

## Voodoo Priests, Noble Savages, and Ozark Gypsies: The Life of Mary Alicia Owen

Victoria Smith

*University of Nebraska--Lincoln*

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 2013 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

---

### Recommended Citation

Smith, Victoria. "Voodoo Priests, Noble Savages, and Ozark Gypsies: The Life of Mary Alicia Owen." *The Annals of Iowa* 72 (2013), 402-403.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.1751>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

the line has to be drawn somewhere. *Representation and Inequality* represents the best in political history.

*Garland in His Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of His Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates*, edited by Keith Newlin. *Writers in Their Own Time*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013. xxxviii, 250 pp. Illustrations, chronology, notes, works cited, index. \$45.00 paperback.

Reviewer Marcia Noe is professor of English at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and editor of *MidAmerica*. She is also senior editor of *The Dictionary of Midwestern Literature*.

Hamlin Garland, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author who grew up on farms in Mitchell County, Iowa, was known in the early twentieth century as the dean of American literature. Keith Newlin notes in his introduction that despite having written eight volumes of autobiography, Garland excluded much about his life; moreover, he lacked the critical distance to use appropriate principles of selection and emphasis. This volume remedies those problems by offering a variety of documents—letters, newspaper columns, and excerpts from books and speeches written by his family, friends, colleagues, and notable acquaintances such as Sinclair Lewis, Theodore Roosevelt, and William Allen White — that present a kaleidoscope of perspectives on Garland. From them we learn that Garland was often a too-earnest and humorless advocate for his many causes and an unsociable man who was disliked by some of his neighbors. On the other hand, many of these documents also offer evidence of Garland's generosity and helpfulness to younger writers.

Keith Newlin, the foremost Garland scholar working today, has done a masterful job of selecting and editing these documents, each of which is introduced by a headnote that contextualizes the document, the writer, and his or her relationship to Garland and is followed by endnotes that provide further explanation and context. The book usefully complements Newlin's earlier biography of Garland and provides the fullest picture to date of one of the major nineteenth-century chroniclers of midwestern rural life. This book is an essential purchase for Garland scholars as well as for scholars of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literature and history.

*Voodoo Priests, Noble Savages, and Ozark Gypsies: The Life of Mary Alicia Owen*, by Greg Olson. *Missouri Biography Series*. Columbia: University

of Missouri Press, 2012. x, 171 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$30.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Victoria Smith is associate professor of history and ethnic studies at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. She is the author of *Captive Arizona: Indian Captives and Captive Indians in Territorial Arizona, 1850–1912* (2009).

At the academic level, this book engages several lines of inquiry. It explores the life of Mary Alicia Owen, a Vassar-educated folklorist, and her sisters Ella, a geologist, and Juliette, an artist and ornithologist. All three unmarried academic females called St. Joseph, Missouri, home their entire lives during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The author, Greg Olson, examines the published folklore and fiction of Mary Owen and places her in the context of the academic struggle between folklore as anthropology and folklore as literature. He also connects the upper-class Owen family to the history of St. Joseph and explores the society that fashioned their lives.

Iowans, especially those interested in river towns born as ports of departure for an expanding American West, will find in Owen's life and work archetypes for their own historical pioneers: a wealthy, educated, and influential unmarried woman suspended between her privileged upbringing and an insatiable curiosity about the characters that peopled her world; the displaced natives, bereft of homelands, never quite sure if the land they lived on was really theirs; African American elders in their shantytowns, caught between the antebellum slavery of their youth and the marginal freedom of emancipation; and tales of encounters with Romani gypsies who wandered the frontier river towns of the American West. Owen interacted with them all, yet carefully maintained the class and racial boundaries that separated her from her subjects. Despite determination and an inquisitive mind, Owen could never quite surmount the social perceptions that bound her.

*The Farmers' Game: Baseball in Rural America*, by David Vaught. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. xi, 214 pp. Illustrations, notes, essay on sources, index. \$29.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Benjamin G. Rader is James L. Sellers Professor of History Emeritus at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. He is the author of *Baseball: A History of America's Game* (1992; 3rd ed., 2008).

The history of baseball in America has been told almost exclusively as a city and as a professional game. David Vaught seeks to rectify this lacunae by offering a history of rural baseball—the game played by farmers and the residents of small towns. The supremacy of the city game's history arose in part, Vaught contends, from the effort of base-