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Review of *Fort Union Fur Trade Symposium Proceedings, September 13-15, 1990*

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Fort Union Fur Trade Symposium Proceedings, September 13-15, 1990. Friends of Fort Union Trading Post, Williston, North Dakota, 1994. vi+121 pp. Endnotes. \$15.00.

The 13 papers in this volume derive from the Fort Union Fur Trade Symposium held in mid-September 1990 at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers, the heartland of the 19th-century American fur trade. Conference organizers, intending this meeting to be reminiscent of the well-known, periodic North American Fur Trade Conferences, had invited nearly two dozen preeminent scholars to offer their insights into the trade and traders of the upper Missouri country. To this end the papers appearing in this publication cover such diverse topics as the geographic setting, the construction of Fort Union, the men of the fur trade, the social life of these men, the observations of individuals such as Jean Baptiste Moncravie and Father Peter John DeSmet, S.J., and the operations of the nearby posts of Fort Henry, Fort William, and Fort Clark.

Using primary sources, the authors have highlighted the key players in this historical period. Some of the most important names in United States history pepper the pages of these articles: Lewis and Clark, McKenzie, Astor, Maxmillian, Culbertson, Larpenteur, Kurz, Denig, Audubon, Chardon, Moncravie, DeSmet, Hubbell, Chouteau, Henry, Lisa, Sublette, Campbell, and Kipp.

In any collection of papers, a reviewer will find articles which strike a chord. As an archaeologist I enjoyed William J. Hunt, Jr.'s paper, "At the Yellowstone . . . To Build A Fort: Fort Union Trading Post, 1828-1833," detailing the archaeological excavations conducted from 1986 to 1988 and which were designed to reconcile the actual location of various structures at

Fort Union with the descriptions provided in historical documents. Similarly, Erwin N. Thompson's "Here Far from Civilization the Traders Pass the Best of Their Days: Social Life at Fort Union Trading Post," overviewed the economic and social aspects of fur trader lives. Trader Edwin Denig's statement that "traders enjoy at least the semblance of living like their more quiet, though not more useful brothers in the United States" (p. 50) speaks volumes about the politics of the day. One paper which set out to challenge established points of view was "A Businessman Looks at the Fur Trade" by Marvin L. Kaiser. In addition, Kaiser very nicely places the fur trade of 150 years ago in the context of contemporary fur production by introducing for discussion the impact of the Animal Welfare Coalition. His conclusion that "the role of the fur trade in western expansion and the development of entrepreneurs is a bigger story than the trade's economic impact on a young country" (p. 114) is applicable north of the Missouri on the Saskatchewan.

Overall there is a wealth of information in the *Fort Union Fur Trade Symposium Proceedings*, information of interest to academics and avocationalists, historians and archaeologists alike. Collectively, these papers capture the flavor of life on the upper Missouri in the 19th century. Were one to criticize the volume, three points come to mind. Maps of the region and sketches of the layout of individual posts would add tremendously to many papers. A paper devoted to Indian tribes of the region is in order. And lastly, it would have been nice if the volume had included a detailed timeline of the historical events described herein.

For those who would read this book, reflect on Edward J. Hagan's statement, "the place of union of the two rivers has had a boisterous history" (p. 4) and heed his advice, "we must continue to learn from these rivers to prevent further tragedies" (p. 5). This volume is a welcome contribution to our understanding of "the meaning of place." **Laurie A. Milne**, *Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Medicine Hat College, Medicine Hat, Alberta.*