

In Gatsby's Shadow: The Story of Charles Macomb Flandrau

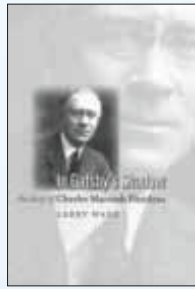
By Larry Haeg

(Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004. 273 p. Cloth, \$29.95.)

BORN IN 1871 IN ST. PAUL, writer and critic Charles Macomb Flandrau combined the social sensitivity of F. Scott Fitzgerald and the acerbic wit of H. L. Mencken—although Flandrau would have certainly disdained comparison to the latter, since Mencken struck him as too anti-American. But while the places of Fitzgerald and Mencken in the world of letters are firmly established and likely to remain so, Flandrau will continue to be an obscure footnote to literary history. In this wonderful study of Flandrau, first-time biographer Larry Haeg attempts to explain why. Although Haeg never quite puts a finger on the exact reason for Flandrau's descent from promising author into unknown shade—it could have been anything from his Victorian desire not to draw attention to himself to his rumored homosexuality—Haeg does a craftsmanlike job of chronicling the obsessive nature of Flandrau's relationship with his mother, his love of travel, his alcoholism, his self-imposed isolation verging on misanthropy, and his flirtation with fame.

Haeg pulled the title from and devotes the book's prologue to the relationship between Flandrau and his Summit Hill acquaintance Fitzgerald. Both went East to college and documented that experience, Flandrau in *Harvard Episodes* in 1897 and Fitzgerald in *This Side of Paradise* 23 years later. Both books were critical of their universities' club systems, each enraged the administrators at Harvard and Princeton, respectively, and both were hot sellers. Fitzgerald quickly took full advantage of his newfound star status by selling previously rejected short stories to Hollywood, marrying *the* girl, and offering himself to a celebrity-worshipping public. Flandrau did nothing of the sort, choosing instead to depart on a quiet around-the-world cruise with a classmate on the day of his book's release.

These opposite reactions say a lot about money and era-bound social-class expectations. Like Fitzgerald, Flandrau referred to himself as poor when, in fact, both led comfortable early lives: Flandrau through the investments of his father, Judge Charles Flandrau, a founder of what became the St. Paul Companies, and Fitzgerald through the largess of his maternal grandmother, whose husband, Philip McQuillan, built a successful wholesale grocery business. Unlike Fitzgerald, however, Flandrau would inherit a sizable fortune. His



55 shares of St. Paul Fire and Marine would produce annual dividends of \$10,500—even through the Great Depression. Flandrau wrote when he felt like it, dismissing the requests of editors, publishers, and fans for more. Even more important, for Flandrau, working at writing “would have been unimaginable—worse, would have been ‘bad form.’”

After finishing *Harvard Episodes*, Flandrau did tentatively begin work on a satire of what he called the East's “decaying provincial aristocracy.” Perhaps his temperament was not fit for the style, or he was not interested in immediately jumping into another long project. In any event, he set aside his novel on the conflict between old Newport and the nouveau riche, a theme—Haeg points out—“Fitzgerald would mine twenty-five years later on Long Island with *Gatsby's* West Egg and East Egg.”

Flandrau reached the apogee of his artistic output in 1908 with *Viva Mexico*. Called perhaps the best travel book written by an American, it perceptively documents life on Flandrau's brother's coffee plantation. Blair Flandrau eventually married Grace Hodgson, who would inherit the Flandrau family fortune. As he would eventually do for Fitzgerald, Charles Flandrau encouraged Grace in her literary leanings. She, in turn, would hook Fitzgerald up with her agent, Paul Reynolds, and posthumously repay her debt to Flandrau, a life-long bachelor, by storing all of his papers. These letters, diaries, and journals comprised the bulk of material for Haeg's biography.

The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* provided another source of biographical material for Flandrau's later life. Refusing to take “no” for an answer, its editor tempted Flandrau by giving him complete editorial freedom and \$50 a month. Beginning in 1915, Flandrau produced hundreds of essays, columns, and reviews. In a piece on a Bach organ recital, for example, he noted that no one minded “Bach's musical mathematics very much except one baby, who . . . had to be carried out by its father and strangled in the corridor.”

Because *In Gatsby's Shadow* is not a literary biography, readers will not gain much understanding of Flandrau's writing style; however, they will come away with a deeper appreciation of the period when the Victorian era gave way to the Jazz Age and the life of one person who hated to see it go.

Reviewed by David Page, who teaches writing at Inver Hills Community College. He co-authored F. Scott Fitzgerald in Minnesota: Toward the Summit and co-edited The St. Paul Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Jane Grey Swisshelm: An Unconventional Life

By Sylvia D. Hoffert

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. 255 p. Cloth, \$39.95.)

MANY REFORMERS ARE DIFFICULT PEOPLE, too caught up in their convictions and certainties to move easily among lesser mortals. Jane Grey Swisshelm, anti-slavery, women's rights, and temperance advocate, was more difficult than most. A caustic, critical, and unyielding writer and editor, Swisshelm began her career as a reformer in the 1840s in Pittsburgh, where her own troubled marriage taught her painful lessons about the limits of female autonomy. Although she lived during an era of burgeoning social reform, Swisshelm remained a lone, sometimes idiosyncratic, voice. Her harsh criticisms of those who should have been her friends in the reform community isolated her. Her sense that she was doing God's work "as a thistle-digger in the vineyard" allowed her to justify behavior that was not always reasonable or honorable. Yet her ability to clearly state and forcefully argue her case for various reforms, especially those related to women, and her talent for skewering those she blamed for various malfesances gained her a wide readership.

During her six-year sojourn in St. Cloud, which began in 1857 when she fled her twenty-year marriage with her five-year-old daughter in tow, she first allied herself with the Democratic party and then became an organizer for the new Republican party in the infant state. Her primary concern was to tweak those in power, expose their hypocrisies, and urge social change. Swisshelm returned East in 1862 but continued to write and publish her cogent arguments almost to the time of her death in 1884.

Swisshelm's biographer, Sylvia Hoffert, tells her story in an unconventional fashion, lending a dual meaning to the title phrase "An Unconventional Life." This is not a chronological biography that proceeds from birth to death. Instead, Hoffert chose "a format that is both asymmetrical and circuitous." One chapter deals with Swisshelm's religious background as a Covenanter Presbyterian and the impact her strict Calvinist understanding of God and her relationship with him had on her life and on her reform style. Another chapter explains the complex legal battles the Swisshelm family endured, while other chapters provide overviews of Swisshelm's reform ideas and her near alienation from her only child, daughter Zo. The format allows Hoffert to



expound at length on the social and legal history of women and marriage in the nineteenth century and the ways in which Swisshelm's life illustrates past and present debates about gender. It also, unfortunately, makes it difficult for the reader to picture Jane Swisshelm in her environs, to understand the context of her life, and to assess cause and effect.

Much of readers' attraction to biography is the opportunity to inhabit the subject's life for a short time and to be informed, enriched, or perhaps horrified by its details. Because Hoffert rejects linear storytelling for a format "like the strands of a braid" where "parts of the story will appear, disappear and then reappear," it is a struggle to determine which events coincide, which kinds of articles, stories, and poems—and therefore ideas—Swisshelm produced at various times, and which of her domestic disasters coincided with which of her public actions. While it may be impossible to truly "know" the prickly Swisshelm, the asymmetrical approach employed here complicates that task considerably.

Hoffert also has some difficulty with her subject's nineteenth-century perspectives on some issues. Jane Grey Swisshelm was anti-Catholic, for example, a fact about which the author apologizes. It should be the historian's task to explain why people might believe what they do, but not to apologize for their actions. Swisshelm was a staunch Presbyterian who had lost ancestors in religious wars. She was the product of an evolving Reformation that rejected the vestments and hierarchy of Catholicism for what Protestants believed was a more Biblically based religious structure and practice. Is it really so surprising that she might criticize or even mock Catholicism at a time of religious stress in Pittsburgh?

Hoffert does a somewhat better job of explaining Swisshelm's evolving attitudes toward the Dakota Indians during and after the 1862 Dakota War in Minnesota. She is able to understand why Swisshelm would move from sympathy to hostility as a result of warfare, although she is uncomfortable with the depth of the reformer's anger and fear. Swisshelm, along with other residents of St. Cloud and parts of Minnesota, faced direct personal danger and even death during those traumatic months in 1862. Intense fear is often a life-altering experience, and it seems to have been so in this case. It is a very human reaction, although not one well understood by those who have not faced such threats.

This book contains much of value about Jane Grey Swisshelm's life and times. Although the format is off-putting and the subject herself a difficult, sometimes unlikable person, readers interested in nineteenth-century reformers, their ideas and motivations, women's rights and property issues, and the movement of women into occupations such as newspaper editing and ownership will benefit from Hoffert's work.

Reviewed by Paula M. Nelson, professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. She is the author of essays and articles about women in the Midwest and Great Plains and two books about life in the west river country of South Dakota. Her edited collection, *Sunshine Always: The Courtship Letters of Joseph Gossage and Alice Bower in Dakota Territory, 1881–82*, will be published in 2006.

On the Viking Trail: Travels in Scandinavian America

By Don Lago

(Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004. 275 p. Cloth, \$27.95.)

ON THIS PARTICULAR VIKING TRAIL, the reader wanders through both usual and unexpected territory in Scandinavian America. Inspired by his father's loss of memory, author Don Lago decided to seek out stories of Swedes and other Scandinavian Americans throughout the United States to see what he could learn about his family's past. After growing up Columbia, Missouri, a descendant of the small Swedish community in Tippecanoe County, Indiana, Lago was wise enough to know that he needed to look not just in obvious places like Minnesota, Illinois, and the Pacific Northwest for Swedish stories. He looked in other places with lots of Swedes, as well.

Lago began his journey in his ancestral town of Gränna, Sweden, where his father had rediscovered his family connections years before. His travels took him next to New York City, where he discusses two prominent nineteenth-century Swedish women, Jenny Lind and Fredrika Bremer. Lago next moves home to Indiana, recounting how Swedes were persuaded to settle there on expensive, not-very-good farmland by a politically well-connected Yankee, then discusses a radical Swede who shipped out on board the *Titanic*. In Iowa, at Stanton's Swedish Coffee Pot, he muses about Mrs. Olson's ability to convince TV viewers of her expertise about coffee.

Lago then moves further afield in several ways, heading to St. Louis, remarking on why Huck Finn wasn't a Finn, and admiring Eero Saarinen's Gateway Arch before leapfrogging up the Mississippi to Minnesota, where he adds Norwegians to the mix in a discussion of authors O. E. Rolvaag and Vilhelm Moberg. Talking about Moberg gets Lago to Chisago County's Swedish towns, from which he ventures to Moorhead and the reproduction Viking ship *Hjemkomst*.

Heading for the Wild West of Nebraska, Lago enlightens readers about the challenges of heritage tourism. He



discusses Gothenburg, where touring Swedes often visit although the town focuses on its history as a Pony Express station, and Stromsburg, which emphasizes its Swedish past but attracts fewer Scandinavian visitors.

Minnesota figures into three of the last four chapters. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area, Burntside Lake, and Sigurd Olson conjure Swedes in the North Woods. After talking about Scandinavian tourist towns in California, such as the Danish Solvang, he comes to Lake Wobegon, a fictional Minnesota town on the prairies. Lago concludes the book with a discussion of St. Peter, Minnesota, and Scandinavian-style democracy, highlighting male social reformers—Earl Warren, William Rehnquist, Eric Sevareid, Jacob Riis, Thorstein Veblen, Carl Sandburg, Nelson Algren, Floyd B. Olson, and Hubert H. Humphrey.

The photographs on the book jacket, two of the three from the Minnesota Historical Society's photo collection, lead one to think that the stories we read will be different, more rural perhaps, than the ones Lago has chosen to tell. Since these are the only photos in the entire book, this reader would have appreciated a more direct connection between images and text. A map of Lago's travels would also have been helpful.

Like other contemporary voyages of discovery, this book tells readers most about where a strong interest in family history can take a determined traveler. H. Arnold Barton's excellent book, *The Search for Ancestors: A Swedish-American Family Saga* (1979), shows what a historian of Swedish America can make of the same kinds of questions. Scandinavian Americans today may want to read *On the Viking Trail* to help them think about how their family stories, on both sides of the Atlantic, fit into a larger history of Scandinavian immigration to the United States.

Reviewed by Deborah L. Miller, a historian of Scandinavian America, who works in the Minnesota Historical Society reference library.

The Life of Emily Peake, One Dedicated Ojibwe

By Jane Pejisa

(Minneapolis: Nodin Press, 2003. 209 p. Paper, \$18.95.)

A MEMORIAL TO EMILY PEAKE in the Stevens Square neighborhood of Minneapolis sparked city resident Jane Pejisa's curiosity and led to this biography. Its format is somewhat unusual, in that Emily



Peake figures in only about one-third of the book, making it more a biography of a family than of a single individual.

Pejsa begins with a history of Peake's Ojibwe and white ancestors, who first settled in Minnesota in the mid-nineteenth century. Emily descended from several different Ojibwe families who had removed to White Earth Reservation; however, she was born in Minneapolis in 1920, a time when few Indians resided in the Twin Cities. Peake's parents, Fred and Louise, were each active in their own ways in the Indian community, but it was their daughter Emily who would become a prominent leader in a variety of initiatives from the 1950s until her death in 1995. She helped found and operate the Upper Midwest American Indian Center, served on city and state commissions for human rights and Indian affairs, and participated in and directed a host of other social programs.

Many readers with ties to Minneapolis will especially appreciate the final third of the book. This section not only details Peake's numerous organizational affiliations but also the frequently conflicting visions of Indian activism circulating in Minneapolis during the 1960s and 1970s, when the American Indian Movement pushed the Indian community to adopt more radical measures. Pejsa clearly has great affection for the city's history, and she richly contextualizes Peake's life in the various neighborhoods in which she lived and worked.

However, for me, the book's most memorable and intriguing moments occurred whenever Emily or members of her family were involved in events that transcended the local. For example, Emily's grandfather met her grandmother in Mississippi while fighting with Union troops in the Civil War;

her uncle George Peake trained with the nationally renowned dancer Ted Shawn and then made his living as "Chief Little Moose," head of a dance troupe that gave Indian-style performances at the Wisconsin Dells. Particularly compelling and tragic is the story of Emily's sister Natalie, who was active in the labor movement, including the Minneapolis truckers' strike of 1934. Later, during World War II, the Federal Bureau of Investigation hounded her for her leftist associations, and shortly after, like her father before her, she succumbed to mental illness, living out the rest of her life in mental institutions. Emily's own life also took fascinating twists. She joined the Coast Guard during World War II and traveled throughout the United States. In the postwar period she lived in Europe, first in Paris and then Austria, working as a secretary for the allies' occupation forces.

By narrating the history of the Peake family over several generations, Pejsa gives us a glimpse of the worldliness and vast connections to all kinds of people and places that many Minnesota Ojibwe have probably experienced. Historians have often ignored or missed these connections by choosing instead to focus on a reservation or tribe—not an individual or family—as the means of understanding American Indian history.

Reviewed by Nancy Shoemaker, an associate professor of history at the University of Connecticut, Storrs, and the author of several books on American Indian history. Her first publication was an article on urban Indians in Minneapolis, 1920–50 (Western Historical Quarterly, 1988), while she was a doctoral candidate in history at the University of Minnesota.

■ *Our Readers Write: A grainy photo of Sinclair Lewis and a car in "Letters from Sinclair Lewis" (Spring 2005) caught the eye of Minneapolis reader Robert R. Johnson. Citing Bruce W. McCalley's book, Model T Ford: The Car that Changed the World, and a September 26, 1916, listing in the newspaper Finance and Commerce, Mr. Johnson set us straight on both the vehicle and its age, opening an intriguing possibility that this was the very car Lewis mentioned in his letters:*

"The photograph on page 219 should be dated summer 1916 or 1917 rather than 1910. The car in the photo is a 1916 Ford Model T touring, most likely the same car that Lewis drove on his cross-country tour in 1916, as mentioned in the article. The Minnesota 1915-17 license plate, number 112986, mounted on the rear of the car, was issued to Sinclair Lewis, resident of Sauk Centre, for a Ford in the summer of 1916, probably when the car was purchased. The car appears to be rather clean and new in the photo and suggests the year 1916, but it could possibly be 1917.

"In the article it is also mentioned that in October 1919 Lewis was driving a Hupmobile, which was a few steps up from a Ford."

■ We asked, and you answered: The results of last winter's *Minnesota History* reader survey have been tabulated, and they show clearly that the magazine is reaching an involved and appreciative audience. More than 85 percent of you read all or most of the articles and features in each issue, more than 50 percent read the footnotes (and even more appreciate having them for occasional reference), and 88 percent think the article length is just right. Many readers display current issues, keep the magazine "indefinitely," and recommend it to friends. More than half of you strongly opposed adding advertising to the magazine, although 86 percent would accept it if absolutely necessary. Overall, you gave *Minnesota History* a 99.7 percent approval rating—for which we thank you very much.

Readers also offered excellent sugges-

tions on diversifying article topics and broadening their reach to include all regions of the state. We will now begin working on ways to achieve some of these goals.

■ Sometime in the 1970s Alan MacDougall made a major change in his life and went to sea on an ore boat plying the Great Lakes. Many of his thoughts about this life are expressed in his collection of poems, *Inland Sailing: A Seaman's 11-year Odyssey on the Great Lakes* (Keizer, OR: Eden Publishing, 2001, 102 p., paper, \$16.95). It was a tough life, but he captured the toil in taut phrases. Readers who know the Great Lakes will appreciate his love for the way the moonlight looks on the calm water or how the dawn breaks over a glassy sea. MacDougall is especially adept at conveying the numbing cold of winter with the onslaught of snow and ice and wind as a sailor tries to maneuver a rope or walk across the deck.

■ Ross Bernstein has carved a niche for himself in Minnesota sports writing. His latest offering is *Grappling Glory: Celebrating a Century of Minnesota Wrestling and Rassling* (Minneapolis: Nodin Press, 2004, 200 p., hardcover, \$29.95). Like his previous books on baseball, football, hockey, and basketball, this one covers the professional scene, college and high school teams, and Olympic and Greco Roman matches through the twentieth century. A major part of the book is devoted to biographies of more than 50 prominent wrestlers, including such favorites as Stan Kowalski, Scott Ledoux, Ric Flair, Leo Nomellini, Bronko Nagurski, and Verne Gagne. Readers may be amazed or pleased to see a couple of pages on women wrestlers. As always, Bernstein has included lists of award winners and many photographs of wrestlers and teams.

■ In *Black Life on the Mississippi: Slaves, Free Blacks, and the Western Steamboat World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, 272 p., hardcover, \$32.50), Thomas C. Buchanan explores the relationship between slavery, freedom, and America's greatest

river. A counternarrative to Twain's well-known tale of life from the pilothouse, *Black Life on the Mississippi* reveals the world below decks and along the river, where grueling labor ruled. Through the stories of enslaved and free workers and their ingenuous networking between South and North, Buchanan sheds new light on the ways African Americans resisted slavery and developed a vibrant culture and economy along the mighty Mississippi.

■ The James J. Hill Library announces a new round of grants (up to \$2,000) to support research in the James J. Hill, Louis W. Hill, and Reed/Hyde papers. The deadline for applications is November 1, 2005. For more information, contact W. Thomas White, curator, James J. Hill Library, 80 W. Fourth St., St. Paul, MN 55102, 651-265-5441, or email twhite@jjhill.org.

■ The peripatetic study *On Foot: A History of Walking* (New York: New York University Press, 2004, 342 p., hardcover, \$29.95) by Joseph A. Amato surveys bipedalism and its impact on human society over the centuries. Amato ably guides readers on a journey that covers migrating humans, marching Roman legions, trekking medieval pilgrims, strolling courtiers, ambling window shoppers, and suburban mall walkers while exploring how advances like paved roads, carriages, and cars have altered lives and societies. *On Foot* is an expansive and illuminating field trip, complete with rest stops for little-known facts about an everyday activity many of us take for granted.

■ "We didn't have a plan for failure. . . . There was always something that kept us afloat," says a citizen whose activism helped revitalize Duluth in the 1970s. His voice captures the spirit of *The Will and the Way*, compiled and published by Manley Goldfine and Donn Larson (Duluth, 2004, 331 p., paper, \$26.95 plus \$4.50 shipping), a rousing compilation of 40-plus civic achievements that led to Duluth's extraordinary evolution over the

last four decades. Everyday activism is the theme of this “how-to” on community achievement, written by those who took part in transformative projects, such as the creation of the now-legendary Grandma’s Marathon and establishment of the techno-savvy University of Minnesota-Duluth library.

The *Duluth News Tribune* recently editorialized that the book’s “biggest sales really ought to come from outside Duluth—people in struggling cities throughout the country having trouble adapting to the 21st century. They can learn from it.” The successes covered, accompanied by photos and quotations, leave a record intended to inspire a new generation of leaders.

Orders and inquires should be directed to Valerie Jerome, Suite 405, 525

Lake Avenue South, Duluth, 55802; 218-727-0461 or vjerome@chartermi.net.

■ A parent’s worst nightmare—a child murdered, the killer at large—unfolds in John S. Munday’s *Justice for Marlys: A Family’s Twenty-Year Search for a Killer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, 200 p., cloth, \$22.95). In a case that appeared on *48 Hours*, 18-year-old Marlys Wohlenhaus was murdered in her Afton home in May 1979 by serial killer Joseph Ture Jr., who initially escaped justice with a seemingly airtight alibi. The steps that members of Marlys’s family took to revive a cold case and eventually see Ture convicted—as well as their grief and eventual healing—are related in this terrifying yet ultimately empowering book.

■ Just in time for summer travels: *Lake Superior: The Ultimate Guide to the Region* (2005, 320 p., paper, \$16.95) is the newest offering from Lake Superior Port Cities, publisher of *Lake Superior Magazine*. Author Hugh E. Bishop, for a decade the primary researcher for the annual *Lake Superior Travel Guide*, offers additional history and tidbits in this comprehensive volume. Organized alphabetically, complete with maps, photos, and directory information, this “ultimate guide” will help visitors plan and enjoy their journeys on and around the lake. It is available from the publisher: PO Box 16417, Duluth, MN, 55816-0417, telephone 888-244-5253; add \$6.95 for shipping and handling.

■ Glenda Riley’s *Confronting Race: Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1815-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004, 352 p., cloth, \$39.95, paper, \$21.95) updates her path-breaking 1984 volume *Women and Indians on the Frontier*. Deepening her analysis through readings of diaries and journals kept by trail women, settlers, army wives, and missionaries, Riley explores white women’s preconceived notions about themselves and the stereotypes they perpetuated about their native neighbors. This revised edition benefits from two decades of shifts in western women’s history as well as from Riley’s evolving interpretations of the roles that gender, race, and class played in frontier settlement.

■ Investigative reporter Bruce Rubenstein reveals the seamy side of the North Star State in *Greed, Rage, and Love Gone Wrong: Murder in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, 232 p., cloth \$22.95). From the Red River Valley to Minneapolis’s Hennepin Avenue, Rubenstein recounts ten murders in vivid detail, including the story of the O’Kasick brothers’ cop-killing crime spree in the 1950s, the notorious Congdon mansion murders in Duluth in the 1970s, and the random killings in northeast Minneapolis committed by two drifters in 1998. This chilling collection of true-crime tales places readers at the scene of the state’s most notorious murders.

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