

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
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Summer 2010

Volume 45, Number 2

*“A Rented House Is Not
a Home”*

Thomas Frankson:
Real Estate Promoter
and Unorthodox Politician

Roger Bergerson

—Page 13

“He Had a Great Flair for the Colorful”

Louis W. Hill and Glacier National Park

Biloine W. Young with Eileen R. McCormack

Page 3



As part of his campaign to promote travel to Glacier National Park on the trains of the Great Northern Railway, Louis W. Hill hired Winhold Reiss (1880–1953) to paint portraits of the Blackfeet Indians who lived in that part of Montana. This 1927 portrait shows Lazy Boy, Glacier National Park, in his medicine robes. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program of presenting, publishing and preserving.

CONTENTS

- 3 “*He Had a Great Flair for the Colorful*”
Louis W. Hill and Galcier National Park
Biloiné W. Young and Eileen R. McCormack
- 13 “*A Rented House Is Not A Home*”
Thomas Frankson: Real Estate Promoter
and Unorthodox Politician
Roger Bergerson
- 24 *A Saint Paul Chronicle*
The Return of the “Black Maria”
Maya J. Beecham

27 Book Review

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A Message from the Editorial Board

James J. Hill built the Great Northern Railway as a freight line to carry America’s cargo. But his son, Louis W. Hill, attracted passengers to take the train to a new, grand destination: Glacier National Park. This issue contains an excerpt from the Ramsey County Historical Society’s new book, where Billie Young and Eileen McCormack tell the fascinating story of how the younger Hill developed the park as a tourist mecca, complete with Swiss-chalet-style housing, luring vacationers to its grand vistas. The article also delineates Hill’s complex relationship with the Blackfoot tribe, whom he simultaneously took advantage of and supported as he sought to popularize the park’s Indian heritage. For a perspective on Native Americans in Minnesota history, read Mary Lethert Wingerd’s new book, *North Country: The Making of Minnesota*, insightfully reviewed here by Professor Gwen Westerman. We are lucky to have Wingerd as a member of the Editorial Board of this magazine. This issue also contains Roger Bergerson’s biography of the Midway area’s real estate developer and politician, Thomas Frankson, and Maya Beecham’s vignette of the St. Paul Police Department’s famous “Black Maria,” horse-drawn paddy wagon, which is still available for public viewing. Enjoy!

Anne Cowie, Chair, Editorial Board

Book Review

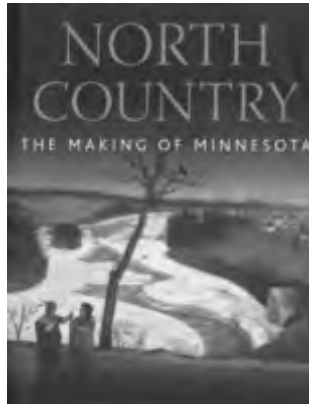
North Country: The Making of Minnesota

Mary Lethert Wingerd
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
Press, 2010
472 pages (including 155 illustrations
and 17 maps); \$34.95

A people's connection to place is often an integral aspect of their identity, and Mary Lethert Wingerd has brought together the complex stories that shaped the history of a state and its residents we thought we knew. Extensively researched and beginning in 1650 when the Dakota people were already well established from the western shores of Lake Superior to distant points south and west, this important volume is, according to the author herself, "not your momma's history of Minnesota."

North Country was commissioned by the Office of the President of the University of Minnesota as a gift to the state for its sesquicentennial in 2008. As Wingerd began her research, she soon discovered that Minnesota had two histories: "the familiar story of settlement and development that carries us from the mid-nineteenth century to the present was quite literally built on the ruins of an earlier multicultural society." Her book follows the impact of more than two centuries of cultural interaction among Dakota, Ojibwe, Winnebago, French, British, American, and immigrant societies that have called this place home. This story of Minnesota is one that she says has been "only briefly touched upon in other state histories," and presents a place where Europeans and Indian peoples coexisted and shared more than trade goods when borders were more cultural than geographic.

Wingerd, associate professor of history at St. Cloud State University, is also the author of *Claiming the City: Politics, Faith, and the Power of Place in St. Paul,*



which considers how the distinct history of St. Paul forged working-class identities and loyalties. *North Country* has extensive illustrations and maps from the time period, compiled and annotated by historian Kirsten Delegard, including maps by Champlain, Hennepin, and Carver, as well as classic paintings by Rindisbacher, Catlin, and Eastman, and photographs by Whitney, Upton, and Ebell. These images portray more of what Wingerd calls an "eye witness" account of place rather than a contemporary interpretation.

Prominent names in Minnesota history—Taliaferro, Eastman, Sibley, Rice, Ramsey—are linked in a complex mix of professional relationships, political maneuvering, and personal ambition. Their fortunes and reputations were formed by a fur trade that transformed into an "Indian" trade based on treaty annuities and ultimately to a land trade fueled by lumber and land speculation. However, Wingerd makes clear that many of those early agents, politicians, and speculators were enriched by deceptive treaties and practices that devastated the Dakota and Ojibwe peoples whose culture of reciprocity and kinship was eroded with each successive wave of newcomers to the region.

As a comprehensive narrative of Minnesota history from Euro-American sources, *North Country* does not "let voices of the Indians be heard,"

as one reviewer proclaimed. The lack of primary and secondary Dakota and Ojibwe sources in the bibliography indicates that we, as native peoples, have a lot of work to do to write our own histories. Another reviewer stated that Wingerd's book looks at the "origins of the state beginning with the tensions between Dakota and white settlers which resulted in the bloody U.S.-Dakota War," which is a misrepresentation of the depth and breadth of her work.

In spite of an occasional lapse in language that recalls common historical stereotypes such as references to Dakota men (but seldom to Ojibwe men) as "warriors," "young braves," or "militants," and mistranslated or misspelled Dakota names and place names, *North Country* provides a documented, chronological narrative of how *Mni Sota Makoce* became the state where we now live. Wingerd exposes general misconceptions about Dakota and Ojibwe presence in the upper Midwest as well as the deliberate constructions of a historical past and popular recollection that erased the stories of native contributions. This is not a book about the U.S.-Dakota War of 1862, or just about Dakota and Ojibwe peoples; it is the story of everyone who came here—French explorers and priests, Canadian *coureurs de bois*, English and Scottish traders, Yankee and Southern women, free Negroes and emancipated slaves, and Irish and German immigrants. That said, she has written a history of Minnesota that accomplishes her charge of more fully illuminating the dynamics that shaped its past and reminds us all that the world as we know it has never been and never will be fully or accurately described from a single point of view.

Gwen N. Westerman, Ph.D., is a Professor in English at Minnesota State University, Mankato and an enrolled member of the Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota.

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German-born artist Julius Seyler (1873–1955) spent the summers of 1913 and 1914 at Glacier National Park, where he painted landscapes and portraits of Blackfoot Indians. His landscape, **Many Glacier Valley**, was completed in 1914 and was used to promote travel to the Park. Painting reproduced courtesy of the William E. Farr Collection. For more on Julius Seyler and Louis W. Hill's work in the creation and development of Glacier Park, see page 3.