The Worlds Between Two Rivers: Perspectives on American Indians in Iowa, An Expanded Edition

Richard Thomas

ISSN 0003-4827
Copyright © 2001 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

Hosted by Iowa Research Online
those relating to Cahokia’s ancient engineers and builders. The relationship of Cahokia to the outside world is discussed in regard to its outposts and place in aboriginal America, along with the probable reasons for its abandonment.

The weakest chapter of the book is the first, “The Making of a Cahokia Archaeologist.” It provides more information than is needed or wanted about the coauthor’s genesis as a Cahokia archeologist. It would have been far better to weave Fowler’s distinguished career at Cahokia into the narrative chronologically, summarizing his early life at the point where he enters the narrative and excising the excess biographical information. For example, do we really need to know that Fowler had a “substantial paycheck” during his brief stint as an engineer at the Civil Aeronautics Administration? The essay’s purpose is understandable and even laudable: to humanize archeology by making flesh and bone of archeologists. But that goal is accomplished quite well in other sections of the book, making the stand-alone chapter on one of the coauthors seem misplaced and overly dutiful by contrast. I level this criticism somewhat reluctantly, for the role of biography in the history of American archeology is a vital one. My objection here concerns placement and balance.

That quibble aside, I cannot think of a better introduction to the archeology of the American Bottom. Interactions between Cahokia and contemporary communities far distant stand in bold relief. The Cahokia experience adds further testimony to the social and cultural dynamics that shaped the lives of indigenous peoples in the late prehistoric era, and resulted in the development of complex chiefdoms and the emergence of urban centers. The glossary will help lay readers decipher the archeologist’s specialized lexicon, and the bibliography and index provide user-friendly insight into such fundamental processes as site formation analysis, ceramic sequences, and the interdisciplinary methodology of such arcane specializations as geoarcheology, zooarcheology, and archeoastronomy. Various site reports, often torturous in their jargon-filled language, are here artfully blended into a smoothly flowing narrative that shares archeology’s humanistic insights with a larger audience. Those interested in the archeology of the American Bottom or public archeology as presented at the Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site will greatly benefit from this work.

Reviewer Richard Thomas is emeritus professor of history at Cornell College. His research interests include American Indians, recent history, and material culture.

With the exceptions of two new chapters, a new introduction, and a revised bibliography, this book is a reprint of a book originally published in 1978. The work, largely a collection of papers and lectures from a 1974 symposium at Iowa State University, promised to "provide some insights into an area where current and accurate material are generally lacking" (xv). Reviews of the first edition expressed appreciation for the many Indian voices included as well as the wide spectrum of views represented. Earlier reviews also noted the lack of a clear organizational theme for the collection, which is still absent in this reprint. (See, for example, Michael Green's review in the *Annals of Iowa* 45 [1980], 239-42.)

The two new chapters continue Indian voices. Maria Pearson (Yankton Sioux) documents Indian leadership and the political actions of Governor Robert Ray in the 1970s on the issue of the disposition of Indian remains. Lance Foster's (Ioway) new essay connects the burial issue with tribal traditional values and contemporary Indian identity.

Reissuing the original edition without seriously addressing any of a number of significant changes in Indian concerns in a book that seeks to fill the void of "current and accurate material" does not seem helpful or merited. Issues such as the impact of Indian gaming, the success or failure of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in Iowa, and declining support for urban Indian centers are not included. The editors acknowledge some of these new realities in the new preface but make no contribution to help us understand any of them.


Reviewer James P. Leary is professor of American folklore at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research and publications have focused on midwestern folklore.

Moved by the stories of native peoples, and concerned that they might not reach a broad readership in unromanticized form, Katharine Berry Judson, a librarian trained in history, drew heavily on the massive nar-