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## Skull in the Ashes: Murder, a Gold Rush Manhunt, and the Birth of Circumstantial Evidence in America

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the Stavig letters, which she places clearly within the framework of the general immigrant experience. Readers who are not familiar with the history of Norwegian immigration may find it useful to read her essay before reading the letters; they would thus gain a better understanding of how the Stavigs' experience represents broader trends in immigration history. In particular, she shows clearly how the lives of second- and third-generation immigrants were vastly different from those of the immigrants themselves. Lars's inability to communicate with his grandchildren, since he had not learned English and they could not speak Norwegian, illustrates the bittersweet character of the immigrant experience: While they were materially successful, many settlers nonetheless felt alienated in their new environment.

As Bergland notes, "The Stavig letters can be seen as both typical and atypical" (129). It is unusual to have both sides of the correspondence survive, and the letters cover a much longer period than most other sets of communication. Yet they also represent many of the overarching themes of Norwegian immigration to America. This volume is a valuable contribution to the study of Norwegian American history and a useful resource for anyone wishing to learn more about the subject.

*Skull in the Ashes: Murder, a Gold Rush Manhunt, and the Birth of Circumstantial Evidence in America*, by Peter Kaufman. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013. 287 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliography, index. \$19.95 paperback.

Reviewer Patricia Bryan is the Martha Brandis Professor of Law at the University of North Carolina. She is the author of "John Wesley Elkins, Boy Murderer, and His Struggle for Pardon" (*Annals of Iowa*, 2010) and, with her husband, Thomas Wolf, of *Midnight Assassin: A Murder in America's Heartland* (2005).

On February 3, 1897, fire destroyed the general store owned by Frank Novak, an ambitious businessman in the small community of Walford, Iowa. A corpse, burned beyond recognition, was found in the smoldering ruins and assumed to be Novak, who often slept in an upstairs room. But reports quickly surfaced about Novak's gambling habits, his ongoing financial troubles, and his recent purchases of life insurance policies. Also, another man was reported missing: Edward Murray, a hard-drinking drifter, who had been seen with Novak the night before the fire. When the few remaining features of the corpse's "ghastly grimacing skull" (5) appeared to match Murray and not Novak, the newly elected Benton County Attorney set out to find Frank Novak and bring him to justice. Neither the lawyer nor the insurance companies financing the search could have anticipated what

would follow: a six-month pursuit that took detectives across the country and deep into the Yukon Territory, and then, back in Benton County, a courtroom drama that was one of the most widely publicized legal proceedings in Iowa history.

Peter Kaufman presents this compelling story in his excellent new book, *Skull in the Ashes*. The book is divided into four very different but equally engaging parts: the mysterious fire in Walford; the perilous manhunt for Novak; the sensational murder trial; and, finally, the long years of incarceration. Most dramatic is the journey through Alaska, with detectives joining the stampede of the Klondike Gold Rush. Relying on a diary of one of the participants, Kaufman takes readers on a fast-paced adventure as the men scale mountains, navigate rapids, and survive near-death experiences. With Novak's capture, the scene shifts back to Benton County and the legal battle begins. Although the pace of the action slows, Kaufman holds readers' attention with his brisk style of writing and vivid depictions of people and places. The final section of the book describes daily life behind the bars of the Anamosa State Penitentiary.

Although Frank Novak is the connective thread of the narrative, he remains a murky character whose motivations are never clear. For much of the book, Kaufman focuses on three other men, each obsessed with Novak, who drive the action in the story. The author's well-rounded portrayals of this trio constitute the most engaging sections of the book. Red Perrin is the detective, "half bloodhound and half rattlesnake" (57), who pursues Novak down the dangerous Yukon River; M. J. Tobin, the aggressive young Benton County prosecutor, "sharp, streetwise and stubborn as a terrier" (7), who is determined to put Novak behind bars; and Thomas Milner, the "fiery, ebullient and downright cocky" (110) defense attorney from Belle Plaine, Iowa, who matches wits against Tobin in the courtroom.

Based on memoirs, diaries, newspaper articles, trial transcripts, and secondary sources, Kaufman's impressive research has resulted in a compelling and highly readable factual narrative. The book is fascinating for its contextual detail, and it also offers a broad historical perspective, with a particular focus on the striking changes in criminal justice at the turn of the century. Kaufman explores how a new breed of detective investigated crimes, utilizing technological innovations. Newspapers responded to the public's "unquenchable thirst for blood and mystery" (33) with melodramatic reports designed to boost circulation. Prosecutors began to rely on advances in forensic science and circumstantial evidence to prove a defendant's guilt. Prison wardens embraced individual rehabilitation over punishment as their primary goal.

In Kaufman's hands, the story of Frank Novak provides an ideal springboard for lively discussions of these groundbreaking developments.

*Skull in the Ashes* is highly recommended for Iowa history buffs who will appreciate Kaufman's rich characterizations and descriptions of Iowa lawyers and judges, newspapers, courtrooms, and prisons. More general readers will also be captivated by this thrilling turn-of-the-century tale of murder and its aftermath. The black-and-white period photographs, especially those inside Anamosa, are a fine addition to the book.

*"Inherently Bad, and Bad Only": A History of State-Level Regulation of Cigarettes and Smoking in the United States since the 1880s, Volume 1, An In-depth National Study Embedding Ultra-Thick Description of a Representative State (Iowa)*, by Marc Linder. Iowa City, 2012. 3,758 pp. Online publication only at <http://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=books>.

Reviewer Matthew M. Mettler earned his Ph.D. in history at the University of Iowa in 2013. He is the author of "A Workers' Cold War in the Quad Cities: The Fate of Labor Militancy in the Farm Equipment Industry, 1949-1955" (*Annals of Iowa*, 2009).

University of Iowa law professor Marc Linder's online history of cigarette regulation is the first scholarly effort to pull into one narrative the complicated and varied histories of state-level cigarette regulation dating back to the 1880s. It is a monumental task and, free of the editorial demands of the printed page, Linder uses 3,758 pages to accomplish it.

The book is divided into six parts that explore two main narratives: the mixed success of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in banning the sale and public consumption of cigarettes on the state level from the 1880s to the 1920s, and the movement to outlaw second-hand smoke in public from the 1970s to the present. The state of Iowa, which had the nation's longest sales ban (1896-1921), is the focus of three of the six parts. Although the themes of social reform, public health, and American politics and industry are constant, Linder relegates them to the periphery of his straightforward and highly detailed legal and legislative history of state cigarette regulation laws and court rulings, as well as the political contexts that explain their passage and repeal. The author neglects secondary historical work that would enrich the project, but the primary research that he uses is impressive, consisting of thousands of original sources from legal, government, press, and social reform organization archives.