

Taming the Wilderness: The Northern Border Country, 1910-1939, by Hiram M. Drache. Danville, IL: Interstate Publishers, 1992. vii, 376 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$21.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY ROY O. HOOVER, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, DULUTH

Taming the Wilderness is a continuation of Hiram Drache's earlier study, *Koochiching: Pioneering along the Rainy River Frontier*, a history of the border country (northern Minnesota where it butts up to Canada from Lake Superior to Lake of the Woods) from the glacial era to mid-1910. In 1910, where *Taming the Wilderness* begins, the area remained primarily wilderness—the last frontier in the lower forty-eight states to be settled. Because the region was unfit for cultivation, the national homestead legislation that had lured prospective farmers only laid the groundwork for frustration, suffering, and final defeat. One local wit carved on a tree, "Kick yourself for coming."

Not all people who came intended to carve out a 160-acre farmstead, however. Edward "King Ed" Wellington Backus saw the border country as a pulp and paper lumberman's empire. With a dam here and a railroad there, the ambitious Backus began to makeover the wilderness into his own image. Caught up in the expansionist optimism, speculators, homesteaders, lumberjacks, clergy, saloon keepers, merchants, prostitutes, and gamblers followed with eager anticipation. The history of this population occupies most of Drache's book, although Backus's bankruptcy in 1931 burst the bubble that supported them.

Another man who left his imprint on the region was Ernest C. Oberholtzer, a conservationist who devoted his life to preserving the northern wilderness. At a time when neither *conservation* nor *preservation* had entered most people's lexicon, Oberholtzer pressed for accepting the wilderness on its own terms. The battle between the contrasting views was joined. Yet today, the economy of the border country depends on both the pulp and paper industry and the preservationists.

Readers of both of Drache's books will come to understand and appreciate the north country. Drache tells a fascinating story of the people who, with dogged determinism, continue to live in this vast wilderness borderland.

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