

A Place Called Home: Writings on the Midwestern Small Town

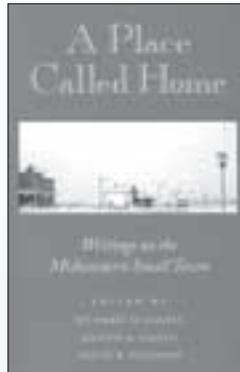
Edited by Richard O. Davies,
Joseph A. Amato, and David R. Pichaske

(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2003. 437 p. Paper, \$24.95.)

THIS SPLENDID ANTHOLOGY brings together two subjects of vast importance that have received less than their fair share of attention in recent decades. Once, the United States was almost entirely a nation of small towns and their surrounding hinterlands. In the wake of rapid industrialization and urbanization after the Civil War, small-town America lost not only its primacy as a physical place; it also lost its centrality in the American imagination. Likewise, the Middle West, for a time considered to be the heartland and center of American life, has lost its prominent position in American thought, as the two coasts and the Southern rim have attracted the bulk of internal migration and become the repository of most of the nation's industrial, financial, political, and cultural influence.

A Place Called Home provides a well-chosen selection of glimpses of midwestern small towns through the eyes and sensibilities of novelists, poets, historians, sociologists, journalists, and other interpreters of the American scene who skillfully evoke what it was like to live in these widely variegated places that so many millions of Americans called home. Extremely helpful are the introductions to the book, the various sections, and each individual selection, which provide a broad overview of what has happened to the small towns over the past two centuries. The editors are well qualified for their task of selection and commentary. Historian Joseph Amato, whose *Rethinking Home: A Case for Writing Local History* (2002) will do much to reorient and reinvigorate local history, is the founder of and guiding force behind the Center for Rural and Regional Studies at Southwest State University in Marshall, Minnesota. His colleague David Pichaske, a professor of literature, is author of several books and an expert on midwestern literature. Among the many books written by historian Richard O. Davies of the University of Nevada, Reno, is *Main Street Blues: the Decline of Small Town America* (1998), which is about his hometown of Camden, Ohio.

The task of choosing selections that could represent the entire period since 1790; provide geographical coverage of



a region stretching from eastern Ohio to central Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas; sample various modes of expression from history and sociology to poetry and novels; touch on a wide variety of social experience; and reflect some diversity of gender, age, race, and ethnicity is a tall order, not to say an impossible task. One could quibble with some of the choices but only if one were prepared to provide an alternate list that was any better. The thirty-four selections are informative, interesting, well written, and thought provoking. Among the authors, historians include Richard C. Wade, John Mack Faragher, Lewis Atherton, John C. Hudson, and Catherine McNicol Stock. Authors are represented by Mark Twain, Garrison Keillor, Hamlin Garland, Langston Hughes, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Edna Ferber, and Carol Bly, among others. Poets include Vachel Lindsay, William Kloefkorn, and Dave Etter. Memoirists include Alan Woolworth and Susan Allen Toth. John C. Hudson utilizes the tools of historical geography, while Robert and Helen Merrell Lynd bring their sociological perspective to bear.

Change over time is evident as the book moves through five chronological sections: The Formative Years, 1790–1900; Main Street Ascendant, 1890–1930; Depression, War, and Resurgence, 1930–60; Crisis on Main Street, 1960–90; and From Farm Crisis to the Present. Many of the classic treatments of small towns emerged during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The most recent selections tend more toward journalistic and sociological analysis. For the editors, this volume was not meant merely as an exercise in interpretation but a project that will lead people to think more clearly about the choices facing the region and to search out alternative futures that will ensure the continued viability of its small towns.

Highly suitable as a reader for college and even high-school classes, this book will have a great appeal for the general reader also.

Reviewed by John E. Miller, a professor of history at South Dakota State University whose publications include a book about small towns, *Looking for History on Highway 14* (1993).

Writing the Wrongs: Eva Valesh and the Rise of Labor Journalism

By Elizabeth Faue

(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002. 249 p. Cloth, \$35.00.)

ELIZABETH FAUE BEGINS HER BIOGRAPHY of Eva McDonald Valesh by noting that her subject “dyed her hair red into her eighties, smoked black twisted cigars, and wore green silk

pajamas. . . . She was an exceptional woman.” Faue amply substantiates that claim.

Valesh is not well remembered in U.S. labor history, though certainly not due to lack of ambition or dedication on her own part. In her research, Faue struggled with a scarcity of primary sources—missing by-lines on articles, the intentional destruction of letters, and the string of angry men Valesh left behind her—all of which go some way toward explaining Valesh’s anonymity. To compensate for this lack, Faue places Valesh squarely in the gender, class, and ethnic context of her time—and consequently comes out with a more interesting and useful book.

Eva McDonald began her working life as a typesetter and reporter for the *St. Paul Globe*. Her series of articles on the lives of working girls helped to fuel a garment-workers’ strike in 1888. She agitated for the eight-hour workday, and her ability to express herself orally as well as in writing led to a brief stint as a lecturer for the Farmers’ Alliance. Returning to journalism after a bitter falling-out with Ignatius Donnelly, the leader of the Alliance, McDonald covered the labor beat for the *Minneapolis Tribune* and edited the *St. Paul Trades and Labor Bulletin*.

When McDonald married Frank Valesh at the age of 25, she already had quite a bit of experience as a public speaker, journalist, and labor organizer. Her growing interest in the American Federation of Labor resulted in a friendship with Samuel Gompers, its president. In 1897, when she separated from her husband, she used this friendship to land a job at the *New York Journal* and moved herself, her son, and her sister-cum-nanny to New York.

Valesh’s career at the *Journal* did not last long, though Faue’s description of her aggressive journalism—Valesh took on the assignment of making the news as well as reporting it—is exciting reading. Still looking for her “slim chance of making good,” Valesh transplanted herself to Washington, D.C. There she sent her son to boarding school and accepted Gompers’s invitation to edit his in-house magazine, the *American Federationist*.

Faue does not miss any of the ironies involved in her subject’s extraordinary rise to the top of the labor movement. The daughter of an immigrant, Valesh completely agreed with the anti-immigrant and racist stances of the AFL at the time. Though she spoke repeatedly on behalf of factory workingwomen, she herself had a profession that protected her from many of the abuses they faced. And she maintained her



class position by being Gompers’ “right-hand man,” observes Faue. “She became what we can only describe as ‘transclass’ and perhaps even ‘transgender,’ in the sense of enlarging her role as woman and taking on the responsibilities and perspective traditionally given over to men.”

The ironies continue: through her association with the socially elite, wealthy women in the Women’s Committee of the National Civic Federation, Valesh met her second husband and completed her ascent to the upper classes. However, because of her chronic inability to manage money, by 1923 she and her husband had exhausted his family fortune. They divorced, and Valesh completed her career quietly as a proofreader for the *New York Times*. As a “working stiff,” she took no part in the labor movement.

It is a puzzling, fascinating story, and Faue leaves us with the ambiguities: “A narrative junkie, and a true lover of parables, I looked in vain for the moral to Valesh’s story. Abandoning the idealism of her working-class youth for the pragmatic adjustments of middle age brought her neither ultimate victory nor tragic defeat. . . . You, dear reader, have to draw the rest of the conclusions yourself.”

Reviewed by Elizabeth Raasch-Gilman, an independent scholar specializing in radical history of the twentieth century. Her publications include “Sisterhood in the Revolution” (Minnesota History, 1999) and “Catheryne Cooke Gilman: Social Worker” in Women of Minnesota: Selected Biographical Essays (1977).

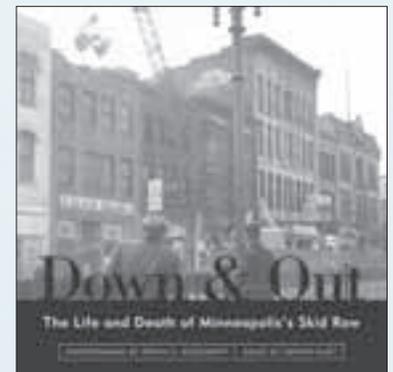
Down & Out: The Life and Death of Minneapolis’s Skid Row

Photographs by Edwin C. Hirschhoff;
essay by Joseph Hart

(*Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. 103 p. Paper, \$26.95.*)

FOR MANY CITIES IN THE UPPER MIDWEST, the boom years of the 1880s were pivotal for constructing downtowns. Cities founded in midcentury took on metropolitan airs as

they grew with unprecedented numbers of immigrants and industrial and commercial expansion brought by the railroads and the development of agriculture and industries.



Minneapolis's Skid Row developed in the late-nineteenth century and helped to define the skyline of the city until the post-World War II era. After the war, civic leaders sought to rebuild the city with plans for a more efficient future.

Down & Out: The Life and Death of Minneapolis's Skid Row provides a glimpse into the city's postwar vision and explores some of the motivations that led civic leaders to undertake the Gateway Center Redevelopment Project that remade the heart of Minneapolis. The book is divided into two sections: an essay by Joseph Hart and photographs by Edwin C. Hirschhoff.

While many planners and authors have condemned the loss of significant structures in the project area, such as the Metropolitan Building, this book does not emphasize the buildings or history of the Gateway. In its approach, *Down & Out* very subtly makes us rethink the urban-renewal era and its effects on people. Hart's discussion of Skid Row's residents and the loss of their economic role draws parallels to the deterioration of buildings that no longer represented the future that Minneapolis's civic leaders envisioned for their downtown.

Hart characterizes the Gateway Center Redevelopment Project as "arguably the most significant transformation of the urban landscape in the city's history." The ambitious "slum clearance" plan took approximately 40 percent of downtown's buildings. Hart's essay is noteworthy for its insight into the development of Skid Row in Minneapolis and the industrial economy that created temporary or seasonal employment for men in lumbering, railroads, agriculture, mining, and a host of other occupations that exploited labor fluctuation. Hart also notes how civic leaders vacillated in their attitudes toward Skid Row—at times the men who congregated there were viewed as bums who deserved to be thrown out of town, while at other times they were simply workingmen necessary to keep the urban economic engine on track. By the 1950s the changing Minneapolis economy altered attitudes toward Skid Row and prompted the major redevelopment effort. It is clear that the Gateway Redevelopment Project also sought to rid the city of the Skid Row denizens who were by then viewed as detrimental to the image of Minneapolis.

Edwin C. Hirschhoff's photographs offer a strong sense of the Skid Row environment in the late 1950s and while demolition was in progress. Although he made his living in advertising and public relations, Hirschhoff's hobby was photography. His work reflected the photographic style known as Pictorialism, which emphasized beauty, aesthetics, and technique. Hirschhoff applied the concepts to nontraditional Pictorialist subjects—buildings ready for demolition. His photographs, taken on lunch breaks and weekends, chronicle

the destruction not only of buildings but also of a neighborhood. Hirschhoff's own words conveyed his views: the "New Gateway, however new and sleek and grandiose, will never replace the glory that was yesterday's Lower Loop."

The book has one omission: a map of the Gateway Redevelopment area. In an era when many residents of the metropolitan area rarely visit downtown Minneapolis, a map would identify the location and help readers envision the neighborhood that once housed an army of laboring men on the move.

Reviewed by Garneth O. Peterson, AICP. An employee of URS Corporation, she is an urban historian and city planner who has written extensively about neighborhoods and historic buildings in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

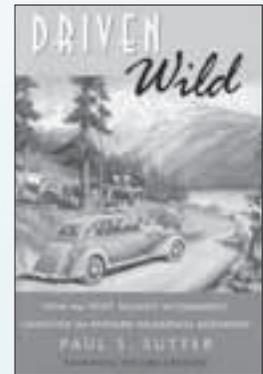
Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement

By Paul S. Sutter

(Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002. 343 p. Cloth, \$35.00.)

AS UBIQUITOUS AS THE AUTOMOBILE HAS BECOME in all aspects of American life, *Driven Wild* reminds us of a time when its very presence in the landscape inspired considerable controversy. Fascinated by what he describes as the national "contest over wilderness" that unfolded in the 1990s, Paul Sutter has delved into the origins of attempts to define and then preserve wild lands in the United States. Focusing upon the 1920s and 1930s, Sutter argues, "Modern wilderness advocacy grew out of questions about the automobile, roads, recreational development and consumerism" that took shape during those interwar years.

While scholarship depicting the intricate linkages between the automobile and the burgeoning pursuit of leisure in twentieth-century America has flourished in recent years, Sutter steers the discussion in an intriguing new direction. Rather than emphasizing the influence of the automobile as technological innovation or the embedding of the car in popular culture, he illuminates the evolution among various conservation-minded Americans of an increasingly critical reaction to the automobile's impact on the outdoor world. That criticism acquired a voice with the formation of the Wilderness Society in 1934, an event that is at the heart of Sutter's book.



Following an introductory chapter that poses “the problem of the wilderness” (“Our love for wild nature is intimately connected with our affection for the automobile and other forms of mechanized transport”), the author provides a thoughtful and well-informed overview of American recreation and leisure between the wars. He then profiles four of the founding fathers of the Wilderness Society—foresters Aldo Leopold and Robert Marshall, writer Robert Sterling Yard and regional planner Benton Mackaye—whose disparate lives and careers, Sutter contends, are united by their skepticism toward the unyielding infatuation of many Americans with mechanized access to leisure and their consequent willingness to push roads into any landscape with recreational possibilities. That skepticism, Sutter maintains, also reflects an abiding rejection by these men of the “commercialization” of nature driven by entrepreneurs seeking ways to profit from popular fascination with various forms of outdoor recreation.

In making his case, Sutter proposes an ambitious re-imagining of how the “wilderness idea” emerged in early twentieth-century American culture and of how it animated the subsequent advocacy of nature preservation. This re-imagining, Sutter hopes, will not only influence current scholarly investigations of the notion of wilderness but also contribute to contemporary debates about its place in and its value to American society. While such goals are a tall order for any scholarly monograph to achieve, Sutter’s aspirations are commensurate with the quality of the work he has produced. Exceptionally well researched and written, *Driven Wild* is argued with uncommon clarity. Beginning with the careful elucidation in his first chapter of the problem he will address and the answer he will provide, Sutter meticulously assembles his evidence through his perceptive portraits of his four subjects. Though principally concerned with their evolving interpretations of the relationships between recreation, leisure, and nature, Sutter also adeptly delineates the professional and organizational milieus in which each man existed, from the bureaucratic thickets of the United States Forest Service to the internecine politics of the conservation movement. Thus, he adds a welcome human dimension to the study of intellectual and cultural constructs.

Sutter’s impressive volume should, and no doubt will, reach a substantial audience among his peers within the world of environmental history, for it makes a notable contribution to the field. As a work of professional scholarship that is also eminently accessible to the lay reader, however, it deserves an even wider audience among those many Americans concerned about the survival of wilderness in the twenty-first century. His cogent examination of the roots of

wilderness advocacy and of the intertwinings of wilderness, recreation, and technology could shed much light on current issues. *Driven Wild* should find a home in many libraries, personal as well as professional.

Reviewed by Peter J. Blodgett, *H. Russell Smith Foundation Curator of Western Historical Manuscripts at the Huntington Library. He is the author of* Land of Golden Dreams: California in the Gold Rush Decade 1848–1858 (1999) *and various essays on the national parks, tourism, and auto travel including, most recently, “You Sing “America,” Why Not See It?: Private Highway Associations and Redefining Tourist Landscapes in the American West 1912–1925.”*

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■ In time for the bicentennial of the famed Lewis and Clark expedition, several new books examine the American West, its native peoples, and exploration. A sampling from the University of Nebraska Press in Lincoln includes *The Lewis and Clark Journals: An American Epic of Discovery*, a one-volume abridgement of Gary E. Moulton's magisterial 13-volume annotated set. The current volume, also edited by Moulton (2003, 413 p., cloth, \$29.95) offers narrative highlights from the longer diaries and juxtaposes the words of officers, enlisted men, and Native Americans. New illustrations and maps complete the new, shorter rendition.

Lewis and Clark on the Great Plains: A Natural History, written and illustrated by Paul A. Johnsgard (2003, 143 p., paper, \$14.95) is a guide to the animals and plants that the expedition encountered. Six route maps help readers track the journey, while the author's descriptions not only catalog the species but also relate their importance to Native Americans, their current status on the Plains, and the long-term importance of the expedition's findings. The book also includes a guide to Lewis and Clark sites, including more than 70 that today's travelers can visit.

A third book from Nebraska is Colin G. Calloway's *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark* (2003, 631 p., cloth, \$39.95), which traces the histories of Indian people from the Appalachians to the Pacific and from their arrival thousands of years ago to the nineteenth century. Calloway's synthesis of Indian ethnohistory and Euro-American accounts gives crucial perspectives on this sweep of history, focusing on conflict and change.

Several decades after Lewis and Clark, John Frémont stepped to the forefront of American expansionism. Tom Chaffin's new work, *Pathfinder: John Charles Frémont and the Course of American Empire* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002, 559 p., cloth, \$35.00), recounts the career and the times of the explorer and mapmaker who went on to become an entrepreneur, abolitionist, Civil War general, presiden-

tial candidate, and Gilded Age aristocrat. Frémont's trans-Mississippi expeditions captured the public's imagination, stirring his contemporaries to envision an American empire from sea to sea. His work with Joseph Nicollet in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Dakotas is an integral part of this saga.

■ A wide range of topics—as well as geography—marks *Interpreting the Promise of America: Essays in Honor of Odd Sverre Lovoll*, edited by Todd W. Nichol (Northfield MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 2002, 220 p., cloth, \$24.95). From Jon Gjerde's article, "Boundaries and Linkages: Norwegian Immigrants, the United States, and Norway," to H. Arnold Barton's "Swedish Americans and the Viking Discovery of America," Einar Niemi's "Dilemmas of Identity for Immigrants from Northern Norway in the United States," Deborah Miller's "Reading Norwegian-American Cookbooks," and editor Nichols's "Landstad in America," these articles touch on the many topics that Lovoll has addressed in his publications. The volume begins with Rudolph Vecoli's "Odd Lovoll as Historian" and ends with a selected bibliography of his writings. It is available from NAHA, 1510 St. Olaf Avenue, Northfield 55057; include \$3.00 postage and \$1.63 sales tax (Minnesota residents only).

■ Reporter Tom Hauser's *Inside the Ropes with Jesse Ventura* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, 427 p., cloth, \$24.95) is a firsthand account that chronicles the unconventional governor's campaign, election, and single term. The immediacy of the sources, coupled with the veteran political reporter's analysis, offers a newsy, rational, and evenhanded look at Ventura's tumultuous years in office. A contribution to recent history, the book may also prove a useful resource to later historians examining Minnesota's maverick political history.

■ Fans eager for the next season to begin might appreciate curling up with

Ross Bernstein's coffee-table presentation, *Batter Up! Celebrating a Century of Minnesota Baseball* (Minneapolis: Nodin Press, 2002, 160 p., cloth, \$31.00). With large pages, small type, and many pictures, the book covers the sport from its earliest years through major and minor league teams, high-school, college, Little League, and women's squads.

■ Drawing on government documents, letters, newspaper editorials, and case studies of individual lives, Michael J. Grant examines the federal government's attempt to help family farmers in *Down and Out on the Family Farm: Rural Rehabilitation in the Great Plains, 1929-1945* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003, 232 p., paper, \$39.95). When the Great Depression lay bare the long-term economic instability of the plains, the New Deal stepped in to help. Grant's book shows how the political desire to assist family farmers clashed with market forces that favored large-scale agriculture—at the same time that drought, regional conservatism, and fiscal constraints limited the ability to offer aid.

■ Informal in tone and studded with photographs, recipes, and other memorabilia, *So Far Away in the World: Stories from the Swedish Twin Cities* by Anne Gillespie Lewis entertains even as it informs. The book is organized into chapters such as "The New Newcomers," "Swedes at Work," and "Swedes at Play," each of which contains sketches and reminiscences of people, some of them well known and others known only to their family and friends. Twin Cities Swedish cultural institutions get their due, too, in this very readable account of one of Minnesota's major ethnic groups. Published in 2002 by Minneapolis's Nodin Press, the 175-page paperback sells for \$19.95.

■ Cass Gilbert went abroad in 1880, seeking work and inspiration in the buildings of England, France, and Italy. His letters home to friend (and fellow architect) Clarence Johnston and to his

mother, Elizabeth Gilbert, along with his European sketches have been collected by Paul Clifford Larson and published as *Cass Gilbert Abroad: The Young Architect's European Tour* by Afton Historical Society Press (Afton, MN, 2003, 128 p., cloth, \$32.00). Larson's helpful introduction to period architecture, architects, and Gilbert himself sets the stage for the young man's candid appraisals and effusions. (He didn't care for Westminster Abbey but wrote from France, "I am learning to live, and to see beauty in everything.") Color and black-and-white reproductions of his sketches, ranging from architectural details to buildings and landscapes accompany the text.

■ In *Icelanders in North America: The First Settlers*, Jonas Thor examines the

immigrants' unique communities in Minnesota as well as in Wisconsin, North Dakota, Washington state, "New Iceland" (southern Manitoba), and other parts of Canada. Natural disasters and nationalism, among other factors, caused masses of Icelanders to emigrate to North America between 1870 and 1914 in hopes of preserving their heritage in a new setting. Using letters, periodicals, newspapers, census data, and archival sources in both the English and Icelandic languages, the author details each community's adjustment to a new continent and its struggles to deal with assimilation. The 306-page paperback, published in 2002 by University of Manitoba Press, is available for \$17.95. Its U.S. distributor is University of Toronto Press, 2250 Military Rd., Tonawanda, NY 14150.

■ Mary Colter is one of the world's best-known unknown architects. Her buildings at Grand Canyon National Park alone, including the Lookout Tower, Hopi House, and Bright Angel Lodge, are admired by five million visitors a year. A contemporary of Frank Lloyd Wright, she also designed three classic hotels: El Navajo (Gallup, NM), La Posada (Winslow, AZ), and Painted Desert Inn (Painted Desert, AZ).

Arnold Berke's *Mary Colter, Architect of the Southwest* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2002, 320 p., paper, \$24.95) investigates Colter's remarkable career and the extent to which she was inspired by regional history and landscape. Colter's teen years were spent in St. Paul, where she moved with her family in 1880. She graduated from high school at age 14, attended art school in San Francisco, and, as her family's main breadwinner, returned to teach art and drafting at what became Mechanic Arts High School until 1907. She was active in the Art Workers' Guild and the New Century Club until her mastery of design and familiarity with Native American art brought her jobs in the West. Colter left the Twin Cities permanently in 1910 to work for hotel-builder and western-travel promoter Fred Harvey and the Santa Fe Railway. This book's quality color and black-and-white photographs suggest the wide range of Colter's themed commercial interiors and exteriors.

■ *Twelve Millennia: Archaeology of the Upper Mississippi River Valley* by James L. Theler and Robert F. Boszhardt (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003, 272 p. paper, \$27.95) provides an overview of the 12,000-year human past of the region from Dubuque to Red Wing. This informative, accessible book is written for the general public. Included is a catalog of the animal remains and rock art found here, as well as a list of sites and museums of interest.

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