

'The fact that' Fitzgerald 'never did write a hymn or homage to the Midwest has always been painful.' GARRISON KEILLOR

St. Paul tender over a slight

Fitzgerald's town finally pays due to novelist who left it behind

By Dennis J. Carroll
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ST. PAUL, Minn. — F. Scott Fitzgerald's birth city finally ended 75 years of pouting over hurt feelings last week as it celebrated the 100th birthday of the writer who left here at the age of 25 and never came back.

"Fitzgerald did that quintessential Midwestern thing — he went somewhere else," said Patricia Hamp, a St. Paul author and one of several writers who gathered here to toast Fitzgerald in celebrations.

Hamp, the director of creative writing at the University of Minnesota and an organizer of the Fitzgerald festival, said that even

though Fitzgerald thought St. Paul was "dull as dishwater . . . he was formed by this place more than a lot of people understand. He was a St. Paul somebody."

The celebration also included a literary festival for students, dances, a 1920s fashion show and the unveiling of a sculpture of the writer and a commemorative US postage stamp. The highlights of the celebration were a special Fitzgerald edition of Garrison Keillor's "Prairie Home Companion," which is broadcast from St. Paul and a "Great Gatsby" ball on Friday night.

Fitzgerald was born in St. Paul on Sept. 24, 1896. By 1919, he had attended Princeton University and served a stint in the Army. Failing financially with his writing and romantically with Zelda Sayre, he returned to St. Paul and moved back into his parents' home on Summit Avenue. He spent that summer rewriting his first novel, "This Side of Paradise," which was accepted for publication later in 1919.

He then returned East, paid off his debts and patched up his romance with Sayre. The couple returned to St. Paul for the birth of their daughter Scottie, but left for good in

1922. Fitzgerald died of a heart attack in Hollywood December 21, 1940, at the age of 44. Zelda Fitzgerald spent her final years in a mental hospital in Asheville, N.C. She died in a fire at the hospital in 1948.

Keillor, a native Minnesotan, told the crowd assembled in Rice Plaza for birthday cake, that they should stop feeling bad that Fitzgerald left and never bothered to return or even to pay tribute to the city.

"It's always been painful for us in St. Paul," Keillor said. "We are lonely people in the Midwest and we crave approval and we crave praise. The fact that this young man flew off to New York, Paris and Hollywood and never did write a hymn or homage to the Midwest has always been painful."

Keillor reminded those gathered that Fitzgerald left for New York because "New York was what he wanted to write about. . . . His milieu was there. His subject was there. But in the end, this was his home."

"Those people on Fifth Avenue and 59th Street in New York are not going to remember F. Scott Fitzgerald," Keillor said. "They're not even going to read him. They're much too busy promoting themselves. It's

back in the Midwest, back in the 'lost Swede towns' of the prairies that people cherish F. Scott Fitzgerald. Who better than those phlegmatic Swedes and taciturn Norwegians and all those deadly earnest liberals of Minnesota to appreciate this perpetual adolescent?"

As if to underscore the point, an editorial in the Minneapolis Star Tribune last week labeled Fitzgerald an "unbeloved infidel," but said it was more than about time that St. Paul recognize this native son. "For too long, St. Paul preferred to forget this handsome,

troublesome artist, even though he enlivened its streets, avenues, families and festivals in literature," the paper said.

"There are those here who are still galled by Fitzgerald's lack of public recognition of the city. People were complaining about the celebration and the money being spent. But some scholars say Fitzgerald did remember St. Paul and it showed in his writing."

Hamp said Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby" is about life among the East Coast wealthy, but "it's not told from the East, it's told from here — from St. Paul."



Michael S. Coughlin, deputy postmaster general of the US Postal Service, announces a commemorative stamp issued Friday in honor of F. Scott Fitzgerald.

For the record

Correction: Because of an editing error, a headline accompanying a story in yesterday's Business section on the profits earned by the Boston Celtics incorrectly identified the television station sold by the team. It was WFXT-TV, Ch. 25.