BOOK REVIEWS

The Tale of a Comet and Other Stories. By Helen M. White.

Well, to begin with, what lover of tales could resist Helen White's subtitle: "Being a Collection of True Accounts of Diverse People and Events Relating to the State of Minnesota, Embracing COMETS, a CIRCUS, the SKI-SPORT, MILITARY OFFICERS of Fort Snelling and the Civil War, REINDEER PEOPLE, a TRUTH-TELLING VEGETARIAN REFORMER, and an INDIAN HISTORIOGRAPHER. Together with an Account of the Remarkable and Curious EVENTS of 1883?" Only a LYING VEGETARIAN REFORMER could have garnered more of my dust-jacket curiosity.

Thus lured inside the cover by this literary medicine-show barker, one does indeed sample the varying delights under the historic big top. True accounts, all. Right this way, folks, and you'll hear of Lieutenant Phineas Andrews, court-marshaled at Fort Snelling for drunkenness; Elijah E. Edwards, a Civil War chaplain whose diaries and sketches recorded his adventures and sorrows; and Frans Herman Wildstrand, the controversial Swedish-American reformer who tried to found a utopian colony in Wright County. Stay awhile longer and you can read of the Great Australian Circus whose performers were stranded in North Branch when the manager absconded with their pay and their tightrope walker, Madame Gosh.

For just another hour's investment, you can follow a Minnesota editor's tangles with Washington bureaucrats in his efforts to become a historiographer of the American Indian. His dream of creating a federal bureau that would "collect and study data on the native peoples of North America" became a reality in the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of Ethnology, but Dr. Thomas Foster was never on its payroll.

Then of course you skiing enthusiasts won't want to miss Mikkel and Torjus Hemmesvedt, heroes from the slopes of Telemark who pioneered the "midwestern ski-sport" in Minnesota. Racing was the glamorous part. Norwegians in central Minnesota made many practical uses of skiing — carrying the mail, collecting taxes, and traveling for groceries. "Pallbearers on skis at Reno, Minnesota, carried a woman in her coffin to her last resting place."

Stick around for the second show, and you'll be treated to Ignatius Donnelly's theories of Atlantis and of comets, to a series of spectacular natural disasters on earth and in the sky in the year 1883. And, so as not to scare the little ones, we'll top off the evening with a tale of reinder — of herds built up in Alaska by Minnesotans of the Lomen family and of childhood fantasies come true in St. Paul when Santa and six reindeer made Christmas, 1920, a memorable one for everyone.

Helen McCann White, former teacher and researcher in the manuscripts division of the Minnesota Historical Society, retired in 1970 "to explore some other byways in the field of history." Her goal has been "to write well-researched history that is fascinating, informative, and fun — history for the people about the people." This idiosyncratic selection of stories ("not fiction, but true stories, as true as I could make them") reflects the curiosity, sentiment, and sympathy that led her to dig up obscure facts about an unusual assortment of knowns and unknowns from Minnesota and the Middle West and to present them with eye-twinkling appeal.

My own personal favorites were those of the stranded circus performers and the title story about Ignatius Donnelly and the events of 1883. Perhaps recent weather disasters — earthquakes, volcano eruptions from Mount St. Helens to Hawaii, the effects of the El Niño currents — give immediacy to recollections of a hundred years ago when Krakatoa erupted and an entire Malayan archipelago exploded and sank into the sea. The weaving of Donnelly's theories about the disappearance of Atlantis, the origins of drift (layer of mixed clay, sand, gravel, and rocks that lies under topsoil and over bedrock), the nature of comets, the explanations of legends and sagas, the marketing of books, and the coincidental displays of the range of nature's forces make for a fascinating tale, indeed.

White's stories are well researched and very detailed. One should not come to this collection expecting tales in the oral tradition, shaggy dog stories, or anecdotes with a punch line. These are dense stories, with much information packed into every line. Occasionally, that attention to every detail becomes excessive and impedes the flow of the narrative. White is always alert, however, to the amusing side notes, such as her description of the chaplain of the Thirty-fifth Iowa Infantry, William Bagley. "It was he who, it was said, became a chaplain because he could drive a mule team without swearing.

Whether readers dip into The Tale of a Comet a story at a time or read it in one sitting, they will learn new things about events, people, and ideas of Minnesota in the 19th century. And they will be sharing in the fulfillment of White's goal to write history that is fascinating, informative, and fun.

Reviewed by Jane Croyt, author of The River's in My Blood: Riverboat Pilots Tell Their Stories (1983) and editor of Samantha Rastles the Woman Question (1983). She is an independent scholar who performs with the Minnesota Chautauqua.

Attorney for the Frontier, Enos Stutsman. By Dale Gibson, with Lee Gibson and Cameron Harvey. (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1983. 180 p. $18.95.)

As this slim volume amply testifies, Enos Stutsman was one of the more remarkable men to occupy the 19th-century Dakota frontier. From his arrival at Sioux City, Iowa, in 1856 to his death at Pembina scarcely 18 years later, he cut a wide swath as an attorney, land speculator, government appointee, politi-
man letters with insights into his political and personal thoughts. The Sioux City and Yankton years, however, are too often documented by the unsigned letters (commonly found in newspapers of that era) which have been attributed to Stutsman but could arguably have been authored by others.

Stutsman's career on the Canadian border receives the most detailed and thorough treatment. This is perhaps understandable in view of the authors' backgrounds. The best-written chapter concerns the McLean trial at Portage la Prairie in September, 1888 — again, not surprising since all three authors can be considered experts in Canadian and Manitoba legal history. The first Riel Rebellion and the annexation movement are treated in the manner currently in vogue among Canadian historians: sympathy for the métis, suspicion and a bit of derision for any American who can be tarred with the brush of the annexation "conspiracy." Stutsman is cast unconvincingly as a major figure in the story.

These objections notwithstanding, this biography is generally well researched and worthy of reading by anyone interested in Dakota and Minnesota history as well as the 19th-century relations between the United States and British North America. It demonstrates that Enos Stutsman deserves renown as considerably more than merely a man for whom a North Dakota county is named.

Reviewed by Frank Vyzbraek of Binwarek, former state archivist of North Dakota, who serves as a consultant to that state's Humanities Council. He is currently writing a book on the history of North Dakota place names.

The Canadian Sioux. By James H. Howard.

(Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1984. 207 p. $15.95.)

THE INDIANS occupying the eight Sioux reservations in Canada today are the descendants of Santees and Yanktonais from the United States who escaped to that country after the Minnesota uprising in 1862-63, and of the Teton Sioux who sought refuge in 1877 following the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876. These Sioux people have been largely ignored by historians and anthropologists. With the publication of this book, the late James H. Howard, former professor of anthropology at Oklahoma State University and a recognized authority on Plains Indian cultures and societies, fills the gap and presents significant information on this Canadian group. The book, based primarily on the author's 1972 field work when Howard conducted a series of interviews with elderly Sioux in Canada, is one of the University of Nebraska Press's new series, Studies in the Anthropology of North American Indians, edited by Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks.

Among the topics considered are tribal divisions, documented and traditional history, warfare, economy, social life, philosophy and religion, ceremonialism, and Canadian Indian policy. Although Howard provides valuable and interesting data on all of these topics, he is at his best in describing Canadian Sioux religion and ceremonialism and in comparing United States and Canadian Indian policy. Excellent explanations of Sioux religious beliefs, supported by tribal stories presented by Sioux informants, illustrate clearly how these people view nature and its interrelatedness. Howard also shows how
some contemporary Canadian Sioux have incorporated non-Sioux religious elements such as reference to Jesus Christ or other aspects of Christianity, creating a cultural syncretism.

The largest portion of the book deals with ceremonialism. Howard differentiates between the activities the Sioux shared with Woodland tribes and those they shared with High Plains tribes. Ceremonies included in the former are the Vision Quest, Medicine Feast, and Medicine Dance; those in the latter are the Sun Dance, Grass Dance, and Heyoka or Clown Cult. The ceremony Howard describes in most detail is the Grass Dance (over 20 pages of text). Originally a ceremony for men preparing for battle, the dance today is open to both sexes and is an expression of Indianness by its participants. Howard explains the dance steps, participants’ roles, songs, and other features of this dance.

Finally, in his comparison of Sioux living in Canada and in the United States, Howard concludes that the Canadian group “have fared the better.” He points out that they did not face an overwhelming westward migration of land-hungry settlers as did the Sioux in the United States, and this gave them time to adjust to the Canadian culture. Moreover, the original Sioux refugees survived on Canadian soil by working as laborers for non-Indian farmers and townspeople. Finally securing reservations, most Sioux were able to earn a living at farming, cattle raising, or by working as laborers for others. Howard further notes that lands assigned to the Canadian Sioux were much better for agriculture than those in the United States.

Howard has written a very good book, which demonstrates that the Canadian Sioux have retained some traditions that their relatives in the United States have abandoned. At times, however, he fails to comment on some of his informants’ observations. Also, the University of Nebraska Press was remiss in not having a justified margin. These criticisms aside, The Canadian Sioux is recommended reading to students of Sioux traditions.

Reviewed by Raymond Wilson, associate professor of history at Fort Hays State University, who is the author of Ohiyesa; Charles Eastman, Sioux (1983) and coauthor of Native Americans in the Twentieth Century (1984).

(Woodland Hills, Calif., Windsor Publications, Inc., 1983. 191 p. $22.95)

IN RECENT YEARS, St. Cloud has been one of the fastest growing areas in Minnesota, a marked contrast with an earlier historical pattern of slow but steady growth. Its location in the center of the state and on the Mississippi River helps explain, then as today, the development and character of the community. This book, one of the Windsor series of illustrated histories of American communities, recounts the city’s story. The quality of the paper, printing, and photo reproduction make this a first-rate production.

The author is a St. Cloud native and clearly enjoys writing about his city. The six chapters generally follow a topical approach within a chronological framework and present a history of the community, beginning with its origins in the 1850s and concluding with a discussion of its approach to the problems of urban growth and the qualities that helped St. Cloud receive an All-American City award in 1974. In between, Dominik looks at St. Cloud’s response to the Civil War and the Sioux Uprising, the development of varied business activity — concentrating on the successful granite industry and the spectacular failure of the Pan Motor Company, bootlegging in Stearns County (with St. Cloud peripheral here), and the establishment of schools, newspapers, and radio. A final chapter, written by William P. Moline, consists of 38 “corporate biographies,” brief historical sketches, with photographs, of those firms that contributed financial support to the publication. The mix of older businesses with deep roots in the community and comparatively recent firms reflects the historically diverse and continually changing nature of St. Cloud’s commercial enterprise. These 38 sketches are not integrated with the text, but they reflect the theme of the work as a whole: the progress, growth, and success of a forward-moving city.

Dominik emphasizes those episodes and facts that he believes “highlighted a major turning point in the area’s development left a strong legacy to the uniqueness of St. Cloud or represented some aspect that conveyed the ambiance of a particular time.” Hence the focus on such aspects of the past as the Red River outcrops, the Burbank brothers, the Sioux Uprising, Jane Grey Swisshelm, the 1886 tornado, Samuel C. Pandalio, and “Minnesota 13.” Accordingly, Dominik argues that the 1862 Sioux Uprising was a unifying event for the three towns that merged to become St. Cloud, the tornado allowed St. Cloud to become the area’s trade center, while the Pan Motor Company debacle left a more cautious business community, at least temporarily. Many of the events and personalities described are traditional and familiar, but the author also relates some less well-known facets of the city’s history: the development of the school system, the story of the ill-fated St. Cloud Fibre Ware Company, community efforts to contend with the effects of the depression, and the long-standing controversy over the form of city government.

The author acknowledges others may question his selection of topics, but he does not claim to have written a complete history of the city. (Space limitations prevented it in any event; there are only about 90 pages of narrative.) There is no account, for example, of the development of churches or labor unions or the repression of German-Americans in World War I or the city’s role in World War II. There are statements that raise intriguing but unanswered questions: “More than one legitimate business in St. Cloud was started on the proceeds of a bootlegging career.” But Dominik chose to emphasize the businesses, events, and people that contributed to or shaped the city’s growth. Within this framework he provides an insight into the character of the community — its conservatism, its German-Catholic influence, its enterprising community spirit. Indeed, commerce, education, and diverse economic enterprise still characterize the basis of the city’s livelihood.

The narrative is liberally interspersed with well-chosen photographs illustrating the people, buildings, and activities of St. Cloud’s colorful past that add an interesting and useful dimension to the work, an aspect aided by the fact that many of the photographs are full or half-page in size. It is mainly through the photographs, including a 16-page color section, that the reader
An Author’s Response. By Thomas Vennum, Jr.

ULTIMATELY the acid test of the validity of folklife documentation is its acceptance by the community where it was carried out. The favorable reception by Lac Court Oreilles Ojibwa of my study of their traditional dance drum is attributable in large part to Indian involvement at every stage of the project. Thus it is not so much the negative tone of Professor Timothy G. Roufs’s review (Minnesota History, Spring, 1984) that compels me to reply, but rather that he obscures the essential point of this first major study of a native American instrument and its cultural role — one Indian people are quick to perceive — choosing instead to nit-pick peripheral details.

In so doing, Roufs falls victim to his own hidebound views of Indian culture, for his criticisms could well be leveled at his own writing. For example, in my brief introductory synopsis of Ojibwa history, Roufs sees me “perpetuating the myth that an Ojibwa monoculture exists” as well as “subtle but significant stereotypes” with my observations that “the race itself was rapidly losing its purity” and “warfare continued unabated between the Ojibwa and Sioux.” But in his The Anishinabe of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (1975) Roufs is free to write “contrary to the normal Ojibwa pattern” (p. 53), “a time when the ethnic survival of the Ojibwa was not a certainty” (p. 99), “years of warfare with the Dakota” (p. 94), and “sporadic fighting continued through the middle of the 19th century” (p. 56).

Alleging my “severe insensitivity” to Indian people and a “19th-century frontier mentality,” Roufs cites my violation of an agreement to publish only pseudonyms by a research group in which Roufs participated and my use of such words as “Sioux” (instead of “Dakota”) and “medicine man.” While the Upper Mississippi Research Project may have felt a need to hide the identities of informants providing the sensitive material they published, I was not party to its agreement and saw no reason not to provide my readers in a footnote the proper names of “Broken Reed Reservation,” as it was germane to my discussion. In fact, the project’s own publication includes such detailed maps that any grade-schooler with a Minnesota road map could discern the identity of all such disguised localities.

Because the general reader for whom my study is intended would probably be confused by Dakota/Lakota/Nakota dialectal distinctions, I opted for the general term “Sioux,” the most commonly recognized word still used by most Ojibwa and many people in the Dakotas. Furthermore, I use both tribal designations interchangeably, just as Roufs has for these people in his own publications as well as for the Ojibwa (for instance, minishkwe/Chippewa). Likewise, “medicine man” is common parlance among the traditionalists of many tribes; in this Algonquian case, it is a literal translation of the Indian name, mishikiketkime. Ethnological anthropologists such as Roufs who insist on looser terminology for the peoples they study simply reveal themselves as unable to cope with the common register vocabulary of their own culture. What would Roufs have me use for medicine man, his project editor’s “Chippewa shaman” or his own redundant and cumbersome creation, medicine doctor and holy man?”

For the record, my manuscript was submitted for comment to five American Indian readers, four of them former or present members of Ojibwa drum societies. In no case did they report the insensitivity Roufs claims; in fact, some were stimulated to provide additional information, for which they were properly credited.

I acknowledge the technical flaws of the film, shot while I was a graduate student (before I came to the Smithsonian) with borrowed equipment on an out-of-pocket budget. The filming was requested by its principal subject, Bill Baker, at a propitious moment in my field work. I doubt that it will be filmed again. Although we used the best recording equipment, northern Wisconsin English used by a native speaker of Ojibwa, often with a mouthful of snuff, is not always intelligible to outsiders. But because Indian people generally understand the narration and find it meaningful, we left it as is and provided its transcription as an appendix to the book, a practice we have continued in the other Smithsonian Folklife Studies monographs, as the American dialects of north Georgia farmers or Nevada Paiutes may be equally difficult for general viewers.

It is somewhat surprising that a social anthropologist, in viewing the film, would focus on the material object rather than its maker, as does Roufs in his complaints that the drum is not played. (Apparently he missed the songs at its beginning and end.) I contend that the film focuses on the craftsman, his personality and beliefs, rather than on his product, the construction of which merely serves as a vehicle. This character study is intended to complement the text, which highlights the drum, and its humanistic emphasis is one reason Indian people can so readily identify with it. One White Earth youth, after a Bemidji State showing, recited to me nearly verbatim passages of narration from the film after one viewing and noted “That guy really reminds me of my grandfather.”

In the last analysis, the viewer/reader must decide the merits of this study. The opinions of Roufs and his anonymous “Ojibwa colleague” notwithstanding, in addition to the many classroom film rentals, two schools with Ojibwa culture classes have purchased their own copies, and the book was selected by another Ojibwa drummaker as his core text in a Native American Studies course at Northland College.
THE WINNER of the Solon J. Buck Award, increased this year to $500, for the best article to appear in this journal in 1983 is Priscilla K. Buffalohead. Her study of "Farmers, Warriors, Traders: A Fresh Look at Ojibway Women," appeared in the Summer issue.

Joan M. Seidel's article on "Consumers' Choices: A Study of Household Furnishing, 1880-1920" won the Theodore C. Blegen Award, now $400, for the best article by an MHS staff member. Her essay was published in the Spring number.

The members of this year's awards committee were Clarke A. Chambers, professor of history and American studies at the University of Minnesota; Annette Atkins, assistant professor of history at St. John's University; and Mary D. Cannon, editor of this magazine.

THE FIFTH VOLUME of an ongoing series covering the Civil War pictorially under the general title, The Image of War, 1861-1865, is called The South Besieged (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1983, 461 p., $39.95). The emphasis is on such actions in the South as the siege of Forts Henry and Donelson; the Atlanta campaign, Union blockade of the South, and the Wilderness and Shermancropl campaigns in Virginia. The final chapter, however, deals with "The Forgotten War: The West" and includes the Dakota War in Minnesota and Dakota Territory. The chapter author, Maurice Melton, devotes some ten paragraphs to the main outline of the Minnesota story, which is illustrated by several photographs from the MHS audio-visual library. Among these are views of St. Paul, Mendota, Fort Snelling and Ripley, and two familiar—at least to Minnesotans—of settlers seated on the prairie during their escape from the Indians and the dismal winter camp of Dakota Indians on the Minnesota River below Fort Snelling. Another MHS picture shows the regimental band of the Fourth Minnesota at Huntsville, Alabama.

THE James Jerome Hill Reference Library will award a number of fellowships (up to $2,000) to support research in the recently opened James J. Hill Papers. Grants may be awarded for any time in calendar year 1985; the deadline for applications is December 1, 1984. For more information, write W. Thomas White, Curator, James Jerome Hill Reference Library, 4th and Market Streets, St. Paul, MN 55102.

ICE PALACES, by architects Fred Anderes and Ann Agranov (New York, Abbeville Press, 1983, 131 p., cloth, $29.95, paper, $16.95), is a beautifully illustrated and fascinating history of ice-castle construction from its beginnings in 18th-century Russia. Minnesotans may note proudly the prominence of St. Paul palaces and learn about others in Montreal, Quebec, and Ottawa in Canada. Leadsville in Colorado, and Sapporo in Japan. Two of the book's nine chapters focus on the ice creations built as part of St. Paul's Winter Carnival celebration, and the accompanying illustrations include about 40 photographs and lithographs from MHS collections, many of which are reproduced in color. Anderes researched the history of ice palaces with the assistance of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Ice Palaces covers the history and practice of ice and snow construction and concludes with a useful chapter on the present state of the art.

Tracey Baker

ANYONE interested in 20th-century history will find valuable material in The Oral History Collections of the Minnesota Historical Society (St. Paul, Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1984, 121 p., $7.55, plus $1.50 handling). The guide was compiled by Lila Johnson Goff, the society's assistant director for libraries and museum collections, and James E. Fugertey, deputy state archivist.

There are 1,474 entries representing personal interviews and reminiscences and 39 oral history projects. The topics covered range from student activism in the 1960s and 1970s to north shore commercial fishing, from Scandinavian history to early aviation, from labor unions to art projects. There are interviews with governors, Supreme Court justices, Indian leaders, college presidents, lumbermen, ministers, and powerline protesters. The groups represented include Finns, blacks, Mexican Americans, women, Jews, and the Irish. There is a wealth of material on third-party politics, the 1930s depression, and the home front during World War II.

Each entry in the guide gives the name of the person interviewed, the date, length of the interview, repository of the tape, whether a transcript or any restrictions on the use of the tape exist, and a description of the material covered in the interview. The guide contains an index of interviewers and a comprehensive index to persons, subjects, and places. This helpful publication opens the way to the mine of information in the society's oral history collections.

FROM Facts on File, Inc. come two voluminous and valuable reference tools. The Encyclopedia of Historic Places, compiled and written by Courtlandt Canby, is a two-volume, hardbound set that consists of nearly 10,000 entries "covering every historically significant place name, past and present, throughout the world."

Illustrated with photographs, line drawings, and maps, the encyclopedia is alphabetically arranged and extensively cross-referenced. Entries range from the earliest time of recorded history to 1982. The set, published in 1984, is available from the publisher for $120.

Historical Maps on File by the same publisher complements the encyclopedia. This is a looseleaf collection of about 300 maps, arranged by historical era and geographical range, and with a comprehensive entry index. The maps are designed for easy photocopying, and there are no copyright restrictions. Issued in 1984, the buckram-bound, three-ring binder costs $145.

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