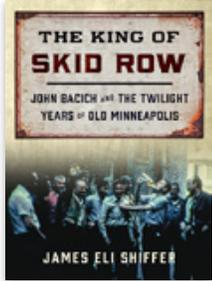
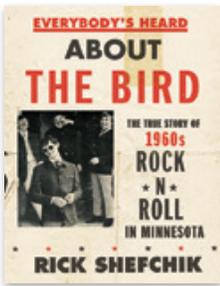


TAKE THREE

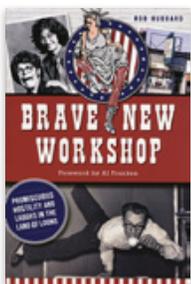
Journalist-authors go beyond “the first draft of history”



The King of Skid Row: John Bacich and the Twilight Years of Old Minneapolis ■ James Eli Shiffer (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016, 182 p., Cloth, \$22.95). In 2003, *Star Tribune* editor and columnist James Eli Shiffer discovered a video called *Skidrow*, assembled from home movies taken 50 years earlier by John Bacich, aka Johnny Rex, owner of a bar, liquor store, and cage hotel in Minneapolis's notorious Gateway district. The images on the video captured Shiffer's imagination in a big way. *The King of Skid Row* is his “attempt to rebuild that place and understand what happened there in its final days.” The key was Bacich, and Shiffer conducted hours of interviews with him in the three years before Bacich's death in 2012. By the end of this artful account of a sometimes-violent, alcohol-soaked world swept away by a massive urban renewal project in the early 1960s, readers may well agree with Shiffer that, “A bum's paradise is far more than the sum of its bricks and broken bottles. It has a hold on a city that will not let go.”



Everybody's Heard about the Bird: The True Story of 1960s Rock 'n' Roll in Minnesota ■ by Rick Shefchik (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015, 354 p., Cloth, \$29.95). Before the Minneapolis Sound of the 1980s came the Minnesota sound of the 1960s. In early 1964, the Trashmen were kings of rock 'n' roll, and not just in the Twin Cities or Minnesota. “Surfin' Bird,” perhaps the silliest-yet-catchiest song ever, was about to hit No. 1 on the *Billboard* chart. By 1965, an estimated 350 to 500 matching-suit-clad Minnesota rock bands were plying the teen dance and ballroom circuit with “unself-conscious rock 'n' roll and good-time party songs.” Rick Shefchik, former *St. Paul Pioneer Press* critic, has meticulously re-created the scene whose biggest names included the Castaways, the Underbeats, the Avanties, and the Gestures. After “Surfin' Bird,” a few other national hits came out of Minnesota, but our “flyover land” status inhibited big success for most bands.



Brave New Workshop: Promiscuous Hostility and Laughs in the Land of Loons ■ by Rob Hubbard, Foreword by Al Franken (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2015, 176 p., Paper, \$21.95). In 1958, one-time circus aerialist and vaudevillian Dudley Riggs opened one of the first bohemian outposts in Minneapolis. Café Espresso served a beverage so exotic that city inspectors made Riggs get training as a boiler operator in order to use the espresso machine he bought in Italy. Staging skits as a way to draw customers on slow nights was the genesis of the Brave New Workshop, a comedy theater that helped launch the careers of satirist-turned-U.S. senator Al Franken and his *Saturday Night Live* writing partner Tom Davis, and many others. Longtime *St. Paul Pioneer Press* writer Rob Hubbard's history is primarily based on interviews he conducted with dozens of principal players, including the octogenarian Riggs. Readers learn that BNW, though best known for the catchy titles of its comedy revues, maintained solvency by creating, among other things, radio sketches for the fledgling NPR news magazine *All Things Considered* and a floating improv comedy company for cruise ships.

LETTERS

Reactions to the Spring 2016 issue

It was exciting to see the story of the building of Thule Air Base [“How far north can a guy git?” Minnesotans at the Top of the World,” by David Christopher Arnold]. My dad was one of the people who worked there when I was 2 or 3. I never really knew much about it, I just knew that he went away for many months to Greenland, he came home for a few weeks and then went back again. —Ruth Cordes, Apple Valley

I have been a letter writer to Minnesota History for some years. My letters are usually in reaction to an article. This one is no different. . . . I am usually not a rabid fan of dance, but I decided to read [“The Modern Dancer's Skin: The Costumes of Gertrude Lippincott,” by Stephanie Olson] anyway. I am happy I did, for one name in addition to that of Mrs. Lippincott stood out immediately. That name was Robert Moulton. I have such fond memories of Bob Moulton from my days with the University of Minnesota Theater. The period was the late '40s, into the early '50s. I actually had courses taught by Bob Moulton, courses in costume design and construction. . . . The photo of [Moulton and Lippincott] in a scene from *Just We Two* is wonderful and typically Bob. —Leroy W. Gardner, Silver Spring, MD

I just want to send an e-mail to let you know how much I enjoy the printed quarterly publication Minnesota History. It is the reason I keep renewing my membership to the Minnesota Historical Society. I keep each issue because, to me, they are keepsakes, full of interesting information and so beautifully produced. It's rare to find quality printed products in this digital day and age. —Carla Erikstrup, Egan

This letter is intended to cover the people who put the Historical Society publication together and do all of the work that goes into getting a magazine of the quality that yours is. . . . Your recent publication for Spring 2016 again measured up to your standards. The articles are eye-opening, informative, and beneficial. —Dan Mundt, Duluth



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