

## Land of Amber Waters: The History of Brewing in Minnesota

Doug Hoverson

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. 340 p. Cloth, \$39.95.)

*Land of Amber Waters* is a coffee table-type book with many nice illustrations. The book grew out of the author's discovery of different kinds of beer and his love of Minnesota history. In it, he presents a relationship between the importance of brewing to Minnesota and the importance of Minnesota brewing to brewing in general.



Hoverson begins with an introductory chapter on the brewing process. He stresses the role of water in changing the taste of beer and of Minnesota as an important barley-growing region. He discusses the alcoholic content of beer but does not acknowledge that while “extreme” brewers, who seek to push the envelope on high alcohol content, disclose this information, most mainstream companies, including Anheuser-Busch, do not.

Hoverson does a good job of detailing the early history of brewing in Minnesota and argues persuasively that the state's temperature favored lager beer, which needs to be cold while it ages. From the beginning of settlement, Minnesota breweries produced lager. And from almost the beginning, they faced competition from out-of-state breweries. When Minnesota was admitted to the Union in May 1858, the new state had at least 30 breweries.

Brewing became involved with the federal government earlier than many other industries. During the Civil War, the government imposed an excise tax on beer and many other products. According to Hoverson, many Minnesota breweries faced individual charges of tax evasion; nationally, however, the industry usually complied with the tax law, striving to have cordial relationships with revenue officials. The excise law appears to have had no ill effects on Minnesota breweries; all remained in business.

Hoverson also explores the impact of railroads on Minnesota brewing. Regional rail centers and cities along the lines could support more than one brewery. Although more remote municipalities did not have the population to support multiple breweries, the farther from a railroad station a town or city was, the more likely it was to have a local brew-

ery. Cities more than 12 hours away would not receive beer shipments, so local production was necessary.

*Land of Amber Waters* covers the rise of the temperance and prohibition movements and their impact on Minnesota breweries. By the turn of the nineteenth century, a primary focus of prohibitionists was the saloon. Nationwide, market conditions and intense competition had propelled many brewers into ownership of saloons. Minnesota breweries were no exception; in 1908 brewers owned 344 of Minneapolis's 432 saloons. August Schell Brewing, Minneapolis Brewing Company, and Hamm's Brewery were among Minnesota's largest producers prior to Prohibition. All survived and reopened following repeal. Only Schell, the country's second-oldest family-owned brewery, still operates, producing more than 40 different beers.

After detailing the history of Minnesota brewing, Hoverson devotes a section of the book to encyclopedic entries on breweries that “produced beer on their premises.” From 1849 to the present, the state has had 290 breweries and brewpubs; 270 have gone out of business. Minnesota never had as many breweries as neighboring Wisconsin; the high point for Minnesota—122 firms—was in 1875. Like many other areas of the country, only in the last 15 years has the number of breweries reached or surpassed repeal levels. Hoverson has done considerable research to unearth the history of “lost” breweries as well as the stories of more familiar firms such as Schell's. *Land of Amber Waters* also includes a directory of Minnesota brewpubs, which, of course, are of more recent origin.

The book contains many sidebars, which are stronger on description than analysis. They cover a variety of topics: the brewing process, breweriana—the collecting of beer ephemera—brewery architecture, advertising, and the preservation of breweries in the twenty-first century.

For much of American history, beer production and consumption was local. The midtwentieth century witnessed a concentration and nationalizing of the industry. As the century ended and the present one began, the country saw a rebirth of local brewing. *Land of Amber Waters* contributes to this larger story by detailing the history of Minnesota brewing.

*Reviewed by Amy Mittelman, who has written extensively on the liquor and beer industries in America. Her most recent publication is Brewing Battles: The United States Brewing Industry from the Colonial Period to the 21st Century (2007). She has a Ph.D. from Columbia University.*

## The Future City on the Inland Sea: A History of Imaginative Geographies of Lake Superior

Eric D. Olmanson

(Athens, OH: Ohio University Press,  
2007. 276 p. Cloth, \$27.00.)



Eric Olmanson's book has an ambitious title, yet its content is straightforward. The prologue starts with Indian nations, Jesuit missionaries, and French fur traders on the southern shore of Lake Superior and also discusses the First Annual Apostle Island Indian Pageant in 1924, which tried to promote tourism by selling "authentic history." The Introduction posits the author's ideas of "imaginative geographies" and compares the Great Plains to Lake Superior: The former was nationally important because settlers had to traverse the grasslands to get to the Pacific Coast; the latter was ignored because pioneers largely bypassed the northern Great Lakes.

Chapter 1, "Reconnaissance," explores how the French voyageurs commonly adopted or translated Indian place names for rivers, islands, points, or other landforms throughout the Great Lakes: today, 48 percent are in English; 40 percent, French; and 12 percent, Native American. The description of the French, British, and then American fur trading is very good, but how does this trade relate to the region's "imagined geography"?

Chapter 2, "Through the Poets' Eyes," quotes individuals such as Thomas McKenney and Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, who described the physical environment for the benefit of tourists. Distinctive places along the southern edge of Lake Superior are also described and located on a map. Schoolcraft's travels in the 1820s and McKenney's 1826 tour of Grand Sable, Picture Rocks, Keweenaw Peninsula, and the Ontonagon River are well recounted and pertinent to the book's theme. Similarly, Chapter 3, "Ordering the Landscape," does a good job of examining the Northwest Ordinance of 1785, nicely developing the three meanings of "ordinance" (survey, military force, and Manifest Destiny) to show the power of words in creating places.

Chapter 4, "Cities in the Wilderness," deals with six early townsites (from Duluth in 1854 to Hurley in 1885) on the west end of Lake Superior, providing details on the region's geology and prospects for mining and tourism. Effective photos of rock formations along the lake, waterfalls, camping, railroads running through scenic landscapes, and resort

hotels are reproduced to convey the "imagined" physical landscape as tourist attractions. But assertions like "Images such as Schoolcraft's and Owen's *surely* [italics added] inspired tourists to seek out such scenes for themselves," (pages 123–24) are really not knowable—and thus underscore the shortcomings of the book's narrative-descriptive approach.

Chapter 5, "The Frontier, the Future City, and the Wild West," effectively uses the region's newspapers to show how the media, from the 1870s to the 1930s, promoted economic development and city growth. Three "narrative" models are used: the future city, independence on the land, and the Wild West. A nice touch is the comparison of commercial boosterism to the "selling" of the frontier thesis by academic Fredrick Jackson Turner. Chapter 6, "Northern Exposure," reproduces bird's-eye views of Ashland, Superior, Bayfield, Washburn, and Hurley to show the visualization of "imagined" (distorted) yet real places. The "hellholes" and labor unrest of the southern lakeshore communities contrast with the idealized perspectives of these views. This is one of the best chapters in the book.

*Future City on the Inland Sea* documents the Europeanization of the United States on a regional scale, yet its subtitle, *A History of Imaginative Geographies of Lake Superior*, more accurately captures what this work is all about. Only two of the six chapters deal with urban themes, and the book is limited to the south shore of Lake Superior, excluding the north shore in Canada, where the boosterism of the USA was never practiced. I also want to differ with Yi-Fu Tuan's characterization of this book (from its jacket) as "a new regional geography." Rather, it is a comprehensive, detailed conventional historical geography. The layered thematic chapter topics represent "sequent occupancy" (as it was once called) that created the distinctive regional geography of the southern shoreline of Lake Superior. Historical geography has always been about setting history within specific places. Despite Olmanson's claim to show how language played a crucial role in place creation, the book is a thoroughly traditional historical geography, well written with ample quotes, figures, and references. His postmodern "imaginative geography" framework adds little to the actual analysis.

*Reviewed by Ingolf Vogeler, professor of human geography at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Among his many publications are Wisconsin: A Geography. His latest book, Critical Cultural Landscapes of North America, has just been finished.*

## OUR READERS WRITE:

*Bette Hillmeier of Renville County, who was vice president of the National Council of Catholic Women and a member of the planning commission for the 1977 St. Cloud Women's Meeting, contacted author Cheri Register after reading her article, "When Women Went Public: Feminist Reforms in the 1970s," in the Summer 2008 issue.*

"Thank you for your concise and accurate report of those years. I would most like to thank you for your report on the Minnesota's Women's Meeting in St. Cloud in 1977. Your research and assessment of the role of Catholic women in that meeting was accurate, except that we weren't present as anti-women, just anti-abortion. Most of all we were naive in the area of Parliamentary Procedure that related to large crowds and even larger issues. I think that you made that abundantly clear without insulting our intelligence. . . .

"The following November I was elected president of the National Council of Catholic Women and as such represented Catholic women in Houston and later at the Women's Meeting in Copenhagen. . . .

"Thank you again for reminding young women of the years and tears that women of my generation spent and wept so that they could have the freedom to do whatever their abilities allow them to do."

*In another letter, author Mary Lou Nemanic, associate professor of communications at Pennsylvania State University, Altoona, responds to David LaVigne's review of her book, One Day for Democracy: Independence Day and the Americanization of Iron Range Immigrants in the Spring 2008 issue.*

"Overall, David LaVigne seems confused by the distinctions between mass media and mass culture. I never simply suggested, 'Mass media caused class interests to decline during the Great Depression.' What I did contend is that commercialization transmitted by *mass culture* was being introduced to the remote Iron Range during the 1920s and 1930s and that its long-term homogenization effects contributed to the decline in labor activism by the 1950s. I argue this in my final chapter, not my Depression chapter, as Mr. LaVigne states.

"Notably, my Depression and early-twentieth-century chapters not only detail the growth of U.S. labor movements and the repression of labor radicalism prior to and during the 1930s but also focus on the effects of the failed 1916 Iron Range strike that drove labor organizing underground until the Wagner Act and other 1930s national labor initiatives allowed it to slowly resurface. Even then the strike's impact delayed region-wide unionization until the early 1940s.

"In addition, I did not present pie-eating competitions as sole direct evidence of working-class radicalism. I cite them to make the point that rowdy contests, rough games, and social inversions such as cross-dressing parodies are markers of the popular radicalism embedded in the vernacular festive style—a style that rejects the orderly and genteel activities favored by the middle class, such as bicycle riding, hot air ballooning, and regattas on Lake Superior.

"Finally, LaVigne's claim that I contradicted my own argument about social commentary and festive culture by stating that clown band members paraded for fun completely misconstrues my argument about humor and covert expressions of vernacular identity. I never stated that social commentary was the only form of popular radicalism. Instead, based on oral history evidence, regional histories, and documentary photography, I detailed how 'fun' for this clown band involves a disorderly parody of marching bands and bourgeois values of order and formality."

■ The Solon J. Buck award for the best article published in *Minnesota History* during 2007 has been won by Jane Lamm Carroll for "This Higgledy-Piggledy Assembly: The McLeods, an Anglo-Dakota Family in Early Minnesota," which appeared in the Summer issue of the magazine. Focusing on a Scots-Canadian fur trader, his young Anglo-Dakota wife, and the family they raised, the article examines the gradual but dramatic social, cultural, and economic shifts that by the 1860s had changed the world the family had known.

The Theodore C. Blegen Award for the best article by a Minnesota Historical Society staff member goes to senior exhibit developer Kate Roberts, whose article "Educated Food for Educated People: Richards Treat Cafeteria, 1924–1957" appeared in the Winter 2006–07 issue. Drawing on oral history, artifacts, published sources, and the voluminous manuscript records of this landmark Minneapolis eatery, the article shows how two home economics professors successfully put theory into practice, creating a long-lived institution and serving nutritious, homelike food while always keeping an eye on new trends, competition, and the bottom line.

This year's judges were Kurt Kortenhof, a history instructor at Saint Paul College and contributing editor to *The History Channel Magazine*, and Danielle Dart, public programs associate for the History Center at the Minnesota Historical Society. Each award includes a prize of \$600.

■ The history of a working fishing community comes alive in a collection of stories from those who made a life on a remote Lake Superior island. In *Island Folk: The People of Isle Royale* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 184 p., paper, \$16.95), Peter Okarinen gathers memories and candid photographs to illuminate the dramatic and sometimes life-and-death experiences of the unique individuals who chose to live in this beautiful and isolated setting. Back in print three decades after its first publication, this lively and charming book tells



of the island's transformation from quiet fishing village to national park haven.

■ Dr. Elden Lawrence, a retired professor and tribal college president, shares tales of the Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Reservation, of military service in Korea, of a hard life as a homeless alcoholic, and of personal redemption in *Stories and Reflections from an Indian Perspective* (Sioux Falls, SD: Pine Hill Press, 2008, 106 p., \$20.00). In one chapter, Lawrence describes an enlightening visit with a story-telling elder: "It was by sharing his foolish mistakes that he hoped the listener would not repeat them in his own life." With self-deprecating humor and an eye for the moral of the story, Lawrence offers his readers the same.



■ From "Doris Rubenstein's Infamous State-Fair Reject Authentic Kosher Dill Pickles" to somewhat less flamboyantly titled entries such as "Basic Cookie Dough" and "Whole Wheat Honey Bread," the Minnesota Sesquicentennial Cookbook Committee offers more than 200 pages of recipes from across the state in *Make It Minnesotan! Sesquicentennial Cookbook: 150 Years of Recipes and Stories from Minnesota Kitchens* (Minneapolis: Nodin Press, 2008, 221 p. hardcover, \$19.95). The book is divided into state regions, and each recipe within is attributed to its donor and his or her county. An index arranged by genre—appetizers through vegetables—helps cooks thread their way through the book.

■ Minnesota's capital city in all of its glory—from early days to the 1970s—comes alive in longtime local historian Steve Trimble's *Historic Photos of St. Paul* (Nashville: Turner Publishing, 2008, 206 p., cloth, \$39.95). While some of the iconic photos, from the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society and Ramsey County Historical Society, are well known and well loved, others capture the spirit of the city in unexpected ways.

The book's four chapters proceed by era from the River City (1840–1869) to the Modern Metropolis (1946–1970s); in each section a brief introduction sets the stage, and all photos have thoughtful captions. A comprehensive source list at the book's end makes it easy to locate the original photo in its repository. You might just want your own copy of those Hilex Drops marching past the Garrick Theater during Winter Carnival.

## MINNESOTA HISTORY

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MHS COLLECTIONS

## A Sweeping Fire



“DETROIT HAS MOST DISASTROUS FIRE IN THE HISTORY OF THE CITY,” exclaimed the headline in the *Detroit Record*, August 14, 1914. On the scene was John H. Horak, a bookkeeper in the town known today as Detroit Lakes. Taking advantage of this newsworthy event, Horak made a series of nine postcards to illustrate the catastrophe for his neighbors.

At the time, postcard photography was the photojournalism of rural areas. Small-town newspaper presses were not able to print photos alongside stories. But “real photo” postcards could be made almost in-

stantaneously if a photographer was set up to produce them on special postcard stock, pre-sensitized and ready for exposure to negatives. Dramatic views could be offered for sale within a day of an event.

And this event was spectacular. “A sweeping fire,” as some of the postcard captions describe it, damaged or destroyed 22 buildings. Ignited on the second floor of a livery barn, the fire proceeded to City Hall and the town’s blacksmith shops, lumberyards, opera house, hotel, and Security State Bank building, where Horak may have worked. You can see that the people on the street are captivated by the scene, wondering which building will go next. The spouting fire hose looks ineffectual,

but in fact the city’s water system rose to the challenge and extinguished the fire in record time. Detroit firefighters were assisted by the Frazee fire department, whose equipment was transported within a half hour by a Northern Pacific train that happened to be at Frazee when the call came in.

The newspaper account estimated \$100,000 in damages, including \$4,000 to Halvor Langslet’s dry goods store. Not to miss an opportunity, Langslet advertised a fire sale in the paper the very next day, as Johnny-on-the-spot as photographer Horak.

—BONNIE WILSON

*Bonnie Wilson, a frequent contributor, is author of Minnesota in the Mail: A Postcard History (2005).*