

The Wisconsin Historical Society: Collecting, Preserving, and Sharing Stories since 1846

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problems that St. Louis faced over the years, such as the city-county divide and the post-World War II problems of segregation and white flight, but his focus is primarily on the “imperial quest” part of St. Louis history, while the “urban crisis” story receives much less attention. Perhaps future work will more clearly illustrate exactly how an international economic focus, especially during the Cold War era, led to a willful abdication of civic responsibilities by the city’s elites.

Nonetheless, Berger’s book offers an insightful reinterpretation of St. Louis’s history and clearly shows that the city deserves a spot at the table when discussing the historical evolution of American foreign policy. One may hope that it will serve as a catalyst for additional studies to see if similar historical patterns can be found in other midwestern cities, such as Des Moines, Omaha, Chicago, or Kansas City. Civic leaders in those communities likely shared a common outlook with their historic St. Louis contemporaries, and those cities no doubt also played a role in the growth of America’s international economic empire.

The Wisconsin Historical Society: Collecting, Preserving, and Sharing Stories since 1846, by John Zimm. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2015. vi, 152 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, index. \$25.00 hardcover.

Reviewer John D. Krugler is professor emeritus of history at Marquette University. His most recent book is *Creating Old World Wisconsin: The Struggle to Build an Outdoor Museum of Ethnic Architecture* (2013).

Writing history that is readily accessible to general audiences is not easy. To succeed, the author must be an accomplished storyteller, someone who does not get bogged down in endless detail. John Zimm, an associate editor at the Wisconsin Historical Society Press, the publisher of this book, has produced a very readable, condensed account of the creation and development of the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS). The book, a revision of an article Zimm published in the *State of Wisconsin Blue Book* for the Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, will appeal to readers who know little about the society.

In many ways, this is a remarkable book. At 169 years old, the WHS has a rich and fascinating history that does not lend itself to a 123-page text. Zimm makes no pretense to offer an in-depth critical analysis of the society. Rather, he shares a number of stories from the society’s long past. He does not have a thesis. Not surprisingly, he presents the society in very positive terms. Nasty battles over budgets, the complicated relationship with the state, and the financial battles over the growth of historic sites, for example, are given short shrift.

The author alludes to many important developments. The society's early leaders held contesting visions, with one group favoring a restricted membership that conferred social status and recognized cultural attainment, while others advocated a more democratic society with an open, dues-paying membership. The latter concept won the day. That, in turn, led to the issue of state funding. The first directors, Lyman Draper and Reuben Gold Thwaites, disagreed: Draper wanted the society to be self-sustaining; Thwaites looked to the state for funding. Thwaites's triumph helped to make the WHS different from "its older more conservative sisters in the Eastern States" (22). Another relationship established by Thwaites also contributed to the society's distinctiveness. Recognizing that most of the users of the library were University of Wisconsin students and faculty, he chose to "hitch the Society's star" (23) to the rapidly growing university. That was mutually beneficial, as the WHS library became the university's American history library.

In time, as its rich library and archival resources increased, the WHS focused on serving the needs of scholars. The founding idea of serving as the people's society faded but never disappeared. Beginning with the tenures of the post-World War II directors—Kenneth Alexander, Clifford Lord, and Leslie H. Fishel Jr.—the WHS reconnected with this important aspect of its past. These leaders committed to making the WHS more accessible to the state's residents. Historic preservation, a new *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, greater involvement with local historical societies and communities, and, above all, the development of an extensive historic sites program, brought the society closer to its roots: the general public. The library and archives significantly bolstered the society's public presence by catering to genealogists and history buffs. The WHS has again embraced both its scholarly and public roles.

The Two-Wheeled World of George B. Thayer, by Kevin J. Hayes. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015. xv, 257 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$28.95 hardcover.

Reviewer James Whiteside is a retired history professor and the author of *Old Blue's Road: A Historian's Motorcycle Journeys in the American West*.

In his 2002 book, *An American Cycling Odyssey, 1887*, Kevin Hayes chronicled the cross-country bicycle adventure of newspaperman George Nellis. In *The Two-Wheeled World of George B. Thayer*, Hayes follows with the biography of a very different, and more prolific, bicy-