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## What the River Carries: Encounters with the Mississippi, Missouri, and Platte

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some days, many days, that counts" (316). In the end we're left with our adages intact, and, as Swift shows, new roads made new ruts.

*What the River Carries: Encounters with the Mississippi, Missouri, and Platte*, by Lisa Knopp. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012. ix, 230 pp. Bibliography. \$19.95 paper.

Reviewer Patrick Nunnally is coordinator of the River Life Program at the University of Minnesota.

Historians have long used personal narratives as historical evidence; think of the contributions of letters, memoirs, autobiographies, and oral histories. Why not include essays, such as this lovely collection, also? Lisa Knopp's reflections on the rivers that have run through her life are richly evocative. While they may someday inform a historian concerned with attitudes about a sense of place in the Midwest, they serve now to illuminate some new stories of the region, as well as revisit some well-known tales.

Knopp grew up in Burlington, Iowa, and the Mississippi is her "home" river. She also addresses the Missouri and the Platte, part of later stages of her life, and in several respects her essays on those rivers, which she came to know as an adult, are more informative than those on the Mississippi. Her essay on Missouri's "Little Dixie" and the story of Jesse James are really strong—personal and evocative stories told well.

It is perhaps in telling the lesser-known stories that Knopp's contribution to our understanding of the region is strongest. With personal essays, of course, the reader gets only what the writer wishes to convey. Her essay "The Taking," on the Pick-Sloan Act of the 1940s that established the system of dams that flooded many Indian communities in the Dakotas and Montana, does not replace the voluminous literature on that sad tale. That said, she does illustrate well a personal, more intimate, dimension to the broad narrative, thereby providing a point of entry for the nonspecialist to begin to try to understand a complex subject.

Of course we don't read essays for the same reasons that we read scholarly history. Knopp does not take up the issues and concerns that motivate scholars, thereby placing her book in conversation with public history, such as the interpretations given at historic sites and museums.

Knopp's subjects are place, self, and history—broad subjects, to be sure, but her choice of rivers as the organizing principle serves her well. Rivers cut through themes of the past; they inherently cross invisible boundaries and serve as connectors of things previously separated.

"Missouri River Music" almost makes readers forget that there is a river at the heart of the story, or that the story of music and the river along the Missouri is in many ways the story of humans anywhere, pursuing any enterprise.

I suppose it is the reviewer's job to reach a conclusion, a summing up that explains "what it all means." Knopp's book resists that effort; there are gems large and small—stories we know pretty well and stories that are new—throughout these reflections. Students of the land and people of the Midwest will find much that is rewarding here. Students of rivers will find even more.

*The Bark River Chronicles: Stories from a Wisconsin Watershed*, by Milton J. Bates. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2012. vii, 293 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$18.95 paper.

Reviewer David Faldet is professor of English at Luther College in Decorah. He is the author of *Oneota Flow: The Upper Iowa River and Its People* (2009).

The sixty-some miles of the Bark River meander through a landscape sculpted by the same Wisconsin ice advance that shaped the heavily tiled pothole region of rural north central Iowa. The Bark, however, flows through exurban Milwaukee, linking at least six lakes and as many cattail marshes in its course. Bates's miscellany of story and history attaches to the chronicle of a single float season's trip on the river—the imagined composite of 30 years of paddling.

Although Bates hopes that "the story of the Bark River is the story of Wisconsin" (196), his book is really a river story of dams, mills, ice harvests, canal schemes, floods, lakeside development, fish, fishing, and wetland conservation. As the author elsewhere happily admits, "In the midst of suburban sprawl and commuter traffic, the Bark remains a place apart" (125). The book lacks the more singular focus of Lynne Heasley's *A Thousand Pieces of Paradise: Landscape and Property in the Kickapoo Valley* (2005), which analyzes land use and ideas of property on another Wisconsin watershed, but in its best moments it captures the rhythms, windings, and repetitions of a river trip by canoe. It chronicles the culverts and beaver dams on a stream small enough to be left off the average atlas map of Wisconsin while showing that this "unsung river" (157) powered the foundation of several towns, that its lakes and millponds continue to be a focus for development and recreation, and that its flood threats and pollution are reminders that we neglect the environment at our peril.