

Curator's Choice



This incense urn, measuring 34 inches high and 25 inches wide, is one of five pieces of a decorative altar set once prominently displayed in Yuen Faung Low, a Chinese restaurant that flourished in Minneapolis from about 1905 to 1967. The three characters (or calligraphy) found on the blue center panel denote the name of the restaurant, which translates as “exotic fragrance from afar.” The mythic symbolism of the gold, stylized lion posed on the urn’s top and the phoenixes on the scrolled side brackets complement the painted enamel panels depicting a variety of scenes such as the tea offering in the bottom panel of the detail at right.

Howard and Lolita Woo of Minneapolis, long-time owners of the restaurant, recently donated the entire altar to the Minnesota Historical Society, further enhancing the growing collection of artifacts documenting the history and voices of Minnesota’s Chinese-American community. For more information about the piece, please turn to the article beginning on page 42. —SHERRI GEBERT-FULLER, museum collections department project supervisor



PHOTOS BY PETER LATNER/MHS



FRONT COVER: E. A. Jones’s threshing crew posed in a photographer’s studio with its tools and a grain bag, about 1890. The photograph is blended with a Clay County wheat harvest. On the county’s King Wheat and how it brought prosperity to families like Moorhead’s Comstocks, please see the article beginning on page 18. The cover image was digitally created by Lois Stanfield.

Book Reviews

MINNESOTA ARCHITECT: THE LIFE AND WORK OF CLARENCE H. JOHNSTON

By Paul Clifford Larson

(Afton, Minn.: Afton Historical Society Press, 1996. 207 p. Cloth, \$65.00.)

There is a lot to be said for writing “history with its nose to the ground,” as Paul Larson says of his biography of architect Clarence Howard Johnston. For starters, the reader gets the hands-on feeling of building history. Painstaking, thorough research is evident throughout this volume. Then, too, the book’s solid foundation of facts provides the basis for further scholarship on other architects and issues related to building in Minnesota.

Johnston (1859–1936) had a long professional career, distinguished in reputation and productivity. Serving as state architect (officially called the architect for the Minnesota State Board of Control) from 1901 until 1931, Johnston and his architectural firm are credited with 3,000 projects spanning 50 years. Since he designed so many public buildings all over the state, the title of this book is certainly appropriate. The sheer volume of construction meant that Johnston’s personal supervision was minimal on many designs, but Larson singles out a few for special praise: the shingle-style cottages of the 1880s and 1890s on Manitou Island in White Bear Lake; the Aberdeen Hotel (with Willcox, St. Paul, 1887–89); the second Oliver Crosby house (St. Paul, 1914–16); and St. Mary of the Angels Church (1924–25) at the College of St. Teresa in Winona.

Larson begins his study with a readable section on Johnston’s unfortunate family circumstances, his fortunate friendships, and his determined will to succeed. His encounters with Cass Gilbert in 1876 in the office of architect Abraham Radcliffe and, subsequently, another St. Paul youth, James Knox Taylor, when Gilbert and Johnston were studying architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology launched Johnston as an “artist in the service of architecture.” His patience often was tested, however, by financial struggles that limited his education and travels. He had to leave MIT after only one semester (in 1878), and his long-awaited trip to Europe came only in 1883. Johnston did obtain a New York job with the Herter Brothers for about two years, giving him contacts

and practical experience in a booming urban center. There he met Herter’s chief designer, Charles Atwood, who taught Johnston much about Renaissance classicism.

The book’s next sections take a careful look at the architectural profession in Minnesota in the 1880s. It was a challenging time to launch a practice: new roles, new patrons, new styles, and new building types combined with professional and intercity competition to test anyone’s mettle. Johnston survived well enough, with substantial mansions and institutional work to his credit. Larson leads the reader through each commission, analyzing personalities, function, and style closely.

Johnston’s partnership with William H. Willcox (1886–89) brought him economic security and further commissions. Larson takes care to assign credit to each partner where possible. The author also provides a good balance of information about real-estate deals, engineering, stylistic concerns, and patronage—all factors that affect the way a building finally looks.

Back in solo practice after 1889, Johnston joined professional organizations and designed a wide variety of structures. Larson, an able writer on stylistic issues, identifies two conflicting paths of development for Johnston: the Gothic and the classic. When the architect synthesized the two, he often found his own distinctive style.

The twentieth century brought Johnston commissions that resulted in buildings that still serve Minnesotans well. At the same time, the architect was over-burdened, and his office sometimes lapsed into a “production mode.” Output was uneven; Larson outlines the management challenges facing Johnston and the variety of projects that he tackled. The lower return rates and the scheduling crunches of state work made it necessary for the architect to continue his private practice to maintain a large office staff. We meet the new group of draftsmen who arrived with Johnston’s office expansion to execute his straightforward approach: “We take the attitude that Minnesota should have the best plans, the best construction, the most adaptable and most attractive buildings that it is possible to provide within the appropriation.”

Johnston oversaw the design and construction of prisons, hospitals, state schools, and university buildings. Larson’s explanation of the tangles—personal, professional, and governmental—that marked the development of

the University of Minnesota campus plan is clear and useful. Johnston's civic-mindedness and even-tempered patience did him credit in this extended project (1903–31).

My complaints about this book are few. Sometimes the building descriptions overwhelm the narrative and one loses track of the overall issues regarding one architect's career in a growing region of America. This confusion would have been mitigated somewhat by references to the illustrations in the text. At times it was not clear whether the building under discussion was illustrated or not. I also found the pinkish-grey tint of the photographs unfortunate.

Clarence Howard Johnston's talents lay in integrating artistic concerns with an efficient, economical building process. We can always be grateful to architects who design functional, sound buildings with a grace or boldness beyond the ordinary. In a parallel way we can be grateful to Paul Clifford Larson for his well-organized, thorough treatment of Johnston's career. Larson gives Johnston his due.

Reviewed by Sharon Irish, the author of a forthcoming biography of Cass Gilbert (1998), another in the "triumvirate of talented architects from St. Paul," as Paul C. Larson described them. Dr. Irish teaches at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign.

MINNESOTA SWEDES: THE EMIGRATION FROM TROLLE LJUNGBY TO GOODHUE COUNTY, 1855–1912

By Lilly Setterdahl

(East Moline, Ill.: American Friends of the Emigrant Institute of Sweden, Inc., 1996. 305 p.
Hard cover, \$33.95.)

In his foreword to this book, geographer Robert C. Ostergren notes that our understanding of the European migrations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries will be developed as scholars "assemble detailed histories of as many migration experiences as possible." Lilly Setterdahl's study of chain migration from the Swedish parish of Trolle Ljungby to Minnesota's Goodhue County offers a richly detailed description of one such process.

The book is arranged in sections rather than chapters, and the first half begins with a thorough description of the parish of Trolle Ljungby. The section on "Background History" includes excellent documentation of the harsh conditions Swedes encountered while living there as tenant farmers, crofters, and farm workers in the nineteenth century, conditions that led to the emigration that commenced in 1855. "Emigration" describes push and pull factors and migration statistics as well as travel routes, and "Swedes in Goodhue County" addresses religious, political, and agricultural aspects of the Trolle Ljungby settlement in that area. The next section compares Swedish set-

tlements in Goodhue and Isanti Counties, and another on "Assimilation" examines the immigrants' lives with regard to various social aspects such as naturalization, education, sexual division of labor, and employment. The second half of the book contains primary documents—letters and interview summaries—that the author collected and used for this study.

This book is strong on descriptive narrative but weak on analysis. The preface presents a thesis regarding how the landless farmers and farm workers emigrating from Trolle Ljungby to Goodhue County might compare with those farm-owning emigrants, studied by Robert Ostergren, who left the parish of Rättvik (in the Swedish province of Dalarna) and immigrated to Isanti County: "If there was no difference in the behavior of these groups, it might mean that the free land and the democratic American frontier were equalizing factors that made pre-migration experiences irrelevant." While one might expect the author to address this question throughout the study, it is not mentioned again until page 123, in the section comparing Goodhue and Isanti Counties. The heavy emphasis on description and lack of an index make it difficult to follow the study without a careful reading of the entire text. And the amateur quality of the printing (many blank spaces within the text, some spelling and grammatical errors) and sometimes cloudy photographs can make for difficult reading.

Setterdahl's inclusion of letters and interview summaries is also problematic. The author does not explain why she chose to include the primary materials, though one would assume it was either to provide resources for future researchers or to allow the reader to understand better how some of her research was conducted. But their inclusion and presentation must be considered carefully. Setterdahl states that she did not include two letters of a "personal nature" as well as "many words and sentences of no importance as well as repetitious phrases." What is deemed important or unimportant varies a great deal between scholars, and it might have been wiser to allow the reader the privilege of determining what material is useful.

In a like vein, the interviews could have been presented more effectively. The author includes only summaries, stating that "the tapes and transcriptions contain much more than could be related here." Too little information is provided to make these summaries really useful as sources. What criteria were used to create the summaries? How long were the original interviews? Was a standard set of questions posed to each interviewee? If so, what were those questions? Perhaps including the complete transcription of one or two representative interviews might have been more useful than the 38 summaries.

In spite of its drawbacks, however, Setterdahl's book presents a wealth of detailed information and was the result of a great deal of research in a wide variety of sources by both the author and her late husband, Lennart Setterdahl. Information was drawn from public documents such as census statistics and Swedish parish records as well as personal documents including diaries, pho-

tographs, and interviews. The Setterdahls traveled extensively in both the sending and receiving regions, conducted interviews with descendants of migrants, and located some fascinating research materials. One example is the “Diary of John J. Malberg, Jan. 1, 1869–Oct. 2, 1903,” from which Setterdahl includes entries that offer a window into early immigrant farm life in the region. Future researchers might consider how this diary compares with other, more well-known diaries such as that of Andrew Peterson upon which Swedish author Vilhelm Moberg drew so heavily.

This study ought also serve as inspiration to local and regional historians and family researchers because it shows how new research material can be unearthed through persistent effort. For example, Setterdahl was initially unable to find correspondence from the Trolle Ljungby immigrants, but when the local parish sexton in Sweden found out about the author’s research, he was able to locate 16 letters, dating from 1856 to 1881, among the local community.

The author’s comparisons between the Rättvik and Trolle Ljungby settlements, though brief, are also interesting and thought provoking. Setterdahl found some differences between the two groups with regard to agricultural practices but rightly noted that variations in place and time of settlement accounted for most of these differences. Of greater interest was her proposition that migrants in the Trolle Ljungby group “were not as tradition-minded” as the immigrants in Ostergren’s study. She suggests that the Trolle Ljungby migrants’ desire to escape their proletarian background may have caused them to sever their ties with the homeland to a greater degree than migrants who had had a higher social status before migration. This idea certainly bears further investigation by migration scholars. Thus, in spite of several shortcomings, the information provided in *Minnesota Swedes* makes an important contribution to the accumulation of knowledge regarding Swedish immigrant settlement in Minnesota and the United States.

Reviewed by Joy K. Lintelman, associate professor of history at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. She is the author of various works on Swedish immigration history; her most recent research has examined Swedes in the Minneapolis city workhouse and is forthcoming in a collection of essays.

FARM AND FACTORY: WORKERS IN THE MIDWEST, 1880–1990

By Daniel Nelson

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. 258 p.
Cloth, \$29.95.)

As part of the *Midwestern History and Culture* series of Indiana University Press, this volume takes on the unique development of the region’s labor history. While Nelson defines the Midwest somewhat narrowly (Ohio,

Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa), his definition of labor is expansive enough to include farmers, blue-collar, white-collar, and service workers, managers, and executives. The book is an ambitious project filled with valuable information and based largely on a wide reading of the available secondary literature on midwestern labor. Indeed, the footnotes are a treasure chest of writings on midwestern labor and economic history.

The thesis of the book is quite compelling. “The essential feature of the region’s labor history,” the author argues, “was the sustained, simultaneous growth of agriculture and industry, a feature that produced a notable pattern of individual mobility and that left a distinctive and inescapable heritage.” Nelson interprets this heritage in a whiggish fashion until the end of the twentieth century, when farmers experienced a crisis in the 1980s and the industrial base of the midwestern urban economy began to pack its bags and move south or overseas. The book provides a comprehensive understanding of the economic growth of the region and its effects on working people right up until 1990. It is particularly noteworthy for its extensive coverage of immigrant, female, and black workers. Nelson also does a splendid job of integrating politics into a story of labor and economic development and decline.

Despite its many blessings, the author’s analysis does not always seem on target. A distinguished labor historian, Nelson does not mount an altogether convincing analysis of farmers. One gets the feeling that farmers experienced a century of growth from 1880 until 1980 with a break during the Great Depression, but his own evidence reveals a continually declining rural and farm population. While it is true that some farmers prospered during this long period, the reality of the experience for most farm folk led to foreclosures and failure.

In terms of workers, Nelson’s understanding of the labor movement is impressive. But, again, his interpretation leaves one wondering who was at fault for the decline of manufacturing and union membership in the region. The key to the spectacular growth of midwestern manufacturing, Nelson argues, was the application of new knowledge to production. “In industry it was a new class of managerial employees who approached their responsibilities in a scientific spirit.” These “heroic” men, among them Henry Ford, Frederick Winslow Taylor, and Richard A. Feiss, led revolutions in management and production. The author’s discussion of these revolutions is incisive and important.

But when Nelson turns to the demise of midwestern industry and recounts the plant closings of union shops in mining, rubber, steel, auto, and meat packing, he seems to cast blame largely on “three decades of job control bargaining.” Though he correctly notes that the results of big labor were high wages and vastly improved benefits, the thrust of this analysis suggests that the improvements enjoyed by industrial workers led to the emergence of the rust belt. In one sentence Nelson points out that what was missing in these years “was the creative activity that had

characterized the Midwest in the early twentieth century and now characterized the New England and Pacific Coast economies.” The celebration of innovative midwestern managers of the early part of the century is not balanced by a critical examination of this same class during the decline of midwestern manufacturing in the 1970s and 1980s.

Readers looking for substantial information on the Minnesota experience will find less than they might on Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Michigan. The best coverage of the state concerns workers on the Iron Range. Overall, however, I learned quite a lot from reading *Farm to Factory*, and this will certainly be the case for all who pick up this valuable and informative book.

Reviewed by Jeffrey Kolnick, who teaches history at Southwest State University in Marshall, Minnesota. Dr. Kolnick is currently working on a project on farmer-labor politics in Minnesota.

THE MINDS OF THE WEST: ETHNOCULTURAL EVOLUTION IN THE RURAL MIDDLE WEST, 1830–1917

By Jon Gjerde

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
426 p. Cloth, \$39.95.)

This remarkably ambitious yet carefully limited study is an important step toward reducing the “Balkanization” of American history into narrow specialties. Exploring the origins and evolution of rural white communities in the Upper Midwest, Gjerde rightly views international migration from northwest Europe together with New Englanders’ westward movement. For example, memoirs and letters show the similarities in the pain of family and community separations that led people in all migrating groups to encourage relatives, friends, and neighbors to follow them west. Later waves of newcomers thus often came from the same localities in Europe or the northeast and traveled the same routes to their new homes in America. Family and community reunions helped the trailblazers re-root specific home-community cultural patterns through webs of mutual support. Chain migration, cultural transplantation, and mutual benefit through voluntary associations, then, are concepts and processes that illuminate the historical experience of both old-stock Americans and immigrants.

The richness of *The Minds of the West* results in part from the impressive number of divergent “Yankee” and northwest European (mostly Irish, German, and Scandinavian) cultural traditions that Gjerde compares: reactions to the secular individualism growing out of the Enlightenment’s political and religious upheavals; attitudes toward the role of the local community and the state in social reform; views of the church’s role in these matters and in cultural preservation; customs governing family participation in religion and politics; and the fea-

tures of family structures that determined generational authority and independence, gendered work roles, and inheritance. These cultural traits marked the distinctiveness of each population group, the signature that gave it a “mind” of its own. The “ethnocultural evolution” in the book’s title, therefore, refers to the negotiations, accommodations, conflicts, and coalition building within and between white groups during the settlement of the Midwest and its subsequent history. Gjerde weaves these processes together in a comparative framework covering nearly a century to help us understand the roots of the region’s interethnic conflict, turn-of-the-century nativism, and central debates over public schools, temperance, and women’s suffrage.

Such integrating, wide-ranging analysis effectively combines the history of ideas, migration studies, ethnography, and social geography with agricultural, religious, political, and social history. In this synthesis, the overarching argument is that immigrants developed a “complementary identity”; that is, they found their American and Old World cultural identities mutually reinforcing. Being American required only an ideological commitment to the freedoms and liberties enshrined in the nation’s founding documents. Immigrant communities extolled these ideals (and felt they thus qualified as Americans) because these rights specifically included the religious freedom and the free expression and assembly that were necessary to create Little Germanies, Swedens, and Irelands on the prairies. As Gjerde remarks, “Immigrants thus did not necessarily have to become ‘Americans’ to be ‘Americanized.’”

From the 1830s when the migration to the region gained speed, however, old-stock Americans expected more and worried that the European immigrants could not or would not meet their expectations. Simply stated, they doubted the immigrants’ capacity to conform to American individualism and republicanism. The Reverend Albert Barnes’s concept of competing “minds” settling the West, presented in an 1849 sermon, captures the American fear of a fundamental difference of mentality between themselves and Europeans. The broad outlines of Gjerde’s analysis define some grounds for American fears: the sheer numbers of foreign-born who settled in the Upper Midwest; the region’s vastness, which allowed heavily ethnicized communities to develop in relative isolation; and the “corporative” (paternalistic and hierarchical instead of individualistic and republican) family, community, and religious institutions of the immigrant cultures. On the other hand, some of the book’s most interesting perceptions come from the author’s insights into the many ways that American freedoms and individualism undermined the authority of transplanted European authorities. In America, fathers and clergymen found that traditional subordinates declared their independence and went their own way—under the very banners these leaders had flown in the name of ethnic preservation. Gjerde presents us with a complex interpretation in which tension among many forces produces a variety of outcomes.

Still, breadth of scope perhaps necessarily leads to a focus on the cultural configuration of the large majority within each group. *Minds of the West* is admirable for making those primary patterns clearer and for accepting the challenge of interpreting their interrelationships in a multifaceted regional cultural history. What one wishes for are the next steps in an overall synthesis, the challenges that Gjerde did not choose to take this time and which conceivably might alter his conclusions: the consideration of later immigrant groups, the existence of greater diversity within each nationality group (and many communities), the discussion of the roles played by nonwhites in the negotiations among the region's "minds," and the integrated

investigation of cultural transplantations and ethnic group formation in urban as well as rural areas. It remains a questionable assertion, for example, that seclusion in the countryside was a sine qua non for the transplantation and maintenance of foreign "minds" in America.

Reviewed by David C. Mauk, associate professor of American civilization at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, Norway. He is the coauthor of the widely used textbook American Civilization, An Introduction and author of The Colony that Rose From the Sea: Norwegian Maritime Migration and Community in Brooklyn, 1850–1910 (1997).

News & Notes

OUR READERS WRITE: Response to Matthew Cecil's "Justice in Heaven: The Trial of Ann Bilansky" in the Winter 1997–98 issue was both animated and incredulous. A jury of our readers today, with the benefit of historical research, would find in favor of the defendant. Dr. Reuben Berman's letter expresses common reader sentiment and takes it one step farther:

"I was fascinated by Matthew Cecil's 'whodunit.' I have a modest proposal: Exhume the body and retest for arsenic. Although the body was exhumed and tested for arsenic in 1859 the test results at best were inconclusive; at worst, worthless. A negative test now would exonerate Mrs. Bilansky."

ANOTHER article from the winter issue, "Hayloft Hoopsters: Legendary Lynd and the State High School Basketball Tournament" by Steven R. Hoffbeck, prompted a letter and a book from Richard E. Londgren, younger brother of the dream team's center, Duane. *Poor Richard's Tips from the Great Depression* (Tacoma, Wash.: Krona Press, 1998, 192 p., paper, \$12.00) offers chatty insights into life in tiny Lynd while recalling ways of recycling and saving and suggesting ways to make the most of resources

now. Its chapter titles reflect the philosophy of the Great Depression: Use it up, Wear it out, Make it do, and Do without. It is available at the Lyon County Historical Museum in Marshall or from the author at Krona Press, 3101 N. 29th St., Tacoma 98407.

THE James J. Hill Reference Library will award a number of grants of up to \$2,000 to support research in the James H. Hill and Louis W. Hill papers, a rich source for the study of the railroad industry, tourism and Glacier National Park, political developments in the nation and the Northwest, national and regional economic development, agronomy, and many other topics concerned with the Upper Midwest, Pacific Northwest, and western Canada. The deadline for applications is November 1, 1998, and the awards will be announced in early 1999. For more information, contact W. Thomas White, curator, 80 West Fourth St., St. Paul 55102; telephone (612)265-5441, fax (612)222-4139, or e-mail twhite@jjhill.org.

HEAVILY ILLUSTRATED and drawn from a variety of published sources and personal stories of residents, *Roots and Wings: A Scrapbook of Time, Cannon*

Falls, Minnesota runs the gamut from history to poetry and "portraits of local folks." Its 431 pages, a compendium of one-to-two page articles, are divided into eight chapters: Indian Territory, Birth of a City, Good Neighbors, Life in the 1990s, Poetry of the People, Seasons in the Valley, the Next Generation, and Portraits of Local Folks. Self-published by the author, photojournalist Connie Bickman, it is available for \$50.00 from Yatra Publications, 218 Mill St. West, Cannon Falls, Minn. 55009.

REMINDER: Handsome, sturdy slipcases, open at the back for maximum protection and convenient storage, keep your back issues of *Minnesota History* within easy reach on your bookshelf. Each container hold eight issues. The maroon-colored cases are embossed with the magazine title and come with a gold-foil transfer for marking the year and volume number on the spine. Available for \$9.95 (MHS member price, \$8.96) plus tax and shipping from MHS Press: (612)297-3243 or 1-800-647-7827 and in the Society's museum store.

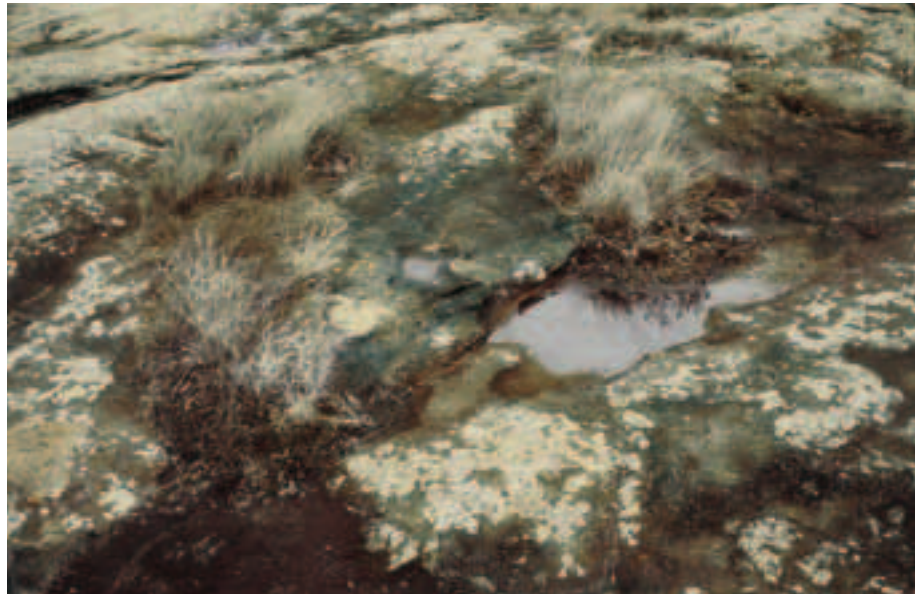
From the Collections

More than 20 years ago, St. Paul-based photographer Craig Thiesen chose the prairie as an evocative landscape to capture with his camera. His connection with the prairie reaches back to his youth on the rich farmland south of Lakefield in Jackson County. Later, visits to his family's homelands in Denmark and Germany helped him view his native turf with a sense of the past: "History and immigration is what I focus on. When I am on the prairie, I am very aware of where I am."

Since 1977 Thiesen has produced a series of hand-colored landscape photographs from northern Europe and the United States, particularly the Lac Qui Parle region of western Minnesota. He has also done six Prairie Day posters for the annual Prairie Day events sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Scientific Natural Areas Program.

Big Stone Lake, National Wildlife Refuge (hand-colored silver print, 1988) captures a small patch of land in the Minnesota River bottom in late fall. "The way I feel about the Big Stone Lake," Thiesen said, "is that it is the closest place to the Garden of Eden." The 15 x 10-inch print is one of two photos by the artist in the Minnesota Historical Society's fine art photograph collection. To see more of his work, visit his web site: www.studio210.com.

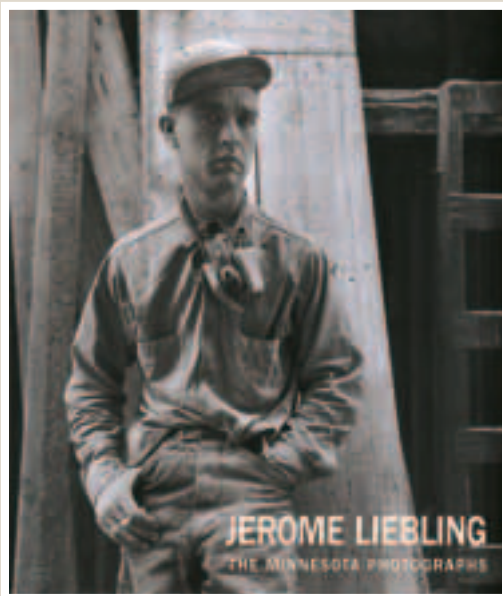
— ANN CHRISTENSEN, Acquisitions Assistant



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Jerome Liebling

The Minnesota Photographs, 1949–1969

Photographs by Jerome Liebling

Essay by Alan Trachtenberg

When photographer Jerome Liebling arrived in Minnesota from his native New York City in 1949, he was a young man of 25 launching what would be nationally recognized as a distinguished career in fine-art photography. Here, in 118 photographs, is portrayed Liebling's Minnesota. During two decades marked by social, political, and cultural change, Liebling traveled the state and found his largest subject—the depiction and interpretation of commonplace human experience.

“In *The Minnesota Photographs* Jerome Liebling has seamlessly combined a deep regard for people and the way they live with respect for the formal possibilities of his medium. This conjunction of a humanistic and an aesthetic sensibility has become increasingly rare and is to be cherished.”—Naomi Rosenblum, author of *A World History of Photography*

“Liebling could be said to be a publicist for humanity itself. He depicted, without sentimentality, every individual he photographed with well-lighted clarity and moving dignity.”—*Booklist*

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