

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

*Minnesota's German
Forty-eighter*

**Albert Wolff:
Brilliant Career, Tragic Death**

LaVern J. Rippley
—Page 12

Spring 2016

Volume 51, Number 1

“Brighter and Better for Every Person”:
**Building the New Salvation Army Rescue Home
of St. Paul, 1913**

Kim Heikkila, page 3



“Children of the Home.” This large portrait of twelve children is from the Salvation Army Rescue Home and Maternity Hospital annual report for the year ending September 30, 1916. The home, located on Como Avenue in St. Paul, cared for 207 children that year, 109 of whom had been born in the home. The inset photo is Adjutant True Earle, superintendent of the Home from 1913 to 1918. Photo courtesy of The Salvation Army USA Central Territory Historical Museum.

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON JANUARY 25, 2016:

Preserving our past, informing our present, inspiring our future

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A Message from the Editorial Board

Buildings often tell stories. Historian Kim Heikkila shares the story behind the drive to build the Salvation Army Rescue Home on Como Avenue, which was led by Adjutant True Earle and businessmen Joseph and William Elsinger. Designed by Clarence Johnston, the Home served many young women and their newborn children as part of the Salvation Army’s outreach programs. Not far away from Como Avenue, near Hamline University, sit eleven houses constructed by a Swedish contractor, Carl Florin, or his brothers, John and Gustav, all of whom lived in St. Paul in the early 1900s. Authors Barbro Sollbe and Ann Thorson Walton give us a rare look into the family who constructed middle-class homes of that era in the popular bungalow style. Records from the St. Paul Building Permits Collection, available in the RCHS Research Center, helped with this article. This issue also contains a biographical profile of Albert Wolff, a journalist with training in theology who came to St. Paul to escape the strife of 1848 in Germany and elsewhere in Europe. According to author LaVern Rippley, Wolff founded German-language newspapers in New Ulm, Chaska, and St. Paul, encouraged emigrants to move to Minnesota for new lives in our invigorating climate, and supported Abraham Lincoln’s Union.

Anne Cowie
Chair, Editorial Board

Book Reviews

John H. Howe, Architect: From Taliesin Apprentice to Master of Organic Design

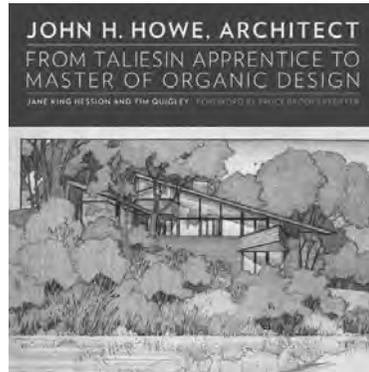
Jane King Hession and Tim Quigley
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015

232 pages; photos; \$49.95 hardcover

Reviewed by Brian McMahon

John H. Howe was just nineteen years old in 1932 when he moved from his home in Evanston, Illinois to Spring Green, Wisconsin to become a charter member of Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin Fellowship. Wright had established the studio to generate income because his architectural practice had slowed during the Great Depression. He was also reeling from scandals in his personal life which included an arrest in Minnesota for violating the Mann Act (adultery). Howe was a great admirer of Wright, even at that young age, but he could not afford the full cost of tuition. Recognizing Howe's talent and motivation, Wright waived a portion of the fees in exchange for maintenance chores. Howe stayed at Taliesin for the next twenty-seven years, ultimately becoming "the pencil in Frank Lloyd Wright's hand."

Frank Lloyd Wright was a brilliant thinker and teacher who imparted far more than just technical knowledge to his students. In their book, *John H. Howe, Architect*, Jane King Hession and Tim Quigley describe how Howe embraced Wright's immersive training regime, which admittedly was not for everyone. In recounting Howe's experiences, the authors give a very good sense of the inner workings of



Wright's studio, and indeed the personality and character of America's greatest architect. Coauthor of an earlier book on Wright, Hession is an architectural historian and curator who specializes in modernism. Quigley is a practicing architect, the principal in a small Minneapolis residential architectural firm, and the former president of the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy.

Howe (1913–1997) took all that Wright had to offer and in exchange provided indispensable support to his mentor through his extraordinary skills as a draftsman. His beautiful renderings helped communicate Wright's complex and unusual designs to clients. The authors persuasively argue that Howe's presentation skills were as masterful as the buildings he illustrated. Wright described Howe as "the greatest draughtsman in the world."

Howe flourished at Taliesin in his background, supportive role. The only significant time he had away from the studio was in 1943, to serve a three-year prison sentence at Sandstone, Minnesota for rejecting military service during World War II. Howe was a pacifist, like Wright, but his request for classification as a conscientious

objector was rejected by the authorities. Howe used his time in prison productively, refining his drawing technique and working on projects of his own design. These were hypothetical projects—some quite fanciful—unburdened by real clients.

Upon Wright's death in 1959, Howe became a principal in the successor firm, renamed the Taliesin Associated Architects. In 1967 he set up his own firm in Minneapolis at the age of 54, building over 100 projects. Over his career, Howe designed more than 80 houses in Minnesota, mostly in attractive suburban or rural settings. These homes clearly reflected the teaching and influence of Wright. Howe's only project in Ramsey County was the 1998 master plan for the campus of Macalester College, which was not implemented.

This handsomely designed book by the University of Minnesota Press is profusely illustrated with drawings and photographs from Howe's time with Wright, as well as his own practice. The authors' extensive research included interviews with residents of houses designed by Howe, which nicely complement the images. These give a real sense of what it was like to live in a structure designed by one of Minnesota's most important modernist architects.

Brian McMahon is a graduate of the Pratt Institute School of Architecture and a long-time student of historic preservation. He has written often about the history of University Avenue and has a book about the Ford Motor Company's Assembly Plant in St. Paul that will be published by the University of Minnesota Press later this year.

They Played for the Love of the Game: Untold Stories of Black Baseball in Minnesota

Frank M. White

St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2016

194 pages; photos; \$19.95 paperback

Reviewed by Dave Kenney

Like many amateur historians, Frank M. White arrived at his chosen field of expertise through a family connection. As a young boy growing up in St. Paul during the 1950s, he became aware that his father, Lou “Pud” White, was a gifted baseball player. But it wasn’t until the 1980s that he learned just how accomplished an athlete his father really was. At an exhibit on black baseball at the Minnesota Historical Society, a family friend casually mentioned that Lou White had occasionally played with some of the great Negro League teams that barnstormed Minnesota in the 1930s and ’40s. Frank White was flabbergasted. He knew his father had played with a semi-pro team called the Twin City Colored Giants during the 1940s and with some top-tier fast-pitch softball teams during the 1950s, but he had no idea that he had once played Negro League ball. When he asked his father why he had never mentioned it, Lou White offered a response familiar to anyone who’s tried to coax personal recollections from someone who lived through the Great Depression and World War II.

“It wasn’t important,” he said.

Frank White smiled at his father’s reticence but refused to accept his conclusion. He suspected that the experiences of Lou White and other African American ballplayers were, in fact, very important. In the years that followed, the younger White spoke with dozens of his father’s contemporaries and perused countless newspaper sports sections, gathering fading memories of black baseball in Minnesota. In 2009 and 2010, he worked with the Ramsey County Historical Society to create an

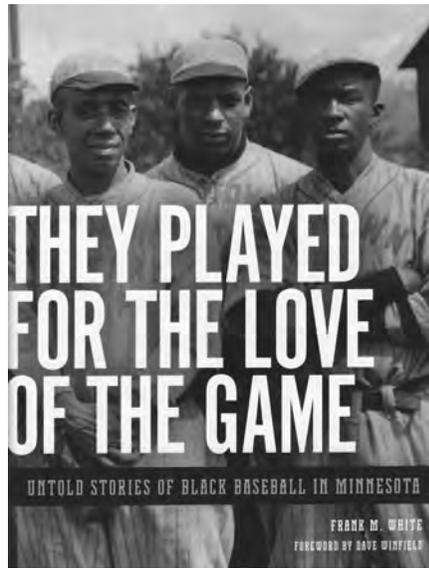


exhibit incorporating much of what he had learned. That experience led to the publication of White’s new book, *They Played for the Love of the Game: Untold Stories of Black Baseball in Minnesota*.

Unlike many facets of African American history in Minnesota, the state’s black baseball past has received plenty of attention in recent years. Not only have the Minnesota Historical Society and the Ramsey County Historical Society hosted exhibits on the subject, but two previous books—Steven R. Hoffbeck’s *Swinging for the Fences* and Todd Peterson’s *Early Black Baseball in Minnesota*—have ensured that future generations will appreciate African Americans’ contributions to the development of the sport in this state. So why yet another book about black baseball in Minnesota? To Frank White, the answer is largely personal. As he points out in his preface, Hoffbeck’s *Swinging for the Fences* mentions “only one local player that I remember hearing about from the early years of black baseball,” and the stories that Peterson tells in his book conclude with the racial integration of the major leagues in the late 1940s. “As someone who saw many games between the Twin City Colored Giants and others,” White writes, “I was looking for some recognition of the many men who played for local teams, including my father.” *They Played for the Love of the Game* is White’s corrective.

Arranged chronologically by decade, *They Played for the Love of the Game*, takes its time getting to the part of the story—amateur baseball and softball in the post-Jackie Robinson era—that White seems most determined to tell. Early chapters on black ballplayers of the 1800s, the founding in 1907 and 1908 of the St. Paul Colored Gophers and the Minneapolis Keystones, and the exploits of visiting Negro League teams during the 1920s, ’30s, and ’40s cover much of the same ground that Hoffbeck’s and Peterson’s books describe more thoroughly. The last half of the book focuses on the previously unexplored periods that are closest to White’s heart. This is where White introduces us to ballplayers who lacked the skill or the desire or the luck to make it to the big leagues (or, for that matter, to minor league teams like the Minneapolis Millers or the St. Paul Saints), but who dominated the sport from the semi-pro level on down. Among the brightest stars of this era was White’s father, Lou, who played at St. Paul’s Mechanic Arts High School and with many other teams including the Twin City Colored Giants. He even caught the attention of scouts from the Negro League’s Kansas City Monarchs and the American League’s New York Yankees.

Racism and discrimination poisoned “America’s pastime” from its beginning, and White is not about to let readers forget it. Each of his chronologically arranged chapters begins with a summary of race relations in the United States and Minnesota. The introduction to the chapter about the 1920s, for example, includes a news item from the *Appeal*, a black-owned newspaper in St. Paul, condemning the city’s plan to build a segregated playground for African American children. “The decent self-respecting people of Saint Paul must fight the nefarious scheme to the finish,” the *Appeal*’s reporter concludes. “If you are a good American you should oppose it. IT MUST NOT BE!”

Yet through it all—even during times when some people thought it might be a good idea to build separate playgrounds

for black children and white children— young African Americans continued to gather on baseball diamonds throughout the Twin Cities and beyond to play the game they loved. Most of them were ordinary athletes who simply liked to swing at balls and run the bases, but a few of them were special. They could throw curveballs tighter and smash fastballs farther than nearly anyone else on the planet. But they played at a time when the color of their skin determined whether they would be allowed to chase baseball glory at the highest levels.

These days, as Frank White acknowledges, young black athletes tend to gravitate toward basketball and football, not baseball. The struggles of earlier generations of ballplayers are fading from memory. Lou White may have believed that his experiences in black baseball were unimportant, but, as his author son knows, the act of remembering them may now be more important than ever.

Dave Kenney is a freelance writer specializing in Minnesota history. His most recent general interest title, Minnesota in the '70s (co-authored with Thomas Saylor) was published by Minnesota Historical Society Press in 2013.

Carrying the Mummy: The Museum Years and Coming of Age on St. Paul's East Side, 1954–1960

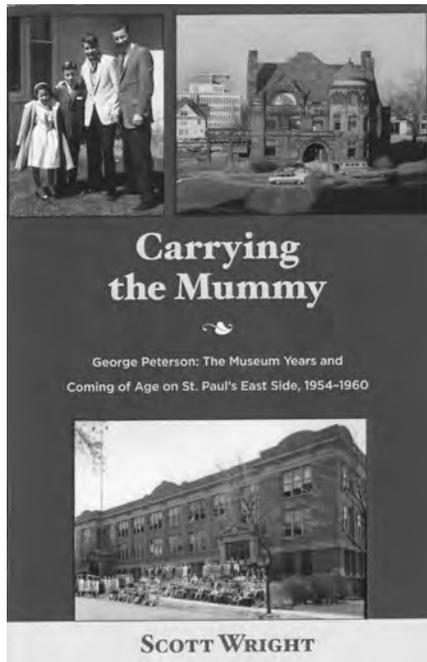
Scott Wright

St. Paul: SW Mindfulness Press
(scottwrightmindfulnesspress.com),
2015

159 pages; photos; softcover \$12.95

Reviewed by John M. Lindley

In 2012 Scott Wright published *Of Snapping Turtles and Packing Plants*, a book that explores the boundaries between autobiography and fiction in dealing with Wright's early years in South St. Paul between 1942, the year of his birth, and 1954, the time when he picks



up his account in this second book. As a literary device, the main character of both books is George Peterson—essentially Wright's alter ego—whose experiences, activities, and feelings are reported in the third person. Wright has changed the actual names of family members, friends, teachers, and others in his account. By doing that, he can not only tell us about them, he can also have them speak as if he had caught on a recorder all that they had said of importance to George.

Using the third person also aids Wright's narrative flow and it allows him to comment on or to analyze what is seen, heard, and experienced, much as an observer of a scientific experiment might document in lab notes his adult perception of other people who figured significantly in his youth. This detached, more clinical viewpoint is reinforced by about a dozen or so "Historical Notes" that are interspersed throughout the book and address topics such as "The Rise of the Postwar Middle Class" and "Religion in America in the 1950s" and "Hitchhiking" in the manner of asides derived from lecture notes that Scott Wright, the retired professor of history at the University of St. Thomas, may have once used in his classes on American history since the Civil War.

Carrying the Mummy opens in South St. Paul where George Peterson, his parents, and his younger brother and sister were living in 1954. This, according to George, was "a quiet, self-contained world." Then George's father, who was a civil and structural engineer, gets a new job with more money and the family moves to a bigger, ranch-style rambler adjacent to Lake Phalen on St. Paul's East Side. George has to leave the friendly confines of his former elementary school for Cleveland Junior High and a year later Hazel Park Junior High. Soon, we learn George takes great interest in the Saint Paul Science Museum, which was then quartered in the former mansion built by John L. Merriam, a local banker and railroad investor, who died in 1895.

The book's title comes from an experience George had at the Museum. His growing interest in natural science and collecting specimens turns into a part-time paying job at the Museum, which he holds all the way through his graduation from Johnson High School in 1960. George does whatever is needed by the staff, such as running the museum's movie projector. One day he helps two curators carry the museum's Egyptian mummy upstairs and outdoors so that sunlight can kill the mold that is slowly growing on the desiccated skin of the cadaver. Although George reports matter-of-factly how this was done, the account itself is truly comical, especially to anyone who's had even modest training in curatorial practices.

The book is seemingly simple in its method. It's all about growing up, the transition from childhood to adolescence, and growing into an adult awareness of George Peterson and who he is. There are accounts of run-ins with a bully at school, the awkwardness of being a non-athlete in gym class, the ups and downs of attending a high school (Johnson) that was so overcrowded with students in the 1950s that classes for everyone were scheduled for half days, getting his driver's license and buying his first car (a 1953 Studebaker), and, of course, romance and young love.

Today George would probably be stereotyped as a “nerd,” as someone who didn’t fit in very well because at times he was socially awkward and had an interest in ideas, particularly those found in books. George’s perceptions of other people are not superficial, however. His growing emotional maturity in the later chapters gives us a young man who is able to report his experiences with others in a nuanced and sometimes complex way. Here the mummy is not a metaphor for embalming things as they were in childhood innocence or for avoiding the natural process of growing up. Instead the mummy is an artifact of the past that George has outgrown. By the end of this book, he is no longer the museum hanger-on and acolyte of scientists; instead George has become an adult who’s ready to chart his own way in the world.

John M. Lindley is the editor of Ramsey County History.

That Great Heart: The Life of I.A. O’Shaughnessy, Oilman and Philanthropist

Doug Hennes

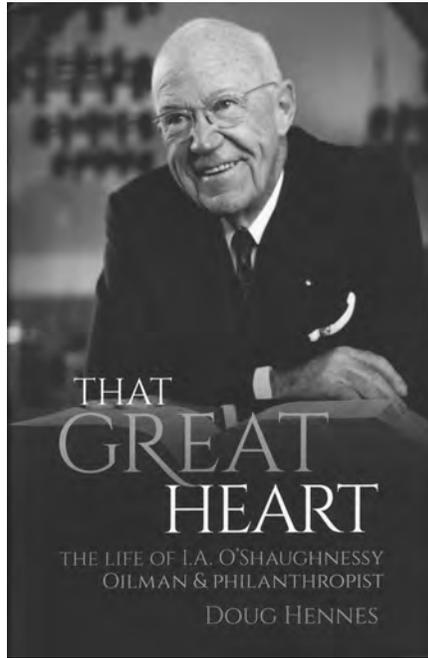
Edina, Minn.: Beaver’s Pond Press, 2014

259 pages; photos; hardcover \$25.00

Reviewed by Scott Wright

Anyone who walks around the campus of the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul will find numerous buildings bearing the name “O’Shaughnessy.” There are, for example, the O’Shaughnessy Stadium, the O’Shaughnessy-Frey Library, and the O’Shaughnessy Education Center. All take their name from I.A. (Ignatius Aloysius) O’Shaughnessy, one of the greatest donors in the University’s history.

Ignatius O’Shaughnessy—his middle name, “Aloysius,” was added later as a confirmation name—was born on July 31, 1885 in Stillwater, Minnesota. He was the thirteenth child of Irish immigrant parents who had come to Minnesota from



Massachusetts in the 1860s. He attended local schools and excelled at athletics and in 1901, following a family tradition (four of his brothers had attended there), he enrolled at St. John’s University located just west of St. Cloud.

Doug Hennes, vice president for university and government relations at the University of St. Thomas and the author of this biography, begins his work with the well-known account of the youthful O’Shaughnessy’s expulsion from St. John’s after one semester (for drinking) and his subsequent admittance to the then-College of St. Thomas. After the experience at St. John’s, O’Shaughnessy got his act together, starred on the football team, and graduated from St. Thomas in 1907.

After a couple of years working in his brother’s insurance business in Texas, O’Shaughnessy entered the oil business. He struck oil in Blackwell, Oklahoma in 1910 and in 1917 founded the Globe Oil and Refining Company. By the mid-1930s he had established himself as the head of one of the world’s largest individually owned refineries and at the time of his death in 1973, he was listed fourth on a list of the wealthiest individuals in Minnesota, in the company of such individuals as William McKnight and Richard Ordway.

In the late 1930s O’Shaughnessy’s role as a major donor to the College of St. Thomas began with the funding of what was to become O’Shaughnessy Hall, an athletic facility located at the west end of the College’s lower quad. It was the first of five St. Thomas buildings to bear his name. Numerous other gifts to St. Thomas followed, including funding for a project to renovate the college chapel in the early 1940s. In addition, O’Shaughnessy made major gifts for buildings and other projects at the College of St. Catherine, the University of Notre Dame, and many other institutions through the I.A. O’Shaughnessy Foundation, which he established in 1941. Harboring no grudge against St. John’s University for his expulsion some fifty years earlier, he sent the university a check for \$1,000 for a project to renovate its football stadium in 1957.

A devout Catholic, O’Shaughnessy received several papal awards for his philanthropic work including being made a Knight Commander of the Order of St. Gregory by Pius XII in 1958 and appointment as a papal count by Paul VI in 1967. He died in 1973.

In addition to covering the major events of O’Shaughnessy’s life in this biography, Doug Hennes does a good job of capturing the spirit and personality of the man, and especially his rich sense of humor. Although this book is not the first biographical treatment of O’Shaughnessy, Hennes gives credit to the 2004 profile of O’Shaughnessy that was written by the late Virginia Brainard Kunz and John Lindley and published in *Ramsey County History*. Hennes’s research in new sources and his in-depth discussion of O’Shaughnessy’s wide ranging philanthropy add richness and increased respect for the great humanity of this generous man from St. Paul.

Scott Wright is a native of St. Paul who retired as a professor of history at University of St. Thomas in 2010.

R.C.H.S.
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