Fame was not fair to Herbert W. Gleason

By Dale R. Schwie

“Fame is not just. It never finely or discriminatingly praises, but coarsely hurrahs. The truest acts of heroism never reach her ear, are never published by her trumpet.” H. D. Thoreau, Journal, June 6, 1854

Today, when outstanding achievement is not a prerequisite for fame, and one can become famous merely for being famous, the lives and works of those who are truly worthy of our interest and admiration are often overlooked.

“I would not subtract any thing from the praise that is due to philanthropy, but merely demand justice for all who by their lives and works are a blessing to mankind.” H.D. Thoreau, Walden

Photographer Herbert W. Gleason (1855-1937) is among those to whom justice is due. Gleason never achieved fame during his lifetime, nor posthumously in photographic history. Though fame may have been of little concern to Gleason, he probably would derive satisfaction from knowing that his contributions as a landscape photographer and environmentalist are at last earning him a rightful place in photographic history. At the core of his work are his photographs of “Thoreau Country,” which were inspired by the writings of Henry David Thoreau and recorded over a period of nearly forty years.

Gleason, originally from Malden, Massachusetts, moved to Minnesota in 1883, not to pursue a career in photography, but to answer a call as a Congregational minister. He served in that capacity for two years in Pelican Rapids, and another two years in Minneapolis where he was the pastor of the Como Avenue Congregational Church, and helped to start another church in Saint Anthony Park in St. Paul. For the next twelve years in Minneapolis, Gleason served as managing editor of a denominational newspaper, The Kingdom; but of greater significance is that during this time, he first became acquainted with portions of Thoreau’s journal, and began to experiment with photography. Over one hundred of Gleason’s Minnesota negatives, dating from 1899, are now included in a collection of over seven thousand of his negatives in the Concord Free Public Library in Concord, Massachusetts. The catalyst for Gleason’s career change from managing editor of The Kingdom to photographer was not ill health, as is generally believed, but a libel suit against The Kingdom Publishing Company—a suit that was lost on a technicality despite the best...
Gleason unemployed, he and his wife, Lulie Rounds Gleason, an accomplished pianist and music teacher at the Northwestern Conservatory of Music, and President of the Thursday Musical for its first eight years, moved back to Boston. At the earliest opportunity, Gleason visited Concord, Massachusetts, to search for and photograph places described by Thoreau. While on Thoreau's trail, he found a new career and a relationship with the author that he later described as “remarkable in more ways than one.” His Concord excursions he wrote, “...were self-rewarding, entirely apart from their historical or personal interest. A breezy walk over Concord meadows or uplands far exceeds in exhilaration and inspiration any afternoon upon a golf course or any conceivable trip in a motor-car.”

**Gleason needed work**

When Gleason returned to Boston, his first priority was to generate an income while searching for permanent employment. He returned to his earlier profession of court reporting, where he found a demand for his services among his former stenographic associates. Gleason’s willingness “…to take twenty-five dollars a day for his services among his former stenographic associates” enabled him to invest in photographic equipment and devote more time to rambling among Thoreau’s “beloved haunts.” Not intending to make a career of court reporting, and doubting that he could succeed as a professional photographer, Gleason continued to explore other options including returning to Minnesota.

When, however, the Houghton Mifflin Company became interested in Gleason’s photographs of Thoreau country, his confidence grew and doubts about succeeding as a photographer vanished. He signed lucrative contracts with Houghton Mifflin to supply photographs for special editions of the writings of Thoreau, and eventually for the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Muir, John Burroughs and others, as well as Gleason’s own book, *Through the Year With Thoreau*, which was published in 1917.

When Gleason first began photographing in Minnesota, and using photographs to illustrate a series of “Out of Doors” articles for *The Kingdom*, he was taking the initial steps of a journey that would lead him across the North American continent some forty times. Along the way, he was appointed by Stephen Marther, the first director of the National Park Service, as an Interior Department Inspector assigned to photographing current and potential parks. Some of Gleason’s lantern slides, hand-colored by Mrs. Gleason, make up what has been considered “…one of the first and best national-park lantern-slide collections.”

In addition to his work with the National Park Service, Gleason photographed other threatened landscapes and lectured extensively in support of the conservation of natural areas. Organizations such as the Appalachian Mountain Club and the Sierra Club provided Gleason with new outlets for his illustrated lectures, and introduced him to leaders in the conservation movement. Foremost among these was John Muir. Gleason and Muir became close friends who worked together in efforts to preserve the California redwoods, and on a hard fought, but unsuccessful, battle to prevent the damming of the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite. Today, Gleason’s photographs of the valley before it was flooded are being used by activists in a movement to restore the Hetch Hetchy Valley.

Although Gleason has gained some recognition since the 1970s, after the publication of two beautiful books of his photographs, *Thoreau Country* and *The Western Wilderness of North America*, and others illustrating the writings of Thoreau, he is still relatively unknown except to photographic historians, and to those familiar with his Thoreau country images.

Perhaps an explanation for Gleason’s not achieving fame as a photographer may be found in the venues he chose for displaying his images, and in his own independence. Gleason was a self-promoter; he was not dependent on the gallery scene and photographic societies; he specialized in illustrated lectures and books. Thousands of photographs taken by Gleason while he was employed by the National Park Service became their property. Gleason lectured to audiences throughout the U.S., but the ephemeral nature of illustrated lectures, and early sales of books by Henry D. Thoreau, John Muir, John Burroughs and others containing his photographs, did not bring fame his way. However, Gleason, who found “…a peculiar satisfaction in being on hand at the beginning of things,” might also concur with Thoreau’s words: “For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be: what is once well done is done for ever.”

Today, many of Gleason’s Concord images, along with Thoreau’s botanical notes, are being studied by biologists researching the effects of global warming on plant growth. In Minnesota, examples of Gleason’s work and multiple talents, can be found not in photographs, but in the logo of the Thursday Musical where his laurel wreath design is still in use after 116 years, and in a pulp that he bought and hand carved in 1884 for the Pelican Rapids Congregational Church. His articles in *The Kingdom* newspaper provide valuable insight into his years in Minnesota, as well as interesting local history. Fame’s trumpet may not have published Gleason’s achievements, but his commitment to photography and the conservation of natural beauty was not dependent on coarse hurrahs. No doubt, he would find a peculiar satisfaction in knowing that the photographs he dedicated nearly forty years of his life to creating, are today a source of new life for him and his works. Fame may not be just, but perhaps for Gleason it has been delayed, rather than denied.

**Notes**

1 The American Book Company vs The Kingdom Publishing Company. Libel suit against The Kingdom Publishing Co. for publishing a booklet entitled: A Fox to American Schools, that accused the American Book Company of using corrupt business practices to introduce their textbooks to public schools.

2 Letter, Herbert W. Gleason to Dr. Thomas S. Roberts. 2 June 1920. University of Minnesota Archives. T.S. Roberts Natural History Correspondence.


4 Letter, HWG to TSR, 12 January 1900. University of Minnesota Archives. T.S. Roberts Natural History Correspondence.

5 Robert Shunkland, Steve Mather of the National Parks. 3d ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knofl, 1972), 93.

6 Herbert W. Gleason, “Early at the Lake,” The Kingdom, 12 May 1898, 590.


**Reflections from the Wireless Pond**

by Charles Culbrini

*It wasn’t Kermit, but it really was a green frog on the poster croaking the thesis of a one-day conference on Saturday, March 1, 2008. Entitled “Afloat in the Wireless Pond,” the event was sponsored by the Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum and the Minnesota Coalition on Government Information, organized by Lucy Brusic and Mary Treacy and funded in part by a grant from the Minnesota Sesquicentennial Commission. Throughout the day about 60 people were on hand to hear an exciting array of speakers at Luther Seminary in St. Paul.*

Setting the tone with a suggestive image, Laura Waterman Wittstock, CEO, Wittstock & Associates, evoked the long house as a place for discussion. The discussion taking place there, however, was not just to deliberate on issues for the present moment, but to decide what would encompass seven generations forward. Waterman Wittstock urged us not just to think in a “now” centered way, as if we had no future. Rather, she coaxed us to enter the long house and think of matters that have consequences for the future, for seven generations.

Kenneth Brusic, Editor of the Orange County Register, (Santa Ana, CA) the keynote speaker of the day, did have the future in mind in his illustrated talk about the role of newspapers in the present and in times to come. Evoking a Minnesota song writer, Brusic intoned the editors’ lament: “The Times, They Are A’Changing.” He was referring, it seems, to the New York Times, The Star Tribune, and his paper The Register; but he was also speaking, calmly (but with a hint of anxiety), about the sea changes affecting information gathering in general and newspapers in particular.

Disruptive technology caused the demise of Western Union, Brusic observed. Similar forces are at work disrupting the continued on the next page
As CSJ archivist Mary is responsible for collecting, organizing, preserving, and making accessible the records of this remarkable community. The Sisters of St. Joseph first arrived in St. Paul in 1851. Four Sisters, invited by Bishop Cretin, had made their way up the Mississippi from St. Louis. By year’s end they had opened St. Joseph Academy on Western and Marshall in St. Paul and St. Joseph’s Hospital near downtown St. Paul. By 1853 they had opened St. Anthony High School in Northeast Minneapolis and by 1905 they had launched the College of St. Catherine, now the nation’s largest women’s college.

The archives Mary KRAFT tends today are bulging with records carefully maintained by the Sisters for these 157 years. High school yearbooks, prom and basketball games, faculty members, groundbreakings, graduations and ministries to the elderly, sick people, to street people—they are all recorded in handwriting. Kodak photo, DVD and spread sheet—preserved, organized, and made accessible through decades of careful work by hundreds of Sisters. The coded archives tended by Mary were formally opened in 1968.

Though the archives at 1890 Randolph are the official archives of the CSJ Sisters, several of the programs run by the Sisters maintain independent historical archives among these are the St. Joseph Hospital archives and the archives of the College of St. Catherine. (Some of the CSJ Archives are incorporated in the Minnesota Digital Library Project.)

Stories abound—stories of women who broke ground in the education of women, in health care, in meeting the needs of the homeless, immigrants, and children without families. They also broke literal ground as they built the venerable edifice at the center of the CSJ campus at Randolph and Fairview in St Paul (just east of the College of St. Catherine).
He did receive his citizenship shortly after he arrived, and his "career" in journalism began when he was a five-year-old peddling newspapers downtown to help support his family. He attended the University of Minnesota part time for seven years, without earning a degree, but he had a very successful career as sports reporter, and later as copy editor, on the Minneapolis Morning Tribune.

He also wrote a weekly column for many years for the American Jewish World, and was a dedicated community volunteer because, as he liked to say, he couldn't give big money, so he had to give himself. He was honored at many community events, received a Minneapolis "Man of the Year" plaque for public service in 1961; in 1964 a forest was planted in Israel in honor of his community service and active participation in raising money for the Jewish National Fund to support the new State of Israel.

Louis Greene met his wife, Florence, at the Tribune, where she worked in classified advertising; they married in 1927, when she was 27 years old and he was only 23. I have his Social Security card, dated 12/7/36, which was the year Social Security began!

Another "moment of fame" was described in Carl Rowan's autobiography, Breaking Barriers. When Rowan graduated from Journalism School at the University of Minnesota, he thought he'd never find a job as a reporter, but Tribune publisher John Cowles had decided it was time to hire a Negro. But then Cowles assigned Rowan to the copy desk, to learn how newspapers are put together. Rowan says my father would scream at him things like, "God damn it, Rowan, don't you know that commas come in pairs?" But then, after two years, when Cowles told Rowan it was time to start reporting the news, Rowan says he loved my Dad so much he didn't want to leave. So we as joke, my father ran the "Lou Greene School of Journalism" at the Tribune.

He also had repeated battles with sports reporter Sid Hartman, whom he thought was an absolute incompetent. Sid went on to have a very successful career on radio and TV. Though. When my Dad died suddenly from a heart attack in March, 1972, Sid wrote a letter of condolence to the Tribune, where he began a B. A. program in Education and met his wife, Kok. The two married in 1937 and Ernie served in the Army Air Corps before settling down, in 1946, in Kok's hometown of St. Paul.

He soon found that choices for Minnesota employment were not so different from those he had faced as a youth back in New Jersey. Degreed and non-degreed blacks in this state had the same work opportunities: janitor, cafeteria worker, vocation as a "tray boy" running food, or if really lucky, as a car attendant or car-rentant on the Great Northern Railway. Greene completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Minnesota with a schedule focused in the sciences. In 1946 he came to the attention of Victor Lorber, M.D., Ph.D., in the Physiology Department of the University of Minnesota Medical School.

Dr. Lorber, a Jewish biochemist at Case-Western Reserve (Cleveland, Ohio), lost his national medical research funding when he was "blackballed" by Wisconsin Sen. Joseph McCarthy; but Lorber had been noticed by Dr. Visscher's assistant, Dr. Maurice Joseph McCarthy; but Lorber had been noticed by Dr. Visscher's assistant, Dr. Maurice

Lorber and Greene emphasized that the pursuit of basic research scientifically is the primary responsibility of the scientific community, and believed that scientists should be primarily concerned with doing research and promoting knowledge. Lorber and Greene also advocated for the pursuit of basic research for its own sake, and for the advancement of knowledge.

Additionally, Lorber and Greene emphasized the importance of scientific collaboration and the dissemination of scientific knowledge. They believed that scientists should actively engage with the public and other scientists to promote the advancement of knowledge and the dissemination of scientific findings.

In later years, these same families took vacation trips together. In 1976, this author and his wife were asked to join members of the ten families for a cruise of the Caribbean. We were able to observe how important these family relationships are, and how much they contribute to the well-being of everyone involved.

Mr. Greene served our state as a member of the Human Rights Commission and for many years spent time as a volunteer tennis coach in the inner city park system. In the late 1970s Ernie took early retirement from the University and began a second career as a tennis pro, instructing at a local tennis academy. And even then, while himself becoming a nationally ranked player on the senior circuit.

Ernest Greene

Ernest (Ernie) A. Greene (b. 05 Dec 1918; d. May 2002)

As a boy growing into manhood in Atlantic City, New Jersey, Ernest Greene's employment opportunities reflected the problems most blacks faced in the United States at that time: his choices were limited to "pin-boy" in a bowling alley or bare-fist boxing for the "entertainment" of white men at local men's social clubs. Greene chose the pin-boy route, but he formed the habit of his duties involved not only the loading of pins in a semi-automatic device that placed them on the lanes, but also the agility to avoid being hit by patrons who enjoyed throwing bowling balls at the "niggers" while they filled the pin slots.

As a fast learner and hard worker, Ernest was accepted by Hamilton Institute in 1935 (a premier Negro college founded in 1868), where he began a B. A. program in Education and met his wife, Kok. The two married in 1937 and Ernie served in the Army Air Corps before settling down, in 1946, in Kok's hometown of St. Paul.

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continued on the next page
Hester Crooks Boutwell

The life of Hester Crooks Boutwell (1817-1853) provides an insight into the Anglo and Indian worlds that existed side by side in the area that would eventually become Minnesota.

Hester Crooks was born May 20, 1817, on Drummond Island in Lake Huron. She was the daughter of an Indian woman named Abahokwe and Ramsay Crooks, the manager of the American Fur Company at Mackinaw. Hester’s mother was probably a mixed blood; she was almost certainly an Odawa-speaker, because Hester later in life had to “brush up” on her Ojibwe, Odawa and Odowa are similar, but not the same languages.

Ramsay Crooks was not on Drummond Island when Hester was born, but he acknowledged her as his daughter and provided for her schooling at the Mackinaw Mission School, where she probably received the equivalent of an tenth-grade education. Hester was described as having her father’s intelligence and her mother’s “Indian” eyes.

Hester collaborated with her husband and other missionaries in a translation of the Bible into Ojibwe; she also assisted in the preparation of school texts and primers to teach English to Ojibwe children. She was only 36 years old when she died in 1853 from complications after the birth of a child. She is buried with her husband in a family plot in Stillwater; the plot is owned and maintained by the city of Stillwater.

Hester Boutwell has generally been esteemed for her loyalty and her work in her husband’s mission field. However, it is no longer fashionable to extol a woman because she is a loyal helpmeet to her husband nor is it popular to recognize the indispensable contributions ministers’ wives have made to their husbands’ profession. In addition, the work of Christian missionaries among the American Indians, however well-intentioned it may have been, is now evaluated with ambivalence.

Nonetheless, Hester Boutwell is a significant figure in the history of early Minnesota—although she seems very far removed from today. She lived in a time when the boundaries that separate races (and probably sexes) do not seem to have been so pronounced as they later became. She probably spoke at least four languages (everyone who lived on Mackinaw spoke both French and English; she spoke at least two Indian languages as well). Through wit, charm, and intelligence, she was able to step between the boundaries that separate races (and probably sexes) do not seem to have been so pronounced as they later became.

I suppose I might never have thought of seeing “mother” through the prism of a snowstorm, an imagined observation from the womb, a percolator (although anyone who’s helped sort through a deceased parent’s things might recognize that one), family cooking styles, gardening, recurrent dreams and ghosts, “a partial list of things my mother couldn’t be bothered with,” a box of clippings Mom sent, Dad’s ashes, canned pickles, scrapbooks and documentary films made by Mom, migrations, cancer therapies, home sales of Stanley products, or (most disconcertingly to me) technological analogs between adoption and computer programming, but each of these starting points helps provide a web for a different spin on coming to grips with Mom.

There are tales in this book from adopted only-daughters but each of these starting points helps provide a web for a different spin on coming to grips with Mom.


Anthologies are “like a box of chocolates,” great as snacks before bed or with morning coffee, if you can nibble just a few pieces. Limiting nibbles is harder when the twenty-one authors are formidable with words, all of them teachers of writing or award-winners or both, distinguished literary lights with recognized names—the last in the book (provider of the title) our own Morgan Grayce Willow, poet, and long-time member of the Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum. It’s even more fascinating when what they all address is something we each find “difficult to put into words,” or sometimes even to get a grip on—our relationship to “mother.” Each piece is preceded by a photograph, usually but not always of the mother written (lovingly in Mom’s youth), always illustrative of the writing to follow.

Ginny Hansen

Ginny Hansen is a long-time member of the MISF and a self-employed editor, with a specialty in medical editing.

Fiddle Game


Crime in Minnesota seems to be on the upswing, at least in recent literature. The Minnesota Crime Wave (that’s what they call it) can be detected in such recent anthologies as The Silence of the Looms and Resort to Murder, wherein about twenty local crime writers pile up the bodies and the mayhem. Another local author, Richard A. Thompson, has made an entry into this area with his debut novel, Fiddle Game.
The main character, Herman Jackson, is a bail bondsman with a shady past. He allows himself to get sucked into a very complex con game involving a priceless old violin, urban Gypsies, and lots of action that stretches from St. Paul to upstate Minnesota, and down to Chicago and Skokie, Illinois. Herman shares some traits with such noir detectives as Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade; he has a code of honor from which he will not deviate; he stays on the scent no matter what; he brilliantly quits his way through every situation; and he has an insouciant way with the gals he hooks up with—he even manages to hit it off with Rosie, so to speak, in the front seat of a car secreted in a Chicago junkyard while trying to elude deadly pursuit.

The plot, while pretty improbable, is nicely crafted. It includes intriguing snippets of violin history, World War II legend, modern Gypsy life and lore, and lots of local color. In a note at the beginning of the book the author tells us to regard the St. Paul of this story as completely fictitious, which is not always easy to do since there is a lot of verisimilitude in the book. For example, anyone who has been in downtown St. Paul heading toward Seven Corners will not see a fictitious city on page 43 where Herman “headed west, past the Courthouse and the County Jail, past high-rise offices with selective blocks of floors lit up for the night cleaning crews, past the Central Library that looks like the Bank of England and the Catholic soup kitchen that looks like nothing at all, towards the oldest part of the city.”

He holds a Ph.D. from Harvard in the History and Philosophy of Religion and is the author of Poitnism and Christianity: A Study in Theism and Verifiability (Nijhoff, 1974) and of Issues in War and Peace: Philosophical Inquiries, co-edited with Joseph Kunkel (Longwood: 1990).

Klein wants to use his paper as a springboard for further discussion of the ways in which people facing terminal diseases can choose to end their lives legally. He is relentlessly pursued by a bent cop. He seeks advice from an imprisoned uncle in an upstate prison. He meets and escapes with Rosie by cleverly foiling a pair of stereotypical dense charlatans he has met, and thenOddly enough, the confession of the man who sold the violin is the only beginning to be made. This story has one of the nicest possibilities for what the writer can do, and it has to do with the violin. It is a story of a conman and his rising star in the business. It is also a story of a man who is pursuing a goal, and it is also a story of a man who is pursuing a dream.

Klein’s huge arm and wondered what was really inside it. “Evil! Salvation! Or just an old fiddle? I hadn’t looked inside the case, and I didn’t intend to.” (235) Deliciously ripe. Anyone who makes it to the end of this home town caper will hope that Herman will show up again to walk the mean streets of St. Paul. Robert Brusic

Robert Brusic is a retired Lutheran pastor with an avid interest in mystery stories.

The Last Word

We have an image of a hero—a firefighter, a soldier, or a policeman—someone who has performed public deeds of heroism that saved lives. However, the purpose of this issue of Practical Thinking was to uncover “hidden heroes”—whose unsung and perhaps unrecognized accomplishments have helped people and advanced the less dramatic but significant causes of learning, peace, or art.

The theme of hidden heroes is well worked out in the biographical sketches of people you may not have heard of—Herbert W. Gleason, Mary Kraft, Louis Greene, Ernest Greene, and Hester Crooks Bouwitt. I appreciate the enthusiasm with which the writer of this essay approached their subjects and the liveliness with which they treated them. In addition the Book Corner reveals some hidden heroes—mothers—and maybe a fictional one—Herman Jackson.

This theme of hidden heroes causes me to comment on an Op-ed piece that appeared in the Washington Post, May 1, 2008. Written by Amelia Rawls (Yale Law, ’10), it is entitled “Best and Brightest, But Not the Nicest”—A Commentary.

Rawls’s essay appeared on the day that college students around the country had to make their college choices; it is a reflection on the college application and selection process. In brief, Rawls wonders what happens to the “nice” people in the race to get into the “good” colleges—“The kind of selfless, genuine ‘nice’ that makes this world a better place—but won’t get you accepted to college.”

It is Rawls’s contention that many of the brightest people in this country, especially in the college race, are so concerned with being the best, or the first, or the top, that they overlook being humble, or cooperative, or generous. Top flight colleges reward outstanding resumes by granting admission to the people with superlative accomplishments. In effect, Rawls sees college selection as an almost-Darwinian process that disadvantages the less-concerned-with-winning people who will really make things work. That the Ivy League sends so many people into politics does not escape Rawls’ irony. For some reason, starting a war looks much better in the history books, than does avoiding one.

I thought of this essay as I read the stories of the “hidden heroes,” the people who quietly and without fanfare made a difference to those around them. I suspect that all of us, especially we Nice Minnesotans, have felt passed over when grandstanders (in politics as elsewhere) start jockeying for position. Humans and structures being what they are, I doubt we can do much to change the status quo. However, we all know those who keep things running, who really listen, and who play fair. We need to affirm these people, support them in their endeavors, and make sure they are heard as often as they speak (which may not be often). I hope that you will recognize, affirm, and maybe even thank a “hidden hero” today.

Lucy Brusic <lucy@brusic.net>

Save the date

October 11: Special MISF lecture-discussion at Washburn Library

“Physician-Assisted Suicide: It should be a legal option!” will be the topic of a paper to be given by Dr. Kenneth Klein at Washburn Library, Lyndale Avenue, Minneapolis, Saturday, October 11, 2008. Dr. Klein recently delivered a similar paper to the American Society on Aging and the National Conference on Aging conference in Washington, D.C.

Dale Schwie, Mary Treacy

Contributors to this issue: R. Michael Brusic, Ginny Hansier, David Juncker, Rhoda Lewin, Dale Schwie, Mary Treacy

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This special issue of *Practical Thinking* was produced in June, 2008, to honor the twenty-fifth annual meeting of the Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum. **Congratulations to the Scholars** on a quarter century of scholarship, leadership, and sheer persistence. Best wishes for the twenty-five years!

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