

Three Jewish Writers

STEVE TRIMBLE AND PAUL NELSON, PAGE 1

By the Numbers . . .

The brainchild of James J. Hill, the Minnesota Transfer in St. Paul proved to be an achievement in logistics and collaboration between multiple railroads, beginning in the late 1800s:

Number of cattle transported through the Minnesota Transfer yard in 1884.
218,000

Number of cars serviced at the Transfer in 1910 and 1916, respectively.
566,745 & 700,000

Number of employees at the Transfer at its peak.
1,000

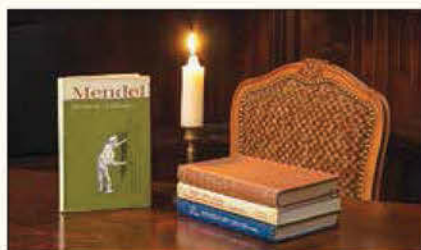
Number of member railroads that collectively operated 55,000 miles of trackage, assuring nearly complete coverage around the country for shippers.
9

Number of cars passing through the Transfer daily in the early 1950s.
2,500 to 3,500

Number of industries in and around the Transfer in the 1950s.
400

SOURCES: See Brian McMahon's article "Creating Communities of Interest: James J. Hill and the Minnesota Transfer," beginning on page 19. This is the story of the phenomenal collaboration and coordination between railroads in St. Paul's Midway.

ON THE COVER



Write what you know. That's what Max Shulman, Norman Katkov, and William Hoffman, did. These writers from St. Paul's West Side Flats infused memories, anecdotes, names, and places into their literary works, giving readers delightful glimpses of the city's old Jewish neighborhoods. *Photograph and design courtesy of Summit Images, LLC—Robert Muschewski and Leaetta Hough.*

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Message from the Editorial Board

History often memorializes transitions. Here, Steve Trimble and Paul Nelson share the stories of three Jewish writers from St. Paul: Max Shulman, Norman Katkov, and William Hoffman. Their families all immigrated to the city, and their St. Paul neighborhoods—Selby-Dale and the West Side—provided fertile ground for their remembrances, novels, and plays, as they moved on as writers after studying journalism at the University of Minnesota. The third article details a much more literal transition story: Brian McMahon's recounting of the Minnesota Transfer project in the Midway area. The railroad's role in commerce may seem less obvious today, but this project, initiated by James J. Hill, moved hundreds of boxcars and sorted tons of cargo on its way to and from destinations around the world. It also spawned the growth of nearby businesses, which took advantage of the convenient shipping facilities. Finally, enjoy the varied book reviews, which should encourage you to dip into three good reads: Melvin Carter Jr.'s memoir; the history of the East Side Freedom Library; and the biography of St. Paul native son, Sandy Boyd.

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

The Ramsey County Historical Society thanks 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 Reviews

Diesel Heart: An Autobiography

Melvin Whitfield Carter Jr.

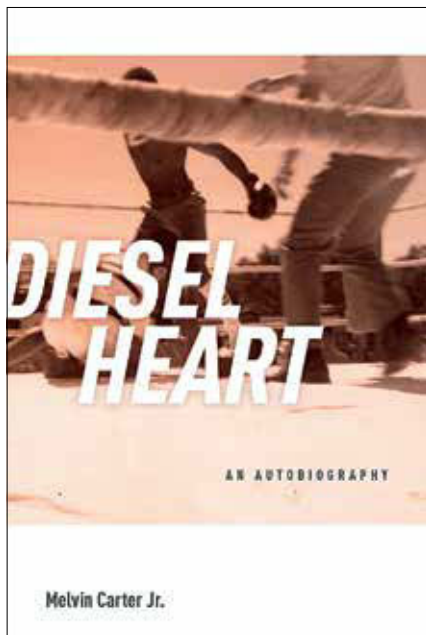
St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2019
256 pages; soft cover; 27 b&w photos; \$17.95

REVIEWED BY MARY LETHERT WINGERD

Melvin Carter Jr. and I both grew up in St. Paul in the 1950s and '60s. But Carter's hometown was a world away from mine. We both played on tree-lined streets where a community of neighbors kept its collective eye on our safety. But while I can revisit most of my childhood haunts even today, Carter and his pals experienced the trauma of seeing monstrous earthmovers devour their neighborhood and fracture their community in multiple ways. While my friends and I felt free to wander wherever we liked, University Avenue marked a color line that Carter crossed only on a dare. While my only encounter with death was the passing of my grandfather when I was twelve, Carter dealt with the senseless death or incarceration of friends and family members whose lives were just beginning.

The destruction of St. Paul's Rondo neighborhood was a tragedy, but even in its heyday, race defined its limits. Beyond its borders, the world was a dangerous place for African Americans. Opportunities were slim. As a young man, Carter seethed with anger that he channeled into becoming a champion boxer. Nonetheless, persistent racism beleaguered him in the navy and even in his career as a police officer.

But this is not a story of victimhood, rather a life full of joy, struggle, and ultimate triumph over daunting obstacles. Carter manages to relate even the darkest moments with the liveliness and candor of a natural storyteller. Not a moment of stuffiness here! And some of the anecdotes are purely hilarious. It is a chronicle of a life well lived, and he gives much of the credit for his success to his remarkable wife, Toni, who serves as a Ramsey County Commissioner and is his stalwart life partner. Today, retired



from the police force, Carter gives much of his time to Save Our Sons, the organization he founded to provide guidance to young, at-risk African American men.

By the 1980s and '90s, many white St. Paulites were inclined to think that our city was more progressive because we didn't see overt protests and, after all, the police chief was African American. *Diesel Heart* reveals how misleading superficial appearances can be and how different the landscape looks, depending on where one is standing. Some may be familiar with the misbegotten destruction of the Rondo neighborhood and its loss to the city's African American community, but in *Diesel Heart*, Melvin Carter brings that community to life in vivid detail that has for too long been missing from the city's collective memory. It is truly a treasure.

Mary Lethert Wingerd is an emerita professor of history at St. Cloud State University in St. Cloud, Minnesota. She is the author of North Country: The Making of Minnesota and Claiming the City: Politics, Faith, and the Power of Peace in St. Paul. She also is a member of the Ramsey County Historical Society Editorial Board and a contributing writer to Ramsey County History.

Reinventing the People's Library

Greg Gaut

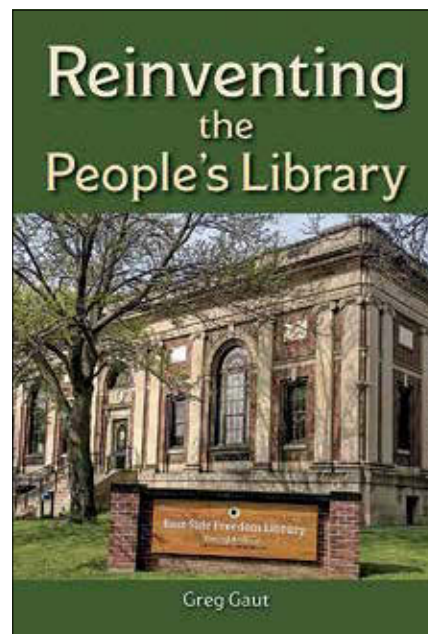
St. Paul: Published with assistance from Minnesota Historical Society with a grant from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, 2019

148 pages; soft cover; 56 b&w photos; \$14.95

REVIEWED BY ANNE COWIE

The majestic old library on St. Paul's East Side reflects the rich history of the people who have lived there—and now helps those who want to remember that history and renew their own connections. In *Reinventing the People's Library*, Greg Gaut describes the organic transformation of the East Side and its library from the days of early settlement to contemporary times. He notes how the rise of literacy in the late nineteenth century created an appetite for more reading material and expanded public libraries. Although St. Paul originally sought help from business magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie to construct a main library, Carnegie persuaded native son James J. Hill to foot the bill for the main branch, instead. Nonetheless, Carnegie provided funding for three branch libraries: St. Anthony Park, Riverview, and Arlington Hills.

The Arlington Hills branch, designed in the Beaux Arts style, opened in 1917 and lent innumerable books to adults and children on the East Side. First, the Swedes came. Attracted to the area by good jobs, they eventually moved from Swede Hollow up the hill and established a thriving business district



on Payne Avenue. The Italians followed, and the library hosted numerous events—from gatherings of Red Cross volunteers during World War I to English classes for immigrant families. The Depression in the 1930s necessitated cuts in library book budgets. And the neighborhood was hit hard in the 1960s and '70s when industry mainstays such as the Seeger Refrigerator Company, Hamm's Brewery, and 3M closed or left for the suburbs. New waves of immigrants revitalized the community—Hmong, Karen, and Latino families. But the library building itself faced imminent demise when the city built a new library blocks away.

Gaut describes how Peter Rachleff and Beth Cleary, professors at Macalester College, spearheaded the drive to preserve the old library. In 2014, their non-profit group negotiated a low-cost lease with the city in exchange for needed maintenance, thus reincarnating the building as the East Side Freedom Library, which now holds vital sources of labor and immigration history. The space hosts writing groups, lecturers, and students working on History Day projects, while participants from different ethnic groups discuss their cultures in special presentations. As Gaut notes, the library now not only memorializes the people who once shaped the East Side but also helps current residents understand their histories. All are welcome to sit under the broad, arched windows of the main reading room and explore their own or their neighbors' compelling stories.

Anne Cowie, who recently retired as a career law clerk with the Minnesota Court of Appeals, is chair of the Ramsey County Historical Society Editorial Board.

A Life on the Middle West's Never-Ending Frontier

Willard L. "Sandy" Boyd

Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2019

394 pages; hard cover; 22 b&w photos; \$35

REVIEWED BY MEREDITH CUMMINGS

A Life on the Middle West's Never Ending Frontier is a well-written and sometimes humorous and self-deprecating memoir by St. Paul native Willard L. "Sandy" Boyd. As the title suggests, Boyd's life as a professor's son, a young lawyer, a university

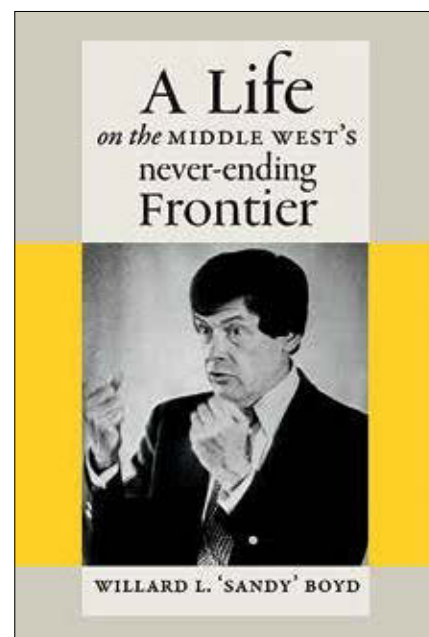
administrator, president of two major institutions, and a respected leader in the world of philanthropy and service was carefully guided by traditional middle-western values. What makes this memoir *different* is Boyd seems to purposely avoid the word "I" when possible. Sure, the book highlights his very full life journey, but that journey deliberately pays tribute to hundreds of people, organizations, and institutions that collaborated with Boyd to make the world a better place than he and they found it.

To start, the memoir highlights the author's early life. Twin Cities' readers will enjoy his childhood anecdotes at 2227 Hillside Avenue in St. Anthony Park. Boyd learned lessons at Guttersen Grade School and Murray Junior High and shares stories about Kusterman's Drug Store and cutting through the fairgrounds to catch the Saturday movies at Midtown Theater. In high school, World War II loomed in the background, and in 1945, following graduation and a few college courses at the U, Boyd joined the navy. Then it was back to school. He earned *two* law degrees and began working as a lawyer before Susan Kuehn—a writer/editor with the *Minnesota Tribune*—came along. Just after Boyd proposed and the couple began preparing for comfortable lives and careers in Minnesota, he got a call from Iowa.

The remainder of Boyd's book focuses on his work from 1954 to the present day, including his dozen years as president of the University of Iowa and fifteen years at the helm of the Field Museum in Chicago. Throughout his career, he kept three important principles in focus: education, research, and service.

The author carefully details the histories of the university and the museum, while crediting those leaders who came before and after him. Readers, unless associated with these two institutions, might want to skim parts of some chapters. They are necessary in documenting important institutional histories, but the many names and detailed minutiae might not entice all readers.

That said, much of the book is intriguing because of several seemingly insurmountable challenges. At the university, Boyd's administration ran head-on into civil rights issues and threats to close the school temporarily, not to mention the day-to-day



need to recruit the best professors, develop new and innovative research, and secure funding. He faced similar challenges at the museum: a push by Native Americans for repatriation of museum collections, efforts to revitalize the museum and navigate controversial exhibitions, and the continuing need to recruit the best, enhance research, and secure funding—always funding!

Boyd plowed through the work, guided by several reminders:

- It's people, not the structures, that matter.
- There's no positivism in negativism. Be optimistic.
- The world is filled with others, as well as you. It belongs to everyone.
- Change is constant. Embrace it with enthusiasm.

In the end, this book is not just about Sandy Boyd. It's also about everyone along the way who stood by this man on his journey. Essentially, *A Life on the Middle West's Never-Ending Frontier* is a remarkable thank you note—and a call-to-action to all of us to assemble a solid strategic plan and keep moving forward for the good of all people.

Meredith Cummings is the editor of Ramsey County History magazine and So It Goes: The Literary Journal of the Kurt Vonnegut Museum and Library.

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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 mission statement of the Ramsey County Historical Society adopted by the Board of Directors on January 25, 2016.

The Ramsey County Historical Society's vision is to be widely recognized as an innovator, leader, and partner in preserving the knowledge of our community, delivering inspiring history programming, and using local history in education. Our mission of *preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future* guides this vision.

The Society began in 1949 when a group of citizens acquired and preserved the Jane and Heman Gibbs Farm in Falcon Heights, which the family had acquired in 1849. Following five years of restoration work, the Society opened the Gibbs Farm museum (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974). Originally programs focused on telling the story of the pioneer life of the Gibbs family. In 2000, with the assistance of a Dakota Advisory Council, the historic site also began interpreting Dakota culture and lifeways, building additional structures, and dedicating outdoor spaces to tell these stories. The remarkable relationship of Jane Gibbs with the Dakota during her childhood in the 1830s and again as an adult encouraged RCHS to expand its interpretation of the Gibbs farm to both pioneer and Dakota life.

In 1964, the Society began publishing its award-winning magazine, *Ramsey County History*. In 1978, an expanded commitment from Ramsey County enabled the organization to move its library, archives, and administrative offices to downtown St. Paul's Landmark Center, a restored Federal Courts building on the National Register of Historic Places. An additional expansion of the Research Center was completed in 2010 to better serve the public and allow greater access to the Society's vast collection of historical archives and artifacts. In 2016, due to an endowment gift of \$1 million, the Research Center was rededicated as the Mary Livingston Griggs & Mary Griggs Burke Research Center.

RCHS offers a wide variety of public programming for youth and adults. Please see www.rchs.com for details of upcoming History Revealed programs, summer camps at Gibbs Farm, and much more. RCHS is a trusted education partner serving 15,000 students annually on field trips or through outreach programs in schools that bring to life the Gibbs Family as well as the Dakota people of Cloud Man's village. These programs are made possible by donors, members, corporations, and foundations, all of whom we appreciate deeply. If you are not yet a member of RCHS, please join today and help bring history to life for more than 50,000 people every year.

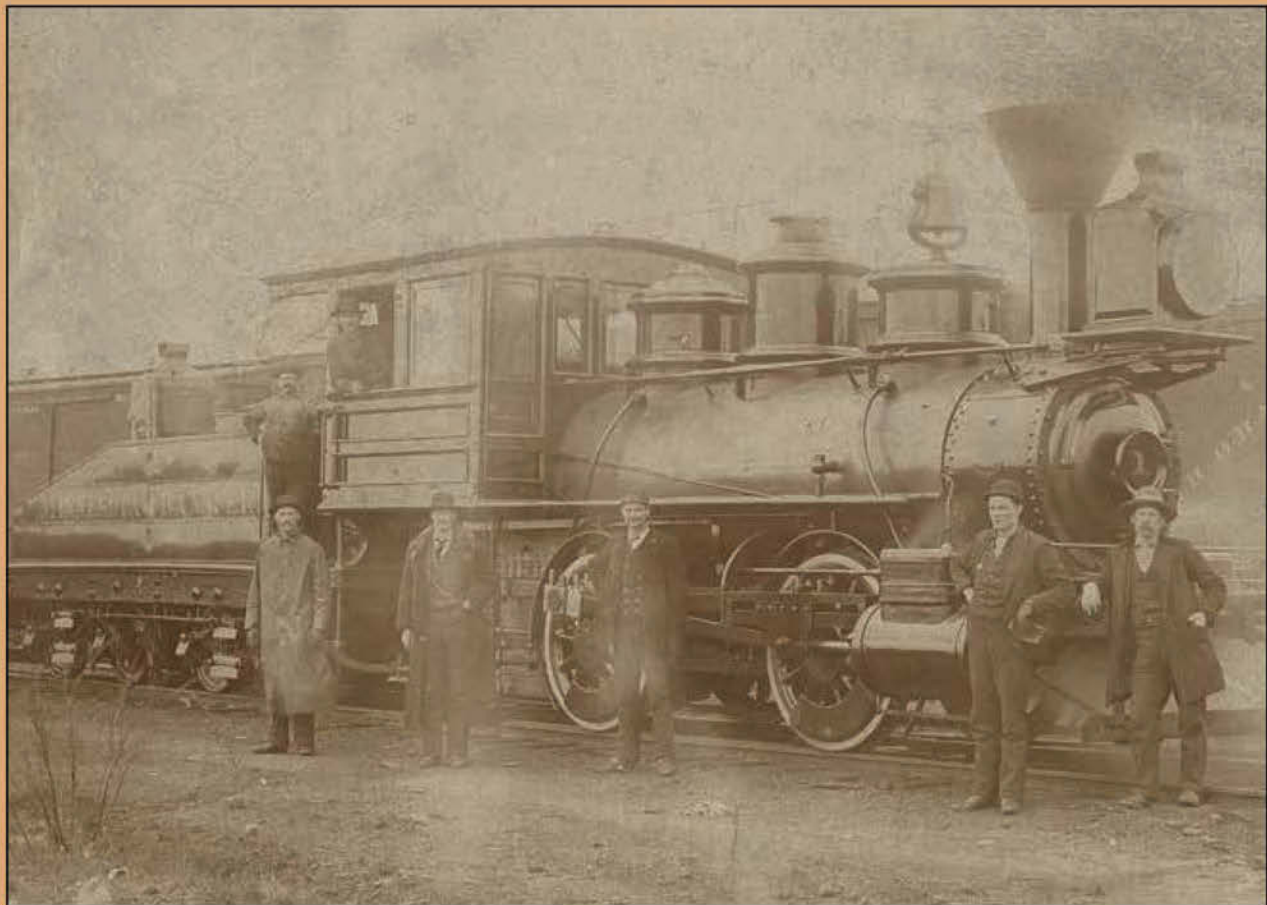
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Minnesota Transfer Railway Company engine and crew (1885). *Courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.*