**BOOK REVIEWS**

*The Boat of Longing.* By O. E. Rolvaag, with an Introduction by Einar Haugen.

EVERYONE should welcome this reissue of the English translation of Ole Rolvaag’s fourth novel: it has long been out of print and has never before appeared in a paperback edition. Most literary scholars regard this as one of Rolvaag’s best, second only to *Giants in the Earth.* The writer himself called *The Boat of Longing* his favorite work. “I have put more of myself into that book than into any other,” he stated. The novel was published in Norwegian in 1921; the English translation by Nora Solum came out in 1933, two years after Rolvaag’s death.

Minnesotans will find a special appeal in this book since over half the action occurs in Minneapolis and other parts of the state. In the novel Rolvaag brings Nils Vaag, a young Norwegian from northern Norway, to the streets of Minneapolis in 1912. He lives in a rooming house called Babel on the corner of Fourth Street and Thirteenth Avenue South and finds odd jobs sweeping floors in saloons and grocery stores on Cedar Avenue in the Seven Corners area. Later Nils works in the woods up north and on the railroad. His favorite spot is the Bohemian Flats, an immigrant settlement beside the Mississippi beneath the Washington Avenue bridge. There he meets an old lady from his own district in Norway and finds contentment playing the old native tunes on her deceased husband’s violin.

*The Boat of Longing* is not, however, a narrative about the immigrant’s realization of his dreams in the New World. Rather, it alerts the reader to the loss, the emptiness, the uncertainty that faced the immigrant. The reality of the life Nils Vaag encounters in Minnesota turns out to be something far removed from his American Dream.

There is no plot structure in this novel. Instead, Rolvaag creates a series of scenes or what he calls “moving pictures” that reveal the immigrant in a variety of situations. These events are placed in a framework of life in Norway, and the structure tends to highlight the prosaic nature of the immigrant experience in contrast to the romanticized allure of the homeland. Rolvaag begins the novel with a depiction of Nils’s early life beside the sea in Norway. Sections two and three are set in Minnesota, chiefly in Minneapolis. In the fourth and final section Rolvaag takes us back to Norway to the lonely parents left behind. In the first and last sections the prose is heightened, more poetic. This forces the reader to experience the immigrant’s life against a backdrop of ultimate meanings, to ponder the immigrant’s pursuit of the American Dream in the context of the depth and mystery of life.

*The Boat of Longing* can be read on several levels. It is a novel about immigrant life, certainly, but it is also a story of an individual’s search for happiness and meaning. It provides no explicit answers, but it raises questions about American life, the immigrant experience, and the larger vision of human destiny. It speaks about human potential, and it does so in symbolic language. To experience life fully, Rolvaag suggests, is to become aware of one’s own potential. Unfortunately, the American experience did not often permit this to happen.

Einar Haugen, professor emeritus of Scandinavian and linguistics at Harvard University, has provided a helpful and insightful introduction to this attractive edition. He points out the events in Rolvaag’s life that led to his concerns in this novel, discusses its reception in 1921 and 1933, and informs the reader of critical reactions to, and interpretations of, the novel.

*The Boat of Longing* is a provocative work: it deserves reading and re-reading, for, as Haugen writes, it “is still worth pondering for our generation and those to come.”

Reviewed by Gerald Thorson, professor of English at St. Olaf College, who has written and lectured frequently on Norwegian immigrant literature and is the editor of Ole Rolvaag: Artist and Cultural Leader (1975).

By Richard Slotkin.
(New York, Atheneum, 1985. 636 p. $37.50.)

NO STUDENT of Minnesota’s early history should miss reading Richard Slotkin’s *The Fatal Environment,* in which major elements of that history are powerfully addressed—Indian wars, struggles over land and resources, conflicts between homesteaders, speculators, and railroad interests, and dreams of transforming “wilderness” into “civilization.” This prodigiously researched *tour de force* of methodology, analysis, and style explores far more deeply than any previous study the frontier’s pervasive impact on the values, myths, and social order of 19th-century Americans. *The Fatal Environment* bids fair to be classified with some of the most enduring of American history scholarship.

One august tradition of such scholarship—that of Turner, Billington, and most recently Joyce Appleby—has presented the frontier as the seedbed of democratic society. Another tradition, just as impressive—that of Henry Nash Smith, Leo Marx, Eric Foner, and most recently Annette Kolodny—has emphasized the frontier as the source of America’s most powerful myths and ideologies. Though
utterly rejecting all equations of the frontier with democratic impulses, Slotkin's work fuses, extends, and greatly enriches both of these traditions by exploring the mutually reinforcing relationships between mythology and social change. The Fatal Environment, in this respect, develops a complex and deeply revealing counterpoint between white America's visions of the frontier and the vast transformations that reshaped that pastoral republic into a volatile industrial empire.

By taking this comprehensive approach, Slotkin is able to explain far more convincingly (and disturbingly) than any other analyst why so many white Americans always felt so driven to suppress Indians in the name of "civilizing" the frontier. The "progress" of "civilization" into the "wilderness," it was believed, perpetuated America as a white man's democracy, free of racial, sexual, or class conflict. In addition, Slotkin argues convincingly that by the mid-1870s whites sought not only to vanquish the "savages" on the frontier, but also the "savages" they feared were rising in the midst of their "civilized" society—emancipated blacks, militant workers, protesting farmers, and renegade urban immigrants. By the mid-1870s, he contends, the traumas of industrialization and the legacies of the Civil War had led many whites to fear general social collapse. Seeking to prevent upheaval by exerting stern new forms of order, powerful editors, politicians, and writers transformed traditional anti-Indian mythology into a general call to arms against "savagery" of all sorts. Justification for Indian subjugation was quickly expanded into a wholesale rationale for violently suppressing all groups chargeable with imperiling America's quest to perfect "civilization." As the nation launched its centennial celebrations in 1876, its leaders also embarked on unprecedented programs of racial and labor repression, accompanied by new campaigns to exterminate red people on the plains. All America's exploited groups, Slotkin argues, had now been transmuted into "Indians."

At the center of this far-reaching analysis stands George A. Custer. His embattled image dominates the dust jacket of The Fatal Environment and much of its text as well, for, in Slotkin's view, Custer was seen as the quintessential symbol of the crisis facing America's new industrial order. Custer's tempestuous career and his electrifying "Last Stand" supplied America's arbiters of industrial civilization with a perfect metaphor through which to act out their fears that the frontier's closing foreshadowed general race and class warfare. Following the Little Bighorn, as Slotkin emphasizes, America's arbiters of industrial civilization created a set of cultural symbols which wholly deserved the bloodthirsty critique they provoked from Mark Twain. A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court concludes with a blatant recapitulation of Custer's Last Stand. But in Twain's version, the triumphing "savages" are demoralized Anglo-Saxon proletarians. The doomed "Custer" is the genius of industrial management, Joe Morgan.

Slotkin has clearly moved the discussion of the frontier's influences on American history far beyond the original Turner thesis. And by stating his case so powerfully and developing it so brilliantly he has also achieved a level of synthesis truly rare in contemporary scholarship. In this sense, his work and Turner's are much more alike than one might first suspect. Those committed to understanding America's past, and Minnesota's too, cannot afford to ignore this book.

Reviewed by JAMES BREWER STEWART, who holds the James Wallace Chair of History at Macalester College. His latest book, a biography of the abolitionist orator and labor reformer Wendell Phillips, will be published by Louisiana State University Press this winter.


(Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1985. 189 p. Cloth, $25.00; paper, $13.95.)

THE TITLE of this book, written by a Northwestern University historical geographer, is somewhat misleading, since his focus is upon the more than 200 platted towns and approximately twice that many rural post offices or inland towns contained in 14 counties of north-central North Dakota. But Hudson's purpose is to use regional case study in order to explain processes of town development on the Great Plains until about 1920, and in developing his model he draws upon many sources and secondary accounts that give his treatment wider significance. This book ranks with studies such as Lewis Atherton's Main Street on the Middle Border and Robert Dykstra's Cattle Towns as a major contribution to our knowledge of the history of small towns.

This is a welcome accomplishment, because small towns have received comparatively little notice from historians, who during the past several decades have lavished considerable attention upon cities. To truly understand the plains, we have to study the towns and rural areas where most of the action takes place. Hudson starts from the premise that isolated studies of single communities will not suffice. He contends that we should rather consider a large group of towns jointly and simultaneously. The resulting book establishes a three-stage developmental model that traces the changes that occurred through the frontier period, the inland town (one which is not served by a railroad) phase, and finally the period when railroad towns dominated the landscape. His observations about each of these phases are highly illuminating and can provide a starting point for similar studies of other regions that underwent like development.

Hudson considers towns from three different perspectives—in terms of their people, activities, and structure. He suggests that historians tend to emphasize the skills of businessmen and promoters (people) and geographers often focus on the functions towns perform (activities) in order to explain their growth and development. He argues that structure in fact plays the predominant role in determining success or failure in towns founded by western railroads and that this sets plains country towns apart from similar-sized ones found elsewhere. This contention will doubtless elicit considerable debate, but the author makes a plausible case for it by imaginative use of evidence from sources as varied as Dun and Bradstreet credit ledgers and the North Dakota Historical Data Project Files.

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The book is most convincing in its discussion of the shape and look of the towns. Hudson employs the three-faceted morphology he has elaborated in several earlier articles, classifying towns into symmetric towns, orthogonal towns, and the ones most frequently found on the Dakota plains, T-towns. The discussion of merchants and trade centers is full of interesting insights. On social relations within the towns, Hudson is also suggestive, but his assertion that plains country towns lacked any sense of real community will raise many eyebrows. The book is strongest on structure, which it argues is primary in town development; it is thinnest on culture and leadership, which it relegated to secondary roles as causal factors. No student of town history will be able to ignore this interesting and provocative book.

Reviewed by John E. Miller, professor of history at South Dakota State University, who has worked on several town and county histories and is currently researching communities located on Highway 14 in eastern South Dakota.

Wall of Flames: The Minnesota Forest Fire of 1894.
By Lawrence H. Larsen.
(Fargo, North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1984. 187 p. $9.85.)

FEW EVENTS in the history of Minnesota have so captured the public imagination as the 1894 Hinckley fire. It was, of course, a monumental disaster filled with tragedy and suffering, heroism and courage, drama and excitement, and it has properly deserved the prominence it has had. On September 1, 1894, driven by strong southwest winds, fire swept into one town after another: Pokegama, Hinckley, Mission Creek, Sandstone, Miller, Finlayson, and Partridge. Although fires had been burning in the countryside for days, and although smoke filled the sky for some time, these were not considered cause for alarm in an era when forest fires were endemic. What is now known, after years of painful experience, is that the right atmospheric conditions — most importantly a sharp drop in humidity — can cause conventional brush fires to blow up into fire storms of unbelievable heat and intensity. Fires in these conditions can generate energy up to 22,500 Btus per foot per second and winds of 60 to 90 miles per hour. These weather conditions and fire storms of this intensity did not happen often, but when they did the big fires destroyed almost everything in their path and did so with much warning. Thus, the people in the small towns and cut-over pine lands surrounding Hinckley were caught by surprise as the fire literally descended upon them. Many died of asphyxiation seeking shelter in wells or root cellars, while streams, rivers, ponds, and swamps offered a better chance of survival. In Hinckley many saved themselves in a flooded grave pit, while others survived in a mill pond or in the Grindstone River. But many collapsed in the streets or were incinerated in blasts of searing heat. An Eastern Minnesota Railway train (part of the Great Northern system) left Hinckley only after the town was burning fiercely and passed over the burning Kettle River bridge just minutes before the structure col-

Andrew Peterson and the Scandia Story.
By Josephine Mihelich.
(Minneapolis, Ford Johnson Graphics, 1984. 202 p. $25.00.)

THIS is an unusual book of local history. Its focus is Andrew Peterson, an emigrant from Östergötland, Sweden, a remarkable farmer, horticulturist, jack-of-all-trades, and public-minded citizen, who settled in Carver County in 1855. Peterson (1818-98), born Anders Pettersson, was 32 when he and his sister emigrated to the United States and settled first in the Burlington, Iowa, area where he farmed, did carpentry work, and was employed in a nursery. One of Peterson’s fellow emigrants and neighbors was the Reverend Frederick Nilsson, a pioneer Swedish Baptist minister, whose congregation Peterson soon joined.

Peterson and Nilsson were in a party of Swedes who moved on to Minnesota and settled near Waconia in a community called Scandia (not to be confused with Scandia in Washington County), now a part of Laketown Township,
Carver County. Here they built their homes, and here Peterson helped to build the first log cabin church for the Baptist congregation. Here, too, the Swedish Baptists held their first Minnesota conference in 1858.

For nearly half a century Peterson kept a diary, now translated into English and preserved at the Minnesota Historical Society. The brief, spare entries of the diary mention his neighbors, his horticultural experiments, community and church activities, and the day-to-day events in the life of Peterson and his family. Swedish novelist Vilhelm Moberg discovered the diary at the historical society in the 1940s and used it as a source for *Last Letter Home*, the final volume of his trilogy on Swedish immigration to the United States. While there is some question as to whether Peterson was the model for Karl-Oskar, Moberg's fictional hero, there is no doubt about the importance of Peterson's diaries in Moberg's works. A fascinating example of how he used his sources is given on pages 142 and 143 where Mihelich presents on facing pages two last letters home—Moberg's version and the original one telling of Peterson's death.

While the diary is not reproduced in this book, Mihelich has studied it closely and taken diary entries as the focus of her story. Hundreds of references to people and events have been expanded into the chapters of her text. In a thorough investigation into a gratifying variety of sources, she has identified, explained, and made meaningful the events and people of Andrew Peterson's world. Key to the book is the excellent map on which are depicted more than 60 parcels of land identified in an accompanying legend by the names of “homestead, church, school, neighbors' houses, farms, and the like.”

Although this reader was hopelessly lost at times in the details of family relationships among Petersons, Andersons, Nelsons, et al., what is one person's bewilderment may well be a bonanza to those interested in family history in the Scandia area. Several other small matters should be mentioned. Titles and scales of miles would have been helpful on the otherwise useful and attractive maps; the reference to Theodore Bost should have a citation to the University of Minnesota publication of Bost letters, or some other source; the reference to “Maiden Bush” apples should probably be Maiden Blush; the miscellaneous chapters dealing with people and events after Peterson's death and not directly related to his diary could well have been summarized.

These matters aside, the book is well written and edited, has many photographs well reproduced, comprehensive end notes and bibliography, and an excellent index. Altogether it is an imaginative and competent contribution to local history.

Reviewed by Helen M. White, Minnesota Independent Scholar of the Year for 1985 and editor of the Dalles Visitor, an annual historical newspaper published in Chisago County.

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**NEWS & NOTES**

WOMEN'S history receives a boost in a new book edited by Dorothy Sterling, who wrote *Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman* and other pioneering works in black history. *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, W. W. Norton & Co., 1984, 535 p., $22.50) is a moving portrayal of black women based on contemporary interviews, letters, diaries, and records. The story is divided into chapters on slavery time, free women 1800–61, the Civil War years, freedwomen, the postwar north, and an epilogue that excerpts the diaries of four women from the late 19th century. Sterling has supplied helpful chapter introductions and some headnotes to each selection, but the focus of the book is the voices of her “sisters,” which shine through even the phony dialect transcriptions of white interviewers. A bibliography, photographs, and engravings enhance this compelling work.

NOW AVAILABLE in new paperback editions are two well-known works on a pair of American fur trade pioneers. One is Richard E. Oglesby's *Manuel Lisa and the Opening of the Missouri Fur Trade* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1984, 246 p., $8.95); the other is Linda M. Hasselstrom, ed., *Journal of a Mountain Man: James Clyman* (Missoula, Mont., Mountain Press Publishing Co., 1984, 295 p., $9.95). First published in 1963, the Lisa work is a biography that centers on the Spanish American's trading and trapping adventures, his founding of several Missouri River fur companies and partnerships, and his dealings with the Indians along the Missouri from 1807 to 1820.

In the Clyman book, first published in 1928 and reissued in 1960, the mountain man sets down in his homey but precise words his experiences on the plains and in the mountains during the heyday of the American fur trade, especially the 1840s. This is a reprint of the 1960 edition and has a new introduction by editor Hasselstrom.

A RELATIONSHIP with the public is what successful public relations means today, according to G. Donald Adams, author of *Museum Public Relations*, the second volume in the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) Management Series. This 237-page work contains a thorough discussion of public relations management for museums and historical societies and deals with such subjects as fund raising, press kits, publications, and staffing and budget needs. A useful appendix includes a variety of sample forms, press releases, and information sheets. The volume is available from the AASLH, 708 Berry Road, Nashville, Tenn. 37204 for $31.00 postpaid ($18.90 to AASLH members).

Lila Goff

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PERSPECTIVES: Women in Nebraska History (Lincoln, Nebraska Department of Education and the Nebraska State Council for the Social Studies, 1984, 239 p., $4.50) is a series of essays on 22 women by a variety of authors. In addition, there is an essay on women active in Omaha labor unions. Those who are covered range from the authors Willa Cather, Mari Sandoz, Bosz Streeter Aldrich, and Tillie Olsen to architects, educators, a newspaper editor, and an artist. Also included are Indian women — Angel DeCora Dietz and the four LaFlesche sisters. A limited number of copies of the book are available, prepaid, from the Department of Education, 301 Centennial Mall South, P.O. Box 94987, Lincoln, Neb. 68509, Attn.: Paul G. Johnson.

A MAJOR exhibition organized by the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, focuses on the history of the métis in this centennial year of the second Riel Rebellion. The exhibition, which after October 6 starts a touring schedule that will take it to Saskatchewan, Winnipeg, Montreal, and Edmonton, is accompanied by a handsome 100-page catalog by the exhibition's curator, Julia Harrison. Métis People between Two Worlds presents a heavily illustrated capsule history of Canada's culturally unique mixed-blood people. Métis skims lightly over the stories of the Red River Settlement and Riel rebellions, and instead spends considerable time exploring what to Americans are less familiar stories: the Canadian land scrip system; the métis radicalism of the 1930s, which resulted in the Ewing Commission and a number of co-op farming and fishing experiments; the long litany of failed government experiments at trying to “save” these people from an impoverishing life style; and their vocal rejection of assimilationist policies in the 1960s. Partly based on interviews, the chapters on the 20th-century history of the métis demonstrate how their lack of legal status failed to dim their sense of cultural distinctness.

For tracing the material and pictorial history of the métis, the book offers less help. Often there is no hint of why or even whether the pictured artifacts are thought to be of métis origin. Information on makers, geographical associations, dates, and origins are frequently left out. Photographs and sketches are treated similarly, even when information is available; an 1870s Henri Julien sketch printed on the endpapers is left unidentified. Illustrations are primarily used to evoke imaginative responses. And yet, as readers of the Summer, 1985, Minnesota History know, even photographs can mislead. Some readers will doubtless be left wishing that métis presented somewhat less evidence of the judgmental tone of whites who have written about the métis, and relatively more information on the individuals in these haunting photographs. The exhibition catalog is available for $24.95 from the Glenbow Museum Shop, 130 9th Ave. S.E., Calgary, Alberta.

Carolyn Gilman

MINNESOTANS of French descent — and there are more than 300,000 of them — will be especially interested in a conference to be held on November 9, 1985, at the Livery in Riverplace, Minneapolis. Entitled "The Quiet Heritage: L'Héritage Tranquille," the conference is the first in a series that will conclude in 1989 on the 200th anniversary of the Bastille's fall. This year's session will focus on exploration, trade development, and settlement and will feature presentations by 12 scholars as well as a keynote address by Dr. Virgil Benoit of the University of North Dakota and a luncheon speech by Emmanuel de Margerie, French ambassador to the United States. For further details, write or call Odell Bjerkness, Concordia College, Moorhead, Minn. 56560 (218-299-4544).

MINNESOTA'S first normal school is the subject of R.A. DuFresne's Winona State University: A History of One Hundred Twenty-Five Years (Winona, Winona State University, 1982, 366 p., cloth, $11.00, paper, $6.00). DuFresne, a former president at Winona State, traces the institution's development from its establishment as a normal school in 1860 through its days as a teachers' college, a state college, and, ultimately, a state university. The work dwells on institutional leadership, curriculum, and physical expansion of the campus within the context of trends in education and state policy. Previously published histories of Winona State are the source of much of the material for the period before 1960. The book contains six appendixes and an index. The most noteworthy item is a paper by George Bates analyzing the social composition of the student body in Winona State's early years. A faculty register for the institution in another appendix may be useful to researchers. The book's greatest appeal likely will be to alumni and other members of the Winona State community because of the author's upbeat approach and familiarity with his subject. Students of education in Minnesota also will find some interesting material on educational administration and policy. The book, however, is not a critical study of the forces, individuals, and decisions that shaped Winona State University.

Mitchell Rubinstein

"SHAPING the Land: Minnesota Landscapes 1840s to the Present" (University Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1985) is the catalog of an art exhibit which will be traveling across Minnesota until 1987. Through a selection of 42 paintings, drawings, prints, and photographs, the exhibit explores the Minnesota landscape and the impact of human activities on it. Paintings by Cameron Booth and Alexis Jean Fournier, prints by Adolf Dehn, Wanda Gág, and Clement Haupers, and photographs by John Szarkowski are among the notable works from 12 Minnesota collections. The 24-page catalog features an essay on the human landscape in Minnesota art, biographical notes on the artists in the exhibit, and ten illustrations. "Shaping the Land" was organized by MHS curator of art Thomas O'Sullivan for the University Art Museum's Touring Exhibitions Program and includes works from the MHS art and map collections. The catalog is available free of charge at all showings of the exhibit statewide; contact the University Art Museum, 84 Church St. S.E., Minneapolis, 55455 for a schedule of local showings.

A CALL for papers has been issued for the 18th annual Dakota History Conference at Madison, South Dakota, April 11 and 12, 1986. Seven cash prizes are to be awarded for papers in various categories. The deadline for submission of papers is January 31, 1986. For complete information, write H. W. Blakely, South Dakota State College, Madison, So. Dak., 57042-1799.