dark Day, in his *Tales of an Indian Camp.*5 This Sioux woman was happily married and the mother of a family. But polygamy was not uncommon in aboriginal society, and her husband decided to take a second wife. Ampato Sapa could not divide her love and accept a rival. Instead she placed her children in a canoe, embarked on the Mississippi River above the Falls of St. Anthony, and died in a plunge down the cataract. Schoolcraft related the same tale and remarked that on a moonlight night the spectral canoe was occasionally visible to those who knew the story. And William Joseph Snelling, in his *Tales of the Northwest* (1830), also recounted the squaw’s suicide, although he gave her name as Weenokhencha Wandeeetakah or the Brave Woman.6

The second story of a romantic death can hardly be considered peculiar to the Minnesota area. Probably every one of the forty-eight states preserves a version of the Winona story, and visitors to all parts of the country are escorted to hills or cliffs from which, according to legend, a maiden leaped. William Cullen Bryant, for example, in his familiar poem “Monument Mountain,” located the episode in the proximity of Great Barrington, Massachusetts. According to one study, Zebulon M. Pike was the first writer to narrate the story of the Sioux maiden who flung herself from a precipice into Lake Pepin, but numerous romancers have embellished the famous love tragedy.7

Jones called his story “The Maiden’s Rock” and provided a dirge which the girl chanted before she fell to her death. Snelling entitled his version “The Lover’s Leap” and introduced an evil French trader as a suitor for the Dakota girl. But Winona preferred death to separation from her beloved. Mrs. Eastman, in a narrative called “The Maiden’s Rock; or, Wenona’s Leap,” emphasized the girl’s preference for one suitor although her parents had chosen another. In a poetic variant of the incident published much later in the century, H. L. Gordon changed the situation radically and had Winona refuse to follow the parental edict because she was in love with a French adventurer, none other than the Sieur Du Luth. As his canoe receded down the lake, Winona threw herself over the cliff.


6 See Henry R. Schoolcraft, *The Indian in His Wigwam,* 99 (Buffalo, 1848); Mentor L. Williams, ed., *Schoolcraft’s Indian Legends,* 266 (East Lansing, 1956); William Joseph Snelling, *Tales of the Northwest,* 197-212 (Boston, 1830). The latter has been reissued with an introduction by John T. Flanagan (Minneapolis, 1936).

Like a brant arrow-pierced in mid-heaven, 
Down whirling and fluttering, she fell, and head­long plunged into the waters.

Since Du Luth died in 1710, Gordon’s version would place the action considerably earlier in time than is usually conceded, although the romantic leap belongs more surely to folklore than to history.8

CLOSELY LINKED with Indian folklore, of course, is the romance of the fur trade, though novels of the Minnesota trade are neither numerous nor impressive. One of the most amusing tales of the early quest for peltries is Snelling’s “Pinchon.”9 His hero comes perhaps closer than any other Minnesota fictional figure to the quarrelsome boatman of the Southern rivers. He is a boaster, a trickster, a man utterly without honor or responsibility, one who glories in his speed and strength and who is contemptuous of his Indian associates. He plays Sioux off against Chippewa, never loses even for a moment his sense of superiority, and is cruel or kind as opportunity serves. Snelling may or may not have been drawing from life, but in his hands Pinchon becomes a true folk figure.

Daniel Harmon, the hero of Walter O’Meara’s novel entitled Grand Portage (1951), influenced his Indian fur hunters by combining some strong medicine with incantatory language. When the braves came into camp empty-handed and complained that a spell had nullified all their efforts, Harmon persuaded them that since his magic was stronger than any spell, their future hunts would be successful.

When the fur trader disappeared from the virgin forests of the upper Mississippi Valley, the lumberjack took over, and his activities soon provided the subject matter for such widely known novels as Stewart Edward White’s Michigan story, The Blazed Trail (1902), and Edna Ferber’s tale of Wisconsin lumbering, Come and Get It (1935). The Minnesota north woods have not yet inspired similar fiction, although Kenneth Davis’ In the Forests of the Night (1942) uses the bogland and forest around Baudette as the locale for a psychological novel. Only one of the fifty-one shantyboy ballads collected by Franz Rickaby seems to have a Minnesota provenience, and that one, “The Crow Wing Drive,” is obviously inferior. The men who worked in the northern white pine empire from 1870 to 1900, however, sang many other lumberjack ballads about cutting logs, camp life, and spring drives in white water.10

Less indigenous are the stories of the feats of Paul Bunyan, who has become a popular figure through skillful publicity rather than through the normal avenues of folk accretion. Several chapters in James Stevens’ collection of Bunyan tales link the mighty woodsman with Minnesota, the best perhaps being “The Black Duck Dinner.” In this story, supposedly derived from a northern Minnesota logger, Paul Bunyan provides food for his hungry crew after spreading an enormous canvas to simulate a lake and luring a flock of ducks to it; the shock of the landing breaks the necks of the birds and furnishes fresh meat for the cooks to prepare. Esther Shephard narrates several Paul Bunyan incidents in “The Buckskin Harness,” giving a Minnesota locale to an account of a harness which stretched when wet and contracted when dry. She tells also that when Paul’s men “drove the wrong logs down the river and over the St. Anthony Falls,” his blue ox, Babe, “just drank the river dry above the falls and sucked ’em all back again.”11

Mabel Seeley has used a Paul Bunyan episode to explain the title of one of her

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8 Jones, Tales of an Indian Camp, 2:131-140; Snelling, Tales of the Northwest, 263-278; Eastman, Dahcotah, 165-173 (New York, 1849); H. L. Gordon, The Feast of the Virgin and Other Poems, 182-211 (Chicago, 1891). Smith, in Minnesota History, 13:367-376, does not mention the versions presented by Jones or Gordon.

9 See Tales of the Northwest, 223-262.


11 Stevens, Paul Bunyan, 90-113 (New York, 1925); Shephard, Paul Bunyan, 89-98 (Seattle, 1924).
excellent mystery stories, *The Chuckling Fingers* (1941). According to this tale, Paul had looked at a certain girl with romantic fervor but had found her unfaithful during his absence. On his return, he discovered the girl dancing with one of his own henchmen to music supplied by his favorite fiddler. Paul seized the girl in a rage and flung her out of the dance, while the fiddler, dying in a final effort to produce music, sank into the ground, leaving only his fingers protruding and apparently reaching for his bow. It should be noted here that most of the Bunyan stories disregard the hero’s romantic life. Robert Frost, in a memorable poem entitled “Paul’s Wife,” did supply the giant lumberjack with a mate, but generally Paul has been depicted as celibate.12

Bunyan also appears in one of the tales spun by Philip D. Jordan in his well-written juvenile about a fantastic raconteur, *Fiddlefoot Jones of the North Woods* (1957). The hero, Plum Nelly, not only meets Paul Bunyan and engages in conversation with him, but also professes acquaintance with a curious creature of the timberland known as the “agropelter.”13 In a very different kind of book, Meridel Le Sueur adds the stone-eating “gyascutus,” the “goofus bird,” and the “pinnacle grouse” to the menagerie of fantastic forest dwellers, and also recapitulates several of the more familiar Bunyan achievements. The fabulous fauna of Bunyan’s “Real America” are well enumerated in a brief article by Marjorie Edgar.14

**Perhaps** the most interesting and vital folklore found in recent Minnesota literature relates to the immigrants who, consciously or unconsciously, brought their myths, legends, superstitions, proverbs,

13 Included in Jordan’s book, p. 173–179 and 194 are two Indian tales derived from Schoolcraft—a story of a young boy who after excessive fasting is transformed into a robin, and a symbolic account of the meeting of an old man (winter) and a young man (spring), which results in the triumph of the vernal season and the appearance of a small white flower where the frost and snow have thawed.
and customs to their new homes. The Swedes, Norwegians, Finns, and Germans have contributed richly to the state's cultural heritage, while the heterogeneous communities of the iron ranges have provided a fascinating melange of traditions.

In *Falconberg* (1879), an early novel about a Norwegian settlement in Minnesota, H. H. Boyesen contrasted several kinds of cultures and introduced an intellectual who, like the author himself, was interested in the Icelandic sagas. But *Falconberg* is stiffly written and is concerned chiefly with political developments. The novels of O. E. Rølvaag, who was closer to the actual Norse immigrants, more clearly define the life of the folk.

The very theme of *The Boat of Longing* (1933) preserves a tradition long familiar to Norwegian fishermen. Off the western coast of Norway a mysterious vessel would frequently appear and would seem to float in watery brightness, but it would vanish if one tried to approach it. The vessel became both a lure and a symbol of futility or death. Also woven into Rølvaag's novel is the story of the Askeladden, a kind of favorite of fortune who travels far in quest of a castle and a princess. Rølvaag's hero, Nils Vaag, succumbs to temptation and travels westward across the Atlantic, ever seeking money, happiness, and a finer, freer life. A musician and an idealist, he finds little success either on the streets of Minneapolis or in the deep pine woods of the North, but he seems to be ever conscious of mirages. Certainly *The Boat of Longing* is an excellent example of the adaptation of Norwegian folk traditions to the American scene.

Folklore figures too in Rølvaag's famous trilogy of prairie settlement in South Dakota, although the legends and superstitions naturally tend to pale as members of the native-born second generation succeed the pioneers. Both Per Hansa and Beret of *Giants in the Earth* (1927) remember the homeland, but whereas the wife is persistently dominated by a feeling of guilt for having emigrated to a land without culture or religion, the husband rises to the challenge of a new land and a different kind of existence. Per Hansa is not unaware of the malice of trolls, nor is he sceptical of their vitality, but the urgency of homesteading gives him little time to worry about invisible obstacles. Beret's doubts are eventually partly resolved by the arrival of a minister, yet one can be sure that the darker traditions of the Norwegian mountains linger in her mind.

A more amusing use of a folklore being appears in Mrs. Seeley's mystery story *The Whispering Cup*, where members of the Halvorsen family, plagued by farm troubles, attribute their bad luck to the presence of a nisse which for some reason they could not placate. The Halvorsens decide to move. As they drive their wagon, loaded high with their possessions, down the road, a neighbor, passing on horseback, sees them and comments on their departure. "'Yes,' the Halvorsens said, 'we're moving today.' So the neighbor started up his horse to go on, and when he got back by the wagon, there was a chest lid popping up and the nisse sticking his head out. 'Yes,' said the nisse. 'We're moving today.'"

Nicholina Dahl, the Bergen-born Norwegian heroine of Frances R. Sterrett's *Years of Achievement*, was determined to go to America and forget the smell of fish and the everlasting rain. At first she lived on a farm in Goodhue County, but after she married John Dahl she moved to Minneapolis and there became the matriarchal head of a large family. Proud of her Norwegian heritage, Nicholina continued to bake fattigman's bakelser, lefse, and fladbärd, and she remembered such family proverbs as "'If is a bad word unless it teaches something," and "If we had no
pennies we would have no dollars." But neither Nicholina nor her family make their heritage ostentatious, and their quiet assimilation of American ways of life finally assures them social acceptance.

In a similar fashion Lyng Skoglund, the protagonist of Borghild Dahl's *Homecoming*, learns to be proud of her Norwegian culture without parading it unnecessarily. Although born in Minneapolis, Lyng has a strict Norwegian mother whose insistence on retaining the language, the religion, and the mores of the old land makes the daughter complain that she is a foreigner in her own country. Lyng attends the University of Minnesota and, encouraged by a wise and tolerant grandmother, gets a teaching job in a town called New Stavanger where she instructs the first high school graduating class. Although she is accepted by the community because of her background, she leads the people to a new recognition of their civic privileges and duties. Her career gives point to the proverb quoted in the book: "Many a mansion has been built with makeshift tools." 16

In a novel of northwestern Minnesota, *Red Rust* (1928), Cornelia Cannon pictures a Swedish family, particularly a young man named Matts Swenson, whose goal is the production of a durable, rust-resistant wheat. Matts finally produces his ideal grain, although he dies a victim of family jealousy before he can appreciate his success. The Swedish backwoods community in which Matts lives is well presented and one is assured that old-country traditions linger there, yet Mrs. Cannon makes little attempt to introduce folklore beyond some allusions to inherited customs or the divinities of Scandinavian mythology.

Like the woodsmen, the emigrants from the northern countries had their songs, oftentimes sentimental or nostalgic reminiscences, but occasionally rollicking ballads, of the New World. Most of them were composed in Europe and carried by the settlers to Wisconsin and Illinois and Minnesota. Perhaps the most famous is "Ole-

ana," a satirical ballad about the Utopian community which Ole Bull established in western Pennsylvania. Many a Minnesota farmer must have sung "Oleana," sometimes perhaps in the wry realization that the paradise of the West had certain shortcomings. The best of the Norwegian emigrant songs were collected by Theodore C. Blegen and translated by Martin Ruud. 17

In several novels depicting the German farmers of the "Pockerbrush country" in the vicinity of Fergus Falls, Herbert Krause has introduced a wealth of folk material varying from proverbs and folk dances to foods and farming superstitions. While both *Wind without Rain* (1939) and *The Thresher* (1947) tend to be prolix and somewhat overwritten, they are vivid narratives about farm people on a rather primitive level. The members of the Vildvogel family of the first novel are well portrayed as they engage in all the varieties of agricultural life. Their activities include pigsticking and cow dehorning, participation in drinking bouts, attendance at barn dances called "shindandies," listening to Sunday sermons full of hell fire, and making such traditional family dishes as blood soup. *The Thresher* follows the career of Johnny Schwartz, or Black, as he matures and as he operates various kinds of threshing machinery, powered by horses, steam, and gasoline. Schwartz's companions are superstitious and credulous. He himself, when his warts itch, tries a folk cure which consists of tying knots in a string and burying it in oozy water while he mutters the following incantation:

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18 For the text of "Oleana," translated from the Norwegian of Ditmar Meidell, 1853, see Blegen and Ruud, *Norwegian Emigrant Songs and Ballads*, 187-198 (Minneapolis, 1936).
A boardinghouse for miners at Hibbing, 1900

Wartman, wartman, hither hie
And see the knots I tightly tie.
A knot for a wart, a wart for a knot;
Cut it or burn or tear or rot,
Spit three times on the knotted string
And bury it deep in a lizard spring.

Fragments of old ballads and courting rhymes sprinkled through the pages suggest in their inconsecutiveness the usual contamination of popular song. To celebrate a country wedding, a shivaree is organized at which the roisterers bang on washtubs and clang colters together.20

THE GREATEST wealth of folk tradition in Minnesota is perhaps preserved in the communities of the Mesabi and Cuyuna ranges, although not many novelists have chosen to exploit it. Iron Land (1946), by Dorothy Ogley and M. Goodwin Cleland, concerns the early struggle to win command of the ore deposits and fails to give any real picture of the people who dig the metal. The Red Mesabi (1930) of George R. Bailey, which provides authentic mining background, focuses on melodrama and sensationalism. The most successful novel to picture the miscellaneous peoples of the iron ranges, with all their superstitions and feuds, is Phil Stong’s The Iron Mountain (1942). The title refers not to a hill of ore, but to a boardinghouse for mine workers run by a Finnish couple. There Scandinavian, Irish, Yankee, Yugoslav, and Russian mingle indiscriminately, engaging in horseplay which often leads to something more dangerous.

The plot of The Iron Mountain, involving the sudden appearance of a Slavic beauty in the town of Birora and sketching the sex rivalry she induces, is trivial, yet Stong manages to convey a good deal of information about the workings of the popular mind. Except for the mine captain and his superintendent of explosives, the men are poorly educated and little above peasant status. In difficulties or emergencies, they are governed by inherited traditions. Proverbs dot their speech: “for the trade, the trinket”; and “if the bridle is silver, look more sharply at the horse”; and “one saves dead flowers from the air.” Yet, oddly enough, those who are most apt to use proverbs themselves shy away from Anglo-Saxon platitudes, like “make hay while the sun shines,” as equivocal jokes.

Mining in subterranean passageways is likely to be a lonely business, and visitors to a shaft are careful to announce their coming in advance. As Stong writes, “It was the etiquette of Underground to give warning of approach, especially with people who were still not sure about
gnomes, earth-spirits, kobolds, and monsters." Injuries were often treated with folk remedies, some of them surprisingly efficacious, others obviously mere primitive survivals. Many of the victims were quick, however, to realize that the American pharmacopoeia was more reliable than the cures of tradition. They found, for example, that turpentine, which the Americans used for deep cuts, was "much better than fat or tallow mixtures." Stong records, too, that "For an inflammation they used a linseed poultice instead of a split rat; for headache they used pills instead of putting a flat rock with a hole in it on the head; for sore throat they gargled hot salt water with a little whisky in it, instead of tying a piece of salt pork around the neck." 21

Stong also attempts to indicate the deep-seated national jealousies and tensions, the sense of superiority or contempt, which often produced pitched battles. Norske and Svenska and Suome insult and challenge one another until both the hospital and the jail are full. A squeeze-box dance, at which an accordion provides the music, ends in a full-scale riot, and skiing races along the cemetery slopes result in homicide. There is also, of course, the verbal melange, the mixture of idiom and dialect, which in Stong's transcription often becomes richly humorous. The Iron Mountain is indeed an effective folk novel.

HENRY A. CASTLE, writing a history of Minnesota in 1915, remarked that the state offered many literary possibilities. But, he added, "the Northwest, and particularly Minnesota, has been terra incognita to eager story tellers from the outside." 22 He went on to mention men who had not yet found biographers and pointed out certain phases of the state's history which would attract the storyteller. Although Castle was

22 Castle, Minnesota: Its Story and Biography, 423 (Chicago, 1915).
not thinking primarily of folklore, his struc-
tures apply just as well there.

Minnesota has had strong and colorful
figures whose folk celebrity already ex-
cesses their historical achievements. Miss
Le Sueur, writing her *North Star Country*
from a passionately proletarian point of
view, portrays the IWW bard Joe Hill as a
kind of mystical leader, and "Yim" Hill
as a capitalistic villain who exploited both
the land and the people. Both concep-
tions symbolize folk belief. But other Min-
nesota leaders have also drawn folk
accretions about them: Alexander Ram-
sey, Knute Nelson, Ignatius Donnelly,
Perry B. Olson, John A. Johnson, Charles
A. Lindbergh. Their appeal to the folk
storyteller seems obvious.

Then there are the early hamlets which
didn't mature as their sponsors hoped, and
which, as ghost towns, seldom even retain
a place on the map. Some, like Donnelly's
Nininger, enjoy a kind of ebb-tide exist-
ence and still attract visitors who are at
least half conscious of their history. Others
— Buchanan, High Forest, Wasioka, Can-
non City — have escaped complete oblivion
only because historical researchers have
made it their business to preserve the rec-
ord. Yet people once lived in these places
and envisaged a prosperous future for
them; the writer able to unlock the folk
mind could make them viable and fresh.

Finally there are the cities of the state.
Essentially, folklore is neither rural nor

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fixed, but rather a living, flexible, colorful
tradition preserved wherever people con-
gregate. The boisterous towns of the iron
ranges like Hibbing and Eveleth, railroad
junctions like Brainerd and Crookston,
lumber centers like Stillwater and Walker,
river ports like Red Wing and Winona,
farming communities like Askov and Chaska, not to speak of great metropolitan
centers like Minneapolis and St. Paul, no-
table for milling, railroading, manufactur-
ing, and finance — these, too, have their
folklore. But to a large extent the novelist
has neglected them.

Folklore derives from activities like ag-
griculture, building, transportation, industry,
salesmanship, journalism, entertainment,
sports, and travel. It may concern the
planting of a future crop, the prediction of
seasonal changes, the doffing of straw hats,
or the sudden appearance of kites and
marbles, the retention of regional dances
or the use of certain proverbs. It may be
humorous, ironic, or serious.

On the morning of July 7, 1958, a seven-
year-old boy, working on the steel
skeleton of the new First National Bank
building in Minneapolis, was killed when
he stepped backward and fell several
stories. As news of the fatality seeped
through the structure, the men slowly be-
gan to pick up their tools, ceased working,
and quietly went home. This was neither
a strike nor a protest. "Stopping work
when a worker is killed is a code of the
men," said the superintendent of construc-
tion. "It's not a rule and it's not compul-
sory." In other words, a tradition of the
building industry supplied both a code and
a tribute.

If folklore is beyond logic and fact, it is
nonetheless vital. In the past, it has given
richness and color and meaning to the
literature about Minnesota. In the future,
with the great diversification of the state's
peoples and activities, it promises even
more. Poets and biographers and novelists
will do well to remember its value as a key
to the popular soul.

*September 1958*