

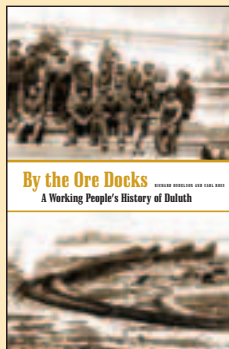
By the Ore Docks: A Working People's History of Duluth

Richard Hudelson and Carl Ross

(*Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. 336 p. Paper, \$18.95.*)

Professor Richard Hudelson and his collaborator Carl Ross have turned out an informative, well-written case study of the Communist party at work in the labor movement of a U.S. city—Duluth, Minnesota. In the preface, Hudelson explains that he wants to contribute to the debate about the nature of the CPUSA. To what extent was it a part of a broad, populist tradition of American social activism, and to what extent did it undermine U.S. democracy by serving the agenda of the Soviet Union? Looking carefully into this microcosm, he comes down in the first camp: the CPUSA expressed the urgencies of working-class people (many of them recent immigrants), especially in the desperate conditions of the Great Depression. In one of those ironies of scholarship, the publication of this book coincided with the donation of the CPUSA's archives to New York University. Those archives surely contain much material on the Twin Ports and will shed more light on Hudelson's central question when they are available to the public.

The authors' approach has a delightful freshness. Hudelson assumes nothing about the reader's prior knowledge of U.S. labor history and so presents clean, simple explanations of complex topics. For example, his treatment of the "Americanization" of the wave of immigrants that arrived in the early 1900s is engaging. He points out two distinct approaches toward Americanization: one that would "eliminate the use of foreign languages, the foreign press, and all traces of loyalty to the homeland from the hearts of the foreign born" and the other that "valued diversity and aimed to preserve the cultural identity of the immigrant within the naturalized citizen." Following this "kinder, gentler understanding of Americanization," he traces the work of the YWCA, the YMCA, the International Institute, and the social settlements in Duluth. He explores how immigrant women were encouraged to practice traditional crafts and ethnic cooking, as well as how civic clubs of "hyphenated Americans" were developed for immigrant men. And he goes on to examine the backlash against immigration in the form of the Ku Klux Klan, which was also quite active in Duluth. In this examination of Americanization, the hand of co-author Carl Ross can be seen. Ross himself lived this



story, being the son of Finnish immigrants and growing up in Superior, Wisconsin. Ross, who directed the 20th Century Radicalism in Minnesota Project of the Minnesota Historical Society, had a great gift of objectivity about his own life and could see it in broader historical context.

The real drama of the book lies in the final three chapters, in which Hudelson details the rise and fall of the Popular Front in Duluth. During the Popular Front years (1935–48), the CPUSA exerted its greatest influence in the labor movement and the Farmer-Labor party. Once again, Hudelson outlines in simple, accessible language the convoluted political flip-flops of the Communist party and their destructive effects on coalitional politics. His description of the pressures on Congressman John Blatnik and labor leader Earl Bester to abandon their Communist allies in the crucial election of 1948 is particularly illuminating. One can wince along with everyone, including Hubert Humphrey, who reacted with understandable rage to a Popular Front leaflet calling him a phony liberal and sell-out as he ran for a seat in the U.S. Senate that fall. Drawing extensively from the personal papers of Earl Bester, Hudelson traces the exact moves through which the Duluth Congress of Industrial Organizations, Steelworkers Union, and Democratic-Farmer-Labor party removed from power the very people who had organized these groups.

This book is richly illustrated with photographs, leaflets and broadsides, and political cartoons. Thankfully, these are scattered throughout, underlining the narrative on the pages, rather than appearing together in the center. For readers familiar with Duluth, the photographs of freighters, factories, grain elevators, and the often grubby and tired-looking people who worked in them will excite a lot of interest.

There are many other good things to report about this book, such as the inclusion of women both as workers and as activists; the fascinating treatment of the temperance movement and its relationship to organized labor; and the honest assessment of white racism against African Americans and Native Americans by workers and bosses alike. The best summary, of course, is "Read it!"

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, Winter 1999), and "Catheryne Cooke Gilman: Social Worker" in Women of Minnesota: Selected Biographical Essays, (1977).

Finding Betty Crocker: The Secret Life of America's First Lady of Food

Susan Marks

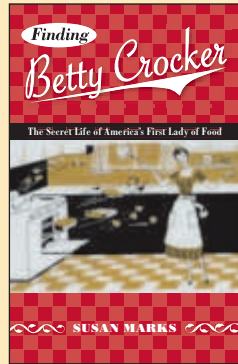
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. 274 p. Paper, \$15.95.)

Just about all that remains of Betty Crocker is her signature inside General Mills' red-spoon corporate logo, but not so long ago she was one of the most popular women in America. For homemakers from the 1920s through the post-World War II era, Betty Crocker was a very real part of life, helping them through good times and bad.

As Susan Marks relates, some women were so admiring that they burst into tears upon discovering, while touring the Betty Crocker Kitchens in Minneapolis, that she wasn't a real person. Their confusion is a piece of cake to understand, for not only did Betty's face grace magazine advertising and packaging, but she also hosted a radio program broadcast live on stations from coast to coast. She gave movie stars cooking tips when she visited Hollywood. Betty even appeared on the George Burns and Gracie Allen television program, a show where real people played themselves in idealized home situations. No wonder visitors to the test kitchens expected to meet her.

Mark's book, newly available in paperback, is filled with personalizing anecdotes and is well illustrated with archival photographs and advertising pieces. She sorts out Betty's life and her impact on both the Gold Medal flour business and homemakers across the country. Betty Crocker sprang to life as the answer to a public relations man's worst nightmare, a promotion that was too good. In 1921 Washburn Crosby flour mills received 30,000 entries in a puzzle contest. Many of them were accompanied by baking queries. Company policy was to answer every consumer question. Rather than sign the letters himself, advertising manager Samuel Gale added a new member to his all-male department—Betty Crocker, named after William Crocker, recently retired company director. Her first name was selected because it sounded cheery.

Betty soon took on a very full life of her own, answering letters and presenting Gold Medal flour products and ways to use them in magazine advertising. As new mass media developed, Betty Crocker jumped right in to take full advantage of improved ways to reach her audience. In 1924 when Washburn Crosby bought a failed Minneapolis radio station, one of the first in the country, the company received new



call letters to reflect its name: WCCO. Betty's home-service program was one of the first on the channel. Her Cooking School of the Air soon followed, complete with a series of lessons to be returned by mail. The million graduates even received diplomas.

Marks introduces us to the women who took on Betty's persona in public and highlights the work of the scores of trained home economists who answered homemakers' letters and developed and perfected Betty's "Triple Tested" recipes. Marks begins each of her seven chapters with a recipe.

The Secret Life is at its best when describing the interrelationship between Betty Crocker and her legions of followers, especially during the Great Depression and World War II. Marks explains just how tough times were: Between 1929 and 1932 average American household income fell 40 percent. Really desperate housewives wrote in for help and to thank Betty not only for her recipes, but also for her "inspiration." As one said, "Your talks, Betty Crocker, have given me hope."

During World War II, rationing changed the way Americans ate, and Betty's recipes led the way. One wartime cookbook distributed at company expense held 52 menus, 226 recipes, and 369 tips. Almost seven million Americans received a copy.

With the armistice, Betty's government service came to an end. Corporate changes and new opportunities were in the wind, and once again Betty took the lead. After investing 30 years and \$100 million building Betty Crocker's image and reputation, the company, now known as General Mills, issued the first Betty Crocker cookbook. A few years later, the company introduced cake mixes for those who did not have time to bake from scratch. As Marks explains, Betty's signature on the package helped ease the way to acceptance among a skeptical public.

The real secret of Betty's life was the sincerity and good will instilled in her at the very beginning and the trust she earned from people everywhere as she represented General Mills and its products to the nation. For some, the company was hers. Belief in her became belief in the company's products. Maybe she was real after all.

Reviewed by Rae Katherine Eighmey, winner of Minnesota History's Solon J. Buck award for her 2006 article "Food Will Win the War: Minnesota Conservation Efforts, 1917-1918." The author of two books combining food and history—A Prairie Kitchen and Hearts & Homes, Eighmey is currently working on two books for Minnesota Historical Society Press.

OUR READERS WRITE:

Dennis Gimmestad of the State Historic Preservation Office updated an article from our Summer 2006 issue.

“Rhoda Gilman’s article, ‘Kensington Runestone Revisited’ (Summer 2006), refers to the establishment of Runestone Park in Alexandria in 1951. Indeed, in that year the Minnesota Highway Department and the Alexandria Kiwanis Club created a roadside park at the eastern edge of the city. A replica of the Kensington stone, made of Cold Spring granite and five times the size of the original, was erected as the focal point of the park.

“Of late, another runestone park is receiving considerable attention. In 1972 Douglas County established Kensington Runestone County Park about 12 miles southwest of Alexandria and 3 miles north of Kensington. At its core is the farm of Swedish immigrants Olof and Karin Ohman, where the stone was unearthed in 1898. After its discovery, the stone traveled to various locations until it found a permanent home at the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce in 1928. During this period, the Ohman farm was a focus of attention for both curious onlookers and serious scholars interested in the emerging debate about the stone’s authenticity.

“In November 2006 Douglas County issued two new planning documents for the 193-acre park, which call for reorganization of road and trail circulation, increased emphasis on the preservation of the Ohman farmstead and the runestone discovery site, and upgraded interpretation of the park’s historic and natural resources.”

■ In *Baby Dragons: The Story of Moorhead’s Campus School, 1888–1972* (Moorhead: Minnesota State University Moorhead, 2007, 193 p., paper, \$15.00), MSUM professor of Education Steve Grineski details how the innovative and progressive methods of this “training” school influenced the lives of future educators, the campus community, and the thousands of K-12 students who filled its laboratory classrooms. Accompanied by many black-and-white photographs of educators, students, and campus buildings, this book will be especially interesting to both alumni of the school and educational history scholars.

■ From the “be careful what you ask for” category: In the 1870s, the Minnesota Historical Society’s first librarian, J. Fletcher Williams, begged members to save and donate to the library ephemera from their daily lives. Everything “they do not care to preserve, such as pamphlets of

all kinds, documents, reports of institutions, catalogues, magazines, religious or political addresses and essays, almanacs, old city directories, and all other publications of that ephemeral nature, such as are usually *thrown into the waste basket*. . . . although not prized now, will become very scarce in a few years, and valuable for many reasons.” One such reason becomes clear in Moira Harris and Leo Harris’s *Minnesota on Paper: Collecting Our Printed History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, 243 p., paper, \$24.95). Paper ephemera—those things meant to be used and discarded—tell us much about consumer culture in Minnesota. From diner menus and advertising calendars to bumper stickers and grocery bags, ephemera is part of our business and artistic history, our political story, leisure pursuits, and social networks. Who knows? Maybe there is some future historical artifact in your recycling bin.

■ First published in 1975 as a small chapbook, a newly edited version of Anne Crooks’s *Tales of Spirit Mountain: A Narrative History of Duluth, Minnesota* is back in print with additional stories detailing the experiences of the Indian peoples and early white settlers who populated the Lake Superior region of northern Minnesota and Wisconsin from the sixteenth through the early-twentieth centuries (St. Paul: Prairie Smoke Press, 2006, 148 p., paper, \$16.95 plus \$3.00 postage and handling). Drawing on diaries, pioneer newspapers, and local histories, Crooks adopts a narrative non-fiction style to craft a collection of stories focused on what she terms the “ordinary people” of the region, whose lives are not normally covered in textbooks. Included are stories about explorers who helped found Duluth, a young Indian couple who suffer a star-crossed love, and a missionary wife who marvels at the development of her young children. This book can be ordered from the publisher, <http://www.prairiesmokepress.com/spirittales.html> or P.O. Box 436, Champlin, MN 55316.

■ Chapter by state chapter, Eric Dregni leads travelers—armchair or otherwise—to wonder at *Midwest Marvels: Roadside Attractions Across Iowa, Minnesota, the Dakotas, and Wisconsin* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006, 437 p., paper, \$17.95). Huge advertising icons, larger-than-life animals, quirky art installations, and noteworthy monuments such as the Sitting Bull bust in Mobridge, South Dakota, and the bones of Saint Peregrine at Saint John’s Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, populate the pages of this breezy guidebook. Locations and simple driving directions complete each descriptive entry.

■ Lewis and Clark aficionados who could not get to Chicago for the Newberry Library’s 2005–06 exhibition, *Lewis and Clark in Indian Country: 200 Years of American History*, can now pay a virtual visit to the show through its companion website: www.newberry.org/lewisandclark. Like the original exhibi-



tion, the site examines initial encounters and relations between the explorers and the Indians along their route, and it also examines the legacy of the “voyage of discovery” for both the United States and modern Native American communities.

■ *The Moments Lost: A Midwest Pilgrim's Progress* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, 468 p., cloth, \$26.00), a novel by Pulitzer Prize nominee Bruce Olds, traces the coming of age of Franklyn Shivs, a Wisconsin farm boy who makes good as a Chicago newsman. While covering an IWW-led copper mine strike in northern Michigan, Franklyn falls for “Fighting Annie,” an activist he

elevates in his reporting to almost folk-hero status. But when their relationship must go public, he finds himself at a crossroads that tests his politics, his loyalty, even his humanity.

■ Frontier schoolteacher Harriet Bishop wrote of a “half-breed girl . . . who could speak English, French and Sioux.” This single line inspired Norma Sommerdorf to imagine a life for this young teacher and translator, now lost to history. The result, *Red River Girl* (New York: Holiday House, 2006, 226 p., cloth, \$16.95, grades 5–8), is Josette Dupre’s journal begun on her thirteenth birthday. After her mother’s death, she cares for her younger siblings, assists in preserving the bounty of a buffalo hunt, and eventu-

ally finds her way to St. Paul, where she observes the everyday details of the rapidly growing town.

■ In *Around the Shores of Lake Superior: A Guide to Historic Sites* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007, 378 p., cloth, \$60.00, paper \$29.95) Margaret Beattie Bogue follows this great lake’s shoreline clockwise through Minnesota, Ontario, Michigan, and Wisconsin, evoking the richness of local history and highlighting hundreds of landmarks and points of interest. Essays on the Ojibwe, the French explorers, and industry on and around the lake give context to the region’s natural and human history. With 200 photographs and a foldout map, this updated and expanded second edition will enrich the appreciation of visitors and residents alike.

■ “What is basketry but art applied to the creation of household equipment?” asks Mary Dodds Schlick in her memoir, *Coming to Stay: A Columbia River Journey* (Portland: University of Oregon Press, 2007, 208 p., paper, \$22.50). Although Schlick left the Midwest in 1949 to live and work with her husband, a forester for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, on the Colville, Yakama, and Warm Springs reservations in Oregon and Washington, she draws us in with a midwestern appreciation for nature, culture, and human relationships. Her narrative resonates with the voices of the many West Coast indigenous friends she has made over the years as she attended weddings and funerals and as she learned to weave bags with bear grass and cornhusks.

Schlick’s passion for the construction and function of all types of basket forms led her to study the distinctive lunch baskets carried by the papermakers at the International Falls and Fort Frances, Ontario, mills during her annual summer stays on Rainy Lake. Her exhibit of these and related baskets made in the 1920s by local Ojibwe weavers opened in June 2007 at the Koochiching County Historical Museum in International Falls.

MINNESOTA HISTORY

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Movie Mystery



CALL IT THE CASE of the celluloid baby and the grumpy foot patrolman. Everything about this photograph raises intriguing questions. What was *The Birth of a Baby*? A movie, obviously, but was it really the talk of the town, as the poster suggests? Why is this well-bundled and well-fed police officer standing there, glaring at the camera as if he's just waiting for an excuse to pop the photographer in the kisser? When and where was the photo taken?

The Birth of a Baby was a Hollywood production that caused a minor nationwide ruckus in 1938—a bland, fictionalized story of a wife and husband awaiting the birth of their first child. Its main claim to fame: the final reel included footage of an actual birth. Egad!

What about the police officer? Although the quality of the photo is too poor to make out the name on his badge, the badge's shape and the buttons' design confirm that he was a member of the Minneapolis Police Department.

And the date? A partially visible poster in the alley reads "Jesse Owens." It turns out that Owens—"the world's fastest human"—appeared in a "double feature track and basketball show" at the Minneapolis Auditorium on March 9, 1938.

Given the general location (Minneapolis) and the general timeframe (March 1938), it's easy to pinpoint the spot at which this picture was taken. The building's stone-block



MHS COLLECTIONS

exterior confirms that we're looking at the Alvin Theater on North Seventh Street. (Want proof? Check out what's now known as the Shubert Theater, the structure that inched down Hennepin Avenue in 1999.) *The Birth of a Baby* opened at the Alvin on March 10, 1938, and played there for a week.

It's hard to say why this police officer is standing vigil outside the Alvin on this particular day. *The*

Birth of a Baby never generated the kind of controversy in Minneapolis that it did in New York (where it was banned) and other cities. He certainly wasn't there to control unruly mobs of outraged and scandalized citizens. There weren't any.

—DAVE KENNEY

Dave Kenney is the author of numerous books on Minnesota history, including Twin Cities Picture Show: A Century of Movie-going, forthcoming in November.



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