

Omaha Gold - A Local Author Creates A Must Read for All History Buffs

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By Leah Parodi

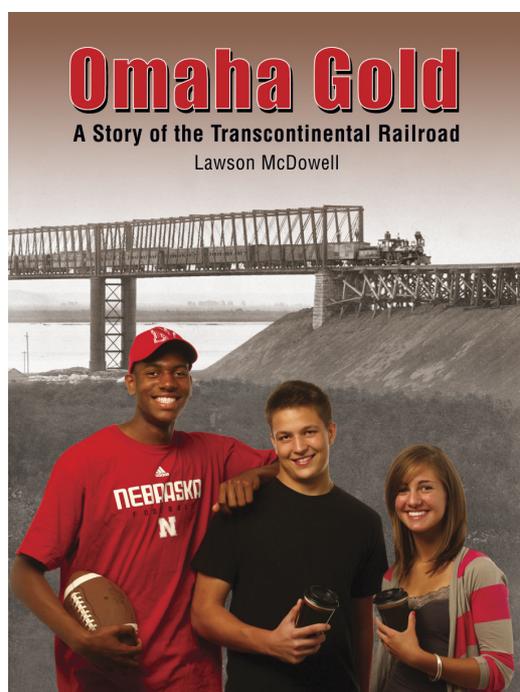
As a grade school student many years ago I did not have much appreciation for history classes of any kind. However, as I have gotten older and wiser, the history of this wonderful country has captured my attention, and living in Omaha provides more than enough historical material.

And I am not alone. Lawson McDowell, a long time railroad employee and enthusiast, also shares in the love of Heartland history, so much so, that he has written a novel that combines historical fact with a fascinating fictional story. His book is a must read not only for history buffs, but for anyone that lives in and loves Omaha.

Lawson has been working with Union Pacific Railroad for nearly 40 years and is the Director of Network Operations for the Premium Operations group. His team oversees the transportation of auto products making sure that parts get to assembly plants and finished vehicles get to distribution points. Lawson is also responsible for seeing that container trains with imported goods and products make their way from harbors to destinations nationwide.

Lawson has done just about every job on the railroad that one can imagine and has lived in cities across the United States. "I came up the ranks," he says. "And I even met my wife through the railroad." Lawson and his wife, Virginia have been married for 33 years. They live in Omaha and have two sons.

Lawson has always had a love of history and living in Omaha with his railroad background, he hit pay dirt for a significant part of our country's growth and legacy. But what prompted Lawson to write a book was a chance meeting with a stranger. "There was an older gentleman wandering in the parking lot (of Union Pacific)," he says.



"I thought he was lost but he said he came to see the old railroad, the site of the transcontinental main line. And that piqued my interest so I did a little research and found out, wow! Not just the railroad came through here, but historic figures came too, people like President-to-be Ulysses S. Grant, General William Sherman and our own Grenville Dodge."

"Many people in Omaha do not know the pivotal role Omaha played in America's westward expansion," says Lawson. "Omaha and the railroad became the nation's best hope for healing and reunification after the Civil War." Lawson decided to write his book, not for anything else but to share what discovered about our area.

Omaha Gold was released last June and tells parallel stories of Omaha past and present. Extensive research intertwined with rich story telling make this book a source of knowledge as well as entertainment. “History tells us what happened, historical fiction tells how it felt,” says Lawson.

Omaha Gold tells the present day story of a young man, Steve, who finds a brass box along the shores of the Missouri River, a box filled with gold belonging to someone from the past. As Steve tries to uncover the origins of the box, he is faced with public officials, crooked cops and would-be thieves who want the box and its contents. Lawson uses local points of interest and landmarks to connect the reader to Omaha.

As for the past, **Omaha Gold** takes us back one hundred and forty years to America’s pioneer days and the construction of the transcontinental railroad. Lawson’s main character from the past is Gene Davenport, a disabled soldier who is caught between doing his duty and fighting the corruption he faces while working for an unscrupulous employer. And while Gene may be a fictional character, Lawson has him intermingled with Abraham Lincoln, U.S. Grant and Omaha’s very own nemesis, the unethical Doctor Durant.

Lawson took great pains to ensure that all of his history was factual and took no liberties there. “The history in **Omaha Gold** will withstand scrutiny,” says Lawson. “This is dead-on.” Lawson saw fit to include historical photos and maps as well as drawings that were created by one of Lawson’s sons. All help the reader become immersed in the story as well as in the history

Lawson’s desire for factual accuracy took him to historically rich sources like the Durham Museum, Douglas County Historical Society and Creighton University, just to name a few. And Lawson’s historical accuracy is so impressive, that Omaha Public Schools has approved **Omaha Gold** for use in their high school classrooms. “**Omaha Gold** is a good cross-over book,” he says. “It’s good for teens and adults because it puts the reader right in the action of the construction era. It’s not about dry statistics, you see how it felt. You have an insider’s perspective of 1860’s events, the Civil War, Lincoln, the railroad.”

As much as Lawson enjoys writing, he also enjoys speaking to groups about **Omaha Gold** and the unknown bits of historical facts that helped shape the book. “Its

one of the things I enjoy doing; presenting the railroad’s story and **Omaha Gold**,” he says. “And so as a locally published book, I get to speak to book clubs and other groups.” Lawson has made presentations to many local groups like the Douglas County Genealogy Society, local schools and book clubs.

Omaha Gold is available for purchase on Amazon.com and Kindle as well as local book stores and can be found at your local library. For more information on **Omaha Gold** visit www.OmahaGoldNovel.com. For more information on a presentation by Lawson McDowell call RAWR Publishing Company at (402) 391-7649 or contact them at publisher@omahagoldnovel.com.

I am now, officially, a history buff in part to Lawson McDowell’s great read. And though my passion for history has been a few years in the making, I would say it was well worth the wait. But I cannot help but wonder that if I had a fun, exciting and factual account of historical events like those found in **Omaha Gold**, I may have done much better in my history classes.



Pictured: Lawson McDowell