

Minnesota 1918: When Flu, Fire, and War Ravaged the State

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French citizens, and the soldiers' attitudes about the war in general. A few letters also describe interactions with African American soldiers, reflecting the racial realities of the time. Of course, censorship and the fact that families allowed the papers to publish these letters meant that most do not give details about locations or the true horrors of World War I combat. Yet these letters do offer a glimpse into the mindset of the young men who volunteered for service in the American Expeditionary Force.

Much of Meyer's previous work has focused on the history of the rural Midwest, and this book is no exception. The soldiers discussed in *Letters from the Boys* hailed from three small towns in Green County, Wisconsin, which the author describes as "a quintessential Wisconsin rural dairy county" (5). The letters contained herein reflect that reality. By focusing solely on Green County, Meyer allows readers to take a step back into an early twentieth-century farming community. The soldiers often compared the sights on the Western Front to their home towns, and readers will appreciate the soldiers' concerns for their family farms and the descriptions of French farms and the French countryside.

This book will be valuable for those interested in the rural Midwest or casual readers seeking insights into life on the Western Front. Readers more familiar with military history, or World War I historiography in general, will not find new analysis or new insights in this book. And because the author relies on letters reproduced in newspapers, it is not possible to follow a single narrative pertaining to American operations. Nonetheless, the book restores voices from the past, and anyone interested in the doughboy experience will connect to the young men in the book. Carrie Meyer ensures that their voices will endure for generations to come.

Minnesota 1918: When Flu, Fire, and War Ravaged the State, by Curt Brown. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2018. 304 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Jeff Nichols is a doctoral candidate in history at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He wrote an undergraduate honors thesis at the University of Iowa on the 1918 influenza epidemic.

Minnesota 1918 chronicles two often-forgotten catastrophes: the Spanish influenza epidemic and the Cloquet-Moose Lake Fire, a conflagration that consumed 1,500 square miles across seven northeastern Minnesota counties. "Paint with numbers and the canvas turns unimaginably dark: nearly 1,500 Minnesota soldiers dying in combat in the World War I trenches of France; 453 fire victims; more than 10,000 deaths in the state

linked to the 1918 influenza scourge," writes Curt Brown, a *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* columnist (21). Throughout the year, the efforts to enforce loyalty threatened the foundation of democracy in the state.

The book does not attempt to be a comprehensive state history of the last year of the Great War. Only 3 of its 23 chapters are set south of the Twin Cities. (Iowa is fleetingly mentioned in an incident in which vigilantes "deported" Nonpartisan League sympathizers.) It is, of course, possible to give a compelling account of the Spanish influenza epidemic in Minnesota without supplying a county-by-county analysis. But the baffling organization of the book undermines Brown's expressed desire to tell "human stories" behind the bleak statistics of 1918, as his narrative restlessly flips back and forth from the fires to influenza to wartime politics without much concern for chronology.

However disjointed, the sections on the fires that swept through immigrant homesteads and mill towns on October 12, 1918, are the strongest parts of the book, as Brown complements the scholarship of Francis M. Carroll and Franklin R. Raiter's *The Fires of Autumn* (1990) with newspapers, unpublished remembrances, and interviews with the descendants of survivors. While providing harrowing stories of families attempting to survive the firestorm by hiding in wells and root cellars, Brown takes care to explore the communities they had built before the war as well as the efforts of survivors to be compensated for a fire that was undoubtedly sparked by the federally administered railroads. Brown also deserves credit for examining the experiences of Native Americans, an underexamined subject within the historiography of the influenza epidemic.

Elsewhere, Brown's research methods are more haphazard. Nothing good can come from using sources such as Wonderslist, a website that deliberates on the "Top 10 Most Beautiful Women in the World (2018)" and the "Top 10 Creepiest Ghost Towns You Wouldn't Want to Visit," as a means of contextualizing World War I. Suggesting that servicemen who lost their lives to influenza were not accorded the honor they deserved, Brown reflects on Albert E. Betz, a German American carpenter from Sauk Center who died at Jefferson Barracks but whose name is missing from state memorials honoring the veterans of the American Expeditionary Force. Unable to uncover any substantive details of Betz's military service, Brown maladroitly characterizes Betz as a "thirty-year-old soldier wannabe" (15). If Brown had pulled from the Minnesota Historical Society Betz's Gold Star Roll file a detailed form created by the Minnesota Commission of Public Safety to document the biographies of servicemen who had lost their lives in the war, he would have

seen that Betz had spent much of his adult life in the Minnesota National Guard. Betz's 1917 draft registration notes that he had risen to the rank of corporal. He was discharged for degenerating vision in his left eye just as his regiment was being mobilized during the Mexican Expedition. So, in the fall of 1918 Betz was not a volunteer "training to fight amid the trenches and mustard gas," as Brown imagines. A draftee, Betz was assigned to limited military service, which would have placed him out of harm's way. He died in the camp hospital two weeks after being inducted into the army. Instead of exploring the camps and battlefields men like Betz found themselves in, Brown moves on to other "forgotten victims" of 1918. As such, he never fully takes in the tragedy of that fatal year.

Ku Klux Kulture: America and the Klan in the 1920s, by Felix Harcourt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. 253 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Brent M. S. Campney is associate professor of history at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. He is the author of *This Is Not Dixie: Racist Violence in Kansas 1861–1927* (2015).

With several significant studies emerging over the past few years, the Ku Klux Klan in its various incarnations is experiencing a rebirth in the historiography. In *Ku Klux Kulture*, Felix Harcourt contributes significantly to this trend with a fascinating and engaging examination of the Invisible Order in American popular culture in the 1920s. With his focus on cultural history, Harcourt has in many respects done for the Second Klan what Elaine Frantz Parsons did for the first in *Ku-Klux* (2016), her extraordinary cultural history of the terrorist group of the 1860s. With sharp analysis and clear writing, Harcourt has substantially increased our understanding of racism and xenophobia in the 1920s and identified new directions for further inquiry.

Harcourt argues that previous studies of the Second Klan prioritize the issue of membership: how many official members did the group claim in the early 1920s, how precipitously did the membership decline after 1925, and how did Klan leaders attract recruits? Yet, as he demonstrates, that focus minimizes the level of support the organization enjoyed among white Protestant Americans generally. "The Klan wielded broad cultural power that reached far beyond a paying membership," he writes. "If we are to understand that power, the Invisible Empire must be understood not only as a social and fraternal organization, but also as a deeply rooted cultural movement" (6–7). Rising in a period of