

Oneota Flow: The Upper Iowa River and its People

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ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

Nunnally, Patrick. "Oneota Flow: The Upper Iowa River and its People." *The Annals of Iowa* 68 (2009), 443-444.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.1381>

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Book Reviews and Notices

Oneota Flow: The Upper Iowa River and its People, by David S. Faldet. American Land and Life Series. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009. ix, 238 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$27.50 paper.

Reviewer Patrick Nunnally is program coordinator in the Institute on the Environment, University of Minnesota. He has been particularly active in work to preserve places and tell stories about the people who have shaped and been shaped by the Mississippi River.

It is difficult to write a really good book about a river. The prospective author should know something about the river as a biophysical system, its hydrology and geology, and the life cycles of the fish, birds, and bugs that live in it, on it, or around it. Rivers also contain complex human stories; they are often the reasons that people live where and how they do. Then there is the matter of structure: should the book be organized as a narrative of a journey? A chronology? Something else altogether?

David Faldet has met these challenges admirably in his jewel of a book about the Upper Iowa River. The Upper Iowa is a hidden gem, flowing quietly out of the southern Minnesota prairie into northeastern Iowa before emptying into the Mississippi. Faldet eloquently weaves the story of the upper Midwest, from the coming of the glaciers to the dawn of the twenty-first century, through the prism of this river and its watershed. He covers many themes familiar to students of the region, but connects them in distinctive ways.

The book's overall structure is a chronology, with current interviews and observations bringing each period to life. Much of the story will be familiar to students of the state and region: settlement and farming, the rise of industrialized agriculture, continuity and change. Even for close students, though, there are good insights and detail here, such as his brief description of how a beaver pelt was processed into a hat. Faldet does best where the story is freshest and closest to his own experience; the book closes with a very nice weaving of his family's history and the recent efforts at environmental protection along the river and in the basin.

As Faldet notes, his is a book of little stories that make up a big story, much as the Upper Iowa is one of many small rivers that make up the epic grandeur of the Mississippi. The idea of "story" implies connection, and connectedness is a theme throughout, a part of his

structure, with information gained from research, traveling in the landscape, and interviewing people. The book is filled with vivid characters, both historical and contemporary, and illustrates the varying ways one can get to know a river and its landscape — by canoe, walking, caving, or driving, for example.

Our public discussions about rivers these days are dominated by science and policy. We understand something about pollutants, ecological integrity, and the difficulties of managing a flowing body of water. Harder to grasp are the ways a river means something — its varying significance to the many people who draw sustenance from it. This is the realm of history and literature, of the humanities, and it is a perspective sadly lacking from our current debate. Faldet's book demonstrates the critical importance of story for understanding a place, and it serves as a model of how a river book can be done.

Enduring Nations: Native Americans in the Midwest, edited by R. David Edmunds. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008. 296 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, index. \$75.00 cloth, \$20.00 paper.

Reviewer Donald L. Fixico is Distinguished Foundation Professor of History at Arizona State University. He is the editor of the three-volume *American Indians: An Encyclopedia of Rights, Conflicts and Sovereignty* (2008).

The essays in *Enduring Nations* cover a wide scope of subjects about the indigenous peoples of the American Midwest. David Edmunds, one of the nation's leading historians of Native Americans, has assembled a fine group of scholars who have contributed their scholarship to make this superb book. The purpose is clear that the native people of this region helped to define its history and they are still here in the twenty-first century. The essays document how the indigenous people of the region have changed their own cultures to certain degrees while retaining their native identities. Organized into a dozen well-written chapters, the book's topics range from early Illinois Indians to women and social welfare on the White Earth Reservation. All of the chapters are balanced and demonstrate sound scholarship.

Edmunds sets the tone of the book with his introduction describing the resilience of the native nations of the Midwest. The three maps following the introduction provide a visual geography of where the native groups resided and important historical points such as trading posts. Three photographs accompany Susan Sleeper-Smith's essay on the white Indian Frances Slocum. Possibly the only criticism of the book is that more photographs would have enhanced the other essays.