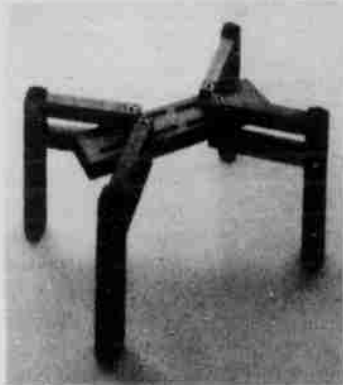


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In Print

Chamber Pieces

John Sanford is one of the best makers of stories in America today, and one of the least known. His "personal history" of the United States, *A More Godly Country*, was well-received when it appeared in 1975, and sold modestly well; his novels — he has published eight — have been praised by such as Carl Sandburg, William Rose Benét, and William Carlos Williams. Yet Sanford had to print his chef d'oeuvre, *Man Without Shoes*, at his own expense, and he remains virtually unmentioned in major works of American literary criticism, meagerly represented in our libraries, and almost unknown among even the most conscientious readers of American prose.

His neglect is inexplicable. His craft is sturdy, his concerns are vital ones, and he is one of the most profoundly American of American authors in our time. He has a terrifyingly accurate ear for plain talk, a deep and honest (if unsentimental) regard for the land itself and the things that grow on it, and a genuinely poetic vision of the historical and social continuity of his (our) country. His themes are frequently revenge, obsession, integrity, and honor — all in peculiarly native incarnations. His characters are real folks.

Sanford's most recent book, and a first-rate one, is *Adirondack Stories* (Capra Press, \$10), a thin and handsome volume of short pieces inspired by the author's sojourn in the Adirondack Mountains in 1931, in the company of his friend Nathanael West. The stories themselves were written in 1932 and 1934, but are fresh and strong today. They are "tales," really — told almost as they might be told on long, unfurling rural nights before a fire or an iron stove. They're dense, compelling stories, with atmosphere you can breathe. One of them, "Adirondack Narrative," about a tentative, mismatched flirtation between a vacationing New York salesman and "one of the nicest girls in Warren County," is a nearly perfect piece of writing. It belongs in anthologies of the "best" American short fiction of the century, along with "The Girls in Their Summer Dresses" and "They Shoot Horses, Don't They?"

Sanford has all the attributes of a master — except, perhaps, alas, the following a master deserves.

Also from Capra Press, a small outfit in Santa Barbara which specializes in what might be called "chamber pieces" by modern writers (and which produces them quite beautifully), is *The Blue Train* by Lawrence Clark Powell (\$10). Powell is best known as an essayist and a regional (Western) historian, and as the former director of the UCLA library; *The Blue Train*, billed as a novel but actually a collection of five vignettes, each of them about a woman and each having some connection with the train station in Dijon, was written by Powell in 1941 and was based on the time he spent in that French city as a medical student. This is the first publication of the vignettes, though Henry Miller liked them enough in 1943 — in a letter to the author used here as an afterword — to call *The Blue Train* "the only book by an American which deals with *les amourettes* and gives to these little passing loves the proper frame and fragrance."

Well, maybe so. But the book is a very youthful one (despite the fact that Powell

rewrote it in 1966 and revised it in 1975), and the young narrator sounds selfish and clumsy, and strangely distant from the French sensuality he describes so earnestly.

Colman Andrews

Hollywood Reported

Since Woodward and Bernstein brought down a government with their relentless investigative reporting, journalism has become one of the most respected and sought-after professions, and practitioners of the ancient art see themselves as a combination of the Lone Ranger and Ralph Nader. In a world of confusion, the person with the true story is King.

The seductive lure of the inside story wasn't lost on a young New York journalist named Marie Brenner who came West to Hollywood to provide the very thing she found absolutely missing from glitter gulch: investigative reporting. After a few short months spent attending parties, interviewing principles and trying to get a handle on the Byzantine workings of Hollywood, Marie went back to New York, declaring Hollywood would not allow a truly free press to exist.

She took her notes with her and turned them into magazine pieces for publications like *New Times* and *New York*. Now that collection of essays appears in a book titled *Going Hollywood* (Delacorte), and the work reveals Brenner as an insightful, deft writer whose only fault was that she wanted to move too quickly, too fast.

Her summation of current Hollywood as a city obsessed with making deals rather than movies is right on target and her choice of words is thankfully devoid of the sycophantic tone taken by too many journalists who cover Hollywood. Particularly outstanding were her short-story-like essays on the Woman Executive in Hollywood and Ali MacGraw.

Going Hollywood makes fascinating reading. Brenner caught a number of people off-guard, and she quotes mercilessly. In fact, one wonders if her sources knew they were in the presence of an on-the-record reporter. It's too bad Marie Brenner gave up on Hollywood; the town and its industry need more reporters who are able to walk that delicate line between catty and candid.

Jacobs Atlas

Chicago Journalism

Done in a Day, edited by Dick Griffin and Rob Warden (Swallow Press, \$7.95), is a collection of columns, feature stories, and reportage culled from *The Chicago Daily News*. Ben Hecht, Carl Sandburg, George Ade, Finley Peter Dunne, and Eugene Field are represented, as are latter-day writers like Nicholas Von Hoffman and Mike Royko. The pieces, drawn from a century's worth of the *News*, cover "War," "Learning," "Life and Death," "Money," "Sport," and seven other matters of concern to newspapers and their readers — and cover these matters with humanity and a lot of style. The *News* has always published good writing — the legendary Henry Justin Smith, in his days as managing editor, quite openly hired writers instead of newsmen — and this anthology contains a lot of it.

C.A.