



BOOK REVIEW

Taconite Dreams: The Struggle to Sustain Mining on Minnesota's Iron Range, 1915–2000

Jeffrey T. Manuel

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015. 312 p. Paper, \$49.95.)

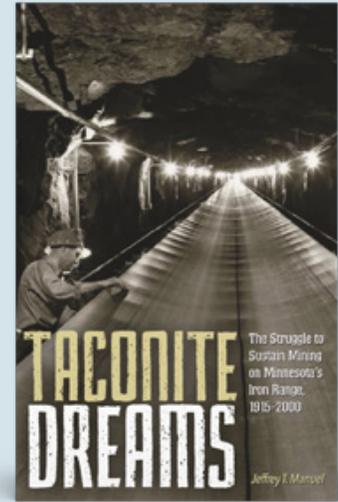
Taconite Dreams brings a range of perspectives to those who want to understand the decisions and processes that transformed many North American working communities over the last century. Author Jeffrey T. Manuel, a Minnesota native, now associate professor of history at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, explores the technological, economic, political, and heritage transformations of the Mesabi Iron Range in northern Minnesota. These transformations were the responses to rising global competition and declining reserves of Mesabi ore. The author shifts historical perspectives back and forth from individuals, institutions, and businesses, much as an optometrist does with lenses during eye exams. These frequent shifts in perspective feel jarring at first, but once we become comfortable with Manuel's approach, the Mesabi Iron Range comes into focus in a way not portrayed before.

The book's sections are loosely chronological. The author begins by looking at the unsustainable rate of high-grade iron ore extraction from the Mesabi Range. During the 1920s to 1940s inventor and promoter E. W. Davis evangelized to politicians and the public about the use of taconite technology on the vast low-grade iron deposits as the Mesabi Range as a way to sustain mining in the region. Manuel portrays Davis as sincere, but flawed, in his beliefs that the proposed technological solution would not come with any environmental or social consequences. Manuel illustrates that Davis's achievement in establishing taconite production on the Mesabi Range was only one aspect of a larger set of economic policies, political shifts, and technological adaptations that he explores in subsequent sections of the book.

The second and third sections of *Taconite Dreams* are impressive for their deep analysis of changing social values that occurred throughout the state of Minnesota to allow for passage of the 1964 Taconite Amendment to the state constitution. This measure ensured lower taxes on taconite production compared to iron ore mining. Manuel deftly shows how alliances between labor unions and liberal New Deal politicians broke down as debates in the region shifted from limiting the power of mining companies toward promoting jobs and economic opportunity. A 1960s and 1970s-era legal battle over the discharge of sediments into Lake Superior from the E.W. Davis works in Silver Bay highlights the social divisions in the region. The case records, worker testimony, and interviews of residents near the plant demonstrate the split between those who believed any economic growth was good and those who were more concerned with balancing costs that came along with the potential benefits of a technology.

The final two sections show how institutions responded to the economic decline of mining. These sections feel less focused than earlier ones. Manuel wades into the messy history of the Iron Range Rehabilitation and Reclamation Board (IRRRB). The board transformed from a 1930s-era poverty relief agency into a jobs and economic development entity by the end of the twentieth century. A large portion of the last section is dedicated to efforts made during the 1960s through early 2000s to feature the region's heritage for tourism. Hostility by local residents towards portraying their way of life as enshrined in the past doomed early efforts with heritage tourism, such as the Calumet Restoration Project, before they even began. Commentary on how other mining regions, such as Michigan's Upper Peninsula, benefited from partnership with the National Park Service is less effective than other examples Manuel has given from Minnesota's Iron Ranges regarding the responses to economic decline.

Overall, the book stands out for the depth of its perspective on issues shaping other post-industrial places in the United States and around the world. Manuel effectively shows the economic and social changes behind the shifts in policies that led to the current roles of mining, tourism, and other industries in this region. *Taconite Dreams* demonstrates that each decision on the Mesabi Iron Range was deliberate and not an inevitable outcome. Manuel reveals that some aspects of the region's economy were protected from the full effects of deindustrialization, but at great public cost in failed ventures or investments in businesses. In other regions across America's rust belt, no such efforts to counter deindustrialization were made and we are still living with the legacy of those inactions—landscapes of vacant structures and communities with limited opportunities.



FRED SUTHERLAND is a recent PhD graduate of Michigan Technological University's program for industrial heritage and archaeology. His research includes studies of the Cuyuna Iron Range in Minnesota. He taught cultural anthropology at Central Lakes College in Brainerd and he has been an interpreter at Historic Fort Snelling for the last five seasons.

BOOK REVIEW

Folksongs of Another America: Field Recordings From the Upper Midwest, 1937-1946

James P. Leary

(Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press; Atlanta, Dust-to-Digital, 2015, 5 CDs, 1 DVD, 427 p. Cloth, \$60.00)

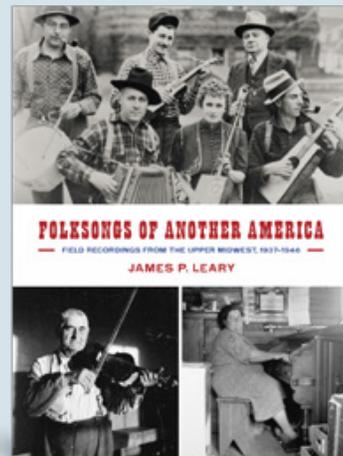
I'll get right to the point: What James P. Leary has accomplished is breathtaking. In concert with the University of Wisconsin Press and the Atlanta-based reissue label Dust-to-Digital, Leary has captured 187 performances of vernacular music by over 200 musicians from the Upper Midwest that reveal the panoply of indigenous and immigrant musical traditions in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin from the midst of the Great Depression to the end of the World War II. This remarkable anthology of recordings on five CDs and one DVD, originally made for the Library of Congress, rescues from obscurity performers who lived lives far below the horizon of popular recognition. Enhanced by Leary's engaging prose and meticulous curatorial skills, *Folksongs of Another America* is a celebration of people making sense of and taking pleasure in their everyday experiences through traditional song, bringing to life a heretofore secret cultural history, or, as Leary puts it, "sonic fragments of lost worlds."

This project was a labor of love, spanning nearly three decades. Introduced to this musical world as a child growing up in Rice Lake, Wisconsin, Leary's appetite was whetted after a trip to a local bar and café called the Buckhorn where he saw the "world's largest assortment of odd lumberjack musical instruments," some made by the Buckhorn's proprietor, Otto Rindlisbacher. As a teenager, Leary happened across an album, *Folk Music From Wisconsin*, that included four tracks by Rindlisbacher. The album also introduced him to the name Helene Stratman-Thomas, who had recorded Wisconsin-based performers for the Library of Congress in the 1940s. In a 2013 talk given at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, Leary, a professor of Scandinavian and folklore studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said the project's protracted gestation was partly due to the enormous challenge of translating 25 different languages, along with various dialects and idiomatic expressions.

Of the folklorists originally involved in capturing the music, the most recognizable name is that of Alan Lomax. (For those unfamiliar with Lomax's important work, become acquainted with John Szwed's 2010 biography, *Alan Lomax: The Man Who Recorded the World*.) Lomax's initial forays into Michigan in 1938 led to his recording, among many others, Ojibwe fiddler Joe Cloud, Finnish and Croatian singers in Copper Country, lumberjack songs sung by loggers in the Upper Peninsula, and "in the shadow of the [Detroit] Chrysler plant," Pajo Tomic playing the single-string gusle and singing in Serbian a moving tale of the 1912 Balkan War.

While Lomax is the most prominent folklorist represented, the bulk of the material comes from two women, the aforementioned Helene Stratman-Thomas and Sidney Robertson, who worked with Lomax recording Wisconsin lumberjacks, one of whom was Otto Rindlisbacher. Together, the women's recordings account for four of the five CDs. Robertson's fascinating back story includes a degree in romance languages from Stanford, and her study with and marriage to legendary American avant-garde composer Henry Cowell. Stratman-Thomas was from Dodgeville, Wisconsin, and, after a brief career working for an investment firm in Minneapolis, she returned to her alma mater, the University of Wisconsin, and earned B.A. and M.A. degrees. Accompanied by recording technician Robert Draves, Stratman-Thomas, possessed with what can only be described as boundless energy and enthusiasm, "captured more than 700 performances ... [of] African Americans, Belgians, Cornish, Croatians, Czechs, Danes, Dutch, Germans, Ho-Chunks, Irish, Italians, Lithuanians, Luxembourgers, Norwegians, Oneidas, Poles, Swiss, Welsh, and more." Two of these performances were gloriously filthy versions of "Red Light Saloon," recorded by Draves only after Stratman-Thomas agreed to leave the room, as the singers were too embarrassed to record in her presence these graphic tunes of "sporting women" who would ply young men with alcohol and the promise of a "little party" in the saloon's upstairs bedrooms.

Nearly 20 years ago, music critic Greil Marcus wrote in *Invisible Republic* that the work of local artists, such as those recorded for this collection, may seem "commonplace and trivial on its face," but such songs are "charged with a power no intention could create and no particular geography or lifespan can enclose." Such is the case here. *Folksongs of Another America* represents research and scholarship of the highest quality that paints a complex and evocative picture of racial and ethnic elements too long disregarded in the study of American music.



JOHN DOUGAN is professor of music business and popular music studies in the Department of Recording Industry at Middle Tennessee State University, and the author of *The Mistakes of Yesterday*, *The Hopes of Tomorrow: The Story of the Prisonaires*. He holds a PhD in American studies from the College of William & Mary.

BOOK REVIEW

Métis and the Medicine Line: Creating a Border and Dividing a People

Michel Hogue

(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. 344 p.
Paper, \$32.95.)

Métis and the Medicine Line, a well-done academic monograph, underlines how the combination of nationality and race denied the nineteenth-century Plains métis, a mixed-blood, multiethnic, trans-border people, their identity, way of life, rights, land, and history in the efforts of the emerging American union and Canadian confederation to divide and absorb North America.

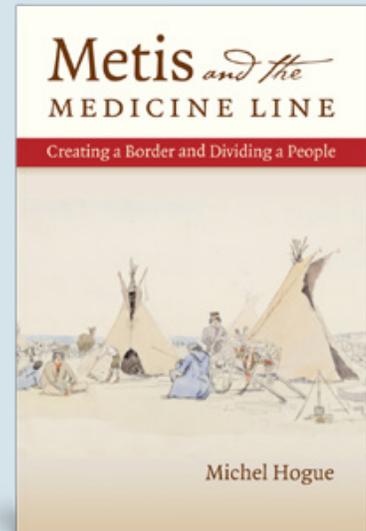
The fate of the métis, who lived on both sides of the forty-ninth parallel that eventually formed the U.S.-Canadian border, forms the core of Hogue's narrative. Starting in the mid-eighteenth century and continuing through the first seven decades of the nineteenth century, the métis, born of the intermarriage of French, Scots, and Indian peoples—the Assiniboine, Cree, and Ojibwe—grew in numbers and space. The métis were unified by their own customs, myths, and religious celebrations, and a language, Michif (largely consisting of Ojibwe verbs and French nouns), while also being conversant in French, English, and one of several Indian languages. The highly adaptive métis were economic opportunists who followed resources, trade, and work. They adapted themselves to an ever-changing landscape: jostling tribes, variations of climate, establishment of forts, increasing waves of settlers, formation of towns and cities along the Minnesota and Missouri rivers, coming of the steamboat, and the articulation of central governments with armies dedicated to the systematic clearance and resettlement of Indian tribes.

Métis men originally worked as fur traders under the dominant Hudson Bay Company and its Montreal competitor, the North West Company. With the shift of the fur trade from the Lake Superior region in the eighteenth century, the métis began moving west and south. As they became increasingly free and independent of company service, two major métis settlements developed, the Red River community, known as the Assiniboia, in the vicinity of present-day Winnipeg, and Pembina, in present-day North Dakota.

Métis communities, which engaged in minimal agriculture, sought what opportunities the prairies and plains presented. They continued to move westward into Saskatchewan using their hunting skills and versatile carts, then southward into Montana following the depleting buffalo herds. Like other indigenous border and cross-border peoples, the métis increasingly found themselves overwhelmed by the encroachment of settlers and new citizens who filled the “empty spaces” and the incorporation of the Great Plains into the United States and Canada as part of their national “destinies.”

Hogue, an assistant professor of history at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, shows how nothing played as powerful a role in sealing the fate of the métis as implementation and enforcement of the 2,175 mile-long international border and the creation of the new states of Minnesota, North Dakota, and Montana and the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Specifying the border as the forty-ninth parallel (drawn by the Anglo-American Convention of 1818 and the Oregon Treaty of 1848) cut an infrangible divide in the trans-border community of the métis. As Hogue elaborates in detail, the métis were forced to choose between nation and race at the cost of their way of life, loss of place, and claims to land. If not integrated into “white society” or Indian reservations, the métis were placeless. Without a valid official history and genealogy for either side of the border, métis struggled, often unsuccessfully, to validate their “scrip” (currency of government promise for services rendered and land sold) and claims for enrollment on reservations and government benefits. Hogue describes dismantling of Plains métis borderland settlements between 1879 and 1885 and defines the period of 1885 to 1920 as a continuing period of “shifting boundaries of belonging” as the métis entered the modern world of official nation and race.

“The Medicine Line,” the Canadian nickname for the forty-ninth parallel, thought to be a “magical” border that U.S. troops couldn't cross, ultimately became the boundary that Indian groups and métis—truly a diverse people—couldn't cross without forfeiting citizenship and claims won on the other side of the border.



JOSEPH A. AMATO, PhD, is professor emeritus of history and rural and regional studies at Southwest Minnesota State University. His newest book is *Everyday Life: How the Ordinary Became Extraordinary* (Reaktion, August, 2016).



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