



## BOOK REVIEW

### **Travels with Frances Densmore: Her Life, Work, and Legacy in Native American Studies**

*Joan M. Jenson and Michelle Wick Patterson, eds.*

(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015, 448 p., Cloth, \$75.00.)

If you are looking for a traditional biography, *Travels with Frances Densmore: Her Life, Work, and Legacy in Native American Studies* is not it. Inspired by Alice Fletcher's work among the Omaha, Frances Densmore began practicing ethnomusicology in the late 1890s as a lecturer who became increasingly interested in field research. Densmore's careful scholarship led to support from the Bureau of American Ethnography (BAE) from 1907 to 1934, after which she remained productive through the 1950s with support from grants and donations.

Like other scholarly women of her generation, whose work could be discredited by even a hint of scandal, Densmore burned all of her personal papers, leaving future generations only the legacy of her professional ethnographical work and personally curated scrapbooks and autobiographical essays. These notes, letters, and publications sprinkled in archives around the country continue to demonstrate the value of her work to American Indian studies, as confirmed by the frequency of Densmore citations in contemporary monographs and articles. This volume honors her memory and contributions, combining a biography of Densmore's professional life with a collection of old and new essays by scholars who discuss the ways in which Densmore's studies were contextualized by her time, gender, and profession and consider the legacy of her work in twenty-first-century American Indian studies.

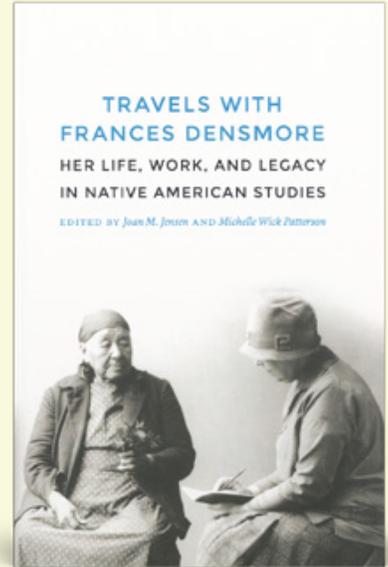
Of particular interest to scholars of American Indian studies is the careful timeline of Densmore's fieldwork and publications, as well as a sense of how some of her ethnocentric attitudes changed over time, while others did not. She never escaped the conviction that she was engaged in the vital task of salvage anthropology (collecting and preserving American Indian cultural practices that early-twentieth-century Americans, including the BAE, believed would soon disappear), and she ignored contemporary adaptation to Euro-American societal norms resulting from federal boarding schools and allotment policy. Her desire to be taken seriously as a scholar, however, led her to include detailed contextual information concerning songs (including the names of her singers), images, and materials that she collected. The depth of these descriptions are testament to the relationships she developed with her informants, which gradually led to increased respect for Native people and their wishes about what to record and preserve as she matured in her field.

Scholars of American women's history will find in Densmore an example of a midwestern woman who fits the mold of the early-twentieth-century "New Woman," one who clearly sought professional recognition and managed to carve out for

herself not only a place in the ethnographic profession but one outside of the academy. Indeed, because she was not affiliated with academia, during her career she was able to work with more American Indian cultures than any anthropologist of her time, taking frequent, extended trips to Indian communities from Florida to California and among her neighbors, the Dakota and Ojibwe communities of Wisconsin and Minnesota. Yet Densmore's legacy has been largely excluded from the historiography of anthropology, as much of the work of the BAE is left out in favor of works generated by individuals with academic appointments with the nation's leading universities.

The essay collection focuses on Densmore's Minnesota work and examines in detail her collection of the day-to-day technological tools of the Grand Portage Ojibwe; her extensive collection of photographs available at the Minnesota Historical Society and National Anthropological Archives; as well as later difficulties archivists and others have experienced with accurately reproducing the thousands of wax cylinder recordings she made during her fieldwork.

However valuable the individual essays may be to scholars in various fields of study, they needed a conclusion to tie them together. Instead, the conclusion muses on what can be learned about Densmore from one of her most iconic photographs and only briefly suggests future fields of study. A deeper reflection on the ways that the collected essays demonstrate Densmore's continued impact and legacy would have made for a more valuable ending. That said, *Travels with Frances Densmore* takes the reader on a unique journey that lifts the veil on her process and shares not only what she hoped her legacy would be but also what scholars since her time have made of her enduring contributions to American Indian ethnography and ethnomusicology.



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**John H. Howe, Architect: From Taliesin Apprentice to Master of Organic Design***Jane King Hession and Tim Quigley*

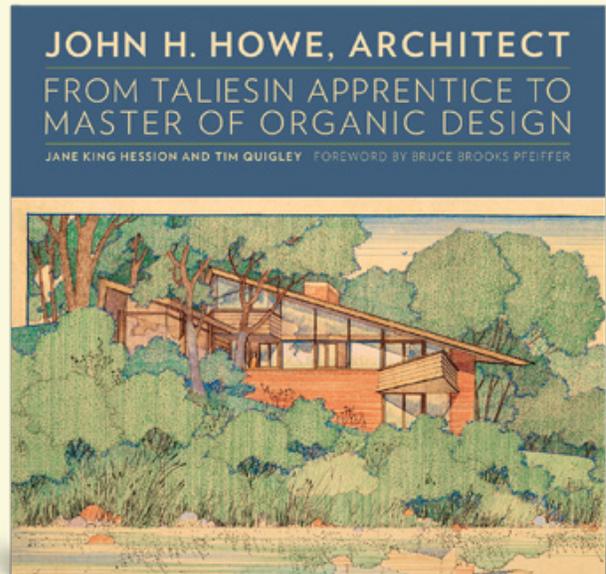
(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015, 232 p., Cloth, \$49.95.)

Overshadowed by Frank Lloyd Wright's towering fame and persona, the story of master draftsman and architect John Howe is rarely told. Now, authors Jane King Hession and Tim Quigley have produced a richly illustrated and eminently readable book that illuminates the entire career of the man vaunted as "the pencil in Wright's hand," from Howe's beginnings as an idealistic high school graduate drawn to the art of architecture to his final days designing in his own Minnesota office.

Most of the first half of the book relates the oft-told history of Taliesin, the cult-like "fellowship" and ideal community Wright sought to build, first in rural Wisconsin, then in Arizona. Hession and Quigley, both former presidents of the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy, happily manage to find a fresh perspective—how chance and Howe's own talents positioned him prominently within the Taliesin fellowship. As a charter member, present almost from day one, Howe had the lucky task of keeping the drafting room fires going, allowing him to soak up Wright's instructions on the principles of organic design while so many other unpaid apprentices were, literally, in the field building Wright's utopian vision. With Wright sitting at his elbow, Howe learned "how hard to press the pencil, how to add line weight, and how to ink a drawing." Perhaps this is why so many of the superb renderings we think of as Wright's postwar work are actually Howe's. When Howe later showed his own apprentices how to draw, he told them, "This is the way [Louis] Sullivan taught Wright to do it and the way Wright taught me to do it." To an architect's ears, this sounds truly magical.

The book's second half turns to the standard format of many an architectural monograph—descriptions of clients and dissections of building designs that can be attributed directly to Howe. Following Wright's death, Howe continued to work at Taliesin Associated Architects (TAA) for five years. Then, at age 51, after more than three decades at Taliesin, fellowship politics pushed Howe out of TAA. He and his wife, Lu, embarked on a wholly new life out in the larger world, away from the communal culture he had known so long, where there were no boundaries between work and private life. Howe began his new career with a three-year stint in San Francisco, then set up his own firm in Minneapolis.

Once in Minneapolis, he continued to work within the principles of organic architecture, where site came first, followed by client needs, then integration of climate. The book describes numerous projects with adoring clients; Bob and Jan Willow in particular were favored by Howe. Of the Willows, Howe said, somewhat smugly, "There wasn't anything about



the house they wanted to change." (Besides his other skills, Howe must have also been a good listener, or, if not, his clients were very clever to select an architect whose work they already knew and loved.) Vice President Walter Mondale later bought the 1971 Willow house, located in North Oaks, in 1983.

It is a testament to Howe's abilities that he seems to have made his transition so smoothly and confidently—and after such an excellent retelling of the Taliesin story, this reader would have been delighted to hear Hession and Quigley tell more about how Howe managed the shift from commune to successful independent practice. For example, what was life like for him in San Francisco in 1967, the "Summer of Love"? Though we are offered a few details—that he lived on Russian Hill, had an easy commute to the office by cable car, and attended protest marches against the Vietnam War—there is little else offered on this aspect of his life. Similarly, beyond the facts that Minneapolis was close to Taliesin and contained a potential client pool, we don't learn much about why he relocated to Minnesota.

Hopefully, *John Howe, Architect* will bring more attention to his body of work. I know I plan to seek out some of his buildings to see if they show as well in real life as they do in his impressive drawings.

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