Book Reviews


THIS ESSAY is a piece of historical analysis as well as a political tract. As such, it is both interesting and stimulating. James M. Youngdale’s historical study focuses on the left-of-center elements within the dissenting political movements in the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Wisconsin from 1890 to almost the present day. His definition of Populism excludes Communism because it is essentially revolutionary rather than evolutionary in its approach to the political process, and it does not function as other dissenting groups do.

This is a political tract because it is Youngdale’s statement about the best of all possible worlds and how to achieve it. Although most historians do the same thing, they are rarely as candid on the issues; and Youngdale is honest.

Among the more refreshing qualities about this book is its explicitness. At the outset Youngdale very carefully explains his assumptions about historical analysis as well as his philosophical biases. There are few historians who could spell out their judgments on such matters, even if they wanted to. Youngdale is, however, different. He is lucid and interesting on these matters. He is an admirer of William Appleman Williams, but this seems more a visceral feeling than an analytical determination.

Youngdale’s analysis is an application of Adlerian psychology and Thomas Kuhn’s use of the paradigm. The psychoanalytical and paradigmatic model develops as a set of axioms and postulates, and it permits Youngdale to deny the validity of other modes of analysis because they are founded on unstated or, as he sees it, unsatisfactory assumptions.

Youngdale has many targets. Richard Hofstadter’s Age of Reform is the primary point of refutation, but other historians as well as sociologists, political scientists, and psychologists are refuted in whole or in part. The nature of the critique may vary from broad exception (Hofstadter) to arguments about critical details that impugn analyses (Theodore Draper) to literary refutation of social scientists (Richard Jensen). In the case of social scientists, Youngdale’s literary approach does not yield him even a Scotch verdict. As Youngdale develops his argument, the work becomes a critical bibliographical essay. He omits few scholars who have written about Populism, the Nonpartisan League, the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party, or the interneonic warfare on the left. Despite Youngdale’s denial of a belief in heroes and villains, his historiography is full of them.

A work of this kind should be judged as a piece of art. Like many essays in American Studies, Youngdale’s book requires a special vocabulary of the author’s creation. This can make for rough going if the reader is unwilling to allow Youngdale the freedom of a creative literary critic. But if he is granted this liberty, and the reader dispassionately follows the historical logic, taking time out to chuckle at Youngdale’s wit, the book is rewarding.

Youngdale juxtaposes materials and ideas in a manner reminiscent of literate men. His intellectual history of the left sounds in part like “radical meeting rhetoric.” Footnotes on occasion are not sources or authorities; they frequently are digressions or obiter dicta. Some of the language sounds angry. At the core, however, this is a well-researched book, and the author has used the manuscript collections in the Minnesota Historical Society and read widely.

If he dissents from conventional wisdom and challenges both the means and goals of contemporary pundits in American Studies, he will nonetheless attract disciples. His work sheds a new light on aspects of the left not only because of his model but also because of his own experiences and interviews with old-time radicals and former politicians. Even if the history of the Populist left was not in reality the way Youngdale perceives of it, many of his readers will wish that it had been so. From time to time, as this reviewer read the book, he was reminded of the thunder in the Twin Cities during the political storm of 1948.

Reviewed by Martin Ridge, editor of The Journal of American History. Among his works connected with Populism is a well-known biography of Ignatius Donnelly and “The Populist as a Social Critic.” First presented as an address at the Minnesota Historical Society’s 124th annual meeting and then published in the Winter, 1973, issue of Minnesota History.

The Swedish Heritage in America: The Swedish Element in America and American-Swedish Relations in Their Historical Perspective. By Allan Kastrup. (Minneapolis, Swedish Council of America, 1975. 863 p. Illustrations. $25.00.)

ALLAN KAstrup’s BOOK is issued as a contribution to the United States bicentennial celebration by the Swedish Council of America, a federation of Swedish-American cultural organizations. The author is a journalist, born in Sweden and with professional experience in that country, but connected with the American-Swedish News Exchange in New York from 1943 to 1964, for most of that time as general manager. His book is not just a history of the Swedish-Americans but devotes a great deal of space to the history of Sweden and to “contacts and exchanges” between the two countries.

Kastrup deals skillfully with the problem of organization posed by his decision to explore three themes, and his style is...
lucid and often attractive (he particularly excels in translation). It is clear that he has read widely in the ever-growing literature about Swedish-America, a twenty-page bibliography of which appears at the end of the book.

The Swedish Heritage in America makes many good points which will be useful to the general or beginning reader. It brings out the low-church character of Swedish-American Lutheranism, which tended to make the Augustana Synod somewhat cautious in its attitude towards the Church of Sweden, and the significantly easier relationships between the "free" churches on both sides of the Atlantic. It emphasizes re-immigration (a continuing phenomenon) and recognizes the importance of urban Swedish communities (by 1910, 60 per cent of Swedish-Americans lived in cities), although the only maps in the book are of the seventeenth-century settlement on the Delaware and of selected rural settlements.

Furthermore, it reminds us that the westward movement of the Swedes often took place in stages. The book also brings into light occupations like tailoring and quarrying, which at one time employed significant numbers of Swedes, although Minnesota readers will note that the granite-cutters of St. Cloud receive no mention.

With all these virtues, however, the book leaves an unsatisfying impression stemming from decisions on proportion and emphasis. It seems to be dragged down by the weight of information about Sweden and Swedish-American contacts (these latter often of a very marginal kind). Even in its consideration of Swedish-America as such, there are disturbing imbalances. Much space is given to "successful Swedes" (to paraphrase the title of a well-known reference book of the 1890s), but while the almost endless procession of academics, businessmen, and technologists marches past, we do not see the figures of the journalists Vilhelm Berger and Johan Person, authors of two penetrating but sympathetic studies of Swedish-American society which well repay reading sixty years later. Indeed, it is surprising that journalism and the press generally receive such fragmented and superficial treatment in view of the importance of the newspaper as an ethnic institution.

We are given sound assessments and a reasonable amount of information on at least the larger Swedish-American churches but almost nothing about the sick benefit societies, such as the Vasa Order of America, although there was a time when lodge members represented an element in the community quite different from the Lutherans and free church people. Similarly, The Swedish Heritage in America tells us almost nothing about the temperance societies, the most notable of which — the International Order of Good Templars — published a Swedish, or "Scandinavian," language paper for more than thirty years (Skandinaviska Good-Templaren was indeed published at Minneapolis for twenty years), or of mutual aid and educational enterprises like the Cafe Idrott and the Swedish Educational League (both Chicago institutions emanating from the IOGT), or of the Scandinavian Liberty League, active in Minneapolis and Chicago.

In some ways this book reminds one of the rather defensive compilations of a past age, with its emphasis on Swedish "contributions" and its picture of a rather bland, conflict-free community, a picture likely to strengthen the prejudices of those who think of the Swedish-Americans as a worthy, industrious, but essentially boring, ethnic group. Kastrup's insights, only some of which are indicated in this review, make one feel that had he been willing to pare down this very long book and to expand his treatment of Swedish-America, he could have produced a shorter but yet more informative one about the Swedes in the United States.

Reviewed by Michael Brook, former chief librarian of the Minnesota Historical Society and now special collections librarian at Nottingham University, Nottingham, England.


(New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975. 222 p. $35.00.)

If you are a Charlie Brown fan, you have plenty of company. Millions of readers follow the Minnesota-born "Peanuts" comic strip, now twenty-five years old, in more than a thousand newspapers across the United States. It also appears in over 100 newspapers abroad, in forty-one countries, and in twelve different languages.

In this handsome volume, Charles Schulz recounts simply and forthrightly his career as a cartoonist and presents a charming history of "Peanuts" through the years. To illustrate the comic strip's development, Schulz has selected 134 of its episodes, reproduced in color, that are either his favorites or have been influential in one way or another.

Among other things, Schulz shows how his early life in his native St. Paul, and later in Minneapolis, affected his cartoon work. Many of his characters came out of his childhood and early adulthood in St. Paul. The forerunner of Snoopy, for example, was a black-and-white dog that would "eat almost anything in sight," including tacks and razor blades. Schulz's first published drawing was one he made of the dog for "Ripley's Believe It or Not!" Playing sandlot baseball near Mattocks school spurred a lifelong interest in that sport.

Schulz's father was a St. Paul barber who liked to read comics, so the fact that Charlie Brown's father also is a barber "is autobiographical." At St. Paul Central High School, Schulz was encouraged to draw by his teacher of illustration, Minette Paro. When out of high school, he submitted cartoons to several major magazines but received only rejection slips and no encouragement. After serving a three-year hitch in the army during World War II and doing some drawing while in France, Schulz returned to St. Paul. He sought work at any art department that might be able to use his drawing talent but was unsuccessful.

Finally, persistence paid off. He got his first job lettering comic book pages that had already been drawn by other artists for Timeless Topix, publisher of a series of Catholic comic magazines in St. Paul. He also was hired by Art Instruction Correspondence School in Minneapolis as an art instructor. His job there was mainly to correct some of the basic lessons.

Working at Art Instruction introduced Schulz to several people who influenced his later life. Each person there had a special interest in some phase of commercial art, cartooning, and painting. Some of his school colleagues have remained his friends, and Schulz has used the names of a number of them in

Summer 1976 77
"Peanuts." Charlie Brown was named after a very good friend at the school, and the Linus and Frieda characters also were named after fellow instructors.

Starting in 1947, Schulz's "Li'l Folks" cartoon panel ran for two years in the women's section of the Sunday St. Paul Pioneer Press. At the same time, he began selling cartoons to the Saturday Evening Post, which published fifteen in all. This encouraged him to ask for more money and daily exposure in the Pioneer Press. When he was turned down, his career with that paper ended.

In 1950, after a long wait, he was invited to the New York office of United Features Syndicate to talk over cartoons he had sent there. He also brought along a new comic strip he was developing. No one but the receptionist was at the syndicate office when Schulz arrived early, so he left his package of drawings and went to get a bite to eat. By the time he returned, syndicate people opened the package and decided they liked his new comic strip well enough to publish it. That was the beginning of "Peanuts, the first episode of which appeared on October 2, 1950.

No one knows better than Schulz that his success lies in the simplicity of its art and ideas. In a broad sense he has "grass roots" appeal. He appeals directly to children and to the child in adults. Readers feel an empathy with his youthful characters; with their frustrations, failures, minor successes. Many of his ideas come from memories of his own childhood frustrations in an adult world or from observable reactions of his own children in the same situation.

All of the 10,000 or so "Peanuts" comic strips to appear so far have been the work of Schulz alone. He does not have assistants. He is never sure of what he is going to put down on the board before he starts. Often he draws in characters and adds copy balloons later. The best ideas come from drawings themselves. New characters from time to time add variety to the strip and so does a change in an old character. Giving Snoopy "thought balloons," for instance, opened up many possibilities.

Schulz sums up: "To create something out of nothing is a wonderful experience. To take a blank piece of paper and draw characters that people love and worry about is extremely satisfying. I hope very much that I will be allowed to do it for another twenty-five years." That hope is shared by this reviewer, who found this book one of the most inspiring and frustrating he has ever read. You are a good man, Charlie Brown!

Reviewed by CHESTER KOZLAK, associate museum curator for the Minnesota Historical Society. During the 1940s he worked in New York as a comic strip artist, developing such "super heroes" as The Atom, Wildcat, Green Lantern, The Flash, Hawkman, and Dr. Fate.


(St. Paul, Witsend Press, 1975. xi, 181 p. Illustrations. $4.95.)

THE GROWING number of books which treat the study of the origin of place-names on a state and a national level is evidence that compilers and readers alike find the subject fascinating. Toponymists on the local level are rare, however, and St. Paulites owe a large debt of gratitude to Donald Empson of the Minnesota Historical Society staff for "over two years of often mind-numbing detail and persistence" which produced this entertaining and informative book on the origin and significance of all the street names currently in use in St. Paul. Empson has easily outdistanced his only predecessor in this field, the late Warren Upham, who devoted thirty-one pages to the street, park, and regional names of St. Paul in his Minnesota Geographic Names: Their Origin and Historic Significance, first published in 1920 by the Minnesota Historical Society and reprinted in 1969.

The Street Where You Live appeared as a daily column in the St. Paul Dispatch from December, 1974, through August, 1975. For its appearance in book form Empson has added an introductory essay on the methods and aesthetics of street naming and an account of the efforts made by city officials in the 1870s and again in the 1940s to eliminate the confusions and inconsistencies in the street names of St. Paul.

The book is delightfully illustrated with many rare views of the city, well reproduced, from the Historical Society's audio-visual library. Portraits and concise biographical sketches of prominent St. Paul men and women add to its value as a reference work on local history. However, it is tempting to think that the book's main mission, despite its modest size, will be to serve as a "coffee-table book" and conversation piece, to entertain St. Paulites wherever they may gather.

Reviewed by ROBERT E. HOAG, retired reference librarian at the St. Paul Public Library. Hoag has compiled indexes of the city's hotels and theaters, is completing one on its churches, and is now helping the MHS audio-visual library identify city scenes among its photographs.

The Warriors of the Plains. By Colin Taylor.

(New York, Arco Publishing Company, 1975. 144 p. Illustrations. $15.00.)

IT WAS exactly a century ago that the Sioux and their allies defeated General George A. Custer, but still the fascination of these colorful people has not abated. Pulp magazine writers and Hollywood film makers continue to grind out spectacular versions of the conflicts on the Great Plains. Serious scholarship has, however, taken a more mature view of the Plains Indian wars. Some years ago historians such as Stanley Vestal, George Grinnell, and George E. Hyde wrote detailed, over-all accounts of this period that still stand as excellent general histories. Sensing that this area of need had been satisfied, recent scholars have tended toward more intense studies of specific events or toward other philosophical viewpoints from which they hoped to derive better perceptions of the Plains Indians and the clash of cultures in the last century. As an example of the specific study, one might cite Charles Kuhlman's Legend into History. The Custer Mystery (1951), a meticulous inquiry into Custer's tactics in the attempt to understand exactly what did happen on that perplexing day. In like manner, Royal B. Hassrick applied new perspectives to his
Innovative The Sioux: Life and Customs of a Warrior Society (1984) in order to improve our understanding of the dynamics of this people's amazing culture.

There is still a great deal to be learned about the Plains Indians and their headlong clash with the encroaching European world. Accordingly, any new work is greeted with expectation for the fresh ideas it may offer. This was the case when we were told the present book was at hand. The author, a lecturer in physics at a British university, is a knowledgeable student of Plains history and culture. With the objective detachment of a foreign scholar and his freedom from our regional biases, we expected him to offer new viewpoints from which we could learn.

Unfortunately, he has made no such contribution. The book is a bland, general description of Plains Indian culture with no uneven review of the period between roughly 1800 and 1890. The author has done his research carefully and in consequence makes very few factual errors. But the book is, in the final analysis, a familiar old story, retold with very little new material of importance and with (as far as this reviewer can recognize) few encouraging flashes of imagination. The fresh approaches and stimulating ideas we had hoped to find are simply not there.

If the author meant his book to be an introduction to Plains Indian history, such criticism would be less valid. However, the general histories written thirty years ago — for example, Vestal's Warpath and Council Fire: The Plains Indians' Struggle for Survival in War and in Diplomacy, 1851-1891 (1948) — tell the same stories in a more concise and readable fashion and are all available in current reprints.

It is disappointing that an author of Taylor's obvious knowledge and talent did not attack one of the many gaps in our understanding of the Plains Indian world. There is also a great deal to be said about the relationship of the Plains wars to the rest of nineteenth-century American history. We hope his next book will approach one of these problems and make the contribution of which he is clearly capable.

Reviewed by Richard Conn, curator, Department of Native Arts, Denver Art Museum.

Metal Weapons, Tools, and Ornaments of the Teton Dakota Indians. By James Austin Hanson.

(Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1975. vi, 118 p. Illustrations. $16.50.)

This long-awaited study is a guide to the identification of typical Teton Dakota metal objects and their use. It is also a study of the transition of these people from a stone-age existence in the Minnesota woodlands in 1860 to a dependent, acculturated group on reservations on the plains of Dakota Territory by 1890.

Metal objects were important to the Teton and rapidly replaced most of their prehistoric tools and weapons. Initially, these new tools greatly enhanced their ability to decorate themselves and their possessions. Thereafter, metal tools increased productivity and created more leisure time. The white man's materials stimulated economic and social change among the Teton Dakota and gradually transformed their native economy. Thus, an examination of Teton metal objects from the prereservation period gives insights into the process of Teton cultural change or acculturation.

Indian traders were businessmen who sought to keep peace on the frontier. They provided well-made durable goods to meet the Indians' needs. Trade goods had to be well adapted to a strenuous and mobile life. The author credits most of the Teton cultural changes to the influence of Indian traders. Lesser roles are assigned to Indian agents and the United States army who did their bit to place these proud people on reservations as the buffalo began to vanish.

An introductory chapter provides an outline of Teton Dakota history in the prereservation era. It also deals with the development of trade patterns, the growth of trading firms such as the American Fur Company, and Teton relations with the United States government. The next chapter discusses pre-1800 trade goods which are scarce and not well understood, as most of them were literally "used up" by their owners. Worn-out or broken knives, for instance, would be ground down into useful awls; leaky kettles could be cut up into brass ornaments, and so on. In this period, firearms, lead, and powder were vital to the Teton. Almost equal in importance were knives, axes, awls, kettles, and firesteels. Brass wire, small bells, peace medals, and silver ornaments were also sought after by these Dakota, though such objects could not be said to have had a vital impact on the Indians' subsistence patterns.

Metal weapons swiftly replaced stone spears and knives, but stone-headed war clubs survived because the traders had no good substitute for them. Guns served two purposes as they were vital for hunting game and for warfare. During the six-year period from 1820 to 1880, flintlocks were supplanted by percussion locks, and they in turn by cartridge breech-loading weapons. Sharp steel knives were of great utility to a hunting people who used them to cut up game animals, to dress hides, and to make new tools and weapons from wood, leather, and bone. Axes and hatchets were much used by the Teton, as were brass and iron kettles and iron skillets. Teton women likewise valued their awls, scissors, needles, and hide scrapers because they made their lives easier and more productive. Steel files were needed to sharpen edged tools and were used in native gunsmithing.

Thousands of pieces of military equipment must have been captured by the Teton during their thirty-five years of warfare with the army which ended in the Wounded Knee tragedy in 1890. Fascinatingly enough, the Teton invariably modified captured horse bits, bridles, and saddles to their own tastes. During the Wounded Knee conflict, a Miniconjou band of Teton Dakota lost most of its belongings. An examination of objects picked up afterwards shows that these people were in an impoverished condition. Their material culture had reached a low ebb. Traditional trade goods had almost vanished, and there was little to distinguish their belongings from worn-out items found in frontier farmyards.

This volume concludes with an examination of metal ornaments used by the Teton. Brass rings and bracelets were popular until the reservation era but were partially superseded by similar items made from German silver. Ear ornaments, brass beads, small bells, peace medals, brass tacks, hair plates, belt
The annual history conference and meeting of the Minnesota Historical Society will be held Saturday, October 16, at the Marriott Inn in Bloomington, Minnesota. Although the subject matter will be varied, emphasis will be on economic, business, and industrial topics. John Kenneth Galbraith, well-known economist and author and former Harvard professor, will speak at the noon luncheon on "Thorstein Veblen: Minnesota-born economist, reformer, philosopher, and author."

Among speakers at sessions during the day will be Hazel Reinhardt, Minnesota state demographer who will speak on Minnesota demography; Albino Martin, professor of history at Harvard whose subject will be James J. Hill (Martin has written a biography of Hill due for fall publication); and Vance P. Packard whose discourse will be on industrial archaeology. Packard is from the Office of Historic Preservation, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg.

At the evening dinner, entertainment will be furnished by Garrison Keillor, public radio personality in the Twin Cities. On Friday, October 15, at 7:30 p.m., the annual business meeting of the society and reception for members will be held at the Burbank-Livingston-Griggs House at 432 Summit Avenue, St. Paul. For further information and registration materials, contact the Annual Meeting and History Conference Committee, Minnesota Historical Society, 1500 Mississippi Street, St. Paul 55101.

Richard W. Cox has been chosen winner of the Minnesota Historical Society's $250 Solon J. Buck Award for the best article to appear in Minnesota History in 1975. His first-place article, "Wanda Gag: The Bite of the Picture Book," was published in the Fall issue. Mr. Cox received his doctorate in history and art history from the University of Wisconsin at Madison in 1973, taught for a time at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, and is American art historian at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.

The Buck Award committee this year consisted of Robert P. Fogerty, professor emeritus of history at the College of St. Thomas; Professor Norman W. Moen, founder of the program in American Studies in the General College of the University of Minnesota; and Kenneth Carley, editor of this magazine. There is no winner of the Theodore C. Blegen Award (for MHS staff members) this year.

Ellen J. Stekert, professor of English at the University of Minnesota, has been appointed state folklorist in keeping with a new law she urged the Legislature to pass. It was sponsored by Senator Gene Merrian of Coon Rapids and Representative Phyllis Kahn of Minneapolis, both DFLers. Thought to be the first official state folklorist not only in Minnesota but in the United States, Professor Stekert was named to the unsalaried post by Russell W. Fridley, director of the Minnesota Historical Society. The statute creates within the society a center for the study of "Minnesota folklife" and makes the state folklorist director of the center. The act defines "folklife" as meaning, in part, "the traditional customs, beliefs, dances, songs, tales, sayings, art, crafts, and other expressions of the spirit common to a group of people within any area of the state."

An editorial in the Minneapolis Tribune of April 14, 1976, said that "The law's aim, according to Fridley, "is to broaden the historical society's efforts to collect and preserve 'the people's story' by giving the society responsibility for ethnic, regional and occupational folklore, whether brought to Minnesota by immigrants or indigenous to the area."

The Wilderness Life (Macmillan, 1975, 241 p., $7.95) is the latest of Calvin Rutstrum's highly readable books about backwoods living. It is a sequel to his popular book, Once Upon a Wilderness. At the beginning of his new work, Rutstrum takes what he calls a critical and philosophical look at wilderness living. For the most part, he compares the joys of backwoods life with the sterility he sees in the "industrial treadmill."

Wilderness living versus city living is an old theme in American letters. Romantic writers have always found nature ennobling and the cities debasing to the human spirit. Rutstrum plays upon this theme in the first chapters. Thereafter, he settles down to elaborating the wilderness subject by drawing upon a lifetime of experience in the bush. Readers will be swept along with accounts of tracking down a wealthy heifer in the wilds of Canada, traveling with Indian companions, or clapping across the Southwest deserts on a saddle horse. This is an enjoyable book that sets the mind to planning summer expeditions.

Newell Searle
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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