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Detroit To Fort Sackville, 1778-1779: The Journal Of Normand MacLeod



Synopsis

In 1777 Normand MacLeod, a British army officer, assumed the post of town major of Detroit, then a British colony on the frontier of late eighteenth-century America. Although it was not in the forefront of action in the American Revolution, the fort at Detroit had an important role because its strategic location made it a point of interest to military leaders on both sides. Detroiters, under the leadership of Captain Normand MacLeod, played a role in the War for Independence that is described in detail in this journal. During the bitter winter of 1778-79, MacLeod led a party of Detroit Volunteer Militia in advance of Henry Hamilton's main force. Hamilton was attempting to hold Fort Sackville (modern Vincennes, Indiana) against George Rogers Clark and his troops. MacLeod was a shrewd and witty reporter. His diary, published for the first time in this volume, details the daily routine of the arduous midwinter military campaign. He describes daily life within the walls of the fort at Detroit, the military adventures planned within those walls, and the rumors, the gossip, and the personal relationships within the community. Offering an unprecedented personal glimpse of Detroit life in the years 1778-79, the diary preserves the flavor of one bitter winter of the American Revolution of special significance for historians of Michigan and Detroit. It is presented in an attractive clothbound volume suitable as a gift for history buffs, a volume which will be treasured by the collector. William A. Evans's introduction to the journal places MacLeod's expedition in the context of Hamilton's strategy and provides a biographical account of MacLeod himself that has not been available previously. Norman MacLeod (1731?-1796) is now a relatively minor figure in American history, but he was a man of some position and power in the early life of Detroit. Born in Scotland, he came to the American colonies as an ensign in the famous Black Watch regiment. He remained primarily a military man throughout his American career, first transferring to the Eightieth Regiment (Gage's Light Infantry), and eventually holding posts at Ontario and as town major, the chief executive officer of the garrison, at Detroit. He also tried his hand at farming and was for a time a partner in a fur-trading company. In 1796 he died in Montreal as he had lived, a loyal subject of the British crown.

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Customer Reviews

A chronicle of military man Normand MacLeod's expedition to Detroit in the late 1700's.

Normand MacLeod (c. 1731 - 1796) was a British army officer, merchant, and official of the British Indian Department. He was born on the Isle of Skye, in Scotland, about 1731. At age sixteen he joined the Forty Second Highlanders (Black Watch) Regiment, and went with his unit to the Netherlands and what is now Belgium. By 1756 he was an ensign as the regiment went to New York to fight in the French and Indian War. In 1760 Macleod won promotion to captain lieutenant and transferred to the Eighteenth Regiment. In 1761 Macleod attended the Niagara Conference held between Sir William Johnson and Pontiac. Macleod heard a rumor that Pontiac was being paid ten shillings a day by the British and this was creating resentment among other Indians which would "end in his ruin."^[1] Soon after this Macleod and 120 men took food and supplies to Detroit, and when he returned he took command of the British fort at Fort Oswego, New York, on Lake Erie,^[2] where his title was "Commissary of Indian Affairs."^[3] He continued working as an agent between Johnson and the Michigan Indians for several years.^[4] Macleod sent Johnson a bottle of oil from a lake which the Indians thought had curative powers; he negotiated a peace between the Seneca and Mississauga tribes.^[5] When the French and Indian War ended the army put Macleod on half-pay. He married Cecile Robert, daughter of Antoine Robert of Detroit.^[6] Macleod also joined the Masons. In 1774 he moved to Detroit, where he set up a general store with nineteen investors. Three years later he was "town major," a military form of mayor. In 1778 he accompanied Henry Hamilton on the attack of Vincennes, Indiana, but went back to Detroit before Vincennes was captured by George Rogers Clark in February 1779. By 1782 Macleod was still in Detroit and was father to one child. He bought interest in a fur trading company with John Gregory and called their company Gregory, Macleod and Co. They later invited Sir Alexander Mackenzie to buy a share in the company; by 1785 Peter Pangman and John Ross became partners as well, and Alexander's cousin, Roderick Mackenzie, served as apprentice clerk.^[7] Macleod worked in the company several

years before moving to Montreal, where he died in 1796.[8]William A. Evans is director, Library and Archives and Administrative Records Center, Health and Hospitals Governing Commission of Cook County, Chicago, Illinois.Elizabeth S. Sklar is an retired professor in the department of English at Wayne State University.B.A., Swarthmore CollegeM.A., University of PennsylvaniaPh.D., University of Pennsylvania

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