



## Farmer-Labor Founder William Mahoney and His Battle with Communists

JIM MCCARTNEY, PAGE 1



How do supplies get to market? Trains, trailer trucks, and cargo ships do most of the heavy lifting these days, but how was it done in the mid-1800s? Back then, convoys of wooden, two-wheeled oxcarts creaking, swaying, and kicking up dust across prairieland were a common site as fur traders loaded their supplies and made their way hundreds of miles from northern territories to an initial destination—St. Paul. Today, though, the once famed Red River trails are silent. But a recent recreated trek by Canadians Terry and Patty Doerksen has us thinking about what life was like for those early businessmen. Check out these transportation statistics from long ago.

Number of miles between Upper Fort Garry in Winnipeg, Manitoba, to the Port of St. Paul, Minnesota:

**469**

Total weight a typical oxcart and ox could carry (goods and people):

**800 to 1,000 pounds**

Number of carts traveling south to St. Paul in the 1840s:

**Low hundreds**

Number of carts traveling to St. Paul in the late 1860s:

**Thousands**

Number of carts tied together in a "brigade" with three drivers and an overseer:

**10**

Average speed and distance for a typical cart in the 1800s:

**2 miles/hour and 20 miles/day**

Source: "Red River Trails facts for kids," Kiddle, accessed September 29, 2022, [https://kids.kiddle.co/Red\\_River\\_Trails](https://kids.kiddle.co/Red_River_Trails).

To read about the Doersens' recent trek, see "*A Man, a Woman, an Ox, and a Cart: Retracing the Red River Trail*" on page 17.

### ON THE COVER

William Mahoney was a pressman, trade unionist, labor leader, political activist and candidate, and editor. He even served as St. Paul's mayor. Most importantly, perhaps, was his work as a "political entrepreneur." According to author Jim McCartney, the founder of the Farmer-Labor Party "crossed paths—and crossed swords—with some of the most influential leaders in the world." See "Farmer-Labor Founder William Mahoney and His Battle with Communists" on page 1. Photographs courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society. News headline in The Minneapolis Morning Tribune, June 18, 1924, 1.



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REVIEWED BY RENOIR W. GAITHER

## Message from the Editorial Board

It's a shame that history is often reduced to lists—dry, uninspiring chronologies of dates and events. History is so much more—it's people, who through their work, make history—or people, who through their love of land and lore, reenact history and make it come alive in the present day.

William Mahoney was a history maker, an early champion of the labor movement, and a politician who never backed down from a good fight. Or a bad one. In Jim McCartney's cover story, we learn about the "quiet, white-haired little man," a fierce advocate for farmers and workers who described himself as a dreamer. McCartney brings Mahoney to life as we follow his political and personal trajectory.

Then there's Canadian couple Terry and Patty Doerksen. They recently followed the mostly forgotten Red River Trail from Upper Fort Garry in Winnipeg to Lowertown St. Paul—just the two of them and a wooden cart pulled by a young ox named Zik. Terry's love of Manitoba history and his deep respect for the ancient lands of the Anishinaabeg led him to attempt this grueling journey. His adapted dispatches to the *Winnipeg Free Press* and Patty's photos are a delightful addition to this issue.

At Ramsey County Historical Society, we don't just make lists. History comes alive on these pages. We hope you enjoy these stories.

*Anne Field, Chair*

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.

# Book Review

## Whiteness in Plain View: A History of Racial Exclusion in Minnesota

Chad Montrie

St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2022,  
272 pages

REVIEWED BY RENOIR W. GAITHER

Chad Montrie's book, *Whiteness in Plain View: A History of Racial Exclusion in Minnesota*, examines racial exclusion around job and housing discrimination meted out to African Americans. The book sutures together haunting narratives that recover "haints" of past and present racial injustices sorely glossed over by white amnesia.

Meant to upend passivity around racial capitalism and the ideological work that whiteness develops, the book centers control over Black labor and the provisions necessary for its reproduction, such as housing—as fundamental to settler colonialism in early Minnesota as in late capitalism. Montrie provides readers with a deeper, more critical analysis of control structures and how they operate.

The book is an essential addition to past state histories. Previous books, such as William D. Green's *A Peculiar Imbalance: The Rise and Fall of Racial Equality in Early Minnesota* (2007), Christopher P. Lehman's *Slavery's Reach: Southern Slaveholders in the North Star State* (2019), and Paul D. Nelson's *Fredrick L. McGhee: A Life on the Color Line, 1861-1912* (2002), examine early stages of racial exclusion and counteractive liberation struggles to obtain political and social equality in our state. David V. Taylor's *African Americans in Minnesota* (2002) gathers a concise history of African American community organizations, influential leaders, and the development of Black communities in several major cities around the state. Montrie's book complements these manuscripts by broadening analysis and geographic scope of Black urban development, housing and employment discrimination, and community organizing efforts in urban and rural Minnesota communities.

The author's histories support his argument that white supremacist ideology was not only pervasive among Minnesota's early white settlers but provided a rationale for the forced removal of Indigenous people and efforts to codify racial inequality for Black migrants during the antebellum, postbellum, and Jim Crow periods. Well-documented and often poignant, his narratives weave together personal and institutional stories that seethe with powerful emotion and indignation over racial discrimination.

Included are histories about white responses to postbellum Black migration to Minnesota—in particular, St. Peter in Nicollet County, Red Wing in Goodhue County, and Hastings in Dakota County in the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These often resulted in Black retreat from these areas in response to limited occupational opportunities, and, in many cases, open hostility—the infamous Duluth lynchings of June 15, 1920; mob violence against Black strikebreakers at the 1922 Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railway roundhouse attack in Austin; and discriminatory housing practices in Edina, Bloomington, and St. Paul in the 1950s and '60s.

*Whiteness in Plain View* provides a strong entry point for readers interested in the evolution of efforts to create fair housing and employment practices in Minnesota. Montrie's skillful analysis and use of credible and varied source materials, including court testimonies, NAACP records, interview transcripts, and other materials is admirable. The book's geographic scope helps readers better understand and appreciate historical institutional barriers to full citizen rights and economic opportunities afforded to African Americans. Included are archival photographs, maps, and illustrations that relate well to surrounding content, along with bountiful notes and a well-organized bibliography.

For Montrie, the current racial order is a consequence of the historic role of majority efforts to exclude and contain Black residents through an evolving set of means—from government aid to collusion with private mortgage lenders and real estate agents and from extralegal racial violence, intimidation, and threats to ideological tools such as discriminatory media and educational institutional practices and policies.

The book's argument revolves around the fossilization of racial exclusion through a perverse and pervasive adoption of historical amnesia and fiction-making that erect false explanations and absolution for recurring racial injustice. Such hauntings deserve collective reckonings, and Montrie's collection of histories hails a well-deserved exorcism.

*Renoir W. Gaither is a poet and former academic librarian. He has held positions at the Shapiro Undergraduate Library at the University of Michigan and Magrath Library at the University of Minnesota. He is a member of the Ramsey County Historical Society Editorial Board.*





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*Ramsey County History* is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, Saint Paul, MN 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 2022, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758.

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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 Heyáta Othúnwe (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](http://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](http://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](http://www.rchs.com). This includes actionable ways in which RCHS pledges to honor the Dakota and other Indigenous peoples of Mnisóta Makhóche.



[www.rchs.com](http://www.rchs.com)

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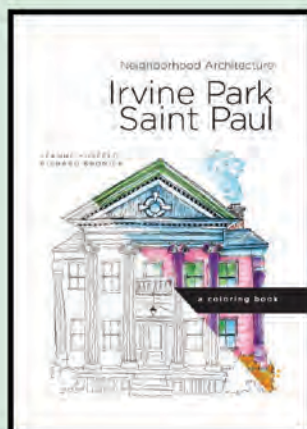
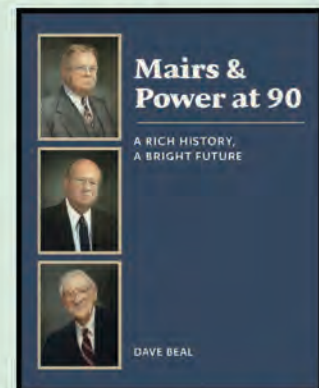
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## *A Man, a Woman, an Ox, and a Cart* **Retracing the Red River Trail**

**TERRY DOERKSEN, PAGE 17**



After two months traveling several hundred miles from Winnipeg to St. Paul along the Red River Trail, Terry Doerksen and his trusty ox, Zik, take their final steps along the banks of the Mississippi River to reach Lambert's Landing in Lowertown. *Courtesy of Ramsey County Historical Society.*