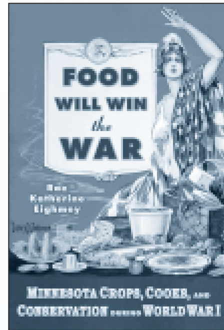
Food Will Win the War: Minnesota Crops, Cooks, and Conservation During World War I

Rae Katherine Eighmey

(St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010. 259 p. Paper, $19.95.)



These days, it seems we're all being urged to eat less meat and more vegetables, to find foods grown locally, and even to raise our own backyard chickens. This isn't the first time that Americans have heard this message, though, as Rae Katherine Eighmey ably demonstrates in her new book *Food Will Win the War: Minnesota Crops, Cooks, and Conservation during World War I*.

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, Americans voluntarily adjusted their diets to supply the troops fighting overseas with high-energy (read, all the good stuff: meat, wheat, sugar) foods. Federal food administrator Herbert Hoover encouraged families to practice patriotism by adopting "meatless Mondays" and "wheatless Wednesdays" in favor of rye, corn, and fish and by avoiding food waste as much as possible. It turns out that the origins of mom's exhortations to clean your plate may result from the Great War.

As a state heavily invested in food production, Minnesota is, in many ways, an ideal place to study war-driven conservation efforts. More than half the state's population was farmers, and food production, processing, and transportation were major state industries. All played an essential role in finding new ways to eat and to extend the harvest at a time when the nation needed food on an unprecedented scale.

Surprisingly, the program to conserve food for wartime relied on the patriotic good will of the people rather than strict mandates and orders. Hoover strongly believed that a voluntary commitment to the cause would be far more effective than any coercive measures. "We knew that, although Americans can be led to make great sacrifices, they do not like to be driven," Hoover later wrote of his technique. But that volunteerism did not come without a hardy dose of persuasion.

Using many of the fantastic period images produced by the U.S. Food Administration and its affiliated state and local organizations, Eighmey shows how the government mastered the propaganda game by combining patriotism with advertising. Conservation posters, events, booklets, displays, and signs effectively spread the message of sacrifice in the days before radio and television. Children, teachers, and women wearing the blue "kitchen warrior" uniforms of the Food Administration went door-to-door urging families to sign a pledge to conserve. Food conservation displays greeted shoppers at grocery and department stores. Newspapers and magazines featured articles and advertisements on self-sufficiency, food preservation, and the elimination of waste. It seems that no Americans could avoid the campaign, even if they tried.

Newspaper stories plus letters and diaries enliven and personalize the narrative, providing an intimate picture of what life was really like for everyday Minnesotans. We learn that the residents of New Ulm could buy reindeer meat fresh from Alaska as a protein alternative and of the wheat-saving success of the war bread produced by Zinmaster's bakery in Duluth.

The recipes sprinkled throughout the book show the ingenuity of Minnesota cooks in dealing with their circumstances but also how unappealing much of this wartime food could be. Emphasizing vegetables, dairy products, and alternative grains, the recipes seem both familiar and inventive. There are recipes for scalloped cheese and apple catsup as well as one for a butter substitute made of gelatin and milk. And though hotdish may seem an iconic midwestern food, Eighmey says it wasn't commonly known or eaten in the early twentieth century.

While Eighmey creates a rich portrait of what food conservation efforts were like for Minnesotans on the home front, she's less successful at explaining why supplying food was so important and necessary to an Allied victory. Three years of war had decimated European agriculture and trade routes as farmers became soldiers and farm fields became battlefields. Feeding our allies as well as our own soldiers—and feeding them well—became a primary concern of the United States government. Eighmey implies more than tells this part of the story, however, undermining the sense of urgency and importance that underlaid the conservation campaign.

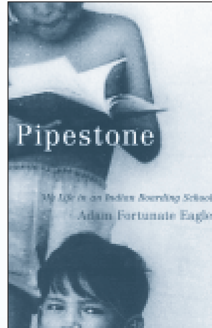
Food Will Win the War offers a fascinating portrait of Minnesotans in wartime and provides many strong parallels with today. The ethic that drove these wartime recipes and conservation measures is strikingly similar to the local food, home garden, and anti-refined and processed culture of modern eaters.

Reviewed by Erika Janik, the author of A Short History of Wisconsin *and* Odd Wisconsin, *and, coincidentally, the article "Food Will Win the War: Food Conservation in World War I Wisconsin," in the Spring 2010 issue of* Wisconsin History. *She is a freelance writer and producer at Wisconsin Public Radio.*

Pipestone: My Life at an Indian Boarding School

Adam Fortunate Eagle

(Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. 193 p. Paper, $19.95.)



Activist Adam Fortunate Eagle provides an insightful and sometimes humorous firsthand account of his boarding-school days in the 1930s and 1940s in Pipestone, Minnesota. Written in the style of a diary, the book offers some historical reflection but is mostly a broadly chronological collection of stories about his experiences. As the author notes, some people have accused him of "whitewashing" the past, but he can only speak for himself, and his goal is to complicate the histories of American Indian education that have focused on the oppressiveness of the schools. In doing so, he illustrates the diversity of Indian children's experiences at those institutions.

Born on the Red Lake reservation in Minnesota in 1929, Fortunate Eagle was sent to Pipestone, along with five of his siblings, when his father died in 1935. His work relates his adventures growing up at the school over the next ten years, as well as illuminating the wider context of the students' lives, including the reservation and the educational alternative of mission schools. While there were negative aspects of life at Pipestone, demonstrated by homesick children and runaways, most of Fortunate Eagle's experience was positive. His book shows that school employees were open about the assimilationist governmental policy designed to train Indian children for incorporation into American society, but this did not translate into the oppressive policies of other schools, such as Carlisle in Pennsylvania. At Pipestone, students were punished for cursing, not for speaking their tribal language. As one of Fortunate Eagle's friends noted, "Compared to the mission school, Pipestone is a little bit of heaven." Also, Fortunate Eagle frequently points out that many of the staff were Indian themselves, and they were all "proud to be Indians here at the school." In Fortunate Eagle's opinion, the school, despite its assimilationist goals, did not seek to destroy Indian cultures.

Fortunate Eagle's work contributes a great deal to the history of Indian education, particularly of boarding schools. Historiography has begun focusing on student experiences and complicating the existing narrative, and Fortunate Eagle's personal account complements this shift, demonstrating that these schools did not always represent oppression to all students. In addition, he illustrates, as scholar Brenda Child has done, that economic reasons, rather than government agents, often motivated parents to send children to boarding school, where they would be provided for.

Yet *Pipestone* also has a much broader appeal. Readers interested in Minnesota's Greatest Generation will undoubtedly be fascinated by Fortunate Eagle's stories of how World War II shaped his experiences at the school and those of his brothers and friends who served in the conflict. For example, Fortunate Eagle illuminates how the fear of a Japanese invasion had consequences for Indian students. When four boys ran away from Pipestone, they apparently instigated a military and police response that included closing highways because someone mistook them for Japanese invaders.

Fortunate Eagle also adds to the Minnesota history of American Indian activism in the 1960s and 1970s, showing the importance of Pipestone to the rise of key activists. The author himself was a leader in the takeover of Alcatraz in 1969, and he also mentions the boarding-school experiences of American Indian Movement activists, including leader Dennis Banks and his brother Mark and Eddie Benton-Banai. While some activists may have been influenced by their negative experiences, Fortunate Eagle was shaped by his positive ones. In one anecdote, he recalls that school employees respected the boys' traditional ways and that his friends reminded him that "we have to carry on our old ways." These efforts at cultural persistence undoubtedly shaped and informed Fortunate Eagle's continued activism on behalf of American Indian peoples.

Some students might have had less positive experiences; the overall contribution of Fortunate Eagle's work is in illustrating the diversity of experience, thereby providing a more complicated narrative of the effects of Indian boarding schools. This is a captivating and valuable work.

Reviewed by Kate Williams, a Ph.D. candidate in history at the University of Minnesota, born and raised in Wales. Her research focuses on the transnational alliances of the American Indian Movement and Welsh nationalists in the late-twentieth century.

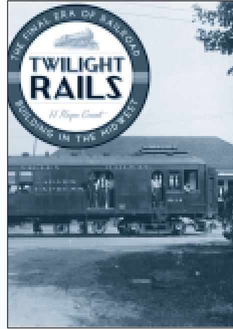
Twilight Rails: The Final Era of Railroad Building in the Midwest

H. Roger Grant

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 275 p. Cloth, $39.95.)

Roger Grant's passion for railroads remains undiminished. In this little volume, he explores the intriguing and neglected subject of what he calls "twilight rails" through case

studies of eight midwestern carriers promoted—and at least partially built—between 1905 and 1930. One of these late bloomers, the Electric Short Line Railway, graced Minnesota; by 1927 it reached from Minneapolis to Gluek. Another road included Minnesota in its title but never got beyond the borders of Illinois.



All eight roads were born of the desire by local parties to add their towns to a national railroad network that had bypassed them despite two decades of overbuilding. Visions of economic prosperity, increased commerce, and rising land values spurred their efforts along with the desire to escape what they deemed an unjust isolation. Only a few saw their dreams fulfilled even in part, and all fell victim to the rise of the automobile and the onset of the Great Depression. Nevertheless, Grant concludes that "a distinguishing and historically significant feature of twilight railroads was the economic development they spawned."

The names of the other seven companies bespeak their larger ambitions: the Akron, Canton & Youngstown; Creston, Winterset & Des Moines; Detroit, Bay City & Western; Ettrick & Northern; Illinois, Iowa & Minnesota; Missouri, Arkansas & Gulf; and St. Joseph Valley. Five of the roads considered using electric power, only to be deterred by the cost. A few did utilize gasoline motor cars for passenger traffic but relied on steam locomotives for freight movement. The misnamed Electric Short Line alone used gasoline units for both passenger and freight service.

Minnesota's contribution to this effort proved somewhat more successful than most. Known as the "Luce Line" in reference to founder William L. Luce and his son, it reached Hutchinson by 1916 but struggled to earn its keep. In 1924 it underwent reorganization and became the Minnesota Western Railroad. Despite its expansion westward to Gluek, it did not survive the onset of depression. Today it exists chiefly as part of Minnesota's extensive rails-to-trails program.

As Grant emphasizes, the twilight roads constituted a last hurrah of the railroad mania that had gripped the nation for nearly a century. With his usual meticulous eye for detail, he portrays the enthusiasm and dedication of promoters and investors who still believed fervently that the magic of a rail connection would transform their communities. When track finally reached Ava, Missouri, in 1910, a local editor wrote, "At half past nine o'clock last Sunday night the old Ava died and the new Ava was born."

It is easy to forget the stark isolation of rural America in the age when poor roads made ordinary travel or getting crops to market so difficult. Of the nation's 2.2 million miles of road in 1914, some 2 million remained unpaved. Nor could anyone have predicted how rapidly and enduringly the automobile would captivate Americans during the 1920s. Between 1900 and 1920, Grant notes, railroad mileage in the eight midwestern states rose from 64,010 to 71,633. At the same time, the interurban craze promised cheap, quiet, clean travel in areas neglected by the railroad companies.

Despite local enthusiasm, financing came hard for most of these roads. Some also faced hostility from larger neighboring roads that did not welcome competing small fry. That they persisted reflects a triumph of faith over experience. Only one of the eight, the Akron, Canton & Youngstown, proved profitable over time. In 1964 it was acquired by the Norfolk & Western and was not dissolved as a corporation until 1982.

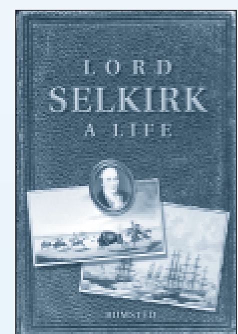
Although these latecomers may seem trivial in the overall history of American railroads, Grant has performed a valuable service in bringing their stories to light. The twilight roads offer an instructive comparison to the broader pattern of American railroad development, one that illustrates yet again how difficult it is at the time to gauge the impact of new technologies such as the automobile on the established way of doing things.

Reviewed by Maury Klein, professor emeritus of history at the University of Rhode Island. The third volume of his history of the Union Pacific Railroad will be published by Oxford University Press this spring. He is presently at work on a book on how America mobilized for World War II.

Lord Selkirk: A Life

J. M. Bumstead

(East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2009. 517 p. Cloth, $39.95.)



The saga of Thomas Douglas, Fifth Earl of Selkirk, and his efforts, starting in 1811, to establish a colony on the Red River near the present site of Winnipeg has been recorded in many books and articles, including some from the perspective of Minnesota history. What has been missing is any full-blown account of Lord Selkirk's life and the background and experiences that led him to undertake creating the colony. His personal story and perspective has also been missing from many accounts.

Part of the problem has to do with the records. A massive

archive survived well into the twentieth century at the Selkirk home in southwestern Scotland. More than 20,000 pages of documents, transcribed for Canadian researchers, are available on microfilm in the National Archives of Canada and other repositories, including the Minnesota Historical Society. But the original records were destroyed by a fire in 1940, including many personal letters and much other material on Selkirk's background. What survives tells a great deal about the history of the Red River Colony but not as much about Selkirk himself.

Historian J. M. Bumstead of St. John's College at the University of Manitoba has sought to supply the missing pieces. Bumstead, who has studied Selkirk and numerous other aspects of Canadian history for more than 30 years, set out to understand Lord Selkirk through what is known of his background and from the way his personality was expressed in his surviving writings and—perhaps more important—his actions. Half of this new biography tells his story before 1811, including the life of his father, the Fourth Earl, and the Fifth Earl's upbringing and education. Like his father and other family members, Lord Selkirk took an active interest in politics and the study of political economy, a passion shared with others during the Scottish Enlightenment, including Adam Smith, David Hume, and James Boswell. Selkirk matriculated at the University of Edinburgh in 1785, studying moral philosophy with the philosopher Dugald Stewart, along with a family friend, the poet Robert Burns. In the years that followed he traveled widely, including several trips to France during the French Revolution. Given his education and family background, one might have expected him to end up an enlightened Scottish lord and landholder, a believer in perfectibility of the human condition through reason, a sometime dabbler in writings on political economy.

Instead, Selkirk soon began to look for ways to solve political and social problems, particularly the condition of the rural poor in Scotland and Ireland. In 1799, after the death of his older brothers and father, he became the Fifth Earl. In the next few years he conceived and in 1803 established a colony of Highlanders on Prince Edward Island. Its management exemplifies an aspect of Selkirk's personality that led to his later failures: While Selkirk did travel to the colony in 1803, he did not stay to see it develop, choosing instead to make a tour of Canada and the United States in the winter of 1803–04. During that time he also set in motion another emigrant colony in Upper Canada, Baldoon. Neither colony would truly thrive, though they continued on for many years.

Selkirk had a talent for conceiving grand schemes. He could also be obsessive about minor details. But due to his restlessness and inattention—which Bumstead partly attributes to tuberculosis, from which Selkirk suffered during a long portion of his life—he was not good at overseeing day-to-day operations. Instead, Selkirk hired unreliable managers. His Prince Edward Island manager seldom sent any reports. Yet, except for his 1803 visit to North America, Selkirk continued for the next few years at home in Scotland or in London, serving in the House of Lords as one of the elected representatives of the Scottish peerage. He wrote books and pamphlets setting forth his plans and examining social issues. Selkirk was good at defending his proposals and his colonies but not very competent at implementing them successfully.

Selkirk's most famous scheme—the Red River Colony—showed all of his strengths and weaknesses. It was perhaps a master stroke to see that the royal charter of the Hudson's Bay Company, granting it control over a vast swath of North America, would make it possible to use the company's land on the Red River for an agricultural colony. It was also smart to buy up enough stock when the HBC was at a low point, so as to leverage support within the company for the colony. But the management of the enterprise itself, which Selkirk left largely to others for the first few years, was faulty, especially in the colony's dealings with the North West Company. The colony needlessly antagonized the Norwesters, to the detriment of both companies. By the time Selkirk arrived on the scene, in 1816, after a series of violent encounters between colony officials and the NWC and its allies, it was too late for him to make a real difference despite bold, improvised strokes such as seizing control of Fort William. Selkirk did his best and, after fighting off numerous lawsuits in Lower and Upper Canada, he returned to England. He died of consumption in France in 1820. The colony survived through a disastrous flood on the Red River in 1826 but was never quite what Selkirk had intended. That the site would eventually become the city of Winnipeg is an interesting fact but not exactly a tribute to Selkirk's vision.

The telling of all that famous fur-trade history—the violent years before, during, and after Selkirk's time, culminating in the amalgamation of the HBC and NWC in 1821—makes for a dramatic story, as it has in previous accounts. But what makes this book so valuable is the context of ideas and Selkirk's personal history in which Bumstead places these events. This biography is massive in more ways than one and will be interesting reading and a very useful resource for years to come.

Reviewed by Bruce White, the author of many articles on the fur trade and Native history in the Great Lakes region, as well as We Are at Home: Pictures of the Ojibwe People *(2007).*

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