

The Vanishing Messiah: The Life and Resurrections of Francis Schlatter

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Midwest, at the same time transcends the region with its strong transnational focus. The book is local, state, regional, and international history.

In evaluating *Good Seeds*, one begins with the title, which suggests seed-based agriculture. This perspective is certainly accurate for corn, but one might recall that potatoes, although they produce seeds, are usually propagated by “eyes.” The emphasis on seeds likewise accords with the wild rice that was important to the diets of the Menominee into the twentieth century. Of course, the emphasis on wild rice extends treatment beyond the cultivated species of Africa and Asia.

Good Seeds provides an important study of foodways in the upper Midwest, treatment that others might well extend to Iowa and other parts of the Midwest. Indeed, remarking about his residence in Kansas, Weso trains his eye on foodways of the lower Midwest so that a balanced treatment emerges. Given the centrality of the potato and corn to the diets of the Menominee, one wonders whether similar patterns emerge in Iowa and other parts of the Midwest. In these ways, *Good Seeds* should command the attention of many scholars.

The Vanishing Messiah: The Life and Resurrections of Francis Schlatter, by David N. Wetzel. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2016. xii, 279 pp. Map, illustrations, appendix, timeline, survey of prior works, index. \$19.95 paperback.

Reviewer Holly Folk is associate professor of liberal studies at Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington. She is the author of *The Religion of Chiropractic: Populist Healing in the American Heartland* (2017).

The social marginality of lay healers has often cast twin shadows—of charlatanry and altruistic spirituality—on their social presentations. *The Vanishing Messiah* challenges readers by blending these categories. David N. Wetzel’s biography of Frances Schlatter, a Progressive Era faith healer, charts the author’s travel to archives and historic sites that reveal Schlatter’s story. Wetzel’s narrative journey beautifully depicts the experience of historic research. His proposed alternative ending for Schlatter’s story chronicles what Wetzel believes was Schlatter’s later life, offering interesting speculations about the healer’s character, and thereby the nature of religious healing.

An Alsatian immigrant, Francis Schlatter arrived in Colorado in 1892. In the fall of 1895 he held nationally publicized healing crusades in Albuquerque and Denver that delivered healing blessings to tens of thousands of people. Because of his physical appearance, refusal to accept payment for healing blessings, and claim that healing came “from the Father,” Schlatter came to be seen as a Christ-like figure.

The "New Mexico Messiah" left Denver suddenly on November 13, 1895, perhaps because he was being called as a witness in a trial for the fraudulent sale of healing handkerchiefs. He is believed to have traveled south to Datil, New Mexico, arriving at the ranch of a woman named Ada Morley in January 1896. Schlatter's three-month visit provided Morley with the source material for a book she published in 1897. *The Life of the Harp in the Hand of the Harper* was proclaimed to be Schlatter's dictated autobiography, although its formalized conversations suggest that it was heavily edited by Morley. It is not clear from Wetzel's book that Schlatter's visit to Datil actually happened. I wish it were easier to access *The Life of the Harp*, but the fragments presented here make me wonder whether it was "channeled" through astral projection, as many esoteric messages are.

Assuming that he was ever there, Schlatter left Datil in the spring of 1896. There is a strong possibility that he died in Mexico later that year of self-imposed starvation. What may have been his personal effects were allegedly found in the desert in 1897, along with a skeleton alleged to be his remains. Wetzel argues compellingly that the skeleton found was probably not Schlatter's.

Starting soon after Schlatter's disappearance, several figures emerged claiming to be him. Most were recognized in their day as charlatans. Wetzel's innovative hypothesis is that Schlatter did not die in Mexico but was interned for a time in an Ohio hospital, where he took on the identity of another man, John Martin, as part of a radical religious pilgrimage toward revealing himself as a new incarnation of the Christ.

I question the evidence justifying Wetzel's conclusions. He cannot account for the radical changes in Schlatter's behavior between 1895 in Denver and his later life. The Martinesque Schlatter had a violent, unpredictable temper and was arrested for disturbing the peace. Wetzel is in a position to comment on the reliability of various sources, but he treats materials that corroborate his interpretation selectively. If Wetzel is right, then Schlatter's early life should be amenable to interpretation through what we know of his later character. Wetzel takes it on faith that the early Schlatter was as saintly as he is presented in *The Life of the Harp*.

Wetzel's treatment of Schlatter's other alleged biography is also puzzling. He argues that while Schlatter was in Michigan he was a source for the book by Ella F. Woodward, *Modern Miracles of Healing*. Wetzel asserts that Schlatter deliberately misled readers, inserting false elements to his biography to conceal his real whereabouts and activities. It is likely that John Martin acted as a source for Woodward's book, but Wetzel attributes full authorship to Martin for reasons I cannot under-

stand. Finally, two photos that Wetzel believes are actually of the same person are reprinted in his book. Readers can draw their own conclusions, but to me the two men do not look remotely like each other.

In the late nineteenth century, people could still disappear for months and even years. Despite the proliferation of newspapers and government records, there is often limited information for reconstructing biographies, with available sources often containing inaccuracies. Add to this deliberate disambiguation, as many people changed important details in their identities. Ambiguities in Schlatter's biography resemble those surrounding chiropractic's founder, Daniel David Palmer, whose life also presents a tantalizing but broken paper trail. In fact, several aspects of Schlatter's story resonate with the early chiropractic movement, where boosters of the profession interwove themes of health, commerce, and entertainment.

I enjoyed reading *The Vanishing Messiah*, for the narrative style is engaging. And, in fact, I enjoyed the interpretive questions presented by the task of reviewing it. Although he probably has not definitively solved the Schlatter mystery, David Wetzel effectively shares the joy of intellectual discovery.

Varmints and Victims: Predator Control in the American West, by Frank Van Nuys. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015. xiv, 338 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Leisl Carr Childers is assistant professor of history at the University of Northern Iowa. She is the author of *The Size of the Risk: Histories of Multiple Use in the Great Basin* (2015).

Iowans are not used to thinking of themselves in relation to wolves, bears, cougars, and even coyotes, but as author Frank Van Nuys explains in *Varmints and Victims: Predator Control in the American West*, the history of those animals' extirpation and their recent recovery reflects the process of western settlement, especially in the Midwest. Van Nuys's study, an update of Thomas R. Dunlap's *Saving America's Wildlife: Ecology and the American Mind*, provides a deep look at the transformation of wildlife management through predator control that is as "vital to the region's incorporation into the American mainstream of ideologies, economics, politics, and culture as any other phenomenon" (4).

Drawing on a wide array of source material, particularly the manuscript collections of key wildlife biologists, including Stokely J. Ligon, Olaus J. Murie, Sigurd Olson, and Stanley P. Young, and state and federal wildlife agency records, Van Nuys narrates the history of predator control in the region west of the Mississippi River in seven chapters that