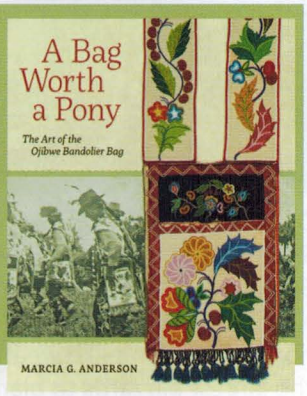
BOOK Reviews

A Bag Worth a Pony: The Art of the Ojibwe Bandolier Bag



Marcia G. Anderson. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2017. 265 pp. $34.95 (paperback). Map, illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index.

In the summer of 1986, *American Indian Art Magazine* dedicated an entire issue to beadwork of the Great Lakes people. For most Americans, this was their first introduction to the material culture of the Chippewa, or Ojibwe, people. Missionaries, military officers, government officials, and historians have been writing about the Chippewa for well over two centuries. Marcia G. Anderson's magnum opus is the first work to move from viewing Chippewa beadwork solely as art to placing it in the context of tribal culture. Anderson has been learning from Chippewa artists and elders about Chippewa beadwork for over thirty years, and this book is a beautifully illustrated snapshot into her journey of discovery.

Gashkibidaagan, or Ojibwe bandolier bags, were exchanged for horses to Dakota, Arikara, and Hidatsa people in North Dakota. These pieces of Chippewa women's beadwork were traded as far west as the Salish people between the Gallatin and Bitteroot Ranges of southwest Montana. The State Historical Society of North Dakota is privileged to have some examples of these bags in the collections.

In November 1897, the Reverend Joseph A. Gillfan wrote to a Minnesota Historical Society executive, "One of the bead-work pouches is the great ornament of an Ojibway, and any person wearing it is considered to be in full dress; it is worth a pony among the Sioux" (25).

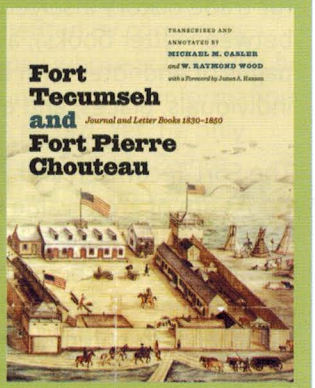
This work is a case study on bandolier bags from Minnesota. Minnesota has a significant population of Chippewa people, and they are committed to keeping their culture alive by the teaching of language and traditions to children from preschool on up. The traditional arts are alive and well in Minnesota, still practiced by Chippewa people.

Anderson takes us through a contextual history and discusses form, technique, and design in her study of the bandolier bags from the seven Chippewa reservations in Minnesota. Over the course of the last three decades Anderson was privileged to connect with beadwork artists and elders who shared their knowledge.

The scholarship in this work is evident in the detailed notes and bibliography. I will be mining this information for the next decade. I suspect that the two-page "Bandolier Bag Care, Handling, Storage, and Cleaning" will result in many copies of this book becoming dog-eared by aficionados, collectors, and curators. Casual readers will quickly become entranced with the extensive color and black-and-white photographs. My copy already has been read numerous times by friends, colleagues, and tribal artists interested in the culture of Chippewa people. This book is worth adding to your library.

Mark J. Halvorson is curator of collections research at the State Historical Society of North Dakota.

Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Chouteau: Journal and Letter Books 1830–1850



Michael M. Casler and W. Raymond Wood, eds. Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2017. xiv + 269 pp. $29.95 (paperback). Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.

Fort Tecumseh (1822–32) and its successor, Fort Pierre Chouteau (1832–55), were major fur trade hubs on the Missouri River (in present-day South Dakota) in the nineteenth century. Employees of trade posts commonly kept journals as well as letter books (collections of all outgoing mail written at a trade post). Some of these documents from Forts Tecumseh and Pierre Chouteau have survived and are held in the Missouri Historical Society's archival collections. The editors have transcribed these original documents to produce an entertaining historical exploration of day-to-day life during the nineteenth century fur trade.

The fort journal (covering periods between 1830 and 1833) consists primarily of brief daily entries describing the weather, the river (e.g., ice, water level), the comings and goings of trade partners and company employees,

visitors, the location of buffalo herds, the results of hunting expeditions, repair and construction activities, illnesses, births, and deaths. The letter books (Fort Tecumseh, November 1830–May 1832; Fort Pierre, periods within 1832–35 and 1845–50) contain letters directed at company employees at other forts, as well as the company's home office in Saint Louis. They include requests for provisions and responses to such requests from other posts, discussions of trade strategies to stay ahead of the competition, news and intelligence, and updates on the credit of trappers and other employees as they traveled between posts. The editors transcribed all words as accurately as possible, excluding those letters originally written in French, which were translated into English by James A. Hanson.

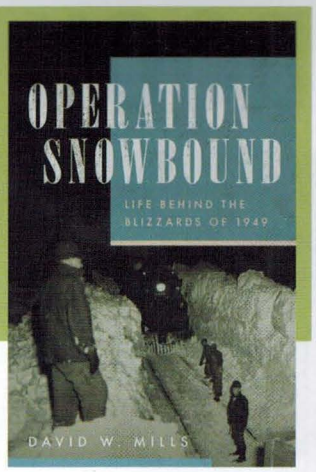
Although the material does not cover the entire lifetime of the forts, all surviving documents are included in the volume. This is the first time the Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre archival material has been published as a whole. By transcribing and publishing the Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre journal and letter books, the editors of this volume have made these archival materials vastly more accessible. The book also provides introductory material (including overviews of fur trade history inserted in some of the larger gaps between letter books), a detailed index, and fifteen pages of endnotes with background information on individuals, places, and events mentioned in the text.

The Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre journal and letter books are of great value to fur trade researchers interested in tracing the movements of individuals, determining the sequence of events in a certain place, or any number of related subjects. Subtle differences between letters recounting the same events provide glimpses into the relationships between various company employees. Some of the material (e.g., the detailed discussions of accounting issues) will no doubt be a little dry for readers with a more casual interest in the fur trade. Nevertheless, the overall volume offers a fairly riveting read for a general audience. Not only does this book offer unique insight into the daily life of mid-nineteenth century trade posts, it is also full of intrigue, office politics, theft, the occasional murder, and even some explosions.

Lotte Govaerts is an archaeologist and PhD candidate at Vrije Universiteit Brussel in Belgium. Her dissertation involves a comparative study of artifact collections from six nineteenth-century trade posts on the Missouri River.

Operation Snowbound: Life behind the Blizzards of 1949

David W. Mills. Fargo: North Dakota State University Press, 2018. 276 pp. $29.95 (hardcover). Map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index.



David Mills opens *Operation Snowbound: Life behind the Blizzards of 1949* on a balmy New Year's Day in 1949. Within hours, the spring-like weather transformed into one of the largest blizzards to blanket the American West in living memory. Over eight chapters, Mills chronicles how residents endured the blizzards of 1949, which dropped dozens of feet of snow, burying highways, killing livestock, stranding travelers, and cutting off the region's inhabitants from the outside world and leaving destruction in their wake. The absence of governmental preparation intensified the storms' devastation, Mills argues, displaying the region's resilience and bringing about changes in federal and state approaches to disaster response.

Observing the 1949 blizzards occurred within the lifetimes of many people living today, Mills smartly notes that those who lived through the months of ceaseless snow still had one foot firmly planted in the previous century. In many communities, horses were as common as automobiles, and more people owned ice boxes than refrigerators. But most importantly, much of the rural West relied upon scattered highways to connect them to the outside world. North Dakota saw sixty-three inches fall by the first week in February, meaning those thin connections were severed, leading to a herculean effort to first save people and livestock, and then to dig out.

One of the reasons the blizzards devastated the region, Mills notes, was the federal and state governments' lack of a methodical approach in how to deal with natural disasters of such scale. Those lessons learned during the storms of 1949 and their aftermath prompted changes in disaster responses over the next several decades, he argues in his conclusion. This is a worthy point—one that Mills could have further expounded upon. Yet, *Operation Snowbound* focuses primarily on the tales of people's survival, struggle, and resilience.

A narrative history, *Operation Snowbound* is intended for a general rather than an academic audience. Mills offers little in the way of analysis but provides a number of engrossing stories drawn from newspaper accounts of the time. Mills opens in chapter one by describing the surreal impact of the first blizzard, in which rural residents often