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Flood Stage and Rising

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downtown mainline Protestant churches dominated the religious life of the city and played a shaping role in the city's culture; and the pastors of those churches were key players in the city's public and political life (it was not unusual for one of them to be mayor). Gradually, "religion lost a good deal of its pride of public place," as "the city's 'sacred' unifiers gradually shifted toward civic commitments" focused on "a new civic infrastructure of sports arenas, museums, and performance venues linked to downtown shopping" rather than "the clutch of tall-steepled churches clustered around the city's center circle" that previously dominated the downtown landscape. Meanwhile, the mainline denominations could no longer assume a "presumptive civic control" as black churches, white evangelical Protestant groups, Catholics, and even the small Jewish community made their voices heard (188-89).

The authors are careful to point out that this evolution was not all "loss," as religious communities are all too quick to assume. Especially in two long chapters that categorize and describe the various ways specific congregations relate to specific neighborhoods, they highlight the rich new ways that congregations have found to continue to contribute to public life. Using sociological "ideal types" along two sets of two axes that are too complicated to describe in this space, these chapters offer potential for congregations seeking to identify or re-identify their primary mission in changing environments, if only these discussions had been presented more accessibly. For historians, this richly nuanced book suggests that there is much potential in studying continuity and change in how religious congregations have related to their communities, whether in the large cities of the Midwest or the smaller cities, small towns, and rural communities of Iowa.

Flood Stage and Rising, by Jane Varley. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. 128 pp. \$20.00 cloth.

Reviewer Kimberly K. Porter is professor of history at the University of North Dakota. She conducted an oral history of the Grand Forks flood of 1997, which resulted in *Uncommon Heroes: The City of Grand Forks' Flood Fight, 1996-97* (2001).

From Dubuque, Iowa, where Jane Varley played in her childhood on the banks of the meandering Mississippi River, to falling in love and marrying along the banks of Virginia's cool, rushing streams, life for Varley has, to some extent, been defined by her relationships not only to water, but to the landscape.

In 1995 Varley, husband Gary Atkins, and Sam the dog moved to Grand Forks, North Dakota, to pursue not only an education at the

University of North Dakota but also new rivers. They settled into the basement apartment they called the "Cave" and began their explorations of the Red River of the North. A sleepy, slow, northward-flowing river, the Red leads a predominantly docile life. However, in the spring of 1997, following a winter marked by eight blizzards and more than 100 inches of snow, the quiet Red sprang to life, leaving Varley and her husband to fill sandbags, place them near the roaring river, and then flee the city.

This, however, is not a tale of disaster and devastation so much as it is a celebration of human discovery of landscapes, riverscapes, and self. The text is lyrical, almost poetic, blending the public and the private, the pain and the pleasures inherent in a struggle for self-definition (both the author's and the city's). A hint of Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, another disaster story of monstrous proportions, pervades the text; chapters alternate, intertwining to illustrate loss and gain.

As one who experienced the flood firsthand, I can only celebrate Jane Varley's ability to capture the lessons of 1997, and encourage others to do the same.

Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: A Guide to the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes, by Thomas Carter and Elizabeth Collins Cromley. Vernacular Architecture Studies Series. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005. xxv, 120 pp. Illustrations, bibliographical references, index. \$19.95 paper.

Reviewer Mary Anne Beecher is associate professor of interior architecture at the University of Oregon. Her publications include "Building for 'Mrs. Farmer': Published Farmhouse Designs and the Role of the Rural Female Consumer" (1999).

The American landscape is filled with ordinary buildings that have much to say about the people, place, and times they encapsulate. Thomas Carter and Elizabeth Collins Cromley's new book provides an effective framework for documenting and studying such buildings. It is a concise and focused analysis of the research methods available to individuals who are interested in investigating common buildings. The book's contents include a discussion of definitions of vernacular architecture, an enumeration of methods for investigating and documenting buildings, and an overview of significant recent scholarship that provides a range of models for interpreting the vernacular built environment. It concludes with a useful and synthesizing example of how the investigation of seemingly anonymous buildings can offer rich lessons about the cultures with which they are associated. In fact,

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