

Book Review: Fur War 1765-1840 two volumes

Reviewed by: Bonnie Lippitt, Natural and Cultural Heritage Interpreter

I just finished David Bainbridge's two-volume historical study "Fur War (1765-1840)" and was amazed by how much I hadn't been taught about this part of our history, how much I learned about its long-term impacts, and how well Bainbridge "connected the dots" between the people, places, and countries involved in the western fur trade for both sea and land mammals. "Volume 1: Fur War-the Political, Economic, Cultural and Ecological Impacts of the Western Fur Trade" surveys the 75-year battle between Russia, England, America, Spain, Mexico, Hawaii, and the countless First Nation tribes for control of not only the fur trade but ultimate control of the development and ownership of the lands and resources of the west coast of North America. While the story itself is compelling, the book's deeply-researched data, quotes, and logbook entries back it up with an unrelenting commitment to paint an accurate, comprehensive, sobering, and cautionary tale. We are still living with its significant impacts almost 200 years later.

"Volume 2: Tenacity-Remarkable People of the Fur War" complements Volume 1 with the individual stories of selected heroes, oligarchs, psychopaths, survivors, scoundrels, and observers that contributed to this history. The deeds of these noteworthy characters bring the entire story to life in very personal ways and offer varying perspectives on the same events, depending on the role they played. Could you imagine doing what they did?

Could you command a ship around the world at the age of nineteen with twenty-two men (most of them older than you) as crew? Could you hike, ride, and camp in the snow for five months every year while caring for several children under the age of 15, preparing food, skinning beaver, and perhaps giving birth and nursing an infant? Could you continue after nine out of ten people in your family and village died of new diseases? Could you survive a 14-month drift across the north Pacific only to shipwreck on the coast — only to be made a slave?

"Fur War" not only helped me look back, but also offered some thoughts and opportunities for the future. Bainbridge includes a bibliography and lists of organizations, agencies, and academic institutions engaged in ecological restoration. He has also developed a series of supplementary materials and a set of 11 lesson plans to help teachers add richness and detail to their history discussions.

About the reviewer:

Bonnie Lippitt has spent her entire life and career on the west coast of the US. She retired after 37 years as a natural and cultural heritage interpreter and program manager with the National Park Service, US Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management at protected areas across Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and California.

Volume 1:

ISBN 978-1-7351492-1-9 Fur War e-pub \$2.99

ISBN 978-1-7351492-2-6 Fur War softbound \$9.99

Volume 2.

ISBN 978-1-7351492-6-4 Tenacity epub \$2.99

ISBN 978-1-7351492-5-7 Tenacity softbound \$12.99

Many additional resources for teachers free on line at www.furwar.com