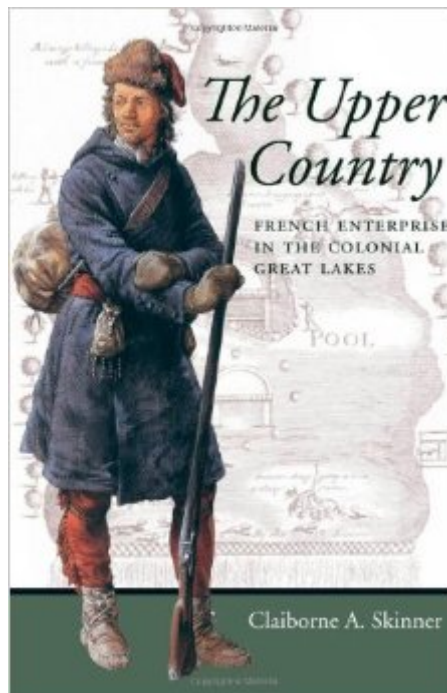


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The Upper Country: French Enterprise In The Colonial Great Lakes (Regional Perspectives On Early America)



Synopsis

The Upper Country melds myth and conventional history to provide a memorable tale of French designs in the middle of what became the United States. Putting the reader on the battlefields, at the trading posts, and on the rivers with voyageurs and their allies from the Indian nations, Claiborne Skinner reveals the saintly missionaries and jolly fur traders of popular myth as agents of a hard-nosed, often ruthless, imperial endeavor. Skinner's engaging narrative takes the reader through daily life at posts like Forts Saint Louis and Michilimackinac, illuminates the complexities of interracial marriage with the courtship of Michel Aco at Peoria, and explains how France's New World adventurism played a role in the outbreak of the Seven Years War and the beginning of the modern era. In this story, many of the traditional heroes and villains of American history take on surprising roles. The last Stuart kings of England seem shrewd and even human; George Washington makes his debut appearance on the stage of history by assassinating a French officer and plunging Europe into the first truly global war. From unthinkable hardship to dreams of fur trade profits, this fascinating exploration sheds new light on France and its imperial venture into the Great Lakes.

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Customer Reviews

As stated by the author in the Introduction, there are no ground-breaking revelations from original scholarship within this work. But it is a good, solid introduction to the politics and economics of the subject region. I only found two small historic errors - details that would be obvious to only the most arcane of French colonial historians. The bibliography reveals that he has consulted virtually every printed source available, and a large part of this book's value lies in the bibliographic resources revealed. Doctor Skinner's collection and collation of facts from widely disparate sources, presented from a highly objective perspective, make this work a valuable introduction for readers who don't have the time or inclination to wallow in the esoterica of the bibliography.

The title implies Lake Superior - Lake Winnipeg and the subtitle says Great Lakes. In fact, the book is mostly about the French on the Mississippi. The coverage is spotty. He is very good in some places where he has done research or found a good source. His bibliography implies that there is no good academic study of the region. There are a number of other popular studies which I have not read. This is a good popular history and a good source for obscure things like the Fox wars and the Chickasaw Wars.

I originally read this because I had taken a class taught by the writer. I'm not a history guy by any stretch, but I just enjoyed his class a lot and was curious what his book would be like. I wasn't disappointed. The book's narrative like structure pulled me in. As an Illinoisan, this is part of my local history I was not really aware of, and I'm glad to have read it. The number of to be verbs per page is also very appropriate for this caliber of writing. Truly some pithy erudition.

I decided to read *The Upper Country: French Enterprise in the Colonial Great Lakes* because part of my husband's family is French Canadian. The earliest of his family group came to Canada from Rouen, France around 1650. I was curious to know what was going on west of the Appalachians before the French and Indian War when George Washington stepped into history. Having been educated in the U.S., I had learned almost nothing about Canadian history but because I grew up in the Pacific Northwest, I was curious about fur trade and how it affected the east coast. Claiborne Skinner's book enlightened me on these topics and many others like the people of the First Nation and their use of agriculture, the struggles of the fur trading economy and other extractive pursuits, politics and the attitude toward colonial North America and other ideas that had never occurred to me. When I first reviewed the book I was pretty sure it would not be just a military history but there

are many military skirmishes and battles detailed in the book which are to me tedious and confusing. Still, there are enough interesting, well written chapters about the people and how they lived to hold my interest.

As resident of the upper region, I've visited many of the historic places discussed in the book. From the time of my awakening (visiting Michilmackinac at the age of 8) to now, I had yet to find one book that provided such a concise overview of French colonialism in North America. Particularly intriguing was the continuing chess game between France, England, and Spain. Highly recommended for anyone interested in this period.

The author covers a significant amount of ground in a very short space. He is effective in bringing history to life. His attention to detail is both interesting and well researched. It is a mandatory read for anyone who is interested in the history of the great lakes. I highly recommend this book!

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