Homecoming: The Art Collection of James J. Hill.
By Jane H. Hancock, Sheila ffollott, and Thomas O'Sullivan.

IN TWO pioneering studies on American art patronage published in 1966, Lillian B. Miller and Neil Harris focused on the emerging support for the arts in antebellum America. Throughout that era, most patrons lived in the urban centers of the East Coast, acquired "Old Master" and contemporary American paintings, and built their holdings through personal correspondence or direct contact with the artist. Perhaps due to our own fin-de-siecle perspective, recent scholarship has shifted to the end of the 19th century, when art patronage became a more complex matrix of cultural and economic factors. Industrialists amassed unprecedented fortunes, chiefly through railroad and banking interests that were often far removed from eastern cities. These men shared a passion for conservative French art and confident self-assurance in their own taste, which was confirmed by a growing number of art dealers and commercial galleries. Studies of post-Civil War patronage have tended to focus on individuals and, consequently, on specific regions: New York dealer Samuel Putnam Avery, Baltimore railroad magnate William T. Walters, Milwaukee collector Frederick R. Layton, Cincinnatini vintner Nicholas Longworth, and publisher Charles Phelps Taft. Homecoming: The Art Collection of James J. Hill is a valuable—and rather unusual—addition to this type of analysis.

There is nothing really unusual about Hill himself. A self-made man, like many of his generation, he amassed a fortune in St. Paul in the railroad industry. His acquisitions, chosen by personal preference or on the advice of dealers, mirror the selections made by his contemporaries. His love for beautiful things was tempered by his business acumen, and he often sold or traded paintings that had become unfashionable. Unlike most patrons, however, Hill made no provision for his collection, which was dispersed after his death. And, although he maintained careful records of his business transactions, Hill left few personal remarks. Thus, the organizers of Homecoming faced a daunting task of reassembling the collection and reconstructing the personality of its owner from archival materials.

The three essays in the catalog are nicely balanced. Positioning Hill within a broader spectrum of contemporary collectors, Jane H. Hancock discerns two overlapping currents in late 19th-century patronage: while collectors of the 1880s rejected the polished academic style of Alexandre Cabanel for the "School of 1830" (whose numbers included the Barbizon landscapists as well as the Social Realist Honoré Daumier), they broadened their holdings in the 1890s to include small decorative objects, Far Eastern art, and a few Impressionist paintings. While she attributes the first change to an escapist yearning for rustic simplicity (equated with piety), Hancock also suggests that American collectors developed a preference for "sketchiness" and a corresponding appreciation for formal quality over narrative content. Relying on Hill's careful inventories and business records, Sheila ffollott documents the history of his collection. She makes good use of her materials, furnishing insights into the collector's changing taste and transformations in the art market (by examining the shifting prices Hill paid for works that he later sold); explaining some unusual purchases (concessions to his wife's religious devotion); and shedding some light on Hill's reticent character (his reluctance to loan his works to exhibitions, for instance). In his essay, Thomas O'Sullivan explores the construction of the Richardsonian house at 240 Summit Avenue, where Hill had his gallery. Here again, the archival materials are invaluable. O'Sullivan details the scrupulous attention Hill gave to his gallery home, to its interior decoration, and to lighting and displaying his collection.

The catalog is handsome and the quality of color reproduction is excellent, capturing both the shimmering texture of Mariano Fortuny's The Hunters and the unusually brittle surfaces of Jean Baptiste Corot's Silemus. Black-and-white photographs interspersed throughout the text provide glimpses of the opulence with which Hill and other collectors of his day surrounded their possessions. Hancock's brief catalog entries for each work cite provenance, medium, dimensions, and general information about the artist.

The authors of Homecoming have done good research. Their careful studies capture something of the character of a proud industrialist whose collection was once hailed as a cultural jewel in the Midwest, even as they demonstrate the extent to which James J. Hill was very much a collector of his time.

Reviewed by JANET A. HEADLEY, assistant professor of fine arts at Loyola College in Maryland. Currently she is an Andrew Mellon Faculty Fellow at Harvard University.

By Gretchen Urnes Beito.

COYA KNUSTON is the only woman ever elected from Minnesota to the United States Congress (she represented the ninth district in the northwestern part of the state for two terms, 1955-1958). Yet she is remembered not for what she did but for what her husband did—when she is remembered...
at all. In the spring of 1958, Andy Knutson wrote a widely publicized letter to his wife ordering her not to file for reelection but to “go home & make a home for your son & husband.” A newspaper headline, “Coya, Come Home,” became famous, but Coya Knutson’s career is barely more than a footnote in the literature of Minnesota politics.

Gretchen Urnes Beito has done a service by writing this biography. She notes that as a high-school student in the 1950s she was inspired when she learned about Knutson’s career; it reinforced her belief “that a woman could achieve her goals with ambition and hard work.” Beito now lives in Knutson’s former district, where she became acquainted with her subject and interviewed others who had been involved in the story.

The author tells us about Coya’s life as a child and young woman on a farm near Edmore, North Dakota, on the western edge of the Red River Valley; about her days as a music student and public-school music teacher; about her work as a farmer, hotelkeeper, New Deal agent, and civic leader in Oklee (Red Lake County); and about her campaigns and service in the Minnesota and U.S. House of Representatives. Readers will feel as if they know Knutson. The picture is of a physically vigorous girl and woman who had ambition and spunk to match.

Coya Come Home describes the social and political context in which it was as possible for Knutson to win a place in Congress as it was for her to lose it before long. Her home territory was one of the few areas of the nation where nonmainstream and third-party organizations had gained some success. Through earlier participation in the Nonpartisan League and then the Farmer-Labor party (later merged into the Democratic-Farmer-Labor, or DFL, party), many farmers and malcontents in Minnesota’s northwestern counties had learned to challenge the system. By entering politics, Coya Knutson defied existing notions of proper female decorum. But she was suitably Norwegian and she knew farming and farm problems. She could talk just as knowledgeably about children, cooking, education, and other topics of interest to women. And she was careful not to be “pushy,” especially with women voters.

The DFL supported Coya’s run for the state legislature. In the state and, later, in Washington, she worked hard and effectively on legislation she thought would benefit farmers and on educational issues, among others. She voted almost 100 percent along DFL party lines. But, being independent and even pushy, she flouted the party by running unendorsed for Congress; operatives wanted her to keep her seat in the Minnesota House. She worked for Estes Kefauver rather than for Adlai Stevenson in the 1956 Minnesota presidential primary, when the DFL was riding the Stevenson wagon. Estes swamped Adlai, and some say Knutson might have been a vice-presidential candidate had Kefauver won the nomination. Although Stevenson ultimately carried the Democrats’ presidential banner, his loss in the Minnesota primary meant that Hubert H. Humphrey’s vice-presidential aspirations were delayed for many years. Her role in this defeat earned Knutson enmity that would hurt her career. (This debacle for the DFL powers led to the prompt elimination of the presidential primary, a primary that now is being reintroduced in an effort to overcome the influence of a few party “insiders.”)

Without party help, Knutson was vulnerable when her character was attacked. Not only was her adequacy as wife and mother called into question, but whispers circulated that she probably was having an affair with her young, attractive, male campaign manager and aide. Fellow DFLers complained that her aide was “running her.” Republican Odin Langen successfully campaigned against her in 1958 using the slogan “A big man for a big job.” The point supposedly was Langen’s six-feet-five-inch height, but the implication was sexist. Andy Knutson was a drunk and a cadger, and he probably was used by others to undo Coya. In the climate of the 1950s, however, she could not tell the truth about her domestic situation in self-defense.

Many things in this book will make feminists gnash their teeth; the sad story of Andy Knutson will stiffen teetotalers’ resolve. But more important, Coya Come Home will provide a good starting point for newcomers or the newly interested to learn something about Minnesota politics. It should establish Coya Knutson’s place in that history. Although the author clearly identifies with her subject, and one may wonder if Knutson was always as friendly, straightforward, and even innocent as she appears in these pages, what is presented is essentially the truth. There are some repetitious passages, some clichés, some minor typographical errors, and some oddities in the indexing, but all in all this book is worthwhile reading.

Reviewed by Sue E. Holbert, coauthor with Arvonne S. Fraser of “Women in the Minnesota Legislature,” in Women of Minnesota: Selected Biographical Essays (1977) and author of “Women’s History Resources at the Minnesota Historical Society,” which appeared in the Fall, 1990, issue of this journal. She has worked in a variety of roles for many years to collect and make available the documentary evidence of political and women’s history in Minnesota.

Knights of the Plow: Oliver H. Kelley and the Origins of the Grange in Republican Ideology.

By Thomas A. Woods.


THOMAS A. WOODS has written a fine, much-needed biographical study (the first!) of Oliver H. Kelley, Minnesota farmer and principal founder of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, commonly known as the Grange. As a biography, Knights of the Plow is unquestionably a success.

The author has unearthed much valuable material on Kelley’s early career in Benton County as a market gardener, land and townsite speculator, promoter of agricultural societies, keeper of agricultural records, and agrarian journalist. This account advances our understanding of Minnesota in the 1850s. Using previously unused sources, Woods is able to describe the Grange convincingly as a natural outgrowth of Kelley’s earlier activities on the Minnesota frontier. Thus, he can prove that Kelley saw economic protection for the farmer as a necessary goal for the Grange from the beginning. Previous historians such as Solon J. Buck have pictured Kelley and other Grange founders as reluctant converts to economic protection and co-operative action.
Knights of the Plow is more than a biographical study, however. In the chapter titled "A Society of Farmers," Woods describes in detail the ritual and regalia of this secret society, as well as its relatively advanced position on female membership and participation. The Patrons were one of the first fraternal organizations in the United States to admit women and participation. The Patrons were one of the first as well as its relatively advanced position on female membership and participation. The Patrons were one of the first fraternal organizations in the United States to admit women and participation. The Patrons were one of the first fraternal organizations in the United States to admit women and participation. The Patrons were one of the first fraternal organizations in the United States to admit women and participation. The Patrons were one of the first fraternal organizations in the United States to admit women and participation.

By attempting to reinterpret the Grange in terms of a paradigmatic "liberal republicanism" and a radical "movement culture" such as the one Lawrence Goodwyn hypothesized for the Farmers' Alliance, Woods has probably attempted more than a biographical model can accomplish. It is difficult for a biographical study of a national Grange leader, who resided in Washington, D.C., during the crucial years of the Grange's rise and fall (1871–75), to portray conclusively a radical movement culture among ordinary farmers at the grass-roots level. Certainly, his reinterpretation will raise several questions among specialists in 19th-century rural history.

Goodwyn assigned responsibility for the decline of Populism to a "shadow movement" of single-issue, free-silver advocates; Woods stresses a take-over by conservative, Washington-based "figurehead Grangers" such as William Saunders as a prime cause for the decline of the Grange after 1873. Yet the state granges of Minnesota and Iowa, for example, vigorously pursued plans for establishing purchasing agencies, setting up co-operatives, and even manufacturing farm implements—despite a lack of direction from the national officers. It is not clear that the leaders in Washington ever had a firm grip on Grangers at the state and local level.

The peripatetic Kelley is difficult to fit into any paradigm. While he employed radical agrarian rhetoric in pieces he wrote for Minnesota newspapers, he was at various times a middleman himself (an implement agent), a townsite speculator in Minnesota as well as in Florida, and a self-described lawyer.

The student of Minnesota history will find much of interest here in addition to the story of Kelley’s life: the early history of the Grange in Minnesota, Ignatius Donnelly and the Anti-Monopoly party, early leaders like John H. Stevens and Daniel A. Robertson. An analysis of the Grange’s failure to recruit many immigrant farmers in Minnesota would have been helpful, but the Grange appeal for Old-Stock American farmers is amply described.

For the professional historian, this work should be cause for discussion and debate in the historical "hot-stove league" and on the conference circuit. It is a welcome addition to the field of 19th-century rural history and a source of hypotheses that could be tested in state and local studies of the Patrons of Husbandry.

Reviewed by Steven J. Keillor, a doctoral candidate in history at the University of Minnesota, who is working on a history of co-ops in the state. He is the author of Hjalmar Peterson of Minnesota: The Politics of Provincial Independence (1987).

The United States Infantry: An Illustrated History 1775–1918.

A HARDCOVER edition of this book was published in Britain several years ago by Blandford Press; the Sterling edition marks the work’s publication in the United States. In this process the book has lost one color plate (the dust jacket) and gained a portion of a Don Trioni painting depicting the 8th Wisconsin at Vicksburg.

As a history of the subject, Urwin’s work is concise and readable. It would be especially good for teenage readers. The lack of footnotes is no major detriment, as the book breaks no new ground and offers no controversial information. What makes the text interesting is the author’s choice of emphasis. Rather than being an encyclopedia of American battles, the work emphasizes the ways in which the U.S. Army survived more than 100 years of governmental neglect and hostility. The major conflicts within the book’s time frame actually receive relatively little space compared to the author’s treatment of the army’s periodic reorganizations and reforms and its creative use of scarce resources in the face of increasing public and governmental demands. The book might be better titled How the United States Infantry Survived Its Own Government.

The author also finds space to include some pithy statements on American Indian policy and expansionist avarice in the 19th century. He describes the so-called Battle of Bad Axe, which ended the Black Hawk War in 1832, as “nothing less than a massacre.” On the motivation for the American war with Spain in 1898, he stresses the policy of “Seizing colonies to serve as safe markets for a nation’s trade, springboards to additional markets, bases for her navy.” He harbors no illusions about the use to which the army was put. After a long discussion of the savagery of the Philippine insurrection, the author denounces it as a “nasty crusade to subdue a far-off people whose only crime was wanting to govern themselves.” Urwin also emphasizes the army’s fundamental racism—whether toward Native Americans, “lesser” foreign peoples, or its own non-Anglo soldiers—by quoting a number of unabashed statements from contemporary soldiers.

The objects that ought to set this work apart from others of a similar nature are the illustrations. The book makes extensive use of contemporary paintings and photographs. These serve primarily to illustrate the changes in uniform, a subject not covered in the body of the text. The 32 color plates and a number of accompanying modern black-and-white illustrations are designed to complement the contemporary graphics and lend color to the limited visual record from before the Civil War. Illustrator Erd has executed a number of plates for the Company of Military Historians’ series, Military Uniforms in America. Many of the plates contained in this volume are copied from other artists’ works and have a somewhat clumsy appearance, as though they were meant for a children’s book.

Despite the author’s reference to a long list of military history experts, including the Minnesota Historical Society’s Stephen E. Osman, the plates are in some cases not up to
current scholarship on items of clothing and equipment. Some of the mistakes, such as the lack of belt plates and the addition of cuff buttons on the 1830s infantrymen in plate 13, are so elementary that one suspects publishing deadlines precluded proper review by subject authorities. While this reviewer makes no claim of expertise in all areas of American military dress, the errors in areas he does know make all the plates suspect.

This is an attractive and readable book with a perspective seldom taken in mass-market works; it is a good introduction to the subject. It is not, however, a reference by any definition. Particularly as regards the appearance of United States infantrymen, it perpetuates a number of inaccuracies long ago corrected.

Reviewed by THOMAS G. SHAW, assistant site manager at the Minnesota Historical Society's Historic Fort Snelling and a student of the pre-Civil War army.

News & Notes

THE MISSOURI Valley History Conference will hold its 35th annual meeting in Omaha on March 12-14, 1992. Proposals for papers and sessions in all areas of history, accompanied by one-page abstracts and vita, should be sent by November 1, 1991, to William C. Pratt, MVHC coordinator, University of Nebraska, Omaha 68182.

THE FALL, 1990, issue of the journal Public Historian includes a discussion of "Craftsmanship and Flexibility in Oral History: A Pluralistic Approach to Methodology and Theory," by Perry K. Blatz. The article is a response to recent criticism that many oral historians lack training and therefore produce poor-quality work. Blatz argues that sophistication in methodology and theory, which amounts to professionalization, would remove oral history from the reach of many people and programs that could otherwise benefit from the kinds of information it reveals. The author advocates instead establishing standards and techniques—which are basic and reasonably straightforward—to accommodate the range of topics and goals in public history.

WITH PROSE as lively as stage patter, an itinerant entertainer recalls his nearly 60 years of travels through the rural Midwest and South as a magician, mentalist, juggler, ventriloquist, puppeteer, and actor in The Life and Times of Augustus Rapp, the Small-Town Showman (Glenwood, Ill., David Meyer Magic Books, 1981, 201 p., 8 illus., cloth $28.95, paper $15.95). "I lasted from the tallow candle to the neon light period and I am not burned out," says "Gus" Rapp (1871-1961), whose 1959 autobiography has been enlarged and "extensively reorganized" for this new edition, which includes an introduction by Robert Parrish and a foreword by Dr. Joseph French of the Performing Arts Department, Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village. Whether describing his life ("I was born a nudist and a pauper"), tricks ("I would catch the marked bullet between my teeth"), or times ("I probably met more peculiar people than anyone else in the world, and right here in glorious small town U.S.A."), Rapp provides a roving trouper's irresistible account of a now-vanished era. Featuring an appendix with sketches of "My Contemporaries" (magicians Alexander Herrmann, Harry Kellar, Harry Houdini, and Howard Thurston), two comedy routines, a typical six-night program of Rapp performances, and directions for making "rag pictures" on stage, the book is available from the publisher: Meyerbooks, P.O. Box 427, Glenwood, Illinois 60425.

Deborah Swanson

THE Woodland Tradition in the Western Great Lakes: Papers Presented to Elden Johnson is number four in the University of Minnesota Publications in Anthropology series (1990, 239 p., $10.00 plus $2.00 shipping and handling). The volume includes editor Guy E. Gibbon's chapter "Elden Johnson, An Appreciation," which chronicles his career and work as a professor at the university and director of the Institute for Minnesota Archaeology; a bibliography of Johnson's publications and a list of excavations is appended. Fifteen chapters on various aspects of archaeology follow, including Alice B. Kehoe's "The Monumental Midwest: Taxonomic Method," Michael G. Michlovic's "Northern Plains-Woodland Interaction in Prehistory," Scott F. Anfinson's and H. E. Wright's "Climatic Change and Culture in Prehistoric Minnesota," and James B. Stoltzman's "The Woodland Tradition in the Prairie du Chien Locality." The book may be ordered from the anthropology department, University of Minnesota, 215 Ford Hall, 224 Church St. SE, Minneapolis 55455.

MINNESOTA leads the nation in adjusting the pay of public employees to reflect the comparable worth of different jobs. Using the state as a case study, Sara M. Evans and Barbara J. Nelson have traced the history of efforts to implement this public policy in Wage Justice: Compareable Worth and the Paradox of Technocratic Reform, which is now available in paperback from the University of Chicago Press (1991, 224 p., $10.95; 5801 South Ellis Avenue, Chicago 60637). The authors have skillfully described the competing goals that characterize the drive to introduce fairness into pay scales. For example, feminist activists bring a commitment to change the way in which women's work is valued by society; in reality, however, comparable worth has been implemented by accepting the hierarchical assumptions that managers have traditionally used to determine the relative value of jobs.