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Frontier Forts of Iowa: Indians, Traders, and Soldiers, 1632–1862

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Book Reviews and Notices

Frontier Forts of Iowa: Indians, Traders, and Soldiers, 1632–1862, edited by William E. Whittaker. A Bur Oak Book. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009. 286 pp. Illustrations, maps, drawings, bibliography, index. \$29.95 paper.

Reviewer Virginia Jelatis is associate professor of history at Western Illinois University. Her research and writing have focused on Indian-white encounters in the Mississippi valley in the early nineteenth century.

In *Frontier Forts of Iowa*, 13 authors combine to uncover the history of early Iowa. Their unit of analysis is the fort, “the main tool used by Europeans to take control of the upper Midwest” (2). Editor William Whittaker organized the book chronologically. The early chapters stress that forts, as trading posts, were key factors that enabled French, Spanish, British, and then Americans to move into the homelands of native groups such as the Ioway, Sauk, Meskwaki, Dakota, and Ho-Chunk. The next several chapters tell the story of individual forts, using each one as a window into a specific moment in time. As time passed, forts became a symbol of American control, where fort personnel protected local inhabitants and enforced treaty agreements. The final chapter provides an overview of original and reconstructed forts for twenty-first-century visitors and tourists. Whittaker is careful to define the terms, time frame, and geographical area covered within the book. The goal is to blend 13 authors, 16 chapters, archaeology, and history into one seamless narrative.

As a history, *Frontier Forts* offers only an overview of the complex connections among trade, expansion, politics, and American Indian policy. There is enough history to keep the story moving but not enough to convince readers that forts were a reflection of the economic and social policies of the day. The real strength of the book is its ability to make archaeology come alive and show how it is essential to understanding the past. From the race to examine Old Fort Madison before it was paved over to the excavation of latrines at Fort Atkinson, Iowa, this book highlights the important work being done every day to preserve artifacts and historic sites. Readers will learn about fort design, placement, and construction. Artifacts such as metal buttons, harmonicas, vials, wire, and broken window glass help recreate the daily

lives of soldiers and others who passed through the area. The color illustrations, black-and-white photos, detailed maps, and visitor information make this a great resource for people who want to stand on the sites where history was made. Although short on analysis, this book will be a helpful reference for anyone writing about western expansion, the trade and economy of the Midwest, the local history of Iowa, or the shifting balance of power between native and non-native groups. Many scholars acknowledge that early Iowa was a dynamic place where native groups hunted, the Sauk and Dakota often clashed, Europeans and Anglo-Americans vied for control, and settlers grew in numbers. By following the trail of forts over time, this book helps us link that history to the physical world that surrounds us.

The Indians of Iowa, by Lance M. Foster. A Bur Oak Book. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009. xiv, 145 pp. Maps, illustrations, places to visit, tribal contacts, bibliography, index. \$16.95 paper.

Reviewer Greg Olson is Curator of Exhibits and Special Projects at the Missouri State Archives in Jefferson City. He is the author of *The Ioway in Missouri* (2008).

The story of American Indian people in the present-day state of Iowa is one that is both rich and complex. For centuries, the region's diverse landscape and system of waterways have attracted a surprising variety of distinct native cultures. Over time these groups have ascended, declined, evolved, or disappeared, leaving in their wake a saga that spans many cultures and centuries. Making sense of this vast story requires expertise in a broad range of academic disciplines. For this reason, Lance Foster — artist, anthropologist, historian, and enrolled member of the Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska — is a natural choice to bring the pieces together in his new book, *The Indians of Iowa*.

By Foster's count, no fewer than 25 Indian tribes have a historical connection to Iowa. Rather than placing these various groups together in a single narrative, Foster discusses each of the tribes in separate sections. Those with the strongest connections to Iowa, such as the Meskwaki, Sauk, and Ioway, each receive individual chapters. Tribes with only brief residencies inside the state, such as the Osage, Kickapoo, and Ojibwa, are lumped together in a single chapter called "Visiting Nations." Each chapter is divided into three sections: an introduction, a description of each group's traditional culture, and a listing of well-known members of each tribe.

Foster intersperses these chapters with sections that touch on a variety of topics related to American Indian people in Iowa. One of the most useful of these is a chapter on the state's archaeology. In this