ForeWord Reviews

JUVENILE FICTION

The Mystery of the Pheasants
Mark Meierhenry
David Volk
Susan Turnbull, illustrator
South Dakota State Historical Society Press
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Originally from China, the zhi ji, or ring-necked pheasant, was named for the white feather "necklace" the male of the species wears. In 1908, neighboring farmers A.E. Cooper and E.L. Ebbert successfully introduced the birds into Spink County, South Dakota. The ring-neck became the state's official bird on February 13, 1943, in part because pheasant hunting adds millions of dollars to South Dakota's economy each year.

The Mystery of the Pheasants, a chapter book intended for first- through third-graders, describes the first pheasant hunt of South Dakota twins Max and Hannah, guided by their knowledgeable grandfather. Grandpa reminds the twins of the lessons they learned in their hunting safety class. In addition, he imparts the history of the ring-necked pheasant, including its origins in China, importation into the United States, successful adaptation to the plains, and importance to the state's hallowed hunting tradition.

The Mystery of the Pheasants, published by the South Dakota State Historical Society Press, is the newest addition to the well-received "Mystery" nature series for children by award-winning authors Mark Meierhenry and David Volk. Both authors are steeped in the traditions of their state. Mark Meierhenry, former South Dakota attorney general, currently practices law in Sioux Falls. Five-time state treasurer David Volk also served as cabinet secretary for Governor William Janklow. The authors' other collaborations includes *The Mystery of the Round Rocks*, *The Mystery of the Tree Rings*, and *The Mystery of the Maize*.

Susan Turnbull's carefully researched illustrations, rendered in graphite-enhanced pastel chalk, add charm to the story. An artist from Rapid City, South Dakota, Turnbull earned the coveted Mom's Choice award for her illustrations in *Raccoon and the Bee Tree*.

The educational message of *The Mystery of the Pheasants* is clear. Grandpa is a fount of knowledge on the ring-neck, and Max and Hannah are eager students. But why this book is labeled a mystery remains a mystery. There is no "whodunit" and no sleuthing. Its

straightforward plot holds no surprises and is absent of all but the mildest tension. Nonetheless, *The Mystery of the Pheasants* will appeal to children eager to share their parents' love of hunting.

Nancy Walker