A MOST WICKED CONSPIRACY:

The Last Great Swindle of the Gilded Age

By Robert Pelotnik

234 pages

Reader Report by Colleen Boyd

When gold was discovered in Nome, Alaska in 1898 by Swedish and Norwegian immigrants, prospectors and fortune seekers from across America rushed in and began mining the precious mineral. Racial tensions between foreign and American miners became inflamed as people started jumping properties, and in the middle of the chaos, Alexander McKenzie, a North Dakota politician, initiated a plan that nearly ruined the rush and created one of the biggest scandals of America’s Gilded Age: he started stealing properties and mining for gold under the guise of caring for the land. And given the lawlessness of Alaska, he might’ve gotten away with it were it not for a dedicated team of judges and a refusal to let the little guy down.

Robert Pelotnik’s *A Most Wicked Conspiracy* thoroughly covers every aspect of McKenzie’s scheme. From the initial finding of the gold and the development of Nome, to McKenzie pilfering miners’ claims through crooked government officials and the eventual legal battle, the author goes into great detail regarding locations, historical figures, and actions taken while maintaining a strong timeline and without sounding dry. Pelotnik’s strongest writing is in portraying McKenzie; supposedly “honest, outspoken and reliable,” Pelotnik deftly characterizes him as a capable liar regarding everything from his first marriage (“on the grounds of Extreme Cruelty–of his wife towards him”) to health problems to escape his prison sentence.

However, Pelonik’s attention to particulars not only slows down the manuscript but also leaves critical information unexpressed. For example, the short prologue talks about how miner Ed Jesson rode his bike up to Nome; there’s no mention of the scandal’s importance, why should readers should care this happened, or how it affected the present day. While Pelotnik does hit his stride around Chapter Four with a better focus on historical facts, he loses concentration again in other places, especially the epilogue; some of the aforementioned questions are answered (like how the affair helped the passing of the 17th Amendment) but not given the full explanation they deserve. Furthermore, he doesn’t tell us what happens to the book’s historical figures after the scandal: McKenzie’s death gets a passing reference while his co-conspirators, such as corrupt judge Arthur Noyes, receive no final mention.

I think such concerns can be fixed with rewriting and editing. This is an overall promising historical nonfiction manuscript that can appeal to history buffs, fans of TV networks like the Discovery Channel, and historical nonfiction lovers. Given Pelotnik’s publication history (his previous book, *Sage of the Circuit: How Lincoln’s Years as Country Lawyer Shaped His Mind and Career*, won the Rob Kaplan Award in 2014), and how the manuscript provides something new to read about, I’d recommend possible consideration.

Marketing Concept for Hallmark

Editors and Writers at Hallmark are idea people who are often asked to brainstorm concepts for new or changing products. This is your chance to create a new product (of any kind-think outside the box!) and follow it from conception to retail display.

Please summarize the following:

* Identify your market (who is it, how old, male/female, lifestyle(s), etc.)
* Briefly describe your new product and create a few specific examples of copy (the type of writing that could be used)
* Give it a name
* Copy ideas and design descriptions for packaging, if needed
* Copy ideas and design direction for the retail display

Market: My product would be marketed for women who are looking for a scent different from the usual perfume. Marketing would focus around women of all age

The product: Hallmark’s first official perfume line! However, the scents created wouldn’t be just any mixture of flowers; instead, the perfumes would consist of smells that bring back old, fond memories, such as kitchen spices, cut grass, old books, and bonfires.

Copy: We recall good memories to help us through hard times and to relax, so why not make remembering a little more sense-sational? Scientific studies have shown that out of all five senses, the sense of smell is most directly linked with the ability to remember. Given that Hallmark’s all about making memories with their cards, this takes Hallmark’s goal to a new level, delivering a dose of fragrances based on the smells that bring back those much-loved memories you treasure in a whole new dimension.

Some copy for perfume descriptions: With so little time to read these days, why not remember your favorite book wherever you go?

Dream up favorite meals, new and old, with the scent of Kitchen Spices!

The name: Comfort. The tagline would be “Fragrances Full of Memories.”

Design for packaging: Each perfume bottle would be a basic box shape with a silver cylinder stopper. Size of bottle would determine ounce (1/2, 1, 4). The labels would have the perfume name and the Comfort brand name set against a picture-based background based off what the scent is (campfire picture for campfire scent, close-up of grass for grass scent, etc.). Packaging would be rectangular boxes with the same type of label from the perfume bottle on the front, and depending on the scent, each box would be a different color (orange for campfire, green for grass, light yellow for old books, etc.)

Design for retail display: A round table would be best, since it lets customers approach from all angles with no corners for potential bruising. The table would be tiered, three layers, like a wedding cake, and the table and tiers would be clear glass. On the top tier would be a two-way sign explaining what Comfort is, and on the other tiers would be the product; depending on popularity, certain scents would have more out. At the bottom tier there would be test bottles (labelled as such) with round cups filled with test strips. These strips would have both the Comfort logo and the Hallmark logo printed on them.

Press Release

April 12th, 2016 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BkMk Press Explores Family *Heirlooms* with Rachel Hall’s Award-Winning Book

In *Heirlooms,* an upcoming book from BkMk Press — an award-winning literary press — Rachel Hall has written a collection of linked stories based on her family history. Beginning in the French town of Saint-Malo in 1939 and ending in the American Midwest in 1989, the book explores four generations of a Jewish family as they cope with World War II and the struggle of upholding the memories of how the war affected them. “*Heirlooms* is an exquisite and thrilling collection,” writes Steve Almond, author of *God Bless America.* “In fearless and incandescent prose, Rachel Hall traces the fragile resilience and quiet horrors of those displaced by war.”

*Heirlooms* is also the recipient of the G. S. Sharat Chandra Prize for Short Fiction. Given to the best book-length collection of short fiction in English by a living author, *Heirlooms* was selected by poet and novelist Marge Piercy. Winners of this prize have received reviews in venues such as *Publishers Weekly* and *Booklist*, and have won awards such as IPPY and ForeWord.

The publication date for this book is Sept. 15, 2016, in rude paper format. Its purchase price is $15.95.

BkMk Press publishes full-length collections of poetry, fiction, and essays. Founded in 1971, it has been a part of the University of Missouri-Kansas City since 1983. Call 816-235-2558 or write to [BkMk@umkc.edu](mailto:BkMk@umkc.edu) to contact.