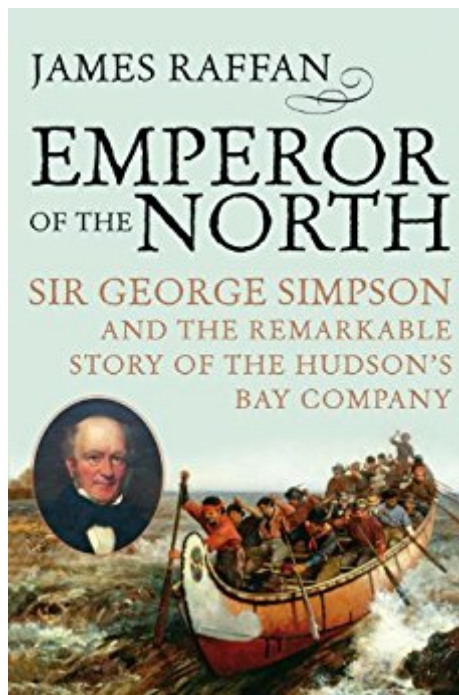




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Emperor Of The North: Sir George Simpson And The Remarkable Story Of The Hudson's Bay Company



Synopsis

The adventure-filled story of the legendary Hudson's Bay Company is inextricably linked to the formation of a Canadian nation stretching from sea to sea to sea. In an absorbing and lively new book on The Bay, James Raffan explores the forces that moulded a man, a company and a country. The histories of Sir George Simpson and the HBC in the golden years of the 19th century are in many ways one history, for Simpson's professional acumen and personal ambitions propelled a failing business to a position of great wealth and political power. At its height, the HBC trading territory covered an astonishing one-twelfth of the world's surface. Raffan captures the many contradictions of the larger-than-life man at its centre: a brilliant manager who kept an iron grip on his fur forts from east to west, ensuring British power across the land; a pompous dandy who was most at home in a voyageur-paddled canoe; a man ashamed of his illegitimate birth but who went on to sire 13 children with eight different women, only one of whom was his wife; a master businessman who laid the foundations for the single greatest business enterprise of its day. Emperor of the North is the vibrant tale of a man who shaped much more than a fur-trading company—he launched an empire of ideas that led to the creation of a country. Meticulously researched, highly readable and wonderfully illuminated by maps and archival photographs, Emperor of the North is a delight for history buffs, armchair adventurers and biography fans alike.

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Customer Reviews

This book tells an exciting and important part of our history. It is a story of which more Canadians should be familiar as he puts many other heroes to shame. While he certainly wasn't a nice guy (he would have made a great Wal-Mart manager) he vitalized the Hudson Bay Company fur trade in its dying days, after the merging of the North West Company and the Hudson Bay. He was fearless and brooked no lackadaisical employees, firing or transferring them for slacking off or inefficiency. He took his bride to York Factory on Hudson Bay an unhappy bride many years younger than him and a first cousin. He made the record fast trip by foot, horse and canoe from the East (Montreal) to the West Coast in one season (in style) and he doubled at the Brit Foreign Office rep, recognizing that the influx of American pioneers to the West was going to ruin the fur trade (which was almost finished anyway as far as beaver pelts were concerned.) He recognized that Fort Vancouver on the Columbia was probably going to end up in US territory so moved the HBC activities to Fort Victoria on Vancouver Island and Fort Langley upstream on the Fraser River. He also closed Fort Hall on the Oregon and California Trail routes. While Simpson was personally not an admirable guest or a social man, as a former accountant in the sugar trade in England, he had the business smarts, the courage and fearlessness to do what was required at the time. But he had a dark birth (he was illegitimate) and strove throughout his life for social recognition and praise. His travels make Lewis and Clark look like pikers. Much of the country they traversed had already been explored by HBC fur traders, and Alexander MacKenzie of the Northwest Company (later to merge with the HBC) was the first to make a crossing north of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean in 1793, ten years before Lewis and Clark. As well as crossing the North American continent several times, he continued on into Russia traversing rivers and tundra, finishing the journey in London - a round the world odyssey. And of course he made himself wealthy in his investments, apart from his interest in the Hudson Bay Company. He retired and died in Lachine Quebec, where he preferred to live, rather than Montreal where the author says he felt like a small fish in a big pond. In nearby Lachine he was the big fish. This is not always a pleasant story but as one of Canada's early historical figure, he merits the accolades which Canadians in their modesty are reluctant to celebrate. Had he been an American crossing the States he would have been a frontier hero.

Really history worth telling If you are interested in exploration of Canada, fur trading trapping, long distance canoeing, I highly recommend this, lots of solid information not just puffery regarding British in North America. Good reading for Indians / First Peoples, too.

Still reading, it is a bit slow. I am hoping it picks up.

Well done. thanks.

Interesting book

The general reader will enjoy this biography of a remarkable personality who had a major impact on North American history. There are too many "must haves" and "would haves" for this to be an academic biography. That said, the technique makes the book readable, fills in the undocumented places and gives the reader a clear idea of the background. For a good general history of the Hudson's Bay Company see Peter C. Newman, "Empire of the Bay".

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