

[PDF] Wisconsin Death Trip

**Michael Lesy, Warren Susman, Charles Van Schaik - pdf
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Description:

The last decade of the 19th century was, for some Americans, a time when great fortunes were to be made. For many others, however, the period was a time of economic dislocation, when the gap between city and countryside, rich and poor, grew ever wider. As the Indian Wars ended and the Gilded Age extended into America's first Imperial Age, social critics such as Mark Twain and William Dean Howells began to examine the dark side of the American dream: violence, poverty, degenerate behavior, suicide, and insanity.

In the late 1960s, another desperate time, historian took a long look at fin-de-siècle America. Examining a collection of several thousand glass plate negatives and historical documents from Jackson County, Wisconsin, he concocted a sprawling treatise on a past that had been willfully forgotten, a brooding rejoinder to 's . First published in 1973, Lesy's *Wisconsin Death Trip*, now reissued in a handsome paperbound edition, became a key text of the counterculture, a book to shelve alongside and --and it sometimes reads like a hip product of its time. Lesy documents the unsettling record of one small corner of rural America, turning up accounts of barn burnings, attacks by gangs of armed tramps, threatening and obscene letters, death by diphtheria and smallpox (the Wisconsin townsfolk had, some years, to attend several funerals a week), alcoholism, madness, business and bank failures, and even a case or two of witchcraft.

After reading Lesy's texts and viewing the sometimes unsettling images he's turned up, you would be forgiven for thinking that no one in small-town Wisconsin in our great-great-grandparents' time was well-adjusted--which is, of course, not the case. Hyperbole notwithstanding, this is a remarkable study, one that Lesy himself rightly calls an experiment in both history and alchemy. --*Gregory McNamee*

From Library Journal As the title suggests, this is a truly strange book. Published in 1973, it is essentially a collection of photos taken in Black River Falls, WI, by Charles Van Schaik between 1890 and 1910. The subject matter ranges from children in coffins, to farm animals, to family portraits of some of the grimmest-looking people imaginable; the photos are accompanied by snippets from newspapers. The whole package seems to confirm that the good old days were actually awful. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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