

## Prime Fathers

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1989 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

---

### Recommended Citation

"Prime Fathers." *The Annals of Iowa* 50 (1989), 317-318.

Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.9414>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

and 1930s, but largely neglected in her later years and since her death in 1960. Suckow created almost her entire fictional world in Iowa, demonstrating a unique ability to capture realistically the people, scenes, institutions, and activities characteristic of her native state.

Selections here include some of Suckow's typical people: the single woman, often longing for a fuller life; elderly parents ill at ease in retirement and with their own children; adolescents struggling for identity and certitude; women and men longing for the remembered contentment of youth. Several of Suckow's recurrent concerns also emerge from these pages, in the juxtaposition of country people with town folks; the price of unquestioning loyalty to a parent, a loved one, an institution; the frustration or emptiness of failed relationships; rigid social stratifications of small towns; the plight of the nonconformist in an unaccepting environment; and "under everything an unassuaged aching" (44) felt by several characters in these and other Suckow stories who yearn for greater satisfaction in their lives.

These stories, accompanied by Clarence A. Andrews's fine introductory overview, give new readers of Suckow a fresh opportunity to know and appreciate her fiction. Many readers already familiar with her works will enthusiastically welcome this new printing, though they will, no doubt, miss personal favorites in the collection, and wish that first publication dates of the stories were included in order to examine development. Any reader interested in Iowa, however, will discover here an invaluable resource not only of vividly imagined fiction, but also of socioeconomic history, all rendered in rich detail. Indeed, as a uniquely significant Iowa author, Suckow deserves to have her work much more widely available in contemporary editions.

*Prime Fathers*, by Frederick Manfred. Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1988. 176 pp. \$15.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY ROBERT F. GISH, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

Frederick Manfred (Frederick Feikema) occupies a special place of respect among writers who continue to explore the American West—old and new. Best known for his "Buckskin Man Tales," Manfred is also a poet and, as *Prime Fathers* demonstrates, an essayist of the first order.

*Prime Fathers* takes its title and theme from Manfred's miscellaneous tributes to some of the men who have influenced him over the years. He throws in a few personal musings on literature and language and on "placeness" and why writers are influenced by land and lives. The implication, overall, is that influences of "prime fathers" are

inclusive, literal, and figurative, and result from family, friends, home, reading, travel, and education—in short, experience.

Much the midwesterner himself, with roots in Minnesota and the Dakotas—what he more generally renames “Siouxland” in his stories and histories—Manfred singles out his own father, Frank Feikema, for poignant and respectful praise. Manfred’s actual “prime father” passed along the Frisian heritage and manner which shaped much of the substance and style of Manfred the man and Manfred the writer. Other midwesterners who offered significant counsel and camaraderie include Hubert Horatio Humphrey, who could give a rousing political speech or spin a yarn with the boys, and whom Manfred knew and worked with in early Minneapolis days, and Sinclair Lewis, a fellow writer much admired by Manfred (and much admiring of Manfred) as he started to stake out his own special western subjects and style.

Some of the best essays in *Prime Fathers*, however, are not such personal portraits, good as they are; the really powerful statements about influence come when Manfred pours out his heart and soul in “The Artist as the True Child of God,” in “On Being a Western American Author,” and, most revealing of all, in “West of the Mississippi,” an interview raised to the level of the art of spontaneity. Through all of these pieces Manfred stresses his allegiance to the American idiom, to oral and aboriginal traditions, and to manly and courageous identification with locale.

The verdict on Manfred’s own influence, his own role as a “prime father,” is not final. He continues to write and reminisce at a prolific pace. Odds are that he, too, will offer lasting inspiration to writer and reader alike who love maleness (machismo), the West, westering, and their telling.

*The U.S.S. “Wisconsin”: A History of Two Battleships*, by Richard H. Zeitlin, with an essay on the ships’ silver by Anne Woodhouse. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1988. 56 pp. Illustrations, bibliographical essay. \$7.00 paper.

REVIEWED BY MALCOLM MUIR, JR., UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY, WEST POINT

This relatively short history of two American battleships has much to offer, including a succinct analysis of the lineage of big gun ships and a trenchant look at the development of United States naval policy. The focus of Zeitlin’s work is, of course, on the two battleships named *Wisconsin*. The first entered service in 1900 and set many of the stan-

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.