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## Book is real-life historical drama

Peggy Vigoren authors book about her father

**BY LAUREL BEAGER**  
Editor

Charlie Keenan Williams had a life about which books are written.

And while he never found the time to write it himself, his daughter, Peggy Ann Vigoren, picked up the pen to do it for him. She recently authored “The Adoption of Charlie Keenan,” spanning 1907 to 1931 and mostly set in Ranier and Rainy Lake.

“My dad lived a very interesting life and he was a great story teller,” Vigoren states. “I believe that he wanted his story told because he left an outline of his early (life) in his papers, which we found after his death.”

Vigoren, the youngest daughter, calls the book a fictional account based as much on archival sources as possible and an imaginative recreation of events of that time. The main story is based on her dad’s outline, his adoption papers and the stories he and Vigoren’s mother, Blanche, told their children over many years. Vigoren’s daughter, Katie, and she researched to fill gaps in the information and then created a storyline together several years ago.

“I brought the big box of research to Alaska with me and didn’t look at it for a couple years,” she told The Journal in an email interview. In November 2011, she went through her research and found the outline and started to write.

The story starts with Cora Keenan, who in 1911 in Duluth is disowned by her father and abandoned by her husband. She and son, 3-year-old Charlie, travel by train to Ranier to look for her husband and she accepts a job from Bob Williams, a Chicago businessman “with a talent for smuggling whiskey and making gin, and their lives change dramatically,” describes Vigoren.

Many years later, Charlie and Blanche Williams would operate the Kettle Falls Hotel, a national historic site with a colorful history. It is the only lodging within Voyageurs National Park, accessible only by water.

Vigoren, in an author’s note, says her father knew little of his biological father and described his childhood as difficult. She said he didn’t share much about his personal details in the stories he told his family about Kettle Falls and other places.

The unsealing by District Judge Charles LeDuc of her father’s adoption documents brought a few surprises, she said. It added to what Vigoren and her family already knew about her dad’s biological father and his abandonment of her dad and grandmother in Duluth 10 days before her dad was born, she said. And she said it revealed the names of those who testified for and against her “Grandpa Bob,”

Robert Williams, who it is said purchased Kettle Falls Hotel in 1918 for \$1,000 and four barrels of whiskey.

“I knew that my grandfather was very good friends with Mayor Frank Keyes, so I wasn’t surprised that Mayor Keyes testified for him,” she said. “It was also not a big surprise that Sheriff Van Ettan and his deputies testified against Grandpa Bob, because Bob was arrested several times for bootlegging but never convicted.”

Vigoren said that while the story is personal for her, each family has a story to tell.

“I think it is important for all of us to remember the strength and perseverance the early settlers must have had in order to survive in a place like northern Minnesota,” she said. “All of their stories are amazing and fascinating to me. Every family has a story to tell and I wish more people would write family histories.”

Peggy Williams Vigoren graduated from Falls High School in 1970. She spent many summers at the Kettle Falls Hotel, which was operated by the Williams family from 1918 until the mid 1990s. She and her husband Steve now reside in Anchorage, but plan to retire on Rainy Lake in the not too distant future.

Vigoren said she’s always wanted to write. “Telling my dad’s story was a perfect way for me to start,” she said.

And in authoring the book, she found she needed to muster some of that strength and perseverance found in the settlers.

“Writing the book was a lot of hard work, but I must say I enjoyed it immensely,” she said. “It was a labor of love for my mother and dad, and my family. I guess I learned a little about myself, in that it was a long and arduous process, and I saw it to the end.”

In just the few first pages of the book, between a dedication to her parents, Charlie and Blanche, with a photo of the couple having shore lunch along Rainy Lake in the 1950s and a map of Rainy Lake and northeastern Minnesota, is this notation from the “International Falls Daily Journal,” Jan. 22, 1952:

“It was a big night for Alderman Charles Williams. He arrived home at 2 a.m. from a six-hour session of the council. He had barely removed his hat and coat when his wife announced quietly the stork was about to call. He rushed his wife to Falls Memorial Hospital where he put in a 10-hour session of pacing the lobby. An 8-pound, 4-ounce, daughter, [Peggy Ann], arrived at noon.”

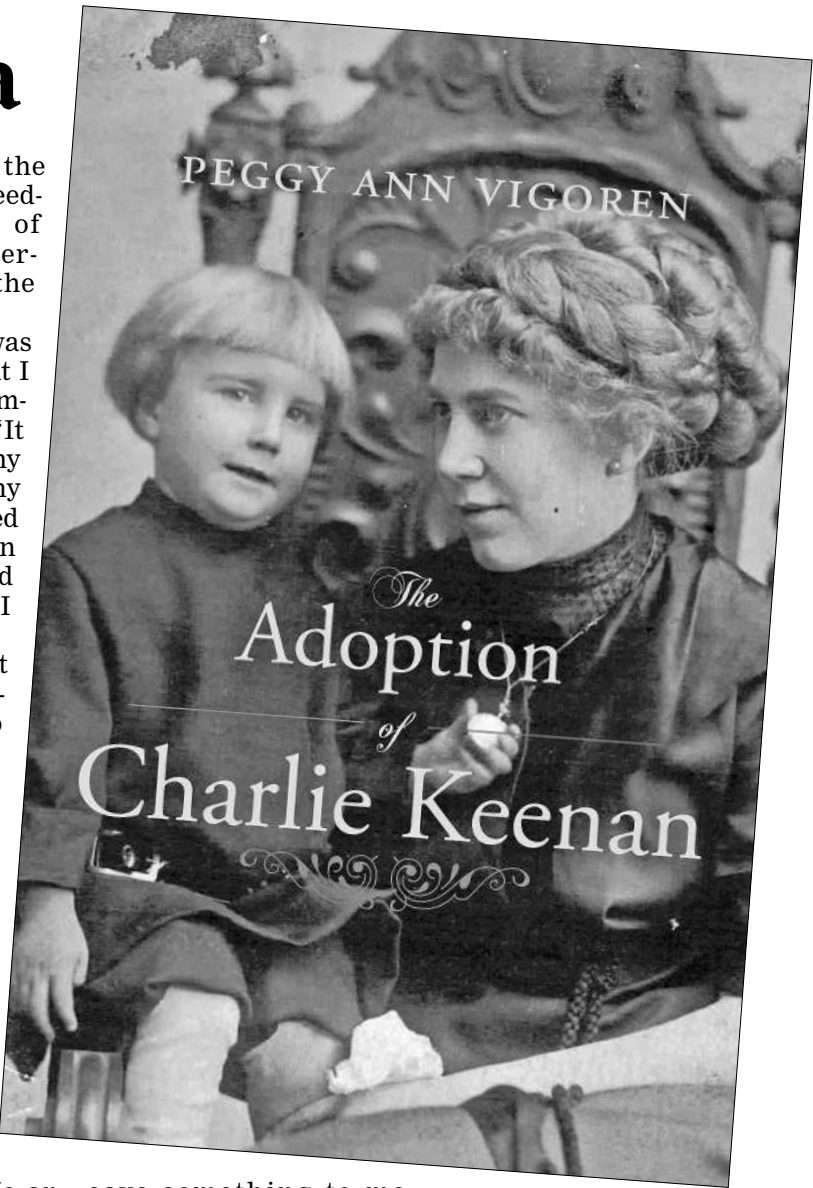
Vigoren said she included the newspaper account of her birth “because it

says something to me about the kind of person my dad was, and how close I was to him.”

She ends the book on New Year’s Day with her parents after their elopement setting out in horse and sleigh across a frozen Sand Bay east about 20 miles to a cabin at a logging camp at Kempton Channel where they would spend the winter as Charlie sang to Blanche, “I found my Thrill on Blueberry Hill.”

“The Adoption of Charlie

Keenan” can be purchased locally at the Koochiching County Historical Museum, at the Coffee Landing Café, and at the Thunderbird Lodge. The book will also be available locally at Rainy Lake Houseboats this spring. For those who live outside of the area, the book can be purchased by contacting Vigoren at [peggyann88@outlook.com](mailto:peggyann88@outlook.com) or by her on Facebook. The book will soon be available as an eBook.



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