

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Romance, Melodrama,
Mayhem in Not-So-
Fictional St. Paul

Page 10

Spring, 1993

Volume 28, Number 1

. . . *'And A Sprinkling of Jews'*

Work, Faith and the Jewish Merchants *Page 4*



The Swadelsky family in the 1890s, Zlotah Rivkah Swadelsky (second from left) settled with her husband and family on the West Side after emigrating from Russia. She was one of those unsung women of history. Pious herself, she led religious services for the women of B'nai Abraham Synagogue on State Street. She ran a Shelter House for strangers passing through the Jewish community, and organized a Women's Free Loan Society that provided loans without interest to immigrant women to help them buy furniture for their new homes. Photo from the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest. See article beginning on page 4.

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORY

Executive Director
Priscilla Farnham
Editor
Virginia Brainard Kunz

RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

William S. Fallon
Chairman of the Board

Joanne Englund
President

John M. Lindley
First Vice President

James Russell
Treasurer

Arthur Baumeister, Jr., Thomas Boyd,
Marshall Hatfield, John Harens, Liz
Johnson, Don Larson, Judge Margaret M.
Marrinan, Dr. Thomas B. Mega, Laurie
Murphy, Richard T. Murphy, Sr., Eileen
Roberts, Darrell Rooney, Mark Stein,
Richard A. Wilhoit and Laurie Zenner.

EDITORIAL BOARD

John M. Lindley, chairman; Thomas H.
Boyd, Thomas C. Buckley, Charlton Dietz,
Thomas J. Kelley, Arthur McWatt, Laurie
M. Murphy, Dr. Thomas B. Mega.

HONORARY ADVISORY BOARD

Elmer L. Andersen, Coleman Bloomfield,
Olivia I. Dodge, Charlton Dietz, William
Finney, Clarence Frame, Otis Godfrey, Jr.,
Ronald Hachey, Reuel D. Harmon, Robert
S. Hess, Ronald M. Hubbs, Fred T.
Lanners, Jr., George Latimer, Lewis Lehr,
David Marsden, Robert B. Mirick, Samuel
Morgan, Marvin J. Pertzik, J. Jerome
Plunkett, Peter S. Popovich, James Reagan,
Rosalie E. Wahl, Donald D. Wozniak.

RAMSEY COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Hal Norgard, chairman
Commissioner Diane Ahrens
Commissioner John Finley
Commissioner Ruby Hunt
Commissioner Warren Schaber
Commissioner Brenda Thomas
Commissioner Richard Wedell

Terry Schutten, executive director, Ramsey
County.

Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, Minn. 55102. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright, 1993, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission from the publisher. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements made by contributors.

RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 28, Number 1

Spring, 1993

CONTENTS

- 3** Letters
- 4** . . . 'And a Sprinkling of Jews'
Work and Faith and Minnesota's Jewish Merchants
Marilyn Chiat
- 10** Romance, Melodrama, Murder, Mayhem—
The Novelist in Not-So-Fictional St. Paul
Frances Sontag
- 19** Growing Up in St. Paul—
Looking Back at the Black Community—Part II
David V. Taylor
- 25** Books, Etc.
- 26** What's Historic About This Site?
The Highland Park Water Tower
And Its Architect, Clarence Wigington
Arthur Mc Watt

Publication of *Ramsey County History* is supported in part by gifts from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie, Jr.; by a contribution from Reuel D. Harmon, and by grants from The Saint Paul Foundation and the F. R. Bigelow Foundation.

Special contributions have been received from the following supporters who are hereby named honorary editors of the Winter and Spring, 1993, issues of *Ramsey County History*:

Anthony Andersen	Robert Haugen
Anthony Bechik	Ronald M. Hubbs
George Benz	Robert B. Mirick
Charlton Dietz	Samuel H. Morgan
Roger Foussard	Mary Bigelow McMillan
Harry and Lorraine Hammerly	John G. Ordway
Marshall and Elizabeth Hatfield	

The Ramsey County Historical Society and the members of *Ramsey County History's* Editorial Board wish to express their deep appreciation to these contributors for their support.

Romance, Melodrama, Murder, Mayhem—

The Novelist in Not-So-Fictional St. Paul

Frances Sontag

How many people can name anyone who was present at the burning of Atlanta, besides Scarlett O'Hara and Rhett Butler? Yes, we know they weren't really there, yet the faces that stand out against those flames in our minds are those of Rhett and Scarlett, not those of Sherman's generals Oliver O. Howard and Henry W. Slocum, or of Captain Orlando Poe, who personally supervised the destruction.

When we want factual information about a city, we look not to fiction but to the work of geographers, statisticians, historians, or economists. Yet those professions can only verify our understanding of life in Joyce's Dublin, Dickens' London, or Cather's Santa Fe. In the work of novelists who plant their characters solidly in the real world of time and place, that created world can be more real than reality itself.

Admitting at the start that St. Paul has not had a Joyce, a Dickens, or even a Margaret Mitchell, it is nevertheless fascinating to look for a sense of St. Paul as a place in the city's past fiction. In our quest for history in fiction, artistic quality will count, but we will find that we can learn a lot from books that richly deserve their place in the dumpster of literary history.

In the century before St. Paul became the capital of Minnesota Territory, the area was traversed and often fought over by the Native Americans, and the Ojibway and Dakota in particular. The great white cliff at the bend of the Mississippi was a landmark for the Native Americans and for the fur traders, explorers, and soldiers who followed. Among the novels that take the reader back to those exciting voyageur days are *Black Feather*, by Harold Titus; *The Forbidden Ground*, by Neil H. Swanson; and *Red River Trail*, by Ethel C. Brill.

Early St. Paul

Pig's Eye, as St. Paul was known in the 1830s, is the setting for *Early Candlelight*,

by Maud Hart Lovelace. Lovelace creates a magical sense of time and place with her descriptions of the river, the bluffs, the seasons, the animals, and the Indians as they were when the first white settlers entered upon the scene. Her descriptions of unspoiled nature, of the social life at Fort Snelling, and of the precarious existence of the early settlers are accurate historically, yet seen through a romantic sensibility.

Early Candlelight, which has been reprinted by the Minnesota Historical Society, is the story of a romance between Delia Du Gay, daughter of a French-Canadian settler, and Jasper Page, American Fur Company factor. Page's lifestyle is obviously based on that of Henry Sibley, but his character and personality are fiction. Delia makes her way toward her own personal happiness while adventures and tragedies surround her.

Lovelace introduces real historic characters seamlessly into the fictional milieu. Her careful research is reflected in the lifelike language and behavior of the real characters, such as the Indian agent, Major Lawrence Taliaferro; early settler Vital Guerin; Father Lucien Galtier; the missionaries Samuel and Gideon Pond; and fur trader Gabriel Renville. She was also able to depict Native American characters sympathetically as individual human beings.

In the 1840s, near the end of the story, little Pig's Eye/St. Paul starts to grow; Father Lucien Galtier suggests to his flock that the name Pig's Eye seems inadequate to the hamlet's dignity, and the villagers agree that St. Paul would be a much better name. Steamboats begin arriving regularly, carrying new people who speak English instead of French, and James M. Goodhue appears with his printing press.

Beginning only a year or two after *Early Candlelight* ends, *The Ox-Cart Trail*, by Herbert Kraus, shows a changed St. Paul. The village has become a crude, violent



Maud Hart Lovelace. Gene Garrett photo, Minnesota Historical Society.

frontier town of over a thousand people, with more arriving every day. English has replaced French as the common language. Only a few settlers from Europe have yet appeared; most of the newcomers are Yankees. Single males make up a large percentage of the population, and the social tone of the community has suffered accordingly. Drinking, swearing, and fighting consume much of the recent arrivals' time and many of Kraus' pages. Allowing for the difference in style between Lovelace and Kraus, the change in atmosphere is striking and probably accurate historically.

The book's main character, Shawn Dark, arrives in St. Paul on a steamboat in the spring of a year in the early 1850s to stay with his Uncle Jabez, who owns a low-class boarding house called the Hunter's Bee. Shawn plans to go north with the Red River ox carts, but must wait until late July for their arrival. In the meantime, he explores St. Paul. He attends one decorous party held in a mansion, but most of the so-

cial life of the town appears to consist of street fights.

Finally, Shawn hears the ox carts in the distance:

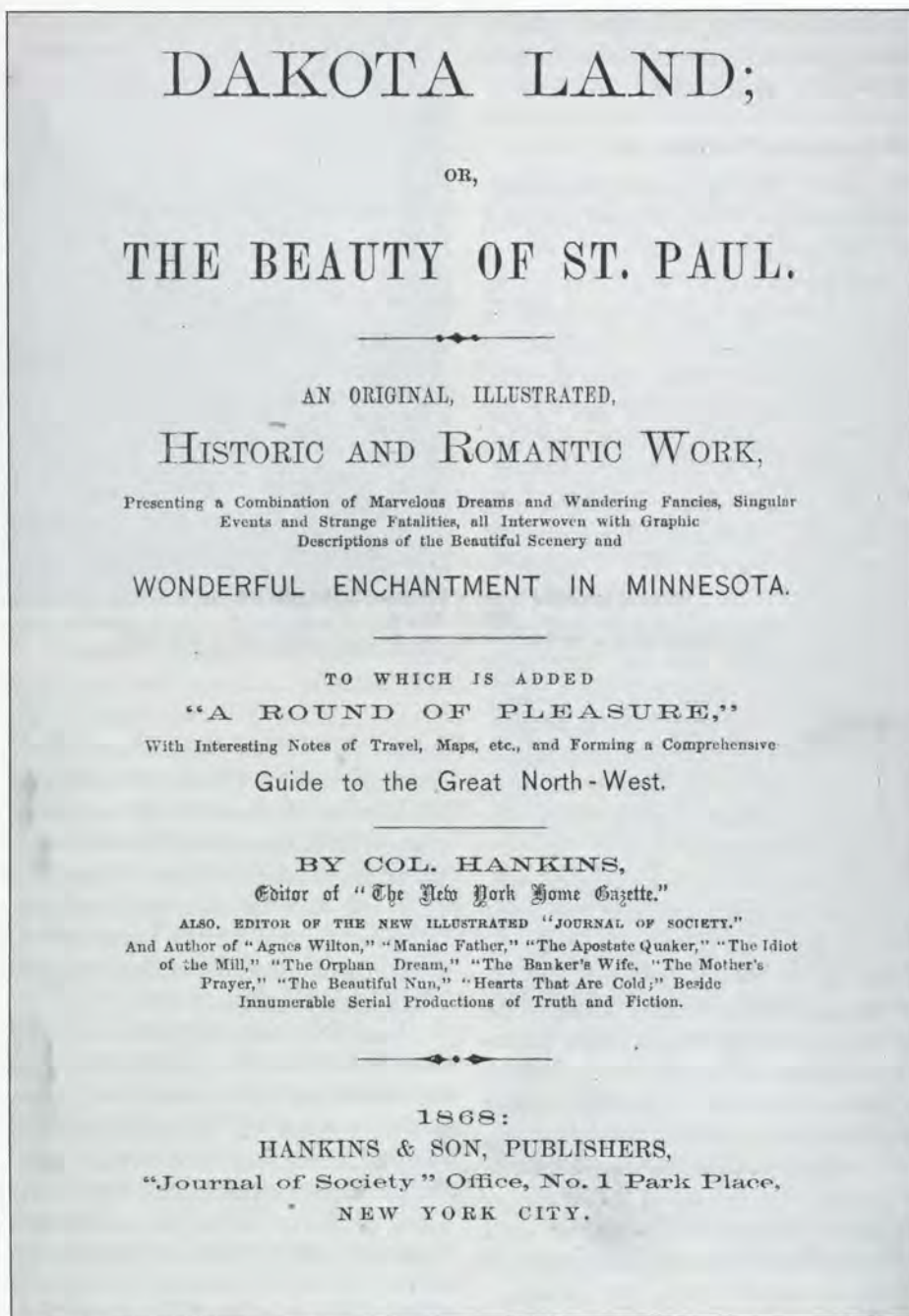
A sound brought him sitting up in the bed. Through the leafwork of the oak he heard the screaming sound coming from beyond St. Anthony Hill, beyond the rim of the western ridge . . . A faraway shout, a nearer but unintelligible answer, a call in the next block and a rush of excited voices from house to house, from street to street. It gathered in volume. 'They're coming! They're coming! Didja hear? The oxcarts. Can't be far away now.!'

The Ox-Cart Trail is not very rewarding as a novel, for it lacks a well-knit plot or serious analysis of human nature, but Kraus manages to work in a great amount of authentic detail about steamboats, buildings, food, clothing, and everyday events of the period.

Fiction As Promotion

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow never visited Minnesota, but his *Hiawatha* played a role in St. Paul's mid-nineteenth century tourist boom. The introduction of luxurious steamboats, along with publicity about the scenery on the Upper Mississippi, the healthy climate, and the cool summers, attracted a stream of summer visitors, many of whom were excited by the romantic view of the "noble red man" as seen by Longfellow and James Fenimore Cooper. As parties of visitors arrived wishing to be taken to the supposed girlhood home of Minnehaha, the name of Brown's Falls was changed to Minnehaha Falls, and the falls speedily became Minnesota's number one tourist attraction.

Tourism promotion could not have been further from Longfellow's mind as he wrote *Hiawatha*, but many lesser writers of that era used fiction to tout the advantages of new locations. A local example of the novel as an economic promotion tool is *Dakota Land, or The Beauty of St. Paul*, written and published in 1868 by Colonel C. Hankins. The fictional thread of the story is best ignored. The colonel devotes more than half his pages to descriptions of St. Paul and environs, to patronizing anecdotes about the Indians (including the famous Old Bets), and to historical yarns of



Title page from Col. Hankins' fanciful account of St. Paul's early years. Ramsey County Historical Society photo.

varying credibility, including a fanciful resolution of the mystery surrounding the fate of Pig's Eye Parrant.

The colonel states in his introduction that he made two short visits to St. Paul before writing the book. He appears to have based his work mostly on conversations in hotel bars with local St. Paul storytellers; thus, the interest of the book today lies in

its report on St. Paul's local historic folklore gathered firsthand from early participants. Appended to the book is a forty-page section of travel information, with details on trains, boats, hotels, and points of interest. Among the tourist attractions the colonel recommends for the St. Paul area are Fort Snelling, Minnehaha Falls, and the bones of the Dakota chief Little

Crow, which he says were then on display in the Minnesota Historical Society's room in the first state Capitol.*

Literature Begins

The earliest St. Paul novel that demonstrates literary effort for its own sake, and that also shows St. Paul as a large city, is *Allisto, a Romance*, by Mrs. Ansel Oppenheim. The book was first published in 1884; it was revised and republished in 1904, and again in 1909, under the title, *Evelyn, A Story of the West and the Far East*. Mrs. Ansel Oppenheim was born Josephine Greve, daughter of a wealthy St. Paul real estate developer, Herman Greve. She married Oppenheim not long after his arrival in St. Paul in 1878. Oppenheim prospered through railroad and real estate investments, built the St. Paul Metropolitan Opera House and the Oppenheim Building, and served on the board of the St. Paul Union Stockyards. Around the turn-of-the-century the Oppenheims moved to New York, where they lived in an apartment at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. She died in 1915 and he in 1916.

While the plot of *Allisto* is typical mid-nineteenth century melodrama, the author uses the story as a framework for the introduction of exotic characters and for serious discussion of many advanced intellectual interests of the day. Her characters converse at length about Oriental religions, Germanic mythology, higher consciousness, scientific thought, fate, and woman's place in the nineteenth century.

The book's heroine, Evelyn, lives in a little woodland settlement in central Min-

**In 1868 the Minnesota Historical Society was located in the basement of the first state Capitol, which stood in the block surrounded by Tenth, Cedar, Exchange, and Wabasha Streets. Patricia Harpole, Minnesota Historical Society reference librarian, stated on April 28, 1992, that the society believes that it never had the complete skeleton of Little Crow, but that his skull and scalp were indeed on display for a short period. These artifacts remained in storage until 1971 when they were returned to Little Crow's people. For a description of Little Crow's death and later treatment of his body, see Duane Schultz, Over the Earth I Come: The Great Sioux Uprising of 1862. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992, pp. 273-74.*



The Merchants Hotel, a favorite setting for novelists, as it looked in 1918. G. P. Gibson photo, Minnesota Historical Society.

nesota. Her mother dies and her father, distraught with grief, leaves her in the kind hands of the Walburn family and disappears. The Walburns move to Memphis, where the whole family dies of cholera in 1873. Evelyn, who now seems to be in her late teens, is cared for by a family friend, the Hungarian Count Tochmann, a refugee of the Kossuth rebellion.

Count Tochmann brings Evelyn to St. Paul for her health to spend the summer at the Merchant's Hotel, which stood at the northeast corner of Third (Kellogg) and Jackson Streets. Noise doesn't seem to endanger Evelyn's health, for she calmly notes the din of hammering on the new buildings going up all over town. Evelyn attends a concert in Rice Park, a picnic at White Bear Lake, and a "hop" at Fort Snelling. She meets some childhood friends again, including Malcolm Graham, who is now a doctor.

Mrs. Oppenheim presents Evelyn as an intelligent, idealistic young woman who seeks some sort of purpose or usefulness, but whose efforts are firmly squelched by the men in her life. When she tells Walburn, for example, that the Women's Reading Club has resolved that young women should be educated to be able to earn their own living, he is shocked and hurt. He tells her that women should "adorn the home." Malcolm, too, "trem-

bles and turns pale at the thought," when she tells him that she would like to be a doctor. He tells her that women are unreasonable to be discontented; in his experience, "women under care of a physician are more in need of spiritual guidance."

Evelyn responds, "If you believe in the theory of evolution, women are but obeying an irresistible law when they chafe against restrictions that narrow the sphere of their activities. Herbert Spencer traces the change of the uniform into the complex, and can women alone be exempt from this law of evolution? It is my opinion that it is the working of this widespread and irresistible law of evolution that makes the women of our age restless."

Not long after arriving in St. Paul, Evelyn meets an exciting, attractive man named Allisto. "He has come to St. Paul," someone tells her, "to pursue certain electrical investigations which the marvellous clarity of the air renders possible." The Count, too, is interested in science; his experiments involve distilling flowers. Evelyn has by now acquired a rather stimulating social circle, to which is added Don Miguel Hidalgo from Mexico. Don Miguel, who is in St. Paul to seek investors in a gold mine, turns out to be Evelyn's father. Evelyn and Allisto marry, honeymoon in Mexico, and return to Allisto's house on Dayton's Bluff.

Mrs. Oppenheim describes Dayton's Bluff in 1875:

This place, removed from the din of the city, afforded a retreat congenial to the studies Evelyn was to pursue, while the picturesque beauty of the surrounding countryside disposed the mind to contemplation, and among the occupants below was found ample opportunity for the exercise of charity.

In regarding the nearby squatter settlement of Swede Hollow and its objects of charity as a real estate advantage, Mrs. Oppenheim shows herself to be an original thinker.

Allisto/Evelyn lacks a believable plot or subtle characterization, but it is interesting in the knowledge of contemporary issues that its author, a young St. Paul woman, displays.

The New American City

By the 1880s, St. Paul, which only thirty years earlier had been a small settlement, was a great city, the center of transportation and wholesaling for the entire Northwest. During the single decade of the 1880s, the population of the city tripled, from 41,500 people to more than 133,000. In addition to the many thousands who came to live in the city, many thousands more passed through on their way to populate its agricultural hinterland.

The overriding theme that emerges from the fiction of that period is the forging of a new social order out of the chaos of values, customs, and languages those newcomers brought to the city. The definition of what it was to be an American, the Americanization of the immigrant, and the struggle for survival and upward mobility were powerful emotional forces in conflict with the older ideas of social class brought by earlier settlers from the East.

By the 1880s, in St. Paul as in every large American city outside the South, new wealth had brought into being a new class system in which status based on suddenly acquired riches challenged status based on birth or behavior. The struggle of the *nouveaux riches* for acceptance by the old aristocracy, and the struggle of the upper middle class to resemble the *nouveaux riches*, form the song and story of the era. Class analysis was a major theme, perhaps

the major theme, of fiction up into the 1950s.

In *A Social Conspiracy, or Under the Ban*, published in St. Paul in 1888, the heroine is a beautiful, virtuous orphaned girl named Pearl, who teaches music in St. Paul. Though poor, she is not friendless; she is received among the city's socially respectable set. Pearl saves the life of the governor, Cassius Kellogg. The governor's wife sets tongues wagging against Pearl, who is soon dropped socially by all but a very few close friends. Through many fast-paced turns of plot, the town discovers that the governor's wife is guilty of a crime committed in another city under another name. The governor's wife disappears from the story, the governor marries Pearl, and presumably they live happily ever after.

The primary theme of the book is a statement against social hypocrisy in St. Paul's upper class. The author, Veen Iogo (pseudonym of Mrs. Ione Daniels), lets the reader know what she thinks of the gossipy old society hens who are so willing to follow power rather than integrity by ostracizing Pearl. But just below the surface lies another theme, the allure of that wealth and power. Though it is her heroine's virtue and high-mindedness that the author wishes to reward with a happy ending, Daniels' glittering descriptions of the governor's horses and carriage, of houses and clothes, and of fancy parties reveal that her values are not anti-materialistic. Daniels is not really criticizing the game; she is only saying that a nice girl can play and win.

In itself, *A Social Conspiracy* is a simplistic Cinderella story, but as an early local novel dealing with what will be the major theme of Minnesota fiction for the next seventy years, social class strivings, it acquires significance and interest. Better writers would explore that theme on many levels. F. Scott Fitzgerald, for example, achieved lasting fame with his sophisticated analysis of manners and morals. And in the hands of Sinclair Lewis, the exposure of social hypocrisy in Minnesota would win a Nobel Prize.

Fitzgerald and Lewis

When St. Paul opened its *Daily News* on

February 15, 1920, and read an article on local writers who were "Breaking Into the Magazines," little did readers know that before the year was out *This Side of Paradise* and *Main Street* would make Minnesota famous or, in the case of *Main Street*, infamous. "Mr. Harry Sinclair Lewis" was described in the article as a writer who did not wait for inspiration to strike, but sat down to work each day at a regular hour. The following paragraph from the story is quoted in its entirety:

"Mrs. Blair Flandrau, sister-in-law of Charles Macomb Flandrau, recently had a story in the *Saturday Evening Post*. F. Scott Fitzgerald, son of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Fitzgerald of Summit Avenue, has had several stories accepted."

Fitzgerald spent his formative years in St. Paul, and the values and conflicts that surrounded his childhood and adolescence formed the basis of his life's work. Though none of his novels is set in St. Paul, many of his best short stories are. In the late 1920s, years after Fitzgerald had become an international figure, he wrote a series of nine short stories about the adolescence of a boy named Basil Duke Lee, who lives with his widowed mother in a comfortable house on Holly Avenue. In his notes to a collection, *The Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, Malcolm Cowley wrote:

He relived his boyhood in the [Basil] stories and made little effort to disguise the fact that he was writing autobiography. Almost every incident happened in life and almost every character can be identified. Basil Duke Lee was of course Fitzgerald himself; his friends Ripley Buckner, Bill Kempf, and Hubert Blair were, in life and respectively, Cecil Read, Paul Ballion and Reuben Warner.

It is interesting to note that, however autobiographical the Basil stories were, Fitzgerald avoids having to deal with his father by making Basil's mother a widow.

Since the Basil stories portray St. Paul in undisguised form, and since most of the Summit Hill buildings of that era still stand, it is easy for today's reader to picture the settings of the stories. In *F. Scott Fitzgerald in Minnesota, His Homes and Haunts*, author John J. Koblas has identified the many St. Paul homes in which the Fitzgerald family lived, along with the

homes of Scott's friends and their schools, clubs, and other haunts. Koblas identifies the Wharton backyard in which Basil gathered to play as that behind the Charles W. Ames home at 501 Grand Hill.

Besides the Basil stories, three other well-known Fitzgerald stories are set in St. Paul: "Winter Dreams," "The Ice Palace," and "Bernice Bobs Her Hair." "Winter Dreams," a story about the love of a grocer's son for a wealthy, spoiled girl, prefigures the theme of *The Great Gatsby*. It is set in the summer colony at White Bear Lake.

In "The Ice Palace" a southern girl, Sally Carroll Happer, comes to St. Paul at Winter Carnival time to meet the family of her fiance, Harry Bellamy. Harry explains St. Paul to Sally: "You'll notice a lot of things that'll seem to you sort of vulgar display at first, Sally Carroll; but just remember that this is a three-generation town. Everybody has a father, and about half of us have grandfathers. Back of that we don't go."

The climate and manners are twin symbols of alien culture to Sally Carroll. She faces the cold and snow bravely, but at her first St. Paul party the cultural climate seems even chillier to her. Fitzgerald wrote:

In the South an engaged girl, even a young married woman, expected the same amount of half-affectionate badinage and flattery that would be accorded a debutante, but here all that seemed banned. One young man, after getting well started on the subject of Sally Carroll's eyes, and how they had allured him ever since she entered the room, went into a violent confusion when he found she was visiting the Bellamys—was Harry's fiancee. He seemed to feel as though he had made some risqué and inexcusable blunder, became immediately formal, and left her at the first opportunity.

After becoming lost and nearly frozen at the Ice Palace, Sally Carroll has had enough of St. Paul and its ways. She breaks the engagement and goes back to Georgia.

All of Fitzgerald's St. Paul stories deal with youth discovering their personal identity through relationships with other young people. Fitzgerald believed that people of his generation were really different from previous generations; he was the

personification and perhaps the inventor of the generation gap.

It is fortunate for local history that Fitzgerald's reputation as a writer rebounded as quickly as it did from the slump that set in during his later years. By the time of his death in 1940, his work was no longer popular. In a 1950 article in *Minnesota History* on "Thirty Years of Minnesota Fiction," the critic John T. Flanagan summed him up thusly: "Serious effort has recently been made to rehabilitate Fitzgerald's fame; still there seems to be small reason for disturbing his position as a clever and bright chronicler of an age which most people are quite willing to let die."

Wrong, Flanagan. By 1960 college students were reading him again, and by 1975 his picture was on T-shirts.

Sinclair Lewis never set an entire novel in St. Paul, though occasional passages take place there. In *Main Street*, Carol Kennicott works briefly at the St. Paul Public Library before Dr. Kennicott persuades her to marry him and go off to Gopher Prairie. During their St. Paul courtship, they take walks and gaze out over the river valley. Lewis himself was very sensitive to the landscape and history of the city, but his characters were thinking only of themselves, so the city does not play an important role in the book.

In one of Lewis' last works, *The God-Seeker*, a naive New England carpenter, Aaron Gadd, goes as a missionary to the Dakota Indians at Bois des Morts, a Presbyterian-Congregationalist mission station near today's western Minnesota border. In 1849, disillusioned with proselytizing the Indians, Aaron flees to St. Paul with Selene Lanark, the half-breed daughter of the local fur baron, to marry and start a new life as a carpenter. Though Lewis was very near the end of his life when he wrote *The God-Seeker*, the sardonic old moralist had not lost his touch, as he demonstrates in his telling of the Gadd's life in 1850s St. Paul, "this land of promise, which is soon to teem with the wheels of commerce, the palaces of the wealthy and the bellyaching of the poor."

Other Writers

Besides the two giants, there were many other writers who dealt with various aspects of class and Americanization.

Mrs. Blair Flandrau, mentioned above, was a St. Paul writer who was a contemporary of Fitzgerald and Lewis; at one time the three lived within a few blocks in St. Paul. Grace Hodgson Flandrau published four novels between 1917 and 1934, all set in St. Paul and all about the search for a deeper purpose in life within the confines of St. Paul society.

The daughter of Edward and Mary Staples Hodgson, Grace Flandrau was born in St. Paul in the late 1880s. (The exact date is debated.) The family lived at 518 Dayton Avenue. The house is still standing, and it demonstrates that the Hodgsons were prosperous, though not perhaps among the city's wealthiest families.

From the age of twelve to seventeen, Flandrau was sent to Paris to a school she later remembered as rather mediocre.* In 1909, she married William Blair Flandrau, son of prominent St. Paul Judge Charles E. Flandrau and brother of the writer Charles Macomb Flandrau. Grace joined Blair on his coffee plantation near Jalapa, Mexico, where they lived until 1916. Forced by the Mexican Revolution to leave, they returned to St. Paul to live with Blair's brother Charles in the old Flandrau mansion at 385 Pleasant Avenue.

Grace Flandrau's first novel, *Cousin Julia*, is the story of a hard-working St. Paul businessman Jim Bradford, his domineering manipulating wife Julia, and their daughters Louise and Virginia. Jim pays the bills and obeys his wife's instructions as she firmly engineers the family's rise in social status. Virginia, who is adopted, loves a French marquis, but Julia secures his marriage to her biological daughter, Louise, by telling the marquis that Louise will inherit the family money. Louise's marriage is unhappy. Virginia finally realizes that the marquis married her sister for money. After a period of disillusionment, Virginia settles for marriage to a nice, rich, boring man.

In *Cousin Julia*, Flandrau introduces a theme which will appear in all her novels: the loneliness of an intelligent and/or talented person in stifling, conventional St.

*Flandrau interview with her friend, Minneapolis writer Brenda Ueland. "Among Those We Know," in *Golfer and Sportsman*, vol. 15, no. 91 (December, 1934) p. 26.

Paul society. That lonely person is usually a woman, but some of her male characters also feel vague longings and spiritual discontents with their workaday lives. It is interesting to note that the same theme appears in *Main Street* among characters at a lower economic level. Would Carol Kennicott's life have been very different if, instead of marrying Dr. Kennicott and entombing herself in Gopher Prairie, she had stayed in St. Paul and married one of Grace Flandrau's wealthy male characters?

Flandrau's second novel, *Being Respectable*, created a stir in St. Paul when it was published in 1923. A full-page story in the *Pioneer Press* for January 21, 1923, was headlined, "St. Paul Society Furnishes Characters for New Novel by Mrs. Flandrau; City's Institutions, Localities are Called by Right Names; Author's Aliases Not Complete Veil to Identities of Persons Named." An example of Flandrau's veiled identities is the mention of a madam named Anna Gifford. And as if that weren't enough excitement, Warner Brothers made a movie based on the book, starring Monte Blue.

Being Respectable is set in Columbia (St. Paul) in the early 1920s. Darius Carpenter is a rich and respectable widower who lives on lower Summit Avenue. His three children, Charles, Louisa, and Deborah, are devoted to their vigorous social lives, so the book contains many scenes of their constant round of dinner parties, dances at the University Club, ladies' luncheons, shopping, etc.

Charles and Louisa are married, Charles to a refined Eastern girl who would prefer to spend more evenings at home, and Louisa to a businessman whom she ignores. Deborah is an intelligent, idealistic young woman searching for something to do with her life. She thinks about going to college, but doesn't. She does some volunteer work, but without a sense of commitment. She flits discontentedly from one interest to another. "You had to do something. They all had to do something, these women and girls of Columbia with their empty hours and fat bank accounts."

Charles and Louisa's husband Philip enter into extramarital affairs, Charles with a woman of their own set, Philip with a poor young woman who lives in Hazel



Grace Flandrau. Lee Bros. photo, Minnesota Historical Society.

Park. "In Columbia," Flandrau wrote, "people did not sacrifice bravely and beautifully to impractical passions. They did not even have them. At most they cheated a little now and then, when opportunity offered."

Flandrau's picture of Jazz Age St. Paul offers a fascinating contrast to that of her neighbor, F. Scott Fitzgerald. While he casts a shimmering glamour over those dinners and dances at the club, with his protagonist outside longing to be on the inside, Flandrau's main character is inside and likely to be a little bored.

In *Entranced*, Flandrau continues the theme of the conflict between personal identity and social form. Dick and Rita Mallory are a brother and sister who were raised apart because of their parents' divorce. Rita comes to St. Paul to attend her brother's wedding to Lydia Harrison, daughter of a wealthy family in the "jobbing" business. She meets Lydia's brother Gordon and marries him.

Dick and Rita are happy in their marriages, but both occasionally feel there must be more to life. Rita flirts with disaster by almost slipping into an affair, but she considers the consequences of leaving a wealthy husband who loves her, and draws back. Dick creates a crisis by secretly investing in a hat factory in Anoka, contrary to his agreement with his father-in-law that he will make no individual investments outside the family interest. He loses a lot of money, but the family closes ranks to pro-

tect their name and bails him out. Dick and Rita gratefully withdraw into the family, chastened by their glimpse of what life could be like outside that secure, respectable fold.

Flandrau published her last novel, *Indeed This Flesh*, in 1934. In it, Will Quane is a St. Paul businessman whose wife Martha is not very intelligent and lacks social grace. The novel depicts the bitterness of marriage between unequal minds as Martha's inadequacies destroy all Will's efforts to improve himself personally and socially, shallow and misjudged as some of those efforts are. Flandrau shows sympathy and understanding toward both parties in this unhappy marriage. *Indeed This Flesh* is set in a period from the 1880s to about 1910.

In her last novel, Flandrau shows a widened range of interests and a deepened power to depict characters and events outside her own social circle. Martha's interests allow Flandrau to introduce common people, and Will's business trips around the Northwest allow the author to explore thwarted lives in dreary little towns far from Summit Avenue. Flandrau rarely notes the personalities of any but her upper class characters. There are maids, coachmen, waiters, and cigar store clerks in her books, but they are stick figures. They have names like Katy, Selma, or Lars, but no human dimensions. Only in her last book did she even begin to deal with such characters as people.

It is significant for local history that none of Flandrau's major characters have Irish names, and none of her female characters seem to know any political figures socially. If her men know the mayor or members of the City Council, they see them only for business reasons and never mention them at home. Darius Carpenter makes one of Flandrau's few references to the political life of St. Paul when he says, "Oh, that City Hall crowd! Just a bunch of crooks."

Why are the works of Sinclair Lewis and F. Scott Fitzgerald still popular while those of Grace Flandrau, though still very readable, are known to few? The contrast today between Flandrau's reputation and that of Lewis and Fitzgerald is probably fair. Compared to Lewis, her human sympathies and understanding are narrow. Her themes and treatments are very similar to

those of Fitzgerald, but his work is crafted with an elegance she never approached. As social history, however, her work is more valuable than ever for its documentation of the aridity of life for upper class women of that era.

Mabel Seeley was the author of several novels set in Minnesota, including a number of detective stories, and she wrote two books, *The Listening House* and *Woman of Property*, with St. Paul settings. Neither book conveys a strong sense of place, but *Woman of Property* remains a vivid story.

With the addition of a little charm, Frieda Schlemke, the heroine of *Woman of Property*, might have been Scarlett O'Hara, but because Seeley gives us a darkly realistic picture of vulgar, grasping Frieda, *Woman of Property* is no *Gone With the Wind*. While the reader knows that Scarlett is selling herself for money, it is possible to be amused by the process, but Frieda's cold use of lust wipes the smile off the reader's face. The pleasure to be derived from *Woman of Property* lies in recognition of its psychological and social realism.

As the story opens in 1889, Frieda, daughter of a German barber in Northfield (called West Haven in the book) is fourteen and working as a stockroom girl in the emporium of Junius B. Hake. In the store, Frieda's eyes begin to open to social class differences. "All her life she had kept away from those Other People of the town—the Americans, the people who Had Things, the people who made the judgements, the people who set the form. Now, however, she wanted to go where she could see, feel and know what made them different from herself."

In Frieda's experience, people who worked hard were poor, so she deduces that the key to becoming an upper class person is not to work, necessary as that might be, but to look like an upper class person. Frieda's first halting efforts to improve her appearance, and her discovery that a corseted figure is essential to social respectability, are touching, but she gradually loses the reader's sympathy. Her employer notes her shrewdness and energy, and she soon moves up in the store.

West Haven has two colleges, Amiot (Carleton) and St. Ansgar's (St. Olaf). Frieda envies the playful students and their

leisured sisters. She tricks an Amiot professor's son into marriage by telling him she is pregnant. When she discovers that the family, who seemed rich to her naive eyes, is really making a genteel appearance on very little money, she feels cheated. The family interest in books and good manners, the sister-in-law who plays Bach on the piano, the ladies' club—all are a total



Norman Katkov. St. Paul Dispatch-Pioneer Press photo.

bore to Frieda.

Eventually, with her two spoiled children and her only remaining friend, the seamstress Rozzie Balik, the divorced Frieda moves to St. Paul, leaving behind her all the people who know her for what she is. In St. Paul, Frieda opens a dress shop based on Rozzie's talents and becomes a great success, eventually to be brought down by her own faults of character. Frieda learned to dress well, but she never learned the ethical and behavioral basis of real class.

Minority Groups in Fiction

St. Paul's fascinating array of racial and national groups has yet to be used fully by novelists. There have been a number of novels set in St. Paul's Jewish community, but the dramatic histories of other groups lie waiting for the right author.

Norman Katkov, a St. Paul native, was

a police reporter for the *St. Paul Dispatch-Pioneer Press* when his first novel was published by Doubleday in 1947. In *Eagle at My Eyes*, Joe, son of an immigrant Jewish family and reporter on the St. Paul paper, meets gentle Mary when she comes in to put a social announcement in the paper. He takes her to the Rice Street Festival. When Joe's family learns of his love for Mary, they put him under intense pressure to break off the relationship.

After a stormy courtship, Joe and Mary elope but their marriage is troubled by Joe's internal conflicts and his inability to accept Mary's family's reception of him. He is constantly alert to anti-Semitism, and he rebuffs overtures from Mary's friends and family. Joe's friend and mentor at the newspaper tells him he has a "persecution complex." Joe and Mary stay together, but the novel lacks artistic resolution.

Eagle at My Eyes is difficult to evaluate because the author's intention is not clear. Is this story meant to be a realistic picture of anti-Semitic prejudice in St. Paul, or is it a psychological study of a young man whose overreaction to bigotry causes him mental health problems?

The chilling portrait of Joe's mother is but one example of the novel's ambiguity. She is a harridan to whom the marriage of a child to a non-Jew is the equivalent of death. The scenes in which she teaches her children her hatred and paranoia are realistic and frightening. Joe treats his mother with respect, but Katkov does not make it clear whether he does so just because she is his mother, or because Joe really has no idea how pathological her influence is. Such a situation in an immigrant of any religion or nationality does not stretch the limits of realism, but Katkov's presentation lacks artistic verisimilitude.

While not very good as a novel, *Eagle at My Eyes* is a reminder of how popular in the postwar world were the issues it raises. After World War II, ecumenical and interracial organizations became very active in St. Paul, and fighting prejudice attracted increasing support. Politics became not only respectable, but a means of upward mobility in itself. Social class issues, in the sense that Fitzgerald and Flandrau knew them, had begun to fade just before the war, and vanished into irrelevancy after the election of John F. Kennedy.

Back to Norman Katkov. In his second book, *A Little Sleep, A Little Slumber*, he gains his voice. His second novel is a touching and beautifully written tribute to an immigrant father and to family love and loyalty. Lev Simon brings his wife Sarah and baby Joe through many perils from Russia to Canada and over the border illegally to join relatives in St. Paul's West Side ghetto. There Lev works hard and has three more sons. He begins as a pushcart peddler, starts a fruit and produce store, and sends his sons to the university, living all the while under the shadow of his illegal entry. Suffice it to say that he eventually becomes a citizen in a great scene set in the old Federal Courts Building, now Landmark Center.

You don't have to be Jewish to love this story. Many St. Paulites would not be here today if it weren't for an ancestor like Lev, and many readers will see their own grandfathers in his courage and devotion to his family. Readers will enjoy, too, the settings—the fruit store, the pool hall, the old Farmers' Market, the streetcars, the steep hill where the kids slide on Isabel Street. As a result of urban renewal, most of the houses and streets on the West Side in this story are only a memory.

Real Characters in Fiction

Some legendary characters in Minnesota history were so fascinating that authors have tried to capture their personalities in fiction. If the author tries to keep the real individual on the fictional stage for more than a short appearance in his or her public role, artistic and historical problems arise. But for readers looking for historic rather than literary value, even unsuccessful attempts to delineate real people and events can be very interesting. And because St. Paul is the state capital and the ultimate arena of Minnesota politics, many of the state's prominent characters show up in St. Paul in fiction as they did in real life.

In *Hill Country, the Story of James J. Hill*, Ramsey Benson keeps Hill before the reader as a legendary presence in the lives of the farmers and smalltown residents who live along the railroad. The book's fictional characters talk about Hill frequently, but they and the reader never meet him in person. A train, said to be carrying the great man, roars through town but it

doesn't stop.

Knute Nelson and Ignatius Donnelly, however, do appear. Nelson is a young lawyer who comes over from Alexandria to the fictional town of Gumbo to defend Scandinavians who can't speak English, to help them become citizens, and to organize them to vote. When Sven Opsahl, the fictional Gumbo newspaper editor, becomes active in the Farmers' Alliance and is elected to the Minnesota House of Representatives, he and the reader meet Donnelly. Benson shows Donnelly as a spellbinding orator and prime manipulator in the legislature, but he shows Sven doubting Donnelly's sincerity. Thus, Benson enmeshes himself in a problem common to writers who mix real and fictional characters: Is Sven's opinion of Donnelly his own or Benson's?

When Sven comes to St. Paul for the legislative session in about 1890, the old Merchant's Hotel is still the center of political intrigue. Sven can't afford to stay there, but he joins in the meetings at the bar. At that time the hotel had recently installed central heating and removed the stoves from the rooms. Sven is amazed to find newspaper reporters listening at the stovepipe holes in rooms next to political kingpins.

A different picture of Ignatius Donnelly, as a great man, appears in Oscar M. Sullivan's *North Star Sage, the Story of Ignatius Donnelly*. The novel's main character is Herman Theobald, editor of the Hastings newspaper. By focusing on the fictional editor's life and by letting the editor follow Donnelly's career closely, Sullivan is able to introduce several "in person" appearances by Donnelly while avoiding the problem of mingling fact and fiction. Donnelly's house in Nininger was still standing when this novel was published in 1953, so the description of its interior, as seen by Theobald on a visit to the Sage, is valuable today.

Sullivan uses the same technique in *The Empire Builder, a Biographical Novel of the Life of James J. Hill*. Hill enters on-stage from time to time, but the main character is Lucien Ryder, a young lawyer who works for Hill and lives in Lower-town. As the young man goes about his life and work, Sullivan takes him to the Winter Carnival, concerts, plays, and major civic



Governor Floyd B. Olson. Minnesota Historical Society photo.

events, including the Villard celebration in 1883, and the festivities upon completion of the Great Northern in 1893. Ryder's work as a railroad lawyer also makes natural the introduction of material relating to legislation and legal battles connected with railroad development in Minnesota.

Lucien is invited to view Hill's famed art collection. He is impressed by the magnate's gallery in his great new house and by the taste his collection evinces. Lucien has been told that Hill's Barbizon paintings "surpass the collections in Boston and New York." More paintings actually owned by Hill are mentioned by title as Lucien studies them intently. Lucien's visit is ended by the arrival of Archbishop Ireland who has dropped in to chat with Hill.

Other aspects of St. Paul life enter the story through Genevieve Sinclair, the "modern" girl Lucien marries. Genevieve lives with her mother on Crocus Hill, is a graduate of the University of Minnesota (where she was a great admirer of Maria Sanford), and is a volunteer social worker for Associated Charities. Lucien is disturbed by the fact that Genevieve actually visits the homes of the poor in the Con-nemara Patch and on the Upper Levee, but she stoutly defends the usefulness of what she does. She tells Lucien about her working day with its "numerous calls in the

households of want, of suffering and misery accompanied by much hard thinking about what should be done in each instance, and followed by a great deal of running around to see church and lodge officials, employers, and similar sources of help." It is unclear whether the attitudes toward the poor expressed here are Sullivan's own or those of the characters, but the picture of the social worker's attempts to change the feckless behavior of the Connemara Irish reveals an attitude bred deep in St. Paul history.

Through Genevieve, Lucien becomes interested in social problems and is elected to the board of Associated Charities. He later serves on the Unemployment and Housing committees of the Association of Commerce, in a St. Paul that begins to resemble the city of today. Near the end of the book we see Hill working on plans for his great library. Back in 1893, according to Sullivan, Hill had tried to get the city fathers of St. Paul to fund a public library rather than the railroad celebration, but they had preferred the party.

Another of Minnesota's legendary figures is Floyd B. Olson, but so far Olson has not been well served by his fictional appearances. In fact, in 1934 he was the subject of a fictional diatribe. *Thirty Years from Now*, a novelette published in St. Paul in 1934 by its author, Robert C. Emery, who was obviously to the right politically from Olson, is set in 1964. John Hansen, who worked for the election of Olson in 1934, has been away from Minnesota for thirty years, and he is looking forward with pleasure to visiting his old home. He is a little surprised to find that the railroad will sell him a ticket only to Hudson, Wisconsin. Minnesota has its own railroad system, he is told.

When the passengers reach Hudson, they disembark, cross the bridge, and are frisked by armed guards. Money and possessions are taken from them before they board the Minnesota train. Hansen finds that "ala Leningrad, the name of Minneapolis has been changed to Olsonia." Hansen spends some time in St. Paul and elsewhere in the state, and after many amusing (to us, not to Emery) incidents, he escapes from the totalitarian soviet state of Minnesota over the border to Iowa.

Another author, Sylvester McGovern,

has a go at Floyd B. Olson in *Last Ditch Stand*, a roman a clef wherein Olson appears as Governor Hank Lund. It's all there—the teamsters' strike, the relationship with FDR, the sexual innuendoes, the political dirty tricks, the death from cancer, and the real political leadership and idealism—but the book is so badly written that it is painful to read. In addition to clumsy writing, McGovern yields glimpses of a love-hate attitude toward his hero.

Old pols say that, aside from the romance with the wife of the president of the Citizens Association, the incidents in this book are largely true; thus, the book has value for its place in Minnesota folklore. But the lesson of *Last Ditch Stand* is, if you've got gossip this good, just tell it. Don't try to get it across through fiction.

The Bad Old Days

St. Paulites today seem to take great interest, and even a little pride, in the city's reputation for corruption and violence during Prohibition days. *Saint Mudd*, by Steve Thayer, is the story of newspaper columnist Grover Mudd and his attempt to pin the goods on the gangsters, crooked cops, and venal politicians who ruled St. Paul when Prohibition was ending and the depression was beginning. The Hamm and Bremer kidnappings, the Hollyhocks Club, the shoot-out at Dillinger's apartment, and early FBI involvement are among the well-known pieces of local history featured in Mudd's daily rounds as a newspaperman. The author has taken some liberties with history, such as the appearance of the famous madam Nina Clifford. She actually had died four years before this novel begins in 1933, but her role in the story works as fiction.

Thayer spent years researching the period, and he does a good job of recreating the way the streets and buildings looked at that time. This is St. Paul before air conditioning and urban renewal—when a lot of its rooms were lit by a single unshaded bulb hanging from the middle of the ceiling, when characters could get around town easily on public transportation, when the present city hall was new.

Those who think that it was Prohibition that brought corruption to St. Paul will be surprised by J. S. Vandiver's *The Boss of the Ward, A Story of Municipal Politics*,

published in 1896, a generation before Prohibition began. *The Boss of the Ward* is set forth as fiction, but it lacks a plot or character development, none of which detracts from its interest. It pictures St. Paul as a city "where the Democratic Party held the balance of power but could show you the descendants of half a dozen Irish kings serving as aldermen, with a corresponding number of subjects on the police force."

As Vandiver demonstrates, the system of harboring criminals in St. Paul began long before John Dillinger took up residence. Vandiver describes the way things were done in St. Paul in 1896:

The chief calls the crook into his office and says to him—'Here, your name is So-and-So. I know you, and I know your graft. You can stay here, and have as good a time as you can find here. But! The first crooked move you make in this town I'll throw you in the sweat box and keep you there until I find out where all you are wanted. Git!'

The fund raised by the local system of corruption, wrote Vandiver, "amounts to about \$75,000 a year, and it is divided about as follows: for the next campaign fund, \$20,000 (\$10,000 a year); the mayor gets \$7,500 a year; captains and detectives \$1,000 each (\$8,000); chief of detectives \$2,500; chairman of the city committee \$6,000; police court judge \$2,000; city clerk \$1,500; recorder or clerk of the police court \$2,000; mayor's private secretary, whatever he can steal. The balance is divided among the aldermen, ward committees, influential organizers and party workers upon an equitable system."

At the time Vandiver wrote his book, a system of ethnic politics later perfected in Chicago seems to have prevailed in St. Paul. He discusses the "race (nationality) question" in Minnesota politics:

Of the foreign vote in Minnesota, for instance, there is probably the ratio of 90 Swedes, 85 Norwegians, 60 Germans, and 40 Irish. Of these the Swedes are all Republicans, while the Irish are all Democrats. The majority of Germans are Democrats, while the majority of Norwegians are Republicans. Now any man not familiar with the practical workings of politics

Novelist to page 24

would expect to see the offices divided in about the same ratio. But they are not. The 85 Norwegians will get twice as many offices as the 90 Swedes, and the 40 Irishmen will get three times as many offices as the 85 Norwegians. In politics the Norwegian is the Irishman of the Scandinavian races.

Vandiver dedicated his book to his dog, with apologies for mentioning its name in the same breath with politicians.

Relatively Recent Times

Norman Katkov left St. Paul about the time his second novel was published and later became a Los Angeles television writer and the biographer of Fanny Brice. Years later he published one more St. Paul story, *Eric Mattson*. Set in the Twin Cities about 1960, *Eric Mattson* is a "doctor book," a very popular genre at the time.

Eric is a resident in surgery at the university hospital, and he works nights as a police surgeon riding around St. Paul in the police ambulance. Katkov must have been a good reporter; his masterful control over his huge set of interrelated characters—the cops, the doctors, the nurses, the reporters, the newspaper owners, the governor and his aides, the desk clerk at the Chippewa (Ryan) hotel—must surely have come from tracking them in real life as a reporter.

Except for some key details, *Eric Mattson* could be set today. Recognizably contemporary, for example, are the internal politics at the university hospital or the way the governor handles the media. But the tip-off that this book was set more than thirty years ago is the role of women. There are no women doctors or medical students at the university; only one reporter and none of the lawyers are women; and not one middle-class married woman in this story has a job.

When *McElroy* was published in 1980, several reviewers were critical because they considered it a clay-footed picture of Eugene McCarthy. It is true that the author, Marvin R. O'Connell, knew McCarthy, and that the story bears many similarities to the lives and backgrounds of McCarthy, his wife Abigail, and their con-

temporaries, but it differs from the actual facts of their lives in many significant ways.

Dennis McElroy is an idealistic Catholic politician. (But he isn't witty, so how could he be Eugene McCarthy?) His wife Mary Anne is the daughter of the wealthy Rileys from Capital City (St. Paul). Dennis attended St. Andrew's, clearly St. John's University, and the ties made there remain critical to his career and to the development of the plot.

Themes in St. Paul Fiction

The social history of St. Paul since white settlement spans more than 150 years. One of the benefits of reading the fiction set in that period is a greater understanding of the city's culture as we know it today. In existing St. Paul fiction, some themes and topics occur frequently, others not at all; and some themes appear in fiction which have been little explored by serious historians.

A frequent theme of St. Paul novels before 1950 involves social and economic conflict between Yankees and immigrant groups. These conflicts play out in such plots as: sensitive, intelligent immigrant struggles toward a goal while suffering being looked down upon by natural inferiors who happen to be WASPs and therefore consider themselves superior; or, immigrant parents and their children suffer pain as the parents try unsuccessfully to keep their children from being Americanized. The immigrant experience loses its tension about 1950 as the members of the last great immigrant wave begin to die, and this change in focus is reflected in fiction being written at that time.

The image of the businessman—as admirable builder, as rapacious exploiter of people and resources, or as Babbitt—appears often in the nineteenth and twentieth-century fiction. The real people behind those images and the important role they played in history have been neglected by professional historians. And the gripping drama of local government and politics in St. Paul has been almost totally ignored by historians.

The most prolific St. Paul writer on the theme of women's lives was Grace Flandrau, though she could hardly be called a

feminist writer because she had no political construct within which to place her characters' problems. Flandrau seems to have identified herself politically as a WASP and a Republican, not as a woman. Her female characters have no notion, nor, does it appear, did Flandrau herself that there was any connection between their problems and those of working class women. Her wealthy women characters complain a lot. Flandrau identifies their problem as boredom.

Powerful themes abound in the life of any city, and they lie unused until someone sees the story in them. For example, there must be at least one dramatic epic, a thriller or two, and a nice domestic comedy in the unwritten history of the Irish in St. Paul. St. Paul's African American community boasts famous artists, heroes of the labor movement, and respected families who have lived in the city for many generations. There has to be a story there. The two great domes that overlook St. Paul appear in many books as beloved features of the landscape, but no novelist has tackled the theme they symbolize, the development of Minnesota's renowned tradition of civil liberty.

Critics have often said that historical writing is a kind of fiction for, however diligently a historian may seek perfect inclusiveness and perfect objectivity, the historical story must be based on selection and validation of existing data. The work of the most balanced historian will inevitably reflect to some extent the interests of the author. The fiction writer, on the other hand, cultivates idiosyncratic vision. In the work of great historians and great novelists alike, somewhere in the creative process must occur a congruence of factual analysis and imagination.

NOTE: Readers will find copies of the books mentioned in this article in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society or the St. Paul Public Library.

Frances Sontag holds a master of arts degree in library science from the University of Minnesota and has a serious interest in local history. She is principal assistant to Ramsey County Commissioner Ruby Hunt.



Murder most foul! Colonel Hankins draws on local lore, circa 1868, for his colorfully imaginative "history" of St. Paul's early years. See the article on novelists and not-so-fictional St. Paul beginning on page 10.

R.C.H.S.
RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

NON-PROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Paul MN
Permit #3989