

Book Review

Tyler R. Tichelaar. *When Teddy Came to Town*. Marquette, MI: Marquette Fiction, 2018, 354 pp.

Reviewed by Dave Friedrichs

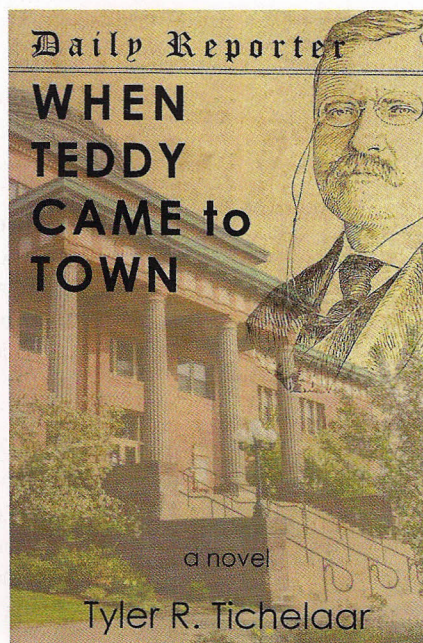
To bring history alive for later generations is an art. In his 2018 *When Teddy Came to Town*, Marquette, Michigan, novelist Tyler Tichelaar succeeds masterfully in capturing both the excitement and the reality of time and place.

Drawing on volumes of court records, historical photos, and historical documents, Tichelaar weaves a tapestry of lesser known facts about Theodore Roosevelt's libel case against George Newett, editor of the local *Iron Ore* newspaper. As a novelist, he creates a handful of fictional local characters to bear witness to both the memorable week of the trial and a vital era in the development of Marquette, Michigan's largest city on Lake Superior.

This book is eminently enjoyable as a summer read, especially for those acquainted with the iron mining history of the Upper Peninsula's Queen City. The novel details for posterity the value of personal honesty and standing one's ground against slander, even amidst adversarial political contests such as the presidential campaign of 1912.

With Colonel Roosevelt as his moniker, TR scheduled his Marquette visit for October 9, 1912, less than thirty days before the vote. An enormous crowd of 6,000 turned out to celebrate the unique visit and hear him paint his Progressive vision for the American republic. In forthright campaign mode, TR lit into the iron and steel interests he believed had denied him the Republican Party's nomination.

Not surprisingly, some took offense at what were interpreted as wild accusations, most notably editor Newett, who was angry personally that Roosevelt had broken with the GOP after his smoke-filled-room rejection at the June convention in Chicago. Inimitably, TR had not held back in his criticisms of "the steel trust" in his stump speech, insisting in an early tête-à-tête with



the warden of the branch prison that truth was being told and falsities exposed.

Watching an exchange between Roosevelt and a critic who interrupted him, some observers wondered whether TR might be intoxicated. Newett went home and authored his accusatory report on October 12, saying "The Roosevelt Way" was to lie and curse. "He gets drunk, too, and not infrequently, and all of his intimates know about it" (pp. 4, 79).

Two days later, the broadside was shown to Roosevelt while en route to Milwaukee and his fateful encounter with (and survival of) an attack by a would-be assassin. TR sent instructions to the Progressive Party's national committeeman from Michigan, Henry M. Wallace, to retain a lawyer and sue Newett for libel. The complaint was filed in Marquette County, and a trial was set for May 26, 1913. (Despite TR's loss in the presidential election, he



Theodore Roosevelt campaigning in Marquette, Michigan, on October 9, 1912.



The twelve final jurors (seated).
The two men standing are likely the undersheriffs.

from Tichelaar, *When Teddy Came to Town*, p. 57

did carry six states, including Michigan.)

As the trial date neared, interest in the case built steadily, both within the state and nationally. Tichelaar creates his novel by interweaving his fictional Marquette characters into the historical events and the activities of those who joined TR for his memorable seven-day visit in his role as plaintiff-for-a-just-cause. These characters enable the author to unfurl a lifetime of city history in colorful and dramatic fashion while staying true to actual facts of Marquette's growth and development.

Most notable among the fictional characters are Matthew Newman and members of his extended, local family. As a New York City newspaper reporter, he is sent to his hometown of Marquette for trial coverage and makes such observations as "the ugliness of the allegedly libelous charge is offset by the beautiful setting where the case will play out" and "justice is never a waste" (pp. 24, 235).

Dozens accompanied Roosevelt to Marquette and were actual witnesses at the trial. These included Gifford Pinchot, former U.S. Chief Forester, Edmund Heller, large mammal naturalist for TR's 1909-1910 African expedition, and James R. Garfield, former secretary of the interior and son of President James A. Garfield. Frank Tyree and James Amos, bodyguard and servant, attended, the latter less than six years later being the last person to whom TR spoke as his life expired.

Trial transcripts and local accounts that survive to this day include items published in the city's venerable local daily paper, the *Mining Journal*. All allowed the author to portray and enliven a most "invigorating" week in the city's political history, some thirty pages in the novel being taken up by TR's own

testimony and cross-examination under oath. This testimony provides insights into the former President's routines and customs in the White House, including one of the trial exposés, the mint garden and mint juleps, subsequently pursued with vigor by national pressmen.

Tichelaar's talents add a sense of firsthand reporting to events known primarily through photographs—and not widely written about in the context of the times. These include a meeting between TR and Civil War veterans, and a bit of exploring of the city's naturalist and conservation area now known as Presque Isle Park. Some of TR's own pronouncements are used as chapter introductions.

Not surprisingly, *When Teddy Came to Town* was designated as a community book and has been read in 2018 in Marquette literary circles. Himself a seventh generation resident, Tichelaar has been writing since his teens in the mid-1980s. He has authored a number of well-regarded books, and he founded the publisher of this novel, Marquette Fiction. He has also encouraged others to pursue historical fiction. In 2011, he received the Marquette County Outstanding Writer Award, as well as an award for historic preservation.

A summer resident of Marquette myself, I find *When Teddy Came to Town* historically accurate, informative, and an engaging read for enthusiasts of either TR or Upper Peninsula history. Until learning of Roosevelt's libel trial, I had been puzzled by the prominent placement of a framed picture of TR on the wall of one of Marquette's oldest downtown restaurants, Vierling's, now a popular brewery.

Readers may even be able to acquire a copy of the book inscribed by the author with the noteworthy phrase he signed into paperback editions: "Always tell the truth." Truth-telling, after all, has taken on a new significance in our contemporary political arena, a century on from TR. For this reviewer, it was nice to discover not only that truth-telling and Theodore Roosevelt went hand-in-hand, but that truth itself was determined to be something worth fighting for in a court of law.



A member of the Theodore Roosevelt Association who resides in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Dave Friedrichs grew up with an interest in America's twenty-sixth President because both he and his older brother share TR's birthday. During work in Brazil as a Fulbright scholar and on subsequent service projects, three as the leader of Habitat for Humanity teams, he became acquainted firsthand with Colonel Candido Rondon's legacy, nearly as great in Brazil as TR's is in the United States. Currently he is an asset manager and licensed builder focused on installing residential and commercial solar energy systems.