When the fire came, Fred Maki was just ahead of it in a car and stopped to pick up the Mattson family and Ida. He tried to outrun the fire but couldn't. He stopped the car, and everyone jumped out and ran. My mother had seen Fred go into this culvert, and not being able to see the rest of the people, she followed him. She said it was so dry, no water anywhere, and flames flew into the culvert. She remembered scratching her fingernails off trying to dig dirt to rub on her skin and cover her hair with to protect herself from the flames. During this time Fred said, “We’re going to burn,” and she told him, “God’s not going to let us burn.” The next morning, Ida was almost blind from the smoke. Arvid Peaura came by, found them, and took my mother to his home for two weeks to recuperate. Her eyesight was still gone, so the Peauras had to feed her. (It did return.)

The next day, Ida’s dad [Hiski Marsyla] went looking for her, but was turned back by military personnel who were letting no one into the area. It was two weeks later when word got through that Ida was alive and with the Peaura family. Ida also suffered lung damage from the smoke and as a result had severe asthma in later years.

Ida’s older sister, Helmi Niemi, Cromwell, added that Ida had gone to stay with Mrs. Mattson in her place, as she did not want to leave her pregnant mother, Senia Marsyla. Senia gave birth to a son, Leonard, on the very day that the fires passed through the Automba area. (The Marsylas, a large Finnish-American family, lived in Crosby, which was not in the path of the fire.) After she recovered, Ida did not return to the Mattson family.

Many years later, Ida met Fred Maki again, when Helmi arranged for the two fire refugees to see each other and reminisce. The Moose Lake Arrowhead Leader of October 11, 1983, related:

For 65 years, Fred Maki has been wondering who was the young lady that was with him in the culvert the night of the fire. After moving to the apartments in Cromwell, he met another tenant, Mrs. Helmi Niemi and related his fire experience to her. Imagine Fred’s surprise when Helmi informed him the young lady was her sister Ida.

By then Ida had married Omer Mathson, a miner, with whom she had four children: Vera’s husband, Robert; John, of Coon Rapids; Charlene Blood, of Silver Bay; and Marilyn. Primarily a homemaker, Ida died in December, 1987, at the age of 81 in Sartell, 69 years after the terrible fires of autumn.

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**Book Reviews**

**Everyone’s Country Estate: A History of Minnesota’s State Parks.**

*By Roy W. Meyer.*


ROY MEYER has done an admirable job of breaking ground in this important and largely overlooked aspect of Minnesota’s history. In the development of Minnesota’s state parks one can see many of the themes of our recent past: growing affluence reflected in the demand for recreation, the rise of environmental awareness, rural versus urban politics, and local interests in conflict with a powerful state bureaucracy.

The author has chosen a straightforward, chronological approach, tracing the history of every (and I mean every) unit in the state park system in the order in which the legislature created it. Each park has its own thumbnail history that is grouped with others into chapters reflecting a particular period in park development. Many readers, especially those who frequent the parks and are looking for a quick history of their favorites, will find this aspect of the book useful.

The problem with this technique is that it results in a somewhat superficial treatment of park development. There are repeated instances in the book, especially where the creation or expansion of a park met strong local opposition, in which the author begins to go beyond the bare outlines of “what happened when” and get to the feelings and motivations of the people involved—only to stop short. For example, antagonism over the proposed expansion of Beaver Creek Valley Park grew so heated that one farmer defined DNR (Department of Natural Resources) as “Damned Near Russia.”

This bluntly eloquent statement implies a great deal about popular attitudes toward government in general and hints that there may have been more going on than opposition to a park. Yet the author moves briskly on to the next one on the list without picking up this tantalizing thread.

Some may also find the author’s treatment of the various parks to be uneven. For example, there are six pages of text on the development of Camden Park, admittedly an interesting account from both an ecological and political perspective, yet only two pages are devoted to St. Croix State Park, one of the largest and most important. One can understand the reasoning in Meyer’s approach. To have written an in-depth history of each park, as the author admits in his introduction, would have been an overwhelming task and created an unwieldy book. One has to wonder, however, why he did not choose to...
leaving out some of the small parks and waysides and spend a bit more time on background. If there is one fault to this book, it is that the volume is short on context. Although Meyer rightly states that his aim was not to create a definitive history, some introductory background about public attitudes toward parks and the general political climate would have made the work much richer.

These criticisms aside, one has to recognize Meyer's accomplishment in putting together a concise, lucid overview of the state park system out of the tremendous volume of unpublished materials in the DNR records and other sources. The general public will find these histories interesting and informative. Readers may even discover, as I did, parks they never knew existed. Historians will find the work a useful source of basic information, and they may well find some potential topics for further investigation, as alluded to earlier. This is also a book that reference librarians will find useful. The brief histories and the handy appendix, which lists the parks alphabetically and includes information on location, year established, and size, make this an excellent ready-reference tool.

Reviewed by Hampton Smith, an archivist in the reference department of the Minnesota Historical Society's division of library and archives, who has a strong interest in environmental history.

American Indians and World War II: Toward a New Era in Indian Affairs.
By Alison R. Bernstein.

ALISON BERNSTEIN has produced the first detailed survey of Indian people during the Second World War. With it, she hopes to demonstrate "the impact of the war on American Indian life and . . . assess its consequences for whites and Indians alike." She believes that the war "had a more profound and lasting effect on the course of Indian affairs in this century than any other single event or period." But even with an impressive array of information, she fails to sustain this argument.

The book draws upon a large body of documents, mostly from United States government archives, to tell the reader what many tribes and individuals were doing during the war years. Thus we obtain some detailed information on Indians who served in the various armed forces and those who worked in the many war-related industries. The author effectively demonstrates that the war provided unusual economic opportunities for Indian people; in general, tribal units and individuals made more money than they ever had before. Unfortunately, this financial windfall was largely temporary, for by 1947 the Indian population was back to its prewar economic status.

Bernstein also provides a great deal of information on how the Bureau of Indian Affairs, particularly its director, John Collier, hoped to employ the war effort to improve the lot of the Native American in American society. The economic boom actually helped Indians more than all the efforts of the BIA during the 1930s. The American "war effort" (a term that was used to encompass anything that would contribute to victory) also led the media to write about Native Americans and their many cultures with a newfound respect. Collier attempted to use this situation to advance his Indian New Deal, balancing the demands of the war and his long-range goals. He found he had to adjust some of those goals, and in the end his work met with mixed results. Bernstein relates all of this activity and effort in great detail. But in attempting to assess its impact, she runs into problems.

The first problem stems from the choice of sources. If a "profound and lasting effect" on Indian-white relations was a result of the war, then it stands to reason that both Indians and whites would have recognized this by now. But Bernstein argues her case almost entirely from sources produced outside of Native American cultures. Many scholars note the difficulty of relying on the evidence of outsiders when studying Indian people. For example, soon after the United States entered the conflict, Secretary of War Henry Stimson ruled that Native Americans would not be segregated in the armed forces. Thus, unlike blacks, Indians went into combat with whites. The sources Bernstein cites, largely BIA records, papers of mainstream advocates, and press stories, suggest that most Indian combat soldiers performed well; many won high decorations for bravery. But did that service really "close the gap between Indian and white society during wartime," as the author suggests? In other words, was this an actual step forward for Indian-white relations or an example of the media attempting to build morale? Bernstein is not certain, admitting that the media may have been at great pains to stress the "warrior tradition" when extolling Indians' service and courage. She notes that other soldiers invariably referred to Indians as "chief," a term as stereotypical as one can imagine. Noting that many combat soldiers were asked to pose for photographs with a "Plains war bonnet regardless of their tribal culture," she suggests that this stereotyping gave these individuals a "growing awareness of an Indian identity apart from and beyond tribal affiliation." Perhaps, but how did it affect their view of white society? Bernstein cannot say.

Likewise, stories about Indian contributions to war-industry work, war-bond sales, and other home-front support fit into the media habit of stressing solidarity. This was in keeping with the policy of the Office of War Information, which exerted considerable influence on the media. OWI administrators pursued with vigor the image of a "people's war" that transcended class, color, and ethnicity (ably chronicled in Allan Winkler's 1978 study, The Politics of Propaganda). Did such press treatment produce better relations between Indian and white society? This reviewer suspects that the media used "the Indian" to further the war effort, often with little concern for how this might affect Indian-white relations. After the war, as Bernstein points out, the Hearst press had no qualms about using the economic plight of the Navajo to attack the Marshall Plan. Different evidence—interviews with a cross section of Native American war veterans, for example—may have revealed that many Indians resented the wartime media image as exploitive and demeaning, thus reinforcing suspicions of white society. It is never entirely fair to focus on what a historian did not do, rather than on what she or he did, but failure to pursue more
Midwestern Folk Humor: Jokes on Farming, Logging, Religion, and Traditional Ways.

By James P. Leary.


IN THIS ERA of increasing conformity and uniformity, of growing homogenization and sterility brought about by the impact of mass media, mass production, and mass marketing on the lives of all Americans, does the region where one resides still exert any significant influence on the flow of daily life? Do elements of regional identity, which once delineated geographical areas of the United States informally yet distinctly, still color the conversations, the attitudes, and the beliefs of residents down South, back East, or in the Upper Midwest? They certainly do according to James P. Leary's *Midwestern Folk Humor*, a compendium of jokes and humorous tales from Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Upper Michigan, which mounts an impressive scholarly case in support of the role of regionalism in America in the late 20th century.

Leary's entertaining collection of 305 jokes, anecdotes, and tall tales reflects several of the Upper Midwest region's distinguishing characteristics: ethnic diversity, occupational stability, and natural beauty. Accordingly, his first nine chapters contain ethnic materials arranged roughly in the order of the various groups' arrivals in the region: Indians, French, Cornish, Germans, Irish, Scandinavians (Norwegians and Swedes), Finns, Poles, and others (Welsh, Dutch, Swiss, Belgians, and Italians). Three subsequent chapters feature the occupational humor of loggers, miners, and farmers, representing the region's distinctive industries. A final pair of chapters is dedicated to places central to the region's humor: the small towns that form the hubs of workaday life, and the lakes and woods that draw fishermen and hunters for outdoor recreation.

The subjects of the region's humorous folk narratives are most frequently familiar figures, activities, and settings. Stock characters, including the Irish duo Pat and Mike and the Scandinavian couple Ole and Lena, share the stage with real people whose exploits have come to be celebrated by their friends and neighbors. Their fictional conversations are often rendered in dialects so thick and jargon so arcane as to be almost indecipherable to outsiders. And their adventures often involve visits to locations like Oconomowoc and Sheboygan, names which themselves evoke humorous stories.

Certain of these accounts, Leary acknowledges, did not originate in the Upper Midwest and are not the exclusive property of the region's residents. Some trace their roots to the Old World before the period of immigration to America. Others are found throughout the United States today, told in identical form or modified slightly from those versions recorded in the area under study. However, as the author persuasively argues in his opening chapter, the collective corpus of midwestern humor "offers insiders a precise glimpse of the familiar. Told about, by, and for Upper Midwesterner, such jokes are valued as fictions that bear essential truths about their shared reality. Together they constitute an important means of creating, acknowledging, and sustaining a rural and small-town world of beer, winter, tavern sociability, religion, and gustatory delights where rival ethnics 'talk funny,' tease one another, and unite against the breakneck modernity of urban intruders. Elements of this cultural configuration, this world view, are present elsewhere in American life, but its totality exists only in the Upper Midwest."

Leary's case for the distinctive regional identity of the Upper Midwest is made all the stronger by the scholarly methods he has applied to the collection, documentation, and presentation of the region's humorous lore. Virtually all of the narratives included are transcribed verbatim from field record-
nings made in taverns, in small-town cafes, at Sunday church suppers, and at morning "coffee Idatches"—the places where midwesterners perform their jokes for friends and family. Each text is accompanied by detailed collection notes, which specify who told the joke, on what date, in what location, and to what audience. These notes also provide useful biographical sketches of many of the raconteurs, helping to explain their knowledge of certain subjects, their use of given dialects, and their ties to specific ethnic and occupational heritages. Commentaries accompanying various texts illuminate some of the more obscure references included and provide comparative notes with regard to other published versions. Chapter headings, on the other hand, offer thoughtful assessments of larger issues.

Midwestern Folk Humor is not merely a joke book of the type widely published throughout the United States over the years and described by William K. McNeil in his useful introduction to this work. Rather it is an accomplished blend of firsthand familiarity with the region and broad academic knowledge of the discipline of folklore. Whether a resident of the region, an occasional visitor, or an unfortunate Ausladder, each reader of Midwestern Folk Humor will gain a heightened appreciation for the people of the nation's heartland from James P. Leary's engaging and enlightening work.

Reviewed by Robert T. Teske, the executive director of the Cedarburg Cultural Center in Cedarburg, Wisconsin. A native of Milwaukee, he curated the traveling exhibition In Tune With Tradition: Wisconsin Folk Musical Instruments.

Brownie the Boomer: The Life of Charles P. Brown, an American Railroader.
Edited by H. Roger Grant.
(De Kalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991. 259 p. Cloth, $24.00.)

RAILROADS were the glamour industry of America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The nation's first big business, the historical equivalent of our own aerospace and computer industries, the railroads have been the subject of an enormous volume of books and articles over the last century and a half. For all that, the railroaders themselves, the men and women who comprised the vast, national work force for the industry in its heyday, have received relatively little attention. They have been slighted even in photographs, those snapshots of the past that detail trains, locomotives, shops, bridges, and other aspects of the business but nearly always lack the human element. Even fewer of these workers left any account of their lives and experiences. Those of us who want to learn more about these and other ordinary people commonly run into blind alleys, since there are few existing records that fully illuminate what most people were about.

This autobiography gives readers a rare glimpse of one such person, Charles P. Brown (1879-19??), who was a railroad "boomer," or itinerant laborer, from the turn of the century until the early 1920s. He was not typical of the diverse railroad work force that, in addition to white, native-born males, included women; immigrants from northern and southern Europe, Asia, Canada, and Mexico; and Native Americans and blacks, depending upon the region and time that they worked on the steel rails. Before the close of the First World War, boomers drawn from these groups often faced nativist or gender prejudices in addition to the uncertainties and hardships occasioned by casual, or migrant, labor.

Although not typical, Brown's experiences were common. A white, single, young male, he worked a wide variety of jobs: fireman, brakeman, switchman, and engineer, among others. He traveled widely in the Middle West, East, and Far West, working for or riding on more than 13 railroads, including the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul, Great Northern, Northern Pacific, Union Pacific, Santa Fe, Southern Pacific, Wabash, and New York Central. Working on the railroad was highly dangerous; Brown lost both feet in a switching accident. After that tragic event, he became an elevator operator in Los Angeles in 1922 and subsequently authored this account, which first appeared in 1929.

Grant learned of this obscure book a little more than a decade ago. At his request, this reviewer searched in vain for it at the James Jerome Hill Reference Library, which specializes in railroad history. Fortunately, Grant finally did locate the only known 1929 edition at the Library of Congress. Because of both the rarity and the scarcity of this account, readers are doubly indebted to Grant and Northern Illinois University Press for bringing out this edition. The volume includes an introduction by the editor with an overview of boomers and a sketch of Brown's life, illustrations, an appendix, and an index. The notes are particularly useful, including explanations of once-common expressions and other information. This book should be of interest to those laypersons or specialists concerned with our railroad legacy, the social history of ordinary people, or general middle western and western history.

Reviewed by W. Thomas White, curator of the James J. Hill and Louis W. Hill papers, James Jerome Hill Reference Library, St. Paul. White has published a number of articles concerned with politics, labor, and business, and currently is completing a coauthored general United States history survey and a history of Pacific Northwestern railway workers up to the New Deal.

For Democracy, Workers, and God: Labor Song-Poems and Labor Protest, 1865-95.
By Clark D. Halker.
(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991. 243 p. $29.95.)

THIS NEW BOOK emerges from the recent trend in labor history that breaks from the earlier institutional history of John R. Commons. Like E. P. Thompson, Herbert Gutman, David Brody, and David Montgomery, Halker takes a social-historical view of workers' culture to examine the song-poems which, he argues, played an important role in American labor organizing from 1865 to 1895.

The book presents a rich sampling of these song-poems by writers as diverse as Michael McGovern, an Irish-Catholic immigrant ironworker, Patrick Maloney, a saloonkeeper, and Mary Agnes Sheridan, a carpet-mill worker. Through their compositions, Halker offers a fascinating look at Gilded Age laborers who, while differing widely in ethnic backgrounds,
work experiences, religious beliefs, and political backgrounds, shared a common belief in the heroic strength and democratic virtues of the working class.

Like E. P. Thompson in his influential 1963 book, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Halker finds the roots of industrial morality in evangelical Protestantism. He also locates this morality in the merger of what he calls the “mechanic ideology” and republicanism. This mechanic ideology is the basis for glorification of workers and denigration of parasitic nonworkers; more than a means of self-congratulation, it provides laboring folk with a foundation for the social criticism so essential to all of the song-poems. A stanza from Thomas Leahy’s “Come Join the Knights of Labor Boys” illustrates clearly the concept of a barrier between the workers, who produce all wealth, and the owners, who produce nothing: "While law has the banker and broker for pets, / Who fatten on the fruits of labor. / The brawny wealth-producer, a thought never gets, / Though working day and night at labor."

Like the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the early 20th century, the song-poem writers of the Gilded Age drew heavily upon the gospel songs of Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey from the 1870s and 1880s. For example, "Hold the Fort" served as the tune for more of the song-poems than any other popular tune. The chorus of Phillip B. Bliss’s labor version makes no reference to an individual savior, human or divine, but only to the strength of the union: "Hold the Fort for we are coming— / Union men be strong. / Side by side we battle onward! Victory will come."

Unfortunately, although Halker does a fine job of depicting the influence of song-poems during the late 19th century, he underestimates the force of class-conscious protest music in later periods of labor history—for example, from 1905 to 1917, when the IWW’s *Little Red Song Book* was commonly found in many workers’ pockets, and during the 1930s, when class-conscious protest music was a critical tool of the Congress of Industrial Organizations. The song-poems, which Halker says "would become the curiosities and relics of a previous labor movement," were, in his view, essentially defunct after the period of 1865 to 1895. But the tradition of labor songs, rather than falling into decline at the end of the 19th century, has served as the call to action for the labor movement until the present day. Books such as Philip S. Foner’s *American Labor Songs of the Nineteenth Century* and Robbie Lieberman’s *My Song is My Weapon*, both published by the University of Illinois Press, point to the powerful legacy that gave strength to the American labor movement.

Reviewed by Donald E. Winters, author of *Soul of the Wobblies: The I.W.W., Religion and American Culture in the Progressive Era, 1905-1917* (1985) and humanities faculty member in the College for Working Adults, Minneapolis Community College.