

Six Decades Making Music and Memories

Minnesota Boychoir

BARBARA W. SOMMER, PAGE 1

By the Numbers . . .

Who doesn't love topping fluffy pancakes with melted butter and pure maple syrup? In Minnesota, it's a spring tradition to tap maple trees and gather all that delicious sweetness. So it's not surprising that one popular brand got its start here. See "The Man and The Can: Patrick J. Towle and the St. Paul Origins of Log Cabin Syrup" by Matthew M. Thomas on page 14. The history is fascinating, but as far as pure maple syrup goes, well. . . .

Percentage of pure maple syrup in the Log Cabin Syrup recipe in its first fifty years:

25^a

Percentage of pure maple syrup in the Log Cabin Syrup recipe today:

0^b

Amount Log Cabin Syrup collectors pay for early paper-label, cabin-shaped tins in very good to fine condition:

\$200-\$2,000^c

Year the iconic cabin-shaped syrup tin was invented:

1897^d

The last year the cabin-shaped tin was used to package Log Cabin Syrup:

1956^e

The average price for a quart of Log Cabin Syrup in 1910:

50 cents^f

SOURCES: For a complete source list, see endnotes on page 26.

ON THE COVER



Top photo: Young singers under the direction of Paul H. Pfeiffer in 1978. Front row (L-R): Sanford Jones, Tom Whitney, Brian Balcom, and Rollin Ransom. Photograph by Paul Shanboom, courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society; Bottom photo: Select members of the Minnesota Boychoir's Allegro choir in 2017-2018 (L-R): Noah Yager, Jacob Engdahl, Alejandro Ricart, Christopher Williams, Per Swenson, Gabe Hug, and Finn Jackson. Photograph by Diana Ricart. Courtesy of Minnesota Boychoir Archives.

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Message from the Editorial Board

This year, the Minnesota Boychoir celebrates its sixtieth anniversary. Founded in 1962, the organization has, over the years, added to our state's international reputation for choral music excellence. What began with thirty members today features four choirs, headquarters in St. Paul, a small artistic and administrative staff, countless volunteers, and a wide repertoire of music. Thanks to historian Barbara W. Sommer, we learn what it's like to be part of this beloved tradition.

Nearly a century before the choir's founding, a young Lillie Belle Gibbs was tending to her chores at the family farm north of St. Paul. It was 1877. At the same time, Patrick J. Towle was working to make a name for himself in the grocery business in Chicago.

Gibbs was the daughter of market farmers. It was not an easy life, but it was a full one, as we witness in the historical fiction children's book *Grasshoppers in My Bed*, soon-to-be-published by Ramsey County Historical Society. Gibbs lived in an agrarian community. She was made by the land and farm.

Towle, on the other hand, was made by the city. He weathered financial ups and downs before moving to St. Paul in 1888 in search of a fresh start. With his Log Cabin Syrup, Towle helped usher in the era of marketing, branding, industrialization, and expansion into distant markets.

These three stories are deeply rooted in our history. Early residents found that Ramsey County was—and still is—a place of prosperity and opportunity—a place where people can make a full life, a prosperous living, and, of course, beautiful music.

Anne Field
Chair, Editorial Board

Correction: Regrets to Judge Tanya Bransford. She was incorrectly identified on page 5 in our Winter 2022 issue. She is a St. Paul native rather than a native of North St. Paul.

The Ramsey County Historical Society thanks former Board Member James A. Stolpestad and affiliate AHS Legacy Fund for supporting the updated design of this magazine. Publication of Ramsey County History is also supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr., and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon. Sincere thanks to Minnesota Boychoir for their financial support.

Book Reviews

A Natural Curiosity: The Story of the Bell Museum

Lansing Shepard, Don Luce, Barbara Coffin, and Gwen Schagrin

Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2022, 400 pages

REVIEWED BY ANNE FIELD

The Bell Museum, located on the edge of the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus, is celebrating its 150th anniversary with *A Natural Curiosity: The Story of the Bell Museum*, a book that fondly recounts the museum's history yet acknowledges its shortcomings. What could have been a dry chronology trumpeting the efforts of mainly white males is, instead, an honest account of the origins of the Bell, its challenges over the years, and its relevance today. The authors' honesty and humility give ballast to *A Natural Curiosity*. It's more than just an anniversary book. It's an admirable yet unflinching history of how the Bell began and how it has survived. Nature is always changing and so is the Bell Museum.

In 1872, the Minnesota State Legislature mandated a geological and natural history survey of the state and created a natural history museum. So began the winding road of the Bell. The book's strength is that it is not a strict chronology of the events of the past century and a half but rather a collection of stories featuring the many characters who built the Bell. A reader may pick up this book, open to any page, and enjoy anecdotes and photos of people whose work was significant to the institution. Early on, there is a multipage timeline of the museum's history that allows the reader to interact with random curiosity, moving easily back and forth through the pages while remaining oriented.

One of the museum's objectives has always been to raise public awareness of the natural world and conservation. Many of us will never see the sandhill crane migration or John James Audubon's enormous *The Birds of America* folio in person, but, in *A Natural Curiosity*, readers may study beautiful color reprints of the museum's dioramas and selected plates from Audubon's tome. This new publication is rich in content, and

the style of the writing is conversational, instructive, and accessible to a range of ages and backgrounds.

Given the era in which the Bell originated, its hallmark was its dioramas. A diorama, or habitat group of animals, was a new way to represent nature in museums in the early twentieth century. Animals were preserved through taxidermy and arranged in an ecological setting in a glass display. The walls of the displays featured exquisitely painted natural settings. This book devotes many pages to the artistry and scope of these dioramas. The organization's goal was to provide the public with "windows into nature," but, by the 1940s, dioramas had fallen from favor. Viewers had other venues through which to experience wildlife, and questions were raised about how much people learned from dioramas. Rather than destroy them, the Bell dioramas were lovingly and expertly refurbished, treated as works of art from a bygone era, corrected to better represent history as we understand it today, and incorporated into the museum's new location on the St. Paul campus.

The book touches on the temporary decline of the institution in the mid-twentieth century, while acknowledging the many people whose dedication kept its original spirit and purpose alive. Scientists were in the field studying environmental change, biodiversity, and human impact. More women entered the sciences, and artists of diverse backgrounds were recognized for their abilities to enhance study of the natural world in innovative and creative ways. Bell Museum curators led the way nationally in using digital media to catalog, manage, and make accessible the museum's vast specimen collections. Slowly, the Bell reinvented itself, embracing technology, collaboration, and social change. Throughout the book, it is clear that this isn't just a building or an institution, rather, *people* have made the Bell what it is today.

A Natural Curiosity traces the Bell Museum's journey from its ambitious beginnings to near neglect and back to a valued place in our state's history. The book is balanced and clear-eyed, both a recognition of growth and achievement and an acknowledgment of the inequities upon which the museum was built. The book is, indeed, a celebration of the Bell and, just like the museum itself, it is open to all.

Anne Field is a community volunteer and serves on the board of the Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS). She is chair of its editorial board.

A Private Wilderness: The Journals of Sigurd F. Olson

Sigurd F. Olson; David Backes, editor

Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2021, 376 pages

REVIEWED BY ANNE COWIE

Sigurd Olson, a father of the movement to save the Boundary Waters in the Quetico-Superior region of northeast Minnesota, wore many hats: backcountry guide, college professor, family man, and, in later years, nationally known advocate for preserving wild places. But his most compelling role was as a nature writer—bringing to life the Northwoods of Minnesota and Wisconsin both as a physical refuge and as a touchstone for spiritual renewal. His numerous books, beginning with *The Singing Wilderness* in 1956, offer inspirational insights that spring from the natural world but can apply to anyone seeking a deep meaning in life.

Olson published eight books and a half-dozen collected works over the years, but his personal journals have remained unpublished—until now. David Backes, the editor of this collection—*A Private Wilderness: The Journals of Sigurd F. Olson*—is well-qualified for the task of bringing them to light. When Backes was a college undergraduate, he considered dropping out and wrote to Olson, whom he admired, for advice. The naturalist wrote back immediately and convinced Backes to stay in school, eventually paving the way for Backes' future career as a professor and scholar of Olson's life and work.

These journals cover roughly twenty years of Olson's life—from age thirty to fifty. During this time, Olson was busy providing for his family. Still, he had an abiding desire to leave his employment as a teacher and turn to writing fulltime. He tried writing for magazines and newspapers, constantly trying to "make it" and determine what would appeal to readers so he could sell enough copies to support himself. In his private journal entries, he agonized to himself, worrying that he would never achieve success in portraying the spiritual element

of the wilderness he cherished in a format that would attract an audience.

What strikes the reader is Olson's persistence: he never gave up—even through reams of rejection letters and failed attempts to “break through” as a writer. Finally, when Olson was in his fifties, he spoke at a national conference on wilderness preservation. Publisher Alfred A. Knopf was there. Knopf saw potential in Olson's work, and the rest, as they say, is history.

The journals seem somewhat at odds with the popular view of Olson as a confident, charming man who was ultimately successful in saving the Boundary Waters and advocating for national wilderness preservation. Through his contemplations, Olson freely acknowledges periods of depression and discouragement in his quest to publish. But his reflections are the honest depictions of a person struggling to hone his craft and find a way to disseminate his personal view of the natural world. Budding authors working to write and publish may see in Olson's dedication a path toward realizing their own vision. And if they happen to visit the wilderness for inspiration, Olson would be the first to approve.

Anne Cowie retired as a career law clerk with the Minnesota Court of Appeals. She has served on the RCHS Editorial Board for sixteen years, fifteen of those as board chair. She enjoys taking long walks in the wilderness.

2022 Minnesota Book Award Finalist¹

Confluence: A History of Fort Snelling

Hampton Smith

St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2021, 278 pages

REVIEWED BY MATTHEW W. WRIGHT

The past six years have seen the publication of two new histories of Fort Snelling and its surroundings by the Minnesota Historical Society Press. These two books, *Fort Snelling at Bdote: A Brief History* by Peter DeCarlo (2016; annotations added 2020) and *Confluence: A History of Fort Snelling* by Hampton Smith (2021), present the first book-length studies of the fort from (and before) its founding in 1819 to its final decommissioning after World War II.

Previous books, such as Marcus L. Hansen's *Old Fort Snelling: 1819-1858* (1918) and Evan Jones's *Citadel in the Wilderness: The Story of Fort Snelling and the Northwest Frontier* (1966), focused on the early years of the fort until its first decommissioning in 1858, when Minnesota became a state. Other books have been published by Mary Henderson Eastman, Charlotte Ouisconsin Van Cleve, Henry Hunt Snelling, and, in recent years, Corrine L. Monjeau-Marz and Stephen E. Osman.

The DeCarlo and Smith books attempt to cover the entire chronological history of the fort. They will likely provide at least part of the foundation for the new interpretive plan for Fort Snelling, which, having recently marked its 200th anniversary, is in the midst of a major renovation and reorientation in its historiographical presentation.

Both books reflect, as earlier ones did, the preoccupations and prejudices of their era. Hansen, for example, wrote from a triumphal nationalist perspective and was primarily concerned with the fort's role in establishing US sovereignty in a frontier territory after the War of 1812. The Smith and DeCarlo books, on the other hand, are written largely from a postcolonial perspective that does not accept uncritically the legitimacy of US national expansion and privileges the perspectives of Indigenous people, particularly the Dakota. They also reflect present-day concerns with race, gender, and sexuality. This marks a clear shift in the way that the stories of the fort are told.

Smith's book is divided into chronological chapters covering the fort's history and its surroundings and their place in Dakota and Euro-American history before Zebulon Pike's expedition in 1805 until the final chapter on the establishment and re-creation of Historic Fort Snelling as we know it today. Each chapter is presented in the larger context of local, national, and world history, and is compellingly and accessibly written. Smith uses primary sources to great effect, including quotations from letters, journals, newspapers, maps, and paintings. The section on the place of dueling among officers at the fort under (and including) Colonel Josiah Snelling is particularly fascinating. There also is an attempt to include the stories of those seen as missing in previous histories, particularly Indigenous people,

African Americans both enslaved and free, and women.

The effort to include a fuller Native picture finds less success in Smith's discussion of Dakota and Ojibwe warfare, which was a constant presence around the fort and in the territory until the forced removal of most of the Dakota in the wake of the US Dakota War of 1862. Smith does briefly note several instances of Dakota-Ojibwe violence in his book, but they are downplayed or couched in ways that emphasize cooperation and fellowship. This is a larger problem in DeCarlo's book, which deemphasizes this conflict even more. In these works we see an intentional shift in the historical representation of Minnesota's Indigenous people that focuses less on the warrior cultures of the Dakota and Ojibwe and more on a story of Indigenous harmony, victimization, and survival.

Smith's book successfully executes his goal of presenting a history that reflects the experiences of a variety of people. The question of the fundamental significance of the fort, which, in the view of Osman in *Fort Snelling and the Civil War* was “how generations of soldiers and civilians used the fort as a fulcrum for regional growth,” is not disputed by Smith. However, his evaluation shifts from a positive or morally agnostic reflection of historical change to one of regret and critical reflection.

The question of whether or not early modern European colonization is so qualitatively different from other forms of migration, displacement, and conquest as to necessitate this historiography, I invite the reader to ponder.

Overall, Smith's book is highly recommended for readers well-versed in the history of the fort and those new to the subject. The other books mentioned here also are necessary reading to understand the varied ways in which this important site has been and can still be seen.

Matthew W. Wright studied history at St. Olaf College, Waseda University, the University of Washington, and UCLA. He has taught history and worked as a historical interpreter at the Minnesota State Capitol. He serves on the RCHS Editorial Board.

NOTES

1. The 2022 Minnesota Book Awards were not yet announced at time of publication.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

A PUBLICATION OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future.

The Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) strives to innovate, lead, and partner in preserving the knowledge of our community, deliver inspiring history programming, and incorporate local history in education.

The Society was established in 1949 to preserve the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, which the family acquired in 1849. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, the original programs told the story of the Gibbs family. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, RCHS also began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways, now telling the stories of the remarkable relationship between Jane Gibbs and the Dakota people of Ĥeyáta Othújwe (Cloud Man's Village).

In 1964, the Society began publishing its award-winning magazine *Ramsey County History*. In 1978, the organization moved to St. Paul's Landmark Center, a restored Federal Courts building on the National Register of Historic Places. An expansion of the Research Center was completed in 2010 and rededicated in 2016 as the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center.

RCHS offers public programming for youth and adults. Visit www.rchs.com for details of upcoming History Revealed programs, summer camps, courthouse and depot tours, and more. The Society serves more than 15,000 students annually on field trips or through school outreach. Programs are made possible by donors, members, corporations, and foundations, all of whom we appreciate deeply. If you are not a member of RCHS, please join today and help bring history to life for more than 50,000 people every year.

Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, & Inclusion

RCHS is committed to ensuring it preserves and presents our county's history. As we continue our work to incorporate more culturally diverse histories, we have made a commitment to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion that is based on this core idea: RCHS exists to serve ALL who call Ramsey County home. To learn more, please see www.rchs.com/about.

Acknowledging This Sacred Dakota Land

Mnisóta Makhóche, the land where the waters are so clear they reflect the clouds, extends beyond the modern borders of Minnesota and is the ancestral and contemporary homeland of the Dakhóta (Dakota) people. It is also home to the Anishinaabe and other Indigenous peoples, all who make up a vibrant community in Mnisóta Makhóche. RCHS acknowledges that its sites are located on and benefit from these sacred Dakota lands.

RCHS is committed to preserving our past, informing our present, and inspiring our future. Part of doing so is acknowledging the painful history and current challenges facing the Dakota people just as we celebrate the contributions of Dakota and other Indigenous peoples.

Find our full Land Acknowledgment Statement on our website, www.rchs.com. This includes actionable ways in which RCHS pledges to honor the Dakota and other Indigenous peoples of Mnisóta Makhóche.

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

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Open to the Public on Saturdays starting May 28th
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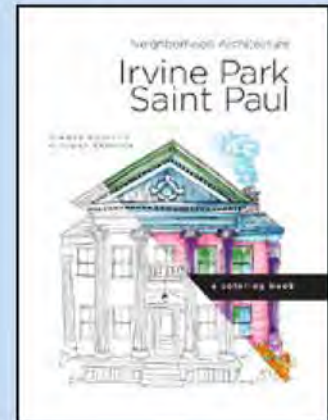


Ramsey County Historical Society congratulates this year's David Stanley Gebhard Award winners:



Jeremiah E. Ellis
Article Prize for
“St. Paul’s Distinct Leadership Tradition:
A Century of the Sterling Club”
Ramsey County History magazine
(Summer 2019)

Jeanne Kosfeld and Richard Kronick
Honorable Mention Book Prize for
*Neighborhood Architecture—
Irvine Park Saint Paul: a coloring book*
(RCHS 2021)



The Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians
will formally present these awards in May.

History Revealed 2022

Making Minnesota: Natives, Settlers, Migrants, and Immigrants

History Revealed programs in 2022 will explore the often untold stories, histories, and experiences of some of the worldwide immigrant, African American, and Indigenous communities that make up our most diverse Minnesota county.

Upcoming programs are planned on the Hmong, Irish, Swedish, African American, and Indigenous people in our community, among others.

For program information, see

www.rchs.com

Past programs are on our YouTube channel.

Go to www.youtube.com and in the search bar enter:
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THE SYRUP CAMP *Try This Delight* **THE SYRUP CAN**

TOWLE'S LOG CABIN SYRUP

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FROM CAMP TO TABLE

The quality or the flavor of Log Cabin never changes.

It is the same today as it was when Mr. P. J. Towle (The Pioneer of Absolutely Pure and Full Measure Maple Syrup) discovered, that in addition to the Towle Process, a small amount of Cane Sugar Syrup blended with the Maple Syrup, greatly improved and balanced the color as well as the flavor, making it soft, mellow, deliciously sweet, still retaining that delicate Maple Character.

It matters not where you purchase Towle's Log Cabin Syrup, from the dealer you have always traded with or at a store where you are a stranger. The Log Cabin Can insures you uniform quality, uniform purity and uniform full measure.

We are so positive that Towle's Log Cabin Syrup will suit you and your family that if your grocer does not sell Towle's it will pay you to go to one who does.

Towle's Log Cabin

The Pioneer Maple Syrup

Full Measure—Full Quality—Full Flavor

We have an attractive book "From Camp to Table" which tells of the many ways Towle's Log Cabin can be used and gives thirty-three prize recipes.

Every housewife should have a copy of this interesting book. By its aid you can delight the family with many new delicacies.

Send for It. It's Free

To every reader of this advertisement who sends us 10 cents in coin or in 3 cent U.S. stamps, we will mail, postpaid, an always useful article: a beautiful, full size, long wearing, silver-plated teaspoon, as illustrated—no advertising on it.

A Souvenir of Towle's Log Cabin

There is a coupon on every can of Log Cabin Syrup, which enables you to secure more of these spoons. Address:

The Towle Maple Products Co.
St. Paul, Minn., U. S. A.
Refineries and Offices:

St. Johnsbury, Vt. In the Virgin Mtns. Range, France. St. Paul, Minn. In the center of North America.

San Francisco, Cal. Seattle, Wash. Headquarters.

Get Mother, but this is good Syrup

"The Man and The Can"

Patrick J. Towle and the St. Paul Origins of Log Cabin Syrup

MATTHEW M. THOMAS, PAGE 14

Color advertisements were fairly rare in the early twentieth century. This one, which appeared in the October 10, 1910 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*, is aimed directly at young boys, who loved syrup on their pancakes and bread, and their mothers, who most likely made the purchasing decisions for the family. Log Cabin Syrup was produced in St. Paul. From the collection of Matthew M. Thomas.