

Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Wilderness Empire* by Allan W. Eckert

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is judicious in his estimates, very good in his treatment of politics, and excellent in his accounts of diplomacy. Every reader of this journal will want to examine this book.

Hobart & William Smith Colleges

James L. Crouthamel

WILDERNESS EMPIRE. By Allan W. Eckert. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969. Pp. xiv, 653. \$8.95.)

The discipline of the historian is not to be taken lightly. It requires search for the truth and adherence to the facts as nearly as they can be ascertained. It implies documentation of statements, either explicitly or through responsible proof. It does not allow falsification, alteration or distortion of documents or facts for any reason whatsoever. Historical fiction on the other hand while often dealing with the materials of the historian and attempting historical interpretation is not bound by these canons. It can use fictional characters, imagined incidents, dialogue and plot, while attempting to portray real events and historic figures. This form has its usefulness, and the reader is well warned of the fictioner's license. The historical novel may at times depict history with fidelity. It is when these two forms are confused that the reader and critic may complain.

Wilderness Empire by Allan W. Eckert is a case in point. It pretends to be a historical narrative but it takes liberties which are justifiable only for the writer of fiction. The author states baldly that his work "is fact, not fiction. Every incident herein described actually occurred; every date is historically accurate." He justifies his creation of dialogue from general statements in documents, of paraphrasing thoughts, and says he has "utilized techniques" normally associated with the novel form. He insists that conversations and dialogue have been derived from sources. "There has been no instance of whole cloth dialogue or fanciful characterization." The reviewer disagrees.

Every section of the volume has a precise date, such as "July 23, 1715—Saturday," yet under such there are included many events before and after. In these chronological sections the author seeks to draw a parallel between the careers of Pontiac and William Johnson. Since there is no documentation for the early life of Pontiac, or in fact for any of his exploits much before 1760, the description of his birth (Dec. 21, 1720), of his life at age ten, and other successive episodes are pure fiction. For William Johnson there is much more documentation possible from the *Johnson Papers*, but Eckert relies upon Flexner's biography, and where the latter has frequently erred (as on Johnson's early life), these errors are compounded. It may be perfectly in accord with his de-

sign to quote in italics from the Johnson documents (and I cannot complain of his smoothing the language in his paraphrase), but on page 30 he gives in full, also in italics, a letter of Peter Warren to his nephew, which, to use his own words, is manufactured out of "whole cloth." No such letter exists, and some statements in it have no validity. Far from having the documentary backing for his narrative, much of it is pure conjecture from the flimsiest of evidence or chance reference. Instances can be multiplied where this technique proliferates error.

There is indeed here an attempt at scholarly paraphernalia in a list of references for each chapter and chapter notes, which are more commentary than documentation. But there is evidence that secondary works were more often the author's reliance. No one familiar with the New York *Colonial Documents* would consistently refer to Governor Cosby as "Crosby," but in this he was following Flexner, who made the same error.

What the present heavy tome amounts to is a retelling of episodes of the French and Indian War with fictional elaboration. There is no attempt at interpretation or the evaluation of the importance of events. Emphasis lies on the dramatic or romantic, with detailed gory accounts of Indian torture and atrocities, and elaboration without warrant of Sir William Johnson's sexual life. The writing as fiction is good and many stories are well done and make fascinating reading. Whatever justification there may be for the liberties taken, it must be concluded that the book is essentially dishonest in claiming to be history. Readers should be warned and this misrepresentation should be condemned.

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Milton W. Hamilton

THE UNCOMPLETED PAST. By Martin Duberman. (New York: Random House, 1969. Pp. 374. \$7.95.)

Historians are by temperament and training a critical lot. They constantly seek to examine their craft and their tools of research and by so doing try to interpret the past with greater accuracy. In recent times other disciplines such as psychology and economics have been employed by the historian to assist him in his labors. How well historians are succeeding in their efforts is the theme of a new and exceedingly provocative book by Martin Duberman, a distinguished historian, biographer, and professor of history at Princeton. Duberman's latest work, *The Uncompleted Past*, is largely a series of essays and reviews written over a period of years. As a group they reflect the author's growing disillusionment with the profession of historian.

In the first place, the author feels that the historian, while en-