Old Rail Fence Corners: Frontier Tales Told by Minnesota Pioneers. Edited by Lucy Leavenworth Wilder Morris. Introduction by Marjorie Kreidberg.


SOME FIFTY years ago when I used to visit antiquarian bookstores in the Twin Cities, I occasionally ran across a copy of Old Rail Fence Corners, usually tucked away inconspicuously on a dusty shelf. I always glanced at the contents, but I never bought a copy chiefly because the price of four or five dollars was beyond my reach. It is good to have the book available again, and its value is increased by Marjorie Kreidberg’s biographical account of the editor, Lucy Morris, and by an index.

Old Rail Fence Corners is a good example of what Theodore C. Blegen liked to call “grass roots” history. Perhaps another possible label for it is oral history. It consists of a number of brief, personal, anecdotal accounts by men and women who came to territorial Minnesota, usually as children, and who lived into their ninth decades with remarkably unimpaired memories. The stories were collected by members of the Daughters of the American Revolution in various parts of the state, although most of the recollections focus on St. Paul and Minneapolis (St. Anthony would be more accurate).

A few celebrities figure in these pages — among them, Henry H. Sibley, Franklin Steele, Edward Eggleston, Little Crow, and Charles E. Flandrau — but even they appear almost casually. The majority of the characters are obscure farmers, homesteaders, artisans, teachers, missionaries, and housewives, lured to Minnesota by rumors of a healthy climate or the chance of acquiring land cheaply. They often came with no money in their pockets, frequently with only health, courage, and persistence to rely upon. Some became “backtrailers,” in Hamlin Garland’s term, but most remained; and if they themselves did not live to benefit fully from the promised land, their families prospered.

As a whole the book is repetitious, incoherent, and not very effectively written. But the reminiscences are honest and often highly interesting. It is hard to realize, roughly a century later, that it was once possible to shoot ducks and prairie chickens along what is now Summit Avenue in St. Paul, that deer and even elk were once visible around Lake Calhoun in Minneapolis, that both Sioux and Chippewa who lounged around the frontier hamlets would gladly exchange moccasins for doughnuts, and that on the very land that produced quantities of cranberries and strawberries both wolves and rattlesnakes were also common. Through these pages the creaking of the wooden Red River oxcarts is frequently heard, not to mention the loud cries of drunken Indians or the dreaded war whoop.

The Civil War is less prominent in the book than the Sioux attacks on New Ulm in 1862, and, although the river steamboats which provided the crucial link with the East are often mentioned, it is the prairie wagons and the ox-drawn sleds that rivet one’s attention. There was suffering on the Minnesota frontier in the 1850s: imperfect sanitation, crude log huts that usually leaked or let snow drift in, a monotonous diet if indeed hunger did not often threaten, rivers to ford when there were no bridges, and too often the threat of Indian depredations. But there was also occasional gaiety and even feasting. Young women would wear hoop skirts and enjoy dancing despite limited cabin space, pork would be supplemented with game, and ersatz coffee could be made of dried corn bread and potato skins with maple sugar for sweetening.

Old Rail Fence Corners is a book to be dipped into rather than read continuously, but some of the scenes and characters stick in the memory. Certainly it can occupy space on the same shelf with more formal and pretentious histories of Minnesota. But two minor caveats must end this review. The rather numerous spelling errors in the original edition of 1914 have not been corrected, and in the paperback edition there is no map of the trails and rivers so often alluded to.

Reviewed by JOHN T. FLANAGAN, professor of English at the University of Illinois at Urbana. He has written many book reviews and articles for Minnesota History through the years.

James J. Hill and the Opening of the Northwest. By Albro Martin.

(New York, Oxford University Press, 1976. xii, 676 p. Maps, illustrations. $19.50.)

MENTION OF the name “Jim” Hill to residents of the American Northwest invariably invokes the memory of an almost legendary figure, a nineteenth-century business luminary, and a giant among the empire builders of the West. Most particularly, the association is one of railroad-building — the Great Northern — with vaguer remembrances of his larger “Hill system.” Therefore, a book subtitled “and the Opening of the Northwest” suggests to the prospective buyer that it will describe not only the excitement of throwing a pair of rails across half a continent, unaided by federal grants, but that it will lay forth Hill’s efforts to enhance the growth and development of the invaded region. Depending upon one’s point of view, or expectations, it may be that the author has done enough to justify his (or the publisher’s) subtitle, but there remains room for argument that it might well have been set aside in favor of another.

The focus of the book is upon Hill the man, his “go west and grow up with the country” success as an immigrant from
Canada to the Minnesota West of the 1850s, his subsequent 'risen from the ranks' ascent to power and fame, accomplished in the approved nineteenth-century Horatio Alger manner, and his ultimate recognition as a Captain of Industry, a kind of commercial and industrial knighthood inferentially conferred upon American tycoons by a nation that professed to abhor titles but whose businessmen sought them avidly.

Because Hill devoted a lifetime to the development of his far-flung empire, the greater possibilities for which were agricultural, it is not out of place that the author chose to divide his book in sections called "Seedtime," "Growth," and "Harvest." The first stanza ends in 1879, designated as a year of triumph, one that signified firm control of the old, bankrupt St. Paul and Pacific Railroad that was succeeded by the aggressive St. Paul, Minneapolis and Manitoba Railway. As the latter name suggests, Hill pointed his earlier efforts in the direction of his native Canada.

The "Growth" part of the book, extending from the important year 1879 to 1895, covers the emergence of the again renamed road, the Great Northern, and its completion to the West Coast in 1893. The "Harvest" section takes the story down to Hill's death in 1916 and depicts a period when the railroader really came into his own, not only making a success of a transcontinental road completed in the panic year but continuing on to greater heights represented by the consolidation of the Great Northern with the Northern Pacific and the Burlington lines — a master stroke that was undone, for the moment, by the Northern Securities suit initiated in Theodore Roosevelt's first administration.

This is an excellent piece of work. It utilizes an enormous amount of original sources (among them collections at the Hill Reference Library in St. Paul and the Minnesota Historical Society) and supplies considerable enrichment through the use of detailed background material that helps to etch a sharp picture of Hill the man. It is set forth in an engaging manner, producing a very pleasant and informative result. Much has been written about railroads in the past four or five decades, producing a very pleasant and informative result. Much has been written about railroads in the past four or five decades, perhaps too much, and some relatively insignificant lines have been treated. During this time the Great Northern Railway and the empire that sprouted from it have yearned for attention. Hill, his Canadian and American financial associates, and the railroad proper now have been recognized in a rich, attractive account. What might he called "Great Northern Country" awaits its historian, and when he emerges Martin's important volume will have provided the necessary prologue to this more extended study.

Reviewed by Robert G. Athearn, professor of history at the University of Colorado at Boulder and author of numerous works of western and railroad history.

Teamster Politics. By Farrell Dobbs.


IN THIS VOLUME Farrell Dobbs continues his account of the crucial years of labor organization, radical activities, and labor politics in Minnesota during the critical Great Depression decade.

In Teamster Rebellion (1972) Dobbs concentrated on the major strike event of the 1930s — the Minneapolis truckers' strike of 1934. In Teamster Power (1973) the author discussed the organizational expansion of the Teamsters to include over-the-road drivers. In Teamster Politics he describes the role of the Trotskyists in the political upheavals of the depression period.

The latest book, like the previous ones, is based on the author's personal experiences, his memory being refreshed by consulting press accounts of events described, his personal papers, and documents submitted to him by various researchers. It is primarily a memoiristic account of a participant in the events rather than a dispassionate historical narrative. The author has not consulted the major manuscript collections of individuals and organizations available mainly at the Minnesota Historical Society. Thus his account of politics is a one-sided narrative, which is usually the case with memoirs.

The author's purpose is to chronicle the "correct" revolutionary line of the Trotskyists in the political events described. Thus to the author everyone in the labor movement but the Trotskyists were either labor bureaucrats, gangs of class collaborationist misleaders, or opportunists. Analysis of Farmer-Labor politics remains on this level in the author's attempt to justify and proclaim the consistent class-conscious politics of the Trotskyists as either Workers party members, absorbed in or absorbing the Socialist party in 1936, or as trade union participants within the Farmer-Labor Association. Post-1935 collaboration of the Stalinists with the New Deal and their activities within the Farmer-Labor Association are particularly, and in part justifiably, chastised.

The Farmer-Labor party's role is seen as the de facto contributor to preservation of the capitalist ruling structure, thereby impeding a working-class advance toward a revolutionary orientation. In this light it is then understandable that the Trotskyists would attempt to sabotage Farmer-Labor party activities which would lead to its demise after 1938.

But it is refreshing to read an account which can retrospectively uncover no errors in past policy or its execution by the group led by the author. Thus the Trotskyist collaboration with the most conservative elements within the Minneapolis Central Labor Union to undermine the candidacy of Kenneth C. Haycraft for Minneapolis mayor in 1937 by supporting the discredited Thomas E. Latimer — thereby allowing the election of George E. Leach, reactionary Republican — is seen as consistent class-conscious politics.

The author has no sober second thought regarding the Trotskyist role in undermining the re-election efforts of Elmer A. Benson for governor in 1938, thus objectively supporting the anti-Semitic reactionary groups aligned first with the Hal- mar Petersen primary campaign and then with the Harold E. Stassen election campaign. Although the author deals extensively with the appearance of the anti-Semitic Silver Shirts as a threat to trade unionism, he does not relate the same phenomenon to its role in the Benson defeat of 1938.

In a well-written and lively manner, the author recounts the role of the Trotskyist Teamsters within the labor movement, their relationship with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and their role in Minnesota politics. He also deals with the role of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the history of labor organization, the Trotskyist role in organizing
the unemployed, the relationship between them and the Communist-influenced Workers’ Alliance, and finally the national WPA strike, centered in Minneapolis, and the legal repression which followed.

Students of Minnesota politics and American labor will have to consult Dobbs’s work, not as final word or authority, but rather as a valuable source document to which the usual canons of historical evaluation for authenticity and bias will have to be applied.

Reviewed by Hyman Berman, professor of history at the University of Minnesota and a specialist in labor history.

Norman Thomas: The Last Idealist. By W. A. Swanberg.

(New York, Scribner’s, 1976. 528 p. $14.95.)

THIS IS an intimate, warm biography of the late Socialist leader. It traces the story of Norman Thomas from his boyhood in Marion, Ohio, where he delivered newspapers for publisher Warren G. Harding, to his last days in a nursing home, where he died in 1968 just after the presidential election of that year. The drama and interest of the account are heightened by a large number of good photographs, which show Thomas in several settings from youth to the latter part of his career.

Thomas came from a remarkable family — his father was a minister — which had very exacting ideals. The children of the family pursued varied careers, some of them, including Norman, revolting against the theological and political commitments of their parents.

Swanberg traces Thomas’ educational career from his undergraduate years at Princeton through theological seminary and his learning experiences as a social worker. Thomas might have gone far as a religious leader, but after a time at the Brick Presbyterian Church he found his faith wavering with respect to what the church could or would do to alleviate the lot of mankind. He could no longer believe in the God of his fathers. Instead, he turned to activities in the Fellowship of Reconciliation and, later on, in the Socialist party.

He was a vigorous opponent of American entry into World War I, and one of the central strains of his political leadership thereafter was his opposition to war. During his long career as a leader of the Socialist party, the war issue was equal in importance to civil liberties and economic justice questions. While Swanberg gives us a good account of Thomas’ struggle with the Old Guard in the Socialist party, discusses his relations with such factions as the “Militant” and “Clarity” groups, and touches on many political debates, he tends to emphasize Thomas’ personal qualities: his amazing energy, his charm, his deep concern for injustices done to particular individuals, his relations with countless prominent persons (John Foster Dulles, for example, as well as Reinhold Niebuhr, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and many others), and, curiously enough, his enjoyment of “gossip.” Swanberg seems to be less concerned with the details of Thomas’ political positions than was Harry Fleischman in an earlier biography.

Besides making six efforts to win the presidency of the United States, Thomas was a Socialist candidate for many other offices — among them governor of the state of New York and mayor of New York City. But always he went down to rather shattering defeat. Although he accepted defeat with good grace and humor and usually held out great hopes for the future, his optimism about the ultimate triumph of socialism began to fade somewhat during the latter part of his political life.

Missing in this biography is any detailed analysis of Thomas’ style and qualities of political leadership. For many years Thomas so completely overshadowed others in the Socialist party that the development of alternative leadership was difficult if not impossible. Doubtless this was not entirely his fault. Yet one cannot help wondering whether the fate of the Socialist party might not have been different had he done more to encourage new leadership. After the defeat of the Old Guard, however, he seemed often to think that it was his due to be regarded as the chief leader. And most members of the party — sometimes rather slavishly — seemed to acquiesce. In party conventions, for example, I have seen speaker argue one position on an issue, with the other delegates seeming to agree, only to have Thomas rise toward the end of the discussion and take the opposite position. After this the delegates would reverse their stands almost as if they were machines. This following of the leader, not necessarily because of what he said but simply because he was Norman Thomas, was good neither for Thomas nor for his followers.

During the latter part of his life he was almost obsessed by the Vietnam War — it was a kind of magnificent obsession — and was one of its outstanding opponents. Aside from the period when he led opposition to American entry into World War II, this was probably his most glorious hour. When he appeared in Northrop Memorial Auditorium at the University of Minnesota to argue against the war, he was clearly the most vigorous and effective of all the speakers, despite his crippling arthritis and his near-blindness.

My last conversation with Norman Thomas was in 1966 when I was asked to present a War Resisters League award to him for his peace work. I was touched by the warmth of his greeting and his friendliness, particularly in light of the fact that I had opposed certain of his positions in Socialist conventions (I was for endorsement of unilateral disarmament, for example, and he was vigorously opposed). In responding to my remarks, he recounted the history of his attitudes to war and peace from World War I to the war in Vietnam. As Swanberg rightly emphasizes, Thomas remained to the end a remarkable crusader for his ideals and for social justice.

Reviewed by Mulford Q. Sibley, professor of political science and American studies at the University of Minnesota.

From Sweden to America: A History of the Migration. Edited by Harald Runblom and Hans Norman.


THE SWEDISH mass migration to America, which from 1850 to 1930 brought more than one million Swedes to this country, is probably the best documented and most thoroughly analyzed of the population movements that made up the great Atlantic migrations. An important contribution toward that achievement has been the work of the Migration Research
Project at the University of Uppsala, Sweden. Since its formation in the early 1960s under the leadership of historian Sten Carlsson, this group has produced a steady stream of systematic historical research, mostly in the form of doctoral dissertations. The active research phase of the project's existence lasted roughly a decade and involved more than thirty scholars who co-operated in the planning of their efforts so that their work might collectively form a comprehensive treatment of the migrations in both their European and American contexts.

This volume, which is intended as a summing up of their work, contains a collection of articles covering various aspects of the migrations. The contributors address themselves to the theoretical approaches to migration research, the source materials, Swedish emigration policy, the chronology and composition of the migrations, the causes of emigration, the role of the transport sector, the question of re-emigration, and, finally, the settlement and assimilation of Swedes in America. Significantly, the book is published jointly by the presses of Uppsala University and the University of Minnesota, a fact that underlines the international character of its subject and its appeal.

Students of the migrations will appreciate the wealth of documentation that runs throughout the book and the exhaustive bibliography of published material from both sides of the Atlantic. In addition there is a generous complement of maps, diagrams, and photographs. One group of color maps is particularly impressive and useful. They show the rate of emigration experienced by local territorial units in the five Nordic countries for ten different time periods, offering a rare opportunity to view on one page comparable data from all the Nordic countries.

Since many of the articles spring from the scholarly papers and dissertations of the contributors, the style of presentation is at times a bit academic, but not overly so. With the possible exception of the methodological article by Sune Åkerman, the long-time theoretical architect and leader of the group, the general reader should experience little difficulty — a happy state of affairs that makes From Sweden to America worth-while reading for both its potential audiences.

Reviewed by ROBERT C. OSTERGREN, assistant professor of geography and history at South Dakota State University.
Brookings. His article, "Cultural Homogeneity and Population Stability Among Swedish Immigrants in Chicago County," was published in the Fall, 1973, issue of Minnesota History.

Roots: The Saga of an American Family. By Alex Haley.

AFTER TEN YEARS of research that took Alex Haley to three continents and involved consultation with a number of scholars in anthropology, linguistics, and history, as well as members of his own family, this former journalist for Reader's Digest has traced his family's history back to its origin in West Africa. Inspired by a series of old tales about a distant ancestor called "the African" that were carefully passed through oral tradition from generation to generation, Haley succeeded in what was long felt impossible for Afro-Americans — tracing his lineage 200 years (including 100 years of slavery) to the actual village where his African ancestor was born. However, the work's importance is not only as a genealogical study of an Afro-American family but also as one of the first composite histories of slavery as seen through four generations of slaves. (Since this review was written, Americans everywhere have become aware of Roots through the tremendous impact of the television series it inspired. —Ed.)

Haley's saga begins in 1750 with the birth of Kunta Kinte, a Muslim Mandingo. The author follows Kunta's boyhood experiences and through them describes the richness and complexity of West African life. He tells of the capture of Kunta by a slave-raiding party, his horrifying passage across the Atlantic on the slave ship "Lord Ligonier," and his traumatic initiation into the world of the whites and Blacks in pre-Revolutionary War plantation Virginia. Kunta emerged as a symbol of resistance to slavery.

Kunta attempted to escape three times, only to have the last try cost him part of his foot. He insisted on retaining his name in spite of attempts to rename him Toby by the plantation owner and American-born slaves. He refused to abandon Islam, though pressured by his slave wife Bell, and he continued to distrust "toubobs" (whites) while not understanding the Blacks who submitted to the slave system. Eventually Kunta was forced to make accommodations with slavery but he retained an elemental dignity that seemed lacking in most of the Blacks and whites now affecting his life. In the book's most compelling scene, Kunta, now an old man, and Bell futilely lash out at their "good" master, William Waller, upon learning that he sold their only child, Kizzy, to a slave trader.

Kizzy was purchased by a North Carolina cockfighter, Tom Lea, who raped her on her first night at the Lea farm. That incident produced her only child, George, who later became Lea's assistant. Through the experiences of Kizzy, George, and his children, we learn the contrasting slave life on the Lea farm with fewer than five slaves and on the Waller plantation with more than twenty. Various other themes emerge, such as the ambivalence of the mulatto George toward his white father and owner, Tom Lea, as well as the class tensions between Lea, who comes from "po white" stock, and some of the wealthier whites.

The defeat of Tom Lea's gamecock forced the second breakup of the family. George was sent to England in partial payment of a lost bet. His children were sold to the Murray plantation in Alamance County, North Carolina. Kizzy, too old to be of value, died on the Lea farm soon afterwards. The sons remained on the Murray plantation until the end of the Civil War. Soon after Appomattox, they were rejoined by George, who led the entire clan, including wives and children of his four sons, on a thousand-mile journey to recently opened farmland around Henning, Tennessee. Haley then traces in rapid manner the three succeeding generations to his own birth in 1921.

Haley has done a masterful job of reconstructing the general pattern of Black life during the slavery period. But he is forced to admit that many of the incidents written of during the pre-Civil War period were "of necessity a novelized amalgam of what I know took place together with what my research led me to plausibly feel took place." Anyone familiar with the history of slavery would recognize this problem and commend...
Haley for portraying as accurately as possible the family's experiences.

However, while writing with a historical backdrop that reflects the growth of the United States from the American Revolution to World War I, he frequently gives the reader bits of history that seem too contrived, too convenient. For example, when the Revolutionary War breaks out, Kunta and Bell are informed by other slaves that Crispus Attucks, a Black man, was the first to die in the Boston Massacre. Later, in reference to Thomas Jefferson, Kunta tells other slaves that Jefferson’s mistress was Sally Hemings, a mulatto, and then describes in intricate detail the preparation of Jefferson’s favorite dish. In another instance a slave relates the percentage of southern whites classified as large slaveholders, small slaveholders, and those who owned no slaves at all. While it is improbable, though not impossible, that Black slaves could have known about Attucks or Sally Hemings, it is doubtful that any slave, or even any southern planter, could have given so accurate an estimate of the percentage of slaveholding and nonslaveholding whites for the entire region in 1770.

More serious inaccuracies occur in Haley’s references to historical periods or major crops. A slave on the Weller plantation in 1770 describes for Kunta some large cotton plantations worked by Black slaves in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama. But none of those areas developed cotton plantations until the second decade of the nineteenth century. Haley also refers erroneously to Spotsylvania County, Virginia, as a major cotton-growing area when the leading crop was tobacco. These inconsistencies are annoying and, in some ways, surprising, considering the overall thoroughness and accuracy of the author’s research.

The only major shortcoming in the book is the imbalance between the pre- and post-Civil War family history. While we have a rich, highly detailed account of the lives of Kunta, Kizzy, George, and his sons, the second 100 years of the family’s history is hurriedly described in the last thirty-six pages of a 357-page book. Considering the increasing emphasis on urban migration, unemployment, and the welfare systems rather than slavery as the reason for the disintegration of the Afro-American family, it would have been interesting to know if Kunta Kinte’s descendants were able to fare as well with these new pressures as they did with slavery. Haley has promised a sequel to Boots that will describe more thoroughly his search for his ancestry. We hope that book or a subsequent volume will include a more detailed and graphic description of the experiences of his post-1865 family.

In spite of its deficiencies, this book will stand as a major contribution to the literature on slavery in the American South. It is one of the few novelized histories that describes successfully the experience of slavery from the slave’s point of view. And it is one of the first attempts to trace the variations in slavery experienced by one family over time, place, and circumstance.

**Printed Review**

**Roots**

By Alex Haley

Haley in American history at the University of Minnesota. He taught Afric-American history at Washington State University at Pullman from 1971 to 1975. By coincidence, Taylor was born near Henning, Tennessee, where the Haley family has lived since the end of the Civil War.

Norwegian Influence on the Upper Midwest. Edited by Harold S. Naess.


THE TITLE given this collection of papers presented at an international conference held in Duluth in 1975— the sesquicentennial year of Norwegian migration to America—is somewhat misleading. Nevertheless, the volume is a notable scholarly contribution, made more significant because it follows a similar discussion called The Finnish Experience in the Western Great Lakes Region (see review in the Winter, 1976, issue of Minnesota History) and precedes a book that will contain the papers read at a 1976 conference on the Swedish impact in the same region. The staff of the Continuing Education and Extension Division at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, has pioneered in coming to grips with the human factor in immigration to Minnesota and neighboring states and has given yeoman support to ethnic and immigration studies.

If the title of this volume is misleading, it is because its articles do not give broad syntheses of such subjects as economic, social, cultural, or religious life among the Norwegian Americans. There are exceptions—especially Marion J. Nelson’s excellent account of folk art. Carl H. Chruslock’s interpretation of the Norwegian influence on Minnesota politics, and Carlson C. Qualey’s general views on immigration and acculturation. But Chruslock and Qualey—and Fredrik A. Schiotz in his review of the contributions of the Lutheran church—although writing against rich backgrounds, actually do more to invite specialized research than to answer the questions other scholars are certain to ask. The book as a whole underscores the reviewer’s conviction that work on the Norwegian-American experience, although seriously pursued for about a century, has only been well started.

The basic value of Norwegian Influence lies in its one-sided enrichment and broadening of approaches to immigration study. Ingrid Semmingsen contributes an able survey of migration research in the Scandinavian countries and Finland and happily raises some questions about the techniques employed, notably by the Uppsala group in Sweden. Arnfinn Engen discusses in some detail emigration from the Dorre district in Norway. Carsten Hopstock, who, like Semmingsen and Engen, is a Norwegian scholar, explains the activities of the Norwegian Folk Museum in Oslo.

The papers prepared by American students range over a wide field. Rudolph J. Vecoli offers a mature and inclusive view of American history. Kenneth Smith presents Waldemar Ager’s writings as interpretations of ethnic experience. and Rudolph Johnson draws on his own family background to view Norwegian-American ethnicity. Einar Haugen reminds historians of the rich sources in bygdelags, publications. and Odd S. Lovoll describes the meetings of the bygdelags. organizations of persons from specific districts of the homeland. Joan Buckley’s contribution places immigrant women in the foreground as role models for today. Matt Kauppi’s exhaustive research on Norwegian professional fishermen on Lake Superior’s North Shore brings the focus of the conference close to Duluth, and Michael C. Karr’s “Norwegian Influence on Finnish Church and Temperance Groups in America” calls attention to the neglected field of Scandinavian interrelationships.

204 Minnesota History
Laura: The Life of Laura Ingalls Wilder. By Donald Zochert.
(Chicago, Henry Regnery, 1976. 260 p. Illustrations. $8.95.)

THIS IS an affectionate biography of the midwestern writer, Laura Ingalls Wilder. The book carefully records the major facts of her life: her birth on February 7, 1867; a childhood spent with parents and sisters in a succession of homesteads in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, South Dakota, and Kansas; her marriage to Almanzo Wilder in 1885 and their early difficult years of illness and financial setbacks; the peaceful years from 1896 onward to her Rocky Ridge Farm in the Missouri Ozarks; and her death on February 10, 1957. During the Missouri years Mrs. Wilder wrote the Little House books for which she is justly famed. The current television series, "Little House on the Prairie," is loosely based on her books, which are in turn fed by her personal experiences and her novels.

In the opening chapter Zochert attempts to recreate the personalities of Laura's parents, Charles and Caroline Quiner Ingalls. In telling their stories, the author presumes a good deal of familiarity on the part of his readers with events and places mentioned in Laura's Little House books. This presumption, valid or not, underlies the structure of the entire book.

Much of the biography is devoted to identifying the influences and experiences that shaped Laura's attitudes toward both life and her art. At the age of fifteen, Laura's older sister, Mary, suffered a stroke. She recovered but was left permanently blind. Zochert stresses heavily the effect that Mary's blindness had upon the young Laura. He writes: "Now that she must see for Mary as well as herself, Laura saw everything."

In a short preface Zochert describes his approach to the material at hand: "I've tried in this book to tell the story of Laura Ingalls Wilder with honesty and affection." In this the book is notably successful, for the author's fondness and esteem for his subject enliven nearly every page. He goes on to say, however: "I have tried to follow Laura's advice — simplify! — and tell her story as fully and clearly as possible." In this he is less successful. The difficulty is that the book wavers between recounting the life of Laura and chronicling the efforts of researchers to reconstruct that life. Both topics are fascinating, but they do not lend themselves to identical literary treatment. Furthermore, their juxtaposition — often in the middle of a chapter, with no warning — is disconcerting to the reader.

Describing, in Laura's direct manner, the complex historical sleuthing that established the precise location of the Kansas house where the Ingalls family homesteaded briefly results in a somewhat incongruous presentation, as a glance at pages 35-37 will testify.

As part of his adherence to Laura's dictum of simplicity, Zochert eschews both footnotes and bibliography. He does, however, include three appendices. One provides a chronology of dates, another lists museums and historical sites connected with her that may be visited, and a third contains an odd sort of apology for the question of reality versus fiction in Laura's writings. The book also includes eight pages of photographs and an index afflicted with erratic preciseness. What is the reader to make, for example, of an entry that reads, "Clock; Almanzo turns hands back?" This entry documents the growing affection that led Almanzo Wilder to propose marriage to Laura Ingalls in 1885, but who would have guessed it? Some restatement of the real subject of the episode would have served the purpose better.

In short, Laura is a sincere, readable portrait of an admirable woman, written by a devoted and enthusiastic biographer. Possibly a bit less enthusiasm might have resulted in a more consistent treatment.

Reviewed by Kathleen Flanagan, assistant professor in the Graduate School of Education, University of Utah, Salt Lake City. She has a special interest in children's literature.

Superior: The Haunted Shore. Photographs by Bruce Littlejohn, text by Wayland Drew.
(Toronto, Gage Publishing Ltd., 1975. 176 p. Illustrations. $35.00.)

NO ONE who travels Lake Superior's northern shore escapes its unique beauty. Steep cliffs and deep water combine with the great dimensions of the lake to create changing moods. One day it is still and sunlit, another day it is dark with wind and waves. To the early French explorer, Radisson, Superior was "the delightfulest lake of the world."

Each season many try to capture the lake with their cameras. But few do it so well as the talented team of Bruce Littlejohn and Wayland Drew. Their Superior: The Haunted Shore, combining stunning photography with poetic prose, traces the northern edge of the lake some 450 miles from Sault Ste. Marie to Grand Portage. The narrative is both descriptive and a journey through history — based on the accounts of explorers and travelers.

From beginning to end, pictures as well as text reflect the great sensitivity of both Littlejohn and Drew to this extraordinary lake and to the need to preserve it. For those of us who are lured back to this "haunted shore" year after year, the book is a bargain at $35.

Reviewed by Robert C. Wheeler, associate director of the Minnesota Historical Society, who has a special interest in the north country.
IN HER PREFACE to The Twin Cities Perceived: A Study in Words and Pictures (University of Minnesota Press, 143 p. $9.95), Jean Adams Ervin calls it "a book on the visual characteristics of St. Paul and Minneapolis" and proposes that it will inspire readers to "take a new look" at both cities. The "words" of the title are by Mrs. Ervin, and the "pictures" are drawings by Twin Cities artists Gemma Rossini Cullen, Robert Halladay, Heidi Schwabacher, and Robert N. Taylor.

Mrs. Ervin has made a highly personal selection of neighborhoods and districts in each city that she feels are representative of the two. She has attempted a "mixture of old and new, of varying architectural styles and topographical features." Included are the areas known as Sheridan, Holland, St. Anthony, Kenwood, Lowry Hill, Whittier, Riverside, Seward, Tanglewood, and Prospect Park in Minneapolis and St. Anthony Park, Upper Payne, Lower Payne, Frogtown, Dayton's Bluff, Highland Park, and the West Side in St. Paul. Each neighborhood and some of its landmarks are located on end-sheet maps. Mrs. Ervin describes them in a text that is fact mixed with her personal evaluations of the visual attractions and successes found in each area. Her subjects are liberally illustrated with seventy-three drawings, some photographic, others more impressionistic, and still others — especially the Cullen ones — quite beautiful works that capture the ambience of the entire community or structure.

Throughout the five chapters, Mrs. Ervin hops back and forth between the cities. She deals first with the importance of the Mississippi River, then proceeds to delineate the personalities of residential areas, public, commercial, and religious buildings, and the cities' parks and recreation areas. In addition to historical information, there is ample commentary on architectural design and detail. Two errors in historical data are apparent: Joseph N. Nicollet, the French scientist and cartographer, arrived in the apparent: Joseph N. Nicollet, the French scientist and cartographer, arrived in the

IN THE WAKE of such bicentennial-inspired items as red, white, and blue ink pens, lunch pails, and toilet seats it is encouraging to note a worthwhile project of that observance. It is Continuum: Threads in the Community Fabric of Northfield, Minnesota (84 p. $3.00), edited by Lynn Carlin, assembled by members of the Northfield community, and published by the Northfield Bicentennial Commission.

Structurally, this local history takes a novel approach to its subject. Thematic rather than chronological, it carries the reader from prehistoric times to the present largely by means of four essays. The first describes the area's geographic and geological features, the second sketches the social history of the community and its people, the third treats Northfield's commercial development, and the fourth surveys the area's architectural heritage. Within these four essays are woven some twenty short features written by local residents and illuminating some aspects of the parent essays. Often nostalgic, these brief pieces cover such subjects as early French explorers, local native American tribes, ethnic groups, claim-staking, old swimming holes, the "glacial speed" of social change, local industries, and, of course, such inevitable Northfield subjects as St. Olaf and Carleton colleges and the Northfield bank robbery attempt by the James-Younger gang in 1876.

Collectively, the essays draw together the threads of Northfield's development from a transplanted "New England village" into the two-college, industrial community it is today. Whatever their respective subjects, the writers agree that "Northfield's hero now and in the past has been the community."

Although they at times rather self-consciously attempt to portray Northfield as a distinctive patch on the national fabric, the booklet's writers wisely avoid a tone of unabashed boosterism. The work is not a reference book of Northfield history, nor was it intended to be, but it does extend Northfield's community threads into the weave of the national fabric — a quality too often lacking in local history publications.

JEAN A. BROOKINS

THE WINONA COUNTY Historical Society in 1975 reprinted the Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Minnesota, which was first published by Alfred T. Andreas in 1874. In recent years the original Atlas has become difficult to obtain and expensive. The reprinted work proved so popular that it quickly sold out and is now in its second printing.

As researchers know, the 390-page Andreas Atlas is lavishly illustrated with nineteenth-century woodcuts portraying various sites in each county: residences, farms, mills, churches, hotels, stores, courthouses, schoolhouses. Especially noteworthy are its panoramic views of major cities, detailed county maps and plats, and brief biographies and portraits of prominent people of the time.

The reprinted Andreas Atlas is a black-and-white version of the original color-tinted book and reduced to 70 per cent of the original size for ease of handling and shelving. Neither change significantly affects the over-all quality of the book, although some maps with color codes do come out less well. The book is available for $16.00 from the Winona County Historical Society, 1601 Johnson Street, Winona, Minnesota 55987.

C. ALLYN RUSSELL of Boston University has gathered together seven of his articles that have been published by various journals, including Minnesota History, for his book Voices of American Fundamentalism: Seven Biographical Studies (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1976. 304 p. $15.00). Russell's "William Bell Riley: Architect of Fundamentalism," which won the Solon J. Buck Award as the best article to be published in Minnesota History in 1972, forms a chapter in the new book under the title of "William Bell Riley: Organizational Fundamentalist."

Others to be treated in chapters are J. Frank Norris, John Roach Stratton, J. C. Massie, J. Gresham Machen, William Jennings Bryan, and Clarence E. Macartney. In the words of Robert T.
Handy of Union Theological Seminary, New York, who wrote the foreword. Dr. Russell's careful biographical studies provide us with some significant building blocks for new interpretations of an important religious movement that has set its stamp not only on its own time but on ours as well.

LOCAL BICENTENNIAL and often coinciding centennial histories continue to come off the presses. A handful of such recent publications to come to the attention of the editors of Minnesota History are described briefly below.

The North Land: A History of Roseau County, by Hazel H. Wahlberg, illustrated by Frances Karlsson. 1975. This 225-page, well-illustrated hardbound book is a clearly organized account of the history of the county up to the present. It includes histories of each township and of local business, industry, agriculture, churches, sports, education, and culture. It is available for $9.95 plus 75 cents postage and handling from Roseau County Historical Society, 505 Third Avenue N.E., Roseau, Minnesota 56751.

The History of Stevens Co., by Edna Mae Busch. 1976. A history of every town and township as well as a general county history is included in this 192-page paperbound book. Cartoons by Delmar Hodgrafer and numerous photographs illustrate the work. It is available for $6.50 from the author, 509 West Eleventh, Morris, Minnesota 56270.

Blackduck Diamond Jubilee Bicentennial Book, by the Blackduck Bicentennial Committee. This 89-page paperbound book is well illustrated and includes histories of neighboring settlements as well as of Blackduck. It is available for $5.00 plus 25 cents postage from Fern Ludemann, Route 1, Blackduck, Minnesota 56719.

Under Prairie Skies: A Centennial History of Ada, Minnesota, by Leonora J. Johnson, illustrated by Patricia Duffney. Ada, located in Norman County in the Red River Valley, has always been dependent upon the rural population for its prosperity, as this book shows. It gives a general account of the early years, then organizes the city's history around its government, churches, businesses, schools, clubs, and recreation. It is available for $12.50 from the author, 404 West 50th Avenue, Ada, Minnesota 56510.

APRIL is the cruelest month, but winter-weary Minnesotans are likely to welcome it, for the very good reason that there has never been a below-zero temperature recorded in the state during that month. So says the fact-packed 1977 WCCO Radio Weather Guide, published in a new calendar form by the Freshwater Biological Research Foundation (Navarre, Minnesota, 1976. 52 p., $2.95). The author and consulting meteorologist is Bruce Watson, who also wrote the still-useful 1975 and 1976 almanacs that appeared in book form.

Each month in the new Guide includes a calendar with an "outdoor planning guide" containing such information as average temperature highs and lows by date. Of special interest to historians and weather buffs in general are the month-by-month general weather picture, a summary of last year's weather during the month, and "great weather events." There are also concomitant biological events from 1976 — a long and cheerful list for April, for example, with such entries as "first bloodroots blooming," "bluebirds are nesting," "common loons return to Gunflint trail area" and "area farmers are planting corn." The guide also includes such general weather information as all-time temperature averages and extremes and safety information like what to do in a lightning storm.

THE TRANSFORMATION of a normal school to a full-fledged, four-year, degree-granting institution is a familiar development in the United States. So the story told by Hilda R. Carter and John R. Jensvold in The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire: A History, 1916-1976 is not unusual, but it is unusually well told. It is properly scholarly, with abundant footnotes, appendixes, a bibliography, and an index, but it is also engrossing and written with warmth and humanity.

The school began as Eau Claire State Normal School, the last of nine such institutions built in Wisconsin between 1868 and 1916. Its enrollment grew from fewer than 200 in its first few years to almost 10,000 in 1976. It is now the largest of the original normal schools and part of the fourth largest system of higher education in the United States. Despite this growth, the Eau Claire campus seems to have maintained the atmosphere and advantages of the small college or university.

Carter and Jensvold do not neglect the facts — the new buildings, the curriculum changes, the administrative changes (there have been only three presidents), the merger of the school with the statewide system in 1971, and perennial financial challenges and adversities. But the authors tell the story in human terms, often with anecdotes and reminiscences — touching, poignant, humorous. They do not gloss over the conflicts and problems. The accompanying national and international events — wars, depressions, political repression — are not a vague background but an integral part of the story (both authors have history backgrounds). They also tell, honestly but sympathetically, of the radical changes in students over the years. The 162-page book is well designed and illustrated. It is available from the University Bookstore, Davies Center, University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire, 54701, for $7.98 including postage and handling.

Virginia L. Martin

Spring 1977  207
A BOOK that is fun as well as useful and handy to have in both office and home is Minnesota Almanac 1977, edited by Thomas J. Rowan. From it you can learn your state representative’s name and address, the salaries of top business executives, the location of snowmobile trails, how to catch walleyes and muskies, and the words to the state song. The Almanac also includes vital statistics, an overview of Minnesota geography and history, information about government, business, agriculture, communications, transportation, taxes, and education, and other subjects.

The 321-page book is available from Robert A. Jones, publisher, 2409 West 66th Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55423. The cost is $4.95.

FUR TRADE archaeologists and others interested in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French and English firearms will want to obtain a copy of Ted M. Hamilton’s Firearms on the Frontier: Guns at Fort Michilimackinac, 1715-1781, published in 1976 by the Mackinac Island State Park Commission as part of its Reports in Mackinac History and Archeology series.

Since 1959, when archaeological excavations began at the Michigan fort site, many gun parts and muzzles that were originally part of the various military, bowing, and trade flintlocks used there have been recovered. This handsomely illustrated booklet of 39 pages identifies and discusses these various parts and arms. Hamilton’s intimate knowledge of his subject is apparent throughout and is enhanced by illustrative and historical contributions by John Mathawy and David A. Armour. Especially interesting are Hamilton’s insights into the basic differences between French and British flintlocks and his comments on the evolution, design, quality, and local repair of these early firearms.

The booklet is available for $3.00 plus 50 cents postage from the Mackinac Island State Park Commission, Mackinac Island, Michigan 49757.

DOUGLAS A. BIRK

IT WOULD BE a valuable contribution to the history of the state to have every major ethnic group represented by a book like The Swedes in Minnesota, edited by Byron Nordstrom for the Minnesota American Swedish Bicentennial Council (Minneapolis, Denison & Co., 1976, 108 p. $3.75). Filialpatriotism has been gently but effectively eliminated in the book, with the result that the very real interest of the story of Minnesota Swedes is revealed. The book is short and could be considered both an introduction to and a summary of the concerns to which scholars of ethnic groups address themselves. There are chapters on reasons for emigration, rural settlement in the state, the Twin Cities, religious organizations, secular organizations, the Swedish language in Minnesota, and Swedes in Minnesota politics, each written by an authority on the subject.

Much work has been done, both in Sweden and the United States, on the "push-pull" factors of Scandinavian migration and on the other topics treated here. A few of the products of this research are listed in the bibliography, which could perhaps have been more extensive.

There are a few problems — early state settlement was in southeastern, not southwestern Minnesota, for example — but they are minor. Editor Nordstrom has done a good job of pulling the sections of the book into a comprehensive whole, and the maps and graphs simply and effectively illustrate the points made in the text. The photographs are well chosen, though of course one always wishes for more of them. As a work of general interest, The Swedes in Minnesota is a success.

DEBORAH STULTZ

INSTITUTIONAL HISTORIES, as Doniver A. Lund notes in the introduction to his book, 50 Years: A History of First Federal/Minneapolis, are often “exercises in going from one triumph to another.” Life, he reminds us, is rarely like that. Thus, Lund’s history of the savings and loan institution is not only highly readable and concise (95 pages) but often surprisingly candid.

Lund has divided the First Federal account into three main sections: “The Formative Years,” 1926 to 1936; “The Saga of Walter Youngquist,” 1936 to 1962; and “Our Times.” In addition to a brief concluding chapter, there are also appendixes and an index. Part of the value of this history lies in the fact that Lund, a professor of history at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, was able to use primary source materials — not only board minutes but interviews with Youngquist and Lloyd A. Swanson, company president since 1962. Copies of the book are available free from First Federal as long as they last.

ERIC SEVAREID’S Not So Wild a Dream, “a personal story of youth and war and the American faith,” was a national best-seller when first published in 1946. Of special appeal in the immediate postwar period was Sevareid’s eyewitness account of World War II, which he covered as a CBS radio correspondent, traveling in Europe, China, India, North Africa, and other countries caught up in the world-wide maelstrom.

The book went through eleven reprints and then a period of some obscurity. In recent years people have been rediscovering it with an air of “gentle excitement,” in Sevareid’s words. Thirty years after its first appearance, the book has been republished by Atheneum (1976, 522 p. $12.50), with a new introduction by the author.

ALTHOUGH it is the smallest in land area of the sixty-seven counties of South Dakota, Clay County is the subject of two ambitious companion volumes published by its historical society at Vermillion in connection with the nation’s bicentennial.

One is History of Clay County, South Dakota (1976, 296 p. $8.95), by Herbert S. Schell, dean emeritus of the history department, University of South Dakota at Vermillion and the author of an earlier one-volume History of South Dakota. Schell’s Clay County book is notable among local publications for its full-scale, comprehensive, well-researched, and well-written account of this small geographical entity (405 square miles) with a population of about 9,000, including University of South Dakota students.

Schell traces the county’s growth from its somewhat unpromising beginnings in 1859 to maturity in the late nineteenth century. He also deals with its progress in modern times. Schell is especially interested in economic and social aspects of history and has related local events to happenings on the state and national scene.

The second book, Clay County Place Names (1976, 202 p. $8.95 hard cover, $6.95 paper), includes 635 names of townships, cities, rivers, bluffs, trails, buildings, monuments, and even non-existing structures. It took researchers five years to collect and verify the material. The lexicson includes names given by Indians and non-Indians, names no longer in use, the meanings and origins of “obvious” names such as Clay County Courthouse as well as unusual ones like C. I. K. (“Cash Is King”) Building. In a classification section, names are listed according to origins — personal, historical, and descriptive. The book includes an introductory historical overview by Schell, a list of references, and a supplementary fold-out map which shows the locations of the place names.
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.

**THE MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**OFFICERS**
- Ronald M. Hubbs
  - President
- Paul L. Parker
  - Vice-president
- Curtis L. Roy
  - Vice-president
- Donald B. Shank
  - Vice-president
- Russell W. Fridley
  - Secretary
- Kennon V. Rothchild
  - Treasurer

**COUNCIL**
- Elmer L. Andersen
- T. R. Anderson
- Charles W. Arnason
- Thomas C. Buckley
- Pierce Butler
- Horace Chamberlain
- Mrs. Frank Chesley
- Carl H. Chrislock
- John J. Costello
- Thomas M. Crosby
- Richard B. Dunsworth
- Richard W. Fitzsimons
- Bower Hawthorne
- Robert E. Hess
- Mrs. Charles Humphrey
- William G. Kirchner
- Rodney C. Loehr
- E. Neil Mattson
- Mrs. Charles R. McCoy
- Joseph S. Micallef
- Louis M. Moore
- Mrs. Ruth A. Myers
- Terence O'Brien
- Clayton Obermeier
- Ramedo J. Saucedo
- Peter S. Popovich
- Gordon Rosenmeier
- Robert L. Rossman
- Robert J. Sivertsen
- Barbara Stuhler
- Lyman E. Wakefield