



BOOK REVIEWS

The Timber Wolf in Wisconsin: The Death and Life of a Majestic Predator. By RICHARD P. THIEL. (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1993. Pp. xxiv, 253. Notes, illustrations, bibliography, index, appendices. ISBN 0-299-13940-9, \$45.00, cloth; ISBN 0-299-13944-1, \$17.95, paper.)

Wolves live in Wisconsin. In a world of ever-diminishing wildness, this is no mean fact. Even in the "wild" west, wolves have been absent for decades, and are confined now to just a few small territories in the most remote mountains of Montana, Idaho, and Washington. In Wisconsin, the last of the native wolf population flickered out in the late 1950's, joining the tall pines, passenger pigeons, bison, oak savannahs, and tallgrass prairies on the state roster of the extinguished. That the wolf held on here for so long is extraordinary. That the wolf has been able since the mid-1970's to reestablish itself attests to the tenacity of the species—and to the capacity of our species to tolerate, value, and understand them.

Over the last twenty-five years, no one in Wisconsin has done more to enhance that capacity than Dick Thiel. As an educator and wolf biologist, and as a former chair of the state's wolf recovery team,

Thiel has helped importantly to secure a home for the wolf here. In a peopled landscape, wolves require not only sufficient physical habitat, but a sufficient margin of social, political, and even spiritual space. That comes only through the slow, contingent shaping of the human sense of wolves. And that in turn requires some understanding of the history of the species within the landscape. In *The Timber Wolf in Wisconsin*, Thiel adds to his previous contributions by providing an account of "what happened to our state's wolves and how and why it happened." (Wisely, Thiel has chosen to include the wolves of Michigan's Upper Peninsula in his account.)

This book is the product of Thiel's diligence in collecting historical information— anecdotes, published accounts, archival references, oral histories—on the biology, local occurrence, persecution, demise, and recovery of wolves in Wisconsin. Most of this information has been unavailable to those interested in wolves and the wild places they inhabit. Much of it is the product of Thiel's own research, in particular his interviews with wolf biologists, trappers, and others who were, in one way or another, part of the sad saga that ended on a county road in Bayfield

County in 1958 (the account of the death of that "last" wolf is the book's most moving and excruciating passage.)

Thiel organizes his storehouse of facts into chapters on wolf biology; wolves in the changing Wisconsin landscape; the shifting relationships between people and wolves; the trapping era; the bounty system; the decades-old conflict between deer management and wolf policy; the "secret wolf study" carried out by William Feeney in the 1940's (a particularly useful chapter for conservation historians); and the ultimate loss of the aboriginal wolf population. In a brief epilogue, Thiel recounts the return of the wolf as a breeding species in Wisconsin in the 1970's and 1980's.

This structure works well in conveying the impressive record that Thiel has compiled, but it does not always lend itself to a smooth overall narrative. The reader often yearns for contextual material to keep the pieces together and to see them as part of the larger drama of the evolution of conservation in the state and in the United States. The book has other flaws. The interaction between wolves and Wisconsin's native peoples is only lightly explored. Similarly, the recovery of the wolf is given surprisingly short shrift (we can hope that Thiel, who knows the details of this recent history better than anyone else, will now record his own work as well as he has recorded that of others). The future of the wolf and of the wild forests it requires, especially as revealed by new concepts in conservation biology, is left untouched. Finally, the book suffers from more than occasional editing failures.

Despite these flaws, Thiel's book is essential reading for those interested in the past, present, and future of this species in particular, and of wild Wisconsin in general. It gives cause for celebration, if not comfort. Biologist David Mech notes in his foreword that the wolf has returned to Wisconsin "as a direct result of the Endangered Species Act of 1973." That act is now up for renewal and under

political siege. At the same time, pressures on the forests and on the solitudes that wolves need are unlikely to subside. The future of the species and its habitats rests with those who, like Thiel, know in their hearts that, as much as wolves live in Wisconsin, Wisconsin lives in its wolves.

CURT MEINE

International Crane Foundation
Baraboo

A Tale of Twin Cities or the Development of the Fox River Waterway. By ARVA LUTHER ADAMS, CARYL CHANDLER HERZIGER, and WINIFRED ANDERSON PAWLOWSKI, editors. (Neenah Historical Society, Neenah, 1993. Pp. iv, 244. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography. \$25.00.)

The emphasis in the last two decades on the importance of public history and the study of the history of local institutions has included some effort to provide standard methods of writing community history that respect the canon of the historical method. But most local written commemorations, as valuable as they are in revealing the symbols that are part of a useable past in communities, demonstrate little in the way of a systematic design.

This collection of essays on the early history of Neenah and Menasha, twin cities at the heart of a manufacturing region along the Fox River Valley of Wisconsin, represents a long-standing genre of amateur local history. During the preparation by the Neenah Historical Society of a documentary drama entitled "A Tale of Two Cities," presented in 1987, considerable research material was gathered. This collection had the aim of preserving it. Twenty-one local authors produced twenty-eight short essays dealing with the history of the region and the two cities until 1856, a date seemingly with no particular significance in the story of the communities.