Our Readers Write:

Lois Glewwe, a researcher with the Pond Dakota Heritage Society, and Dr. Elden Lawrence, Dakota elder, scholar, and great-great-grandson of Catherine Totedutawin, have written in response to Jane Lamm Carroll’s article “Naginowenah, Lucy Prescott, and the Wizard of Cereal Foods: Cultural Identity across Three Generations of an Anglo-Dakota Family,” which appeared in the Summer 2012 issue. Their note corrects Dr. Carroll’s statement, and therefore its sources, that Naginowenah/Mary Prescott was the daughter of Catherine Totedutawin, who was married to Keeiyah and a sister of Chief Wabasha. Their research reveals that these relationships are not accurate. Dr. Lawrence points out that “one of the common oversights made by writers is the way we identify and recognize our relatives and family members.” Terms such as grandmother, brother, and sister are often terms of respect, not biological kinship.


A few of the chapters are thematic, such as “Jewish Golf,” describing two clubs established in the 1920s when Jews were excluded from all other private clubs, and “No Longer a Rich Man’s Game,” covering municipal golf courses (1916–34) which, besides being affordable to the middle class, were the only places African Americans could play. An afterword summarizes how leaner economic times have slowed construction of new courses and affected established clubs.

Given the book’s coffee-table design, readers may be surprised at the lack of color photographs as well as the muddy quality of many of the black-and-whites. And for all of the facts and figures, there are no footnotes or sources to help readers interested in the history of the sport.

Tim I. Purdy notes in Red River: The Early Years (Susanville, CA: Lahontan Images, 2011, 136 p., paper, $24.95) that Thomas Barlow Walker died in Minneapolis in 1928 one of the richest men in the United States. Walker’s beginnings in Minnesota were working on a surveying crew in the 1860s, but he soon began purchasing timberlands and operating sawmills. In 1880 he started the Red River Lumber Company, which grew into a very profitable enterprise with mills in Crookston, on the Red Lake River, and at Akeley, in Hubbard County. However, Minnesota lumbermen could see that the future of timber operations in the Upper Midwest was limited; as early as 1889 Walker, like Frederick Weyerhaeuser and others, sent agents to inspect timberlands in the west. By the early-twentieth century Walker had acquired extensive tracts of land in northern California, and in 1913 built sawmills, using Minnesota workers and equipment. Unlike Weyerhaeuser, Walker closed down his Minnesota operations in 1915 and concentrated exclusively on his California mills and timberlands. Walker’s sons, however, were not able to keep their father’s lumber empire going into another generation. The Red River Lumber Company is known today for its famous Paul Bunyan advertising campaign. In Minnesota, T. B. Walker is now remembered for the town of Walker and as the benefactor of the Walker Art Center. Purdy’s book gives a brief introduction to Walker’s Minnesota beginnings and then focuses on the California operations. He acknowledges that readers must return to Robert Harlt’s Red River: Paul Bunyan’s Own Lumber Company and Its Railroads for the Minnesota story.

Tapping into a rich trove of letters, historian Paul L. Hedren offers a close look at some formative years, 1875–76, in neighboring South Dakota. His edited collection of letters, Ho! For the Black Hills: Captain Jack Crawford Reports the Black Hills Gold Rush and Great Sioux War (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2012, 297 p., cloth, $29.95) presents the words of John Wallace Crawford, aka “Captain Jack,” a young Pennsylvanian who first went west in 1875, part of the Dodge Expedition that sought to investigate rumors of gold in the Black Hills. Prospector, poet, journalist, showman, and scout during the Great Sioux War, Crawford wrote vivid, detailed letters that were published in the Omaha Bee and other newspapers. Hedren’s introduction to both Captain Jack and the Black Hills gold rush sets the scene, as do the helpful chapter-by-chapter headnotes that precede the transcribed letters.

Adrian Lee’s Mysterious Minnesota: Digging Up the Ghostly Past at 13 Haunted Sites (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Worldwide, 2012, 301 p., paper, $15.95) is not your usual collection of spooky stories. Lee, president of the Sank Centre Area Historical Society and an investigator who founded the International Paranormal Society, uses the tools available to both callings to investigate, document, and recount the stories of some of the state’s best-known places. He and his team of paranormal investigators arrive at a site after thoroughly researching its history and interviewing those who have experienced ghostly activity. Armed with tools that measure changes in electromagnetic fields and scan radio frequencies, along with other devices that convert these findings into words—which are then captured on digital voice recorders—they proceed to make contact with resident spirits. The results of their work, along with Lee’s explanation of his
etiquette in interacting with those who have passed on, make up the chapters. The sites range from Port Snelling to the Mantorville Opera House, Duluth’s SS William A. Irvin to the Chase Hotel in Walker. Skeptics as well as believers may find themselves pulled along by the stories that unfold.

“Northfield no longer has a commercial cinema projecting films onto the big screen for collective viewing by a paying audience, as was the tradition for 100+ years.” So concludes Carol Donelan’s Electric Theater: The Emergence of Cinema in Northfield, 1896–1917 (Northfield, MN: Northfield Historical Society, 2012, 105 p., paper, $9.95). This well-illustrated volume chronicles the early years of movies, movie houses, and the viewing public in the town—a story of successes, failures, and not a little controversy. The book ties developments in Northfield to the larger, national story during these early, rough-and-tumble years in the history of cinema. It is available online from the historical society: www.northfieldhistory.org.

Atina Diffley’s memoir, Turn Here Sweet Corn: Organic Farming Works ( Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012, 335 p., cloth, $24.95) interweaves detailed personal history with the story of local organic farming in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century. It is a passionate and innately personal look at the challenges, setbacks, and successes inherent in farming itself, not to mention the impacts of suburban development and a legal fight against a large corporation—Koch Industries, a known polluter that wanted to run a crude-oil pipeline through her family’s (and other) property in Dakota County. Whether or not readers have shopped in area co-op stores, farmers markets, or roadside stands or knowingly bought Gardens of Eagan produce, this story should resonate as part of the era’s public conversation about the ties between healthy living, healthy eating, and a healthy relationship with a healthy environment.

A small pamphlet, clearly a labor of love, documents a Minnesota tradition while also preserving local history. Gene Busch of Mentor has compiled a 12-page booklet (nine pages of information and the remaining three for additions), “At the Lake: The Honor Roll of Family Owned Lake Cabins on Maple Lake” (Polk County). The list begins with two structures from 1898 and ends with several from 1962; the blank pages are for listing newer buildings from 1963 through 1971. Busch has supplied as much information as possible: builders’ names, cabin address, and successive owners through the generations, as well as information on which parts are original, when additions appeared, or when and what kind of remodeling occurred. Information came from the owners themselves as well as 100-year and 50-year markers at the cabins. For more information, contact Mr. Busch at P.O. Box 104, Mentor, MN 56736.

Back in print, minus its original color photographs, is Sigurd F. Olson’s Wilderness Days ( Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012, 233 p., paper, $17.95), originally published in 1972 by Alfred A. Knopf. Olson, a prolific and beloved nature writer and conservation activist, assembled this collection of previously published essays in response to letters from readers who were particularly moved by the pieces. To Olson, those essays, supplemented by some of his own favorites, crystallized his thinking and his reverence for the north country. They are grouped by season, following the pattern of his earlier book The Singing Wilderness as well as the rhythm of the year. An unpaginated section of maps, “Guides to the Quetico-Superior country and the Big North,” follow the text. Each essay begins with a line drawing (not credited in this edition) by Francis Lee Jaques, Robert Hines, or Leslie C. Kouba. 

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