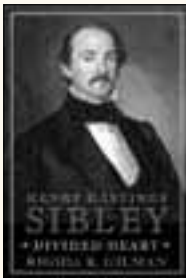


Henry Hastings Sibley: Divided Heart

By Rhoda R. Gilman

(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2004. 286 p. Cloth, \$32.95.)



Gilman, the author of a number of histories, examines Sibley's life as a "businessman, territorial representative, treaty negotiator, state governor, military leader, writer, and elder statesman." Born in Detroit in 1811, Sibley clerked under Robert Stuart of the American Fur Company and joined Ramsay Crooks as a junior partner in the Western Outfit. He located his headquarters across the Minnesota River from Fort Snelling. Various bands of Dakota lived nearby, and in 1837 Sibley represented mixed-blood families in treaty negotiations. Several years later, he fathered a daughter named Helen with a Dakota woman. As the fur trade declined, Sibley invested in lumber mills, steamboats, railroads, and town sites. Five years after his marriage to Sarah Jane Steele in 1843, he was elected territorial delegate to Congress. Sibley declared himself to be "a Democrat of the Jeffersonian school," but his other political principles remain largely unexplored.

Sibley was a man torn between two worlds. According to Gilman, he believed that Western civilization "was a force for good, set in motion by a Christian God. Still, he had misgivings about its course." He warned Congress that the federal government needed to conciliate the tribes with "real friendship or you must very soon suffer the consequences of a bloody and remorseless Indian war." Sibley's motives upon returning to Minnesota, however, were not entirely altruistic. His trading business was crumbling under the weight of debts owed by Indians and mixed-blood trappers. During the treaty negotiations at Traverse des Sioux in 1851, he encouraged the Dakota to seek a large monetary settlement in an effort to bail out his company. The treaty ultimately reimbursed Sibley and other white traders most of the \$275,000 provided the Indians "to settle their affairs." Additionally, Helen received one of the allotments earmarked for mixed-bloods.

Gilman attempts to draw a sharp distinction between Sibley and Governor Lewis Cass, superintendent of Indian affairs for Michigan Territory. "An heir to the Indian policy of Lewis Cass, who had managed to dispossess the Great Lakes tribes without war, Sibley belonged to the generation that was left to pay the final price of that betrayal." Cass reportedly believed that appropriating tribal hunting grounds by "whatever means would not only fulfill God's obvious program for fertile acres; it would contribute ultimately to the

Indians' own good by forcing them to turn to agriculture," Gilman states. In reality, Cass was a religious skeptic unmotivated by divine plans, but he did believe that the only humane solution for the Indians was acculturation. In 1821 at Chicago, to cite a typical example, Cass and Solomon Sibley (Henry's father) negotiated a treaty that included 20 years of annuities and agricultural supports.

Sibley clearly shared Cass's ethnocentric perspective. "Like the rest of the country, he never questioned the moral superiority of European civilization and he saw assimilation with it as uplifting the 'savage.'" Sibley therefore pressured the Dakota to cede much of southern Minnesota under "a cloud of deceit and broken promises." Although Sibley (unlike Cass) was a practicing Christian, the only other major difference between them appears to be that neither Cass nor his children profited directly from treaty negotiations.

Sibley returned to the political arena and served a lackluster term as Minnesota's first governor. During the Civil War, he did not seek a military commission because "he held to a conviction that the carnage might have been avoided." And yet, as the sectional debates in Congress had raged over the Compromise of 1850, Sibley complained that the struggle over slavery "made it nearly impossible to draw attention to any other public issues."

In the summer of 1862, the Dakota War erupted. Governor Alexander Ramsey appointed Sibley a colonel in the state militia and commander of the Indian expedition. Upon viewing the mutilated bodies of white settlers, Sibley echoed the hatred directed at all natives during these hostilities: "Oh, the fiends, the devils in human shape!" The dilatory pursuit of Little Crow's warriors led many volunteers to desert, and although Sibley's force eventually pushed the remnants of the Dakota across the Missouri River, a lack of logistical planning prevented further pursuit. Promoted to brigadier general in the regular army, Sibley subsequently oversaw the hanging of nearly 40 captured Dakota. Summarizing his military exploits, Gilman pithily notes that Sibley "was indeed no soldier."

For the remaining decades of his life, Sibley generally focused on business interests and civic affairs. A few months before his death in 1891, he remarked, "I have been thinking over my life and have decided that it is well nigh a failure." This comprehensive biography refutes that assessment, although it does not fully reveal Sibley as "a complex and deeply human individual." There are references to his business associates attending temperance meetings, for instance, but no mention is made of Sibley's drinking or other personal habits. More significantly, Gilman does not delve deeply into the political and motivating factors that influenced his public life. An acknowledged lack of family corre-

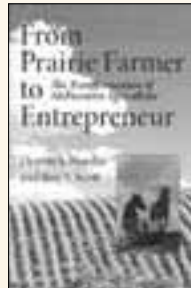
spondence undoubtedly was a serious obstacle faced by the author, but the Henry Hastings Sibley that emerges from this study remains an enigma.

Reviewed by Willard Carl Klunder, associate professor of history at Wichita State University and the author of Lewis Cass and the Politics of Moderation (1996).

From Prairie Farmer to Entrepreneur: The Transformation of Midwestern Agriculture

By Dennis Nordin and Roy V. Scott

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. 356 p. Cloth, \$65.00.)



When you fly over the Midwest in a small airplane, you are struck by the changing land-use patterns. In rural areas it is easy to see the variations produced by rainfall, soils, cropping patterns, and irrigation systems. Traveling from Ohio to the western Dakotas, or from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan to the Bootheel of Missouri, you see both great variability and the dominance of a few crops—especially corn and soybeans. Authors Nordin and Scott do an excellent job of portraying both the variability and the consistency of the USDA-defined 12 states of the Midwest. But this book is most useful in the way it allows the reader to “fly” across space *and* time, somewhat like the protagonist in H. G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*. The authors do an excellent job of fulfilling their subtitle, exploring the transformation of midwestern agriculture in the twentieth century.

Using extensive data, they present a compelling portrait of how agriculture in this region changed from being dominated by subsistence in 1900 to an industrial model in 2000. The book does a first-rate job of tracing the evolution of technology, changes in crop and animal production, the impact of federal agricultural policies, the often unintended effects of federal non-agricultural policies on midwestern farming, changes in farm enterprise structure and size, and the alterations in labor and capital patterns in the region’s farming. Given the heavy focus on data and systems that are somewhat unique to agriculture, the book will not be an easy read for some. But its portrait of a region and a sector in change makes the read worth the effort.

While the book gets positive marks for its rigor and attention to detail, there are three ways in which it is less satisfying. In the introduction, John Lee, former head of the Economic Research Service at USDA, praises the authors for taking on the romantic notions of the family farm, often

lumped into what some call “agrarian fundamentalism.”

The book is worthy of this praise, as it does an excellent job of de-romanticizing the many hardships farm families experienced, especially prior to 1945. But the authors seem unaware that they have fallen into a similar trap of what might be called “industrial fundamentalism.” The book conveys that Jefferson was wrong and Adam Smith was right, without acknowledging that the latter viewpoint is as much of a bias as the former.

Second, perhaps as a consequence of this unacknowledged “blind spot,” those that question the industrial model are largely dismissed as Luddites, muckrakers, or—even worse—ignored altogether. For example, reading the book gives one little understanding of the well-documented negative effects of draining many midwestern wetlands. Similarly, while the book quotes from a pro-industry CAST study on the positive effects of biotechnology, it ignores more critical work done by others like *Alternative Agriculture*, of the Institute of Agriculture.

Finally, the book’s last chapter makes two important but unsubstantiated claims. First, it states, “Whether by grand design, chance, or competition, the coinciding disappearance of and enlargement of farms have helped to make the North Central Region the global model of agricultural development.” This might be true for some areas in Argentina and Brazil, but is it true for Hungary, France, Chad, Japan, and Vietnam? There is no support for this bold claim except midwestern boosterism. In a book that is so careful with data, this is a disappointment. The final chapter also claims that the midwestern farmer is now about “entrepreneurial agriculture.” Unfortunately, the authors don’t define what they mean by entrepreneurship. This chapter does a nice job of providing evidence that new, more specialized alternative forms of farming are emerging in the Midwest, but it is ironic that the examples used to justify the entrepreneurship claim have little to do with the industrial-production model of the region’s dominant crops of corn and soybeans. If entrepreneurship is on the rise, it is outside the mainstream promoted as “the global model of agricultural development.”

While these concerns are serious, they do not negate the overall careful documentation and analysis the book represents. It is worth a read by persons interested in midwestern history or agricultural development.

Reviewed by Karl N. Stauber, Ph.D., president of the Northwest Area Foundation based in St. Paul. (The opinions expressed in this review are his own.) He served in several senior positions at USDA during the Clinton administration and has written extensively on rural development and natural resource policy issues.

Flood Stage and Rising

By Jane Varley

(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. 128 p. Cloth, \$20.00.)



Unlike other natural disasters like earthquakes and typhoons, a flood fascinates because it is the familiar transformed into a monster. Jane Varley catches exactly this metamorphosis in her memoir, *Flood Stage and Rising*, when she describes the view from a dike she's shoring up with sandbags shortly before the waters crest. "The river, usually a sedate stream you could ignore thirty feet below, was only an arm's length away. . . . Large icebergs cruised past. The bluish reflection of the floodlights showed a river that looked a mile wide." When the Red River of the North burst its banks in the spring of 1997, it submerged most of Grand Forks, North Dakota, and forced the evacuation of thousands. Nobody drowns, unlike the more recent disaster in New Orleans, yet lives are uprooted, including the author's. Despite this uprooting, or perhaps because of it, Varley's account of the flood never loses its tone of breathless excitement.

Varley had moved to Grand Forks from Virginia with her husband the year before to attend graduate school. She retains the newcomer's delight in a new landscape, a landscape so flat and full of sky it seemed mainly a stage for grand acts of weather. She looks forward to "wintering" and notes how the local newspaper names the blizzards like hurricanes. That winter the blizzards drop 100 inches of snow, three times the normal amount. In spring, the Red River rises until it becomes "a lake ten miles wide moving north." The river crests at over 54 feet, two feet above the protecting dikes, and the city floods. Driving east to higher ground, Varley observes how the square fields have become an inland sea, which she calls the ghost of glacial Lake Agassiz.

When Varley and her husband evacuate, their view of the flood, along with most of the nation's, is limited to news-

paper accounts and television. Yet even these glimpses are arresting: downtown Grand Forks on fire even as it drowns in floodwater. For three weeks the refugees camp out in Minnesota and imagine what's been lost. But when they return and Varley finds her apartment dry, she's strangely disappointed. She had wanted to be "swept away in a flood as though God had come down and made a change. Nature would change my life."

Just as she'd joined a sandbag crew trying to outrace the river's crest, on her return Varley volunteers for an oral history project to collect stories of the flood. This seems a promising development, blending the author's account with others, but ultimately she rejects the idea and the book turns more inward. Instead of other people's stories, she offers eight short inter-chapters, entitled "My Waters," that recall her memories of other rivers and lakes. These are meant to serve as tributaries to the flood narrative but feel more like forced portages the reader must undertake to get back to the main current.

Varley's memoir is not strictly about the flood but about the transforming possibilities of place. This is the oldest of American themes: Change your life by changing your address. In recounting previous moves from Iowa to Virginia and finally to North Dakota, the author poses the question of how often this magic can occur. It's a little like asking whether you get to fall in love only once in a lifetime. When a visiting novelist proclaims: "Rootlessness is an American disease," Varley cringes—and rightly so. The war of origins that writers wage over "sense of place" is both silly and goes against the grain of our national experience. What *Flood Stage and Rising* shows, especially in its early chapters, is how moving to a new landscape, even one as stark and raw-edged as North Dakota, can feel a lot like falling in love.

Reviewed by John Hildebrand, the author of three books, most recently A Northern Front: New and Selected Essays. He teaches English at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

■ The Solon J. Buck award for the best article published in *Minnesota History* during 2004 has been won by Laura Weber, director of communications at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities General College. Her article, “The House that Bullard Built” (Summer 2004), examines the social and architectural legacy of African American bricklayer and stonemason Casiville Bullard. In recounting the story of Bullard’s long career in Minnesota, the article illuminates how strands of labor, African American, family, and social history intertwine.

The Theodore C. Blegen Award for the best article by a Minnesota Historical Society staff member goes to Benjamin Filene for his *Open House Journal* essays “A Vision of History” and “Telling Their Story” (Summer and Winter, 2004). The second and third in a series of four essays about the development of the *Open House* exhibit, these pieces ponder the intangibles of stories, memory, change, and what it means to belong—to a family, a neighborhood, a place. (The fourth

essay appears in this issue, and the exhibit opens January 14 at the History Center.) Filene is senior exhibit developer at the MHS.

This year’s judges were Brenda Child, associate professor of American Studies at the University of Minneapolis-Twin Cities, and Robert Horton, acting director of library, publications, and collections at the Minnesota Historical Society. Each award includes a prize of \$600.

■ Diving deep into the lake, *Shipwrecks of Lake Superior* brings readers into the hidden world of sunken ships—their treasures and their stories (Duluth: Lake Superior Port Cities, 2005, 119 p., paper, \$19.95). This collection of essays, edited by James R. Marshall, includes intense, first-hand accounts detailing the time before, during, and after shipwrecks. Updated underwater photography, the story of the wreck of the U.S. Coast Guard *Mesquite* and a review of the major theories on the sinking of the *Edmund Fitzgerald* are new to this second edition.

With magazine-sized pages and full-color photos of underwater scenes, maps, and ships, this book is guaranteed to entertain and inform.

■ From wagons to diesel trucks, historian Virginia Brainard Kunz takes her readers on a ride with the Murphy family business. Her book *Bought 2 Horses & A Wagon: The Story of the Murphy Companies, 1904–2004* (St. Paul: Ramsey County Historical Society, 2004, 199 p., hardcover, \$26.00) is an excellent example of how to connect company and family history. Beginning with Edward L. Murphy Sr., a team of horses, and a wagon, the book chronicles important business events and behind-the-scenes history, as well. The company has traveled a long way from its meager start in 1904 to its current position in the warehousing and trucking industry. Even a casual glance at this handsome book shows the firm’s evolution through black-and-white and color pictures of warehouses, equipment, and management.



This year, the Minnesota Historical Society launched a long-term project to preserve and present the history of “Minnesota’s Greatest Generation,” the men and women who grew up during the Great Depression and came of age during World War II. This essay is the first in a series that will spotlight the experiences of generation members from all walks of life. For more on the MHS project, visit www.mngreatestgeneration.org.

Russ Gunvalson, POW

Russ Gunvalson (born 1923) of Rochester served with an army field artillery unit. Along with thousands of other American troops in Belgium, he was captured in late December 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge. The Germans transported many of these POWs in railroad boxcars with small, barbed-wire-covered openings to permanent camp locations.

Although he was packed in with other men, freezing cold, hungry, and wondering what lay ahead, Russ was still able to experience a positive moment:

Christmas Eve, [the Germans] came in and gave us a loaf of bread for six men. . . . We sat there, and we knew it was Christmas Eve. The snow had fallen all day and it was so nice and bright and the moon was out and church bells were ringing. Way back in the end of the boxcar was this young man, Ray Brown from Idaho. He was kind of like a chaplain. He led us in prayer, and we started singing Christmas carols, and we just sang what we could . . . until later on in the evening. About the last one was “Silent Night”. . . . I don’t think any of us ever got through it. It was so still in that boxcar, and it was still in all the boxcars. There was not one word. It was just complete silence.

Russ spent the next three months in several German POW camps. When liberated, he recalls, “I was nothing but skin and bones.”

—Thomas Saylor



■ A collection made for pop culture fans who know that stars aren't always born in Hollywood, *Famous Minnesotans: Past and Present* (Minneapolis: Nodin Press, 2005, 138 p., paper, \$19.95) showcases a well-selected array of sports, television, film, political, industry, and literary icons from the Land of 10,000 Lakes. Through black-and-white photographs, informative biographies, and handy sidebars, Dan Flynn presents a series of portraits featuring Minnesota's best and brightest. Included are world-class celebrities, such as Bob Dylan, Judy Garland, Kirby Puckett, Louie Anderson, the Andrews Sisters, Prince, and Winona Ryder, as well as great luminaries, such as Charles Lindbergh, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sigurd Olson, Paul Wellstone, and James J. Hill.

As newsman Don Shelby asserts in the foreword, with over 100 illustrated biographies featuring details both familiar and obscure, *Famous Minnesotans* "will fill dull evenings at cocktail parties with hours of facts about famous people who came from the same place you do."

■ Comprised of two essays, poetry, diary entries, and pictures, *Summers by Lake Chisago* by John T. Flanagan and Moira F. Harris shows life in Chisago City from the late 1920s to the 1950s (St. Paul: Pogo Press, 2005, 95 p., paper, \$14.95). Flanagan's "Diary of an Ordinary Man (1929-1946)" conveys details of family life and also social commentary, as he writes of subjects such as Howard Hughes, legislation, Sinclair Lewis,

weather, war, payment plans, and nature. "Chisago: A Poem" reflects on the growth and changes of a place, and the final piece, "The Cottage," by his daughter Moira Harris, explores memories linked to the building, still in her family today.

■ For Minnesotans who dream on those long winter nights of getting back to the lake, here's just the book: *Wild Minnesota, A Celebration of Our State's Natural Beauty* (Stillwater, MN: Voyageur Press, 2005, 160 p., cloth, \$29.95). This handsome volume takes the casual reader to Minnesota's beautiful natural places—the North Shore and river country, the prairie lands and lake district. In celebrating this natural abundance, however, it shows a picture of the state that is nearly devoid of human interaction. It may be an imagined Minnesota, but it looks like Eden nonetheless. The text by Shawn Perich plays off the photography of Gary Alan Nelson and reminds readers of the state's legacy of conservation.

■ William Durbin's latest novel, *The Darkest Evening* (New York: Orchard Books, 2004, 240 p., hardcover, \$15.95) vividly recounts the horrors experienced in the U.S.S.R. by Finnish American families caught in the paranoid web of Stalinist Russia. The story is revealed through the experiences of a baseball-loving teenager forced to leave the Mesabi Iron Range and the only life he knows when his parents are caught up in the Karelia Fever that swept across the upper Great Lakes in the 1930s. Because the story is told from a child's perspective, it powerfully reveals the irrational nature of the Karelian experiment and helps the reader understand the helplessness that those idealistic Finnish Americans must have felt as their dream of a workers' paradise shattered under the heel of the KGB's boots. The story of this Finnish immigrant family began in *Song of Sampo Lake* and will conclude in a tale about the Winter War in Finland. The books are intended for young people, but adults will find the stories compelling as well. *The Darkest Evening* won the 2005 Minnesota Book Award for children's fiction.

MINNESOTA HISTORY

Publisher, *Gregory M. Britton*; Editor, *Anne R. Kaplan*; Design and Production, *Percolator*

Minnesota History is published quarterly and copyright 2005 by the Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. West, St. Paul, MN 55102-1906; www.mnhs.org. Membership in the Society includes a subscription to *Minnesota History*. Basic individual memberships are \$55.00; for information, write the Membership Office at the address above or at membership@mnhs.org. Subscriptions to *Minnesota History* are \$20.00 per year. Back issues are \$5.00 each plus tax and \$2.75 postage; add 50¢ for each additional copy; call 651-297-3243 or 1-800-647-7827. Magazine text is available in alternative format from the editor.

Minnesota History welcomes the submission of articles and edited documents dealing with the social economic, political, intellectual, and cultural history of the state and the surrounding region.

The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

The Code below indicates that copying beyond that permitted by Section 107 or 108 of the U.S. Copyright Laws requires the copier to pay the stated per copy fee through the Copyright Clearance Center, Danvers, MA, 978-750-8400 or www.copyright.com. This consent does not extend to other kinds of copying, such as copying for general distribution, for advertising or promotional purposes, for creating new collective works, or for resale. ISSN 0026-5497-05/0016-\$0+\$1.00.

Periodicals postage paid at St. Paul, MN. Postmaster: Send address changes to Membership Office, 345 Kellogg Blvd. West, St. Paul, MN 55102-1906. Publication number 351660.

Printed on recycled paper with soy ink.



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

OFFICERS David A. Koch, *President*; Brenda J. Child, *Vice-President*; Martha H. Kaemmer, *Vice-President*; William R. Stoeri, *Vice-President*; Eleanor C. Winston, *Vice-President*; Nina M. Archabal, *Secretary*; Peter R. Reis, *Treasurer*

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL Abbot Aptor, Sharon Avent, Diane Berthel, Brenda J. Child, Judith S. Corson, Mark E. Davis, Ram Gada, James T. Hale, Margaret Johnson, Martha H. Kaemmer, Jayne B. Khalifa, David A. Koch, David M. Larson, Mary Mackbee, Susan B. McCarthy, Pierce A. McNally, William C. Melton, Robert W. Nelson, Richard Nicholson, Dale Olseth, Peter R. Reis, William R. Stoeri, Edward C. Stringer, Paul Verret, Eleanor C. Winston, Edward J. Zapp

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS Tim Pawlenty, *Governor*; Carol Molnau, *Lieutenant Governor*; Mary Kiffmeyer, *Secretary of State*; Mike Hatch, *Attorney General*; Patricia Anderson, *State Auditor*



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).