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**Review of *The Explorations of the La Verendryes in the Northern Plains, 1738-43* By G. Hubert Smith**

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*The Explorations of the La Verendryes in the Northern Plains, 1738-43.* By G. Hubert Smith. Edited by W. Raymond Wood. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980. Illustrations, notes, references, index. 160 pp. \$13.95.

The La Verendrye family, father and sons, took an active part during the 1730s and 1740s in the movement of the French from Canada toward the West in the interest of the Indian fur trade, international rivalry, and the search for the Western Sea. Excellent fur traders and explorers, they moved south and west from their headquarters north of Lake Superior and pushed the line of French-Canadian posts toward the Rocky Mountains. They were the first Europeans to explore the northern

plains area and to leave a record of their passage.

In 1950 the National Park Service appointed G. Hubert Smith, an anthropologist, ostensibly to assess the proposed location of the La Verendrye National Monument, which had been created largely through the influence of the historian Orrin G. Libby. Smith's report rebutted and rejected Libby's arguments. Smith's work was actually motivated by planning for the Garrison Dam, which would flood the land set aside for the La Verendrye memorial. With the able assistance of Merrill J. Mattes, Grace Lee Nute, and others, Smith worked in all the appropriate archives and historical societies and submitted his report in 1951. The La Verendrye National Monument was subsequently abolished and flooded.

Although Smith continued his work and made notes until his death, he never saw his report published. In this edition anthropologist W. Raymond Wood has made a number of changes. He has updated the report and expanded Smith's references but has left Smith's conclusions intact.

The explorations of the La Verendryes in 1738-39 and 1742-43 are here placed in their proper historical setting. In two short preliminary chapters, the author recounts the early history of the La Verendryes to 1738. The heart of the book follows. Chapter 3 is a shortened version of the journal of the 1738-39 expedition to the Missouri River. The language has been slightly changed, and some minor liberties have been taken with the French syntax and grammar. While not eliminating the use of the original text for the historian, we are given a more readable and modern English translation. In chapter 4 Smith analyzes the journal and provides a classic example of the use of anthropological and historical methods. The discussion of the route followed by the La Verendryes is enlightening and the conclusions praiseworthy. However, Smith's statement that the Burpee edition is full of errors differs distinctly from my conclusions, based on a comparison of the Magry text and the extant version in the French archives.

After a short chapter on the years 1739-42, editor Wood reproduces the entire journal of the 1742-43 expedition (based on Burpee), followed by Smith's interpretation of the journal in the manner of chapter 4. Smith concludes that the La Verendrye brothers reached the foothills of the Big Horn Mountains.

Not a full biography of the La Verendryes, this book does not supersede Burpee's work or Nellis Crouse's biography. It is instead an excellent overview of the La Verendrye explorations and their establishment of the Posts of the Western Sea. The volume is handsomely printed; it contains a good index and a set of ten fine illustrations, mostly photographs of the area. The illustration showing the conjectured routes of the La Verendrye expeditions might have been more clearly reproduced.

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