

*Phantoms of the French Fur Trade: Twenty Men Who Worked in the Trade Between 1618 and 1758, vols. I, II, and III* by Timothy J. Kent

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tillery, as well as the massive and complex infrastructure that supported the gunners' war in France and Belgium. Even a century after the outbreak of war, there is still relatively little in print that deals with logistics (transportation and supply) and related infrastructure in any detail. As a mechanical engineer, Sargent had a particular eye for detail, which enhances the value of his papers for historians and readers who are interested in the nuts and bolts of everyday activities as well as major operations on the Western Front.

Among the revealing passages in Sargent's letters and diaries is one that concerns the distinction between combatant troops (infantry and artillery gun crews for example) and soldiers who served in support trades. Wartime popular culture was mostly oriented toward the combat arms, while those working in support were often targets of derision. Sargent, who hoped to be assigned directly to a field battery, was initially disappointed when he found himself attached to an ammunition column (a transport unit that moved shells up to the guns). He soon learned that ammunition column duty—a part of the unit that he had “never had any use for”—was more

exciting, and more dangerous, than anticipated (128). While the odds of being killed or injured were indeed much higher for the infantry than any other trades, it seems that distinctions between combat and support troops were as much products of popular culture as actual experience.

The very best of Sargent's writing (and Grout's arrangement), however, concerns the everyday material culture of life at war. Readers will find, for example, the gunner's perspective on the differences between serving in a field battery versus a howitzer battery (128). One also begins to appreciate just how much work went in to building new battery positions every time the guns were moved, how camouflage techniques were developed, or what it meant to sleep in steel-roofed Nissen huts with dry concrete floors instead of damp and ill-ventilated dugouts (282-84).

In sum, Grout's volume is the product of considerable effort that enhances the value of an otherwise important addition to Canada's national collection of eyewitness soldier accounts from the First World War.

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## *Phantoms of the French Fur Trade*

### *Twenty Men Who Worked in the Trade Between 1618 and 1758, vols. I, II, and III*

by Timothy J. Kent

Ossineke, MI: Silver Fox Enterprises, 2015. \$120.00 hardcover, 3-volume set, 2,340 pages.  
ISBN 978-0-9657230-7-7

*Phantoms of the French Fur Trade* is an enormous publication, chockablock with incredible detail about the lives of non-Indigenous men, women, and chil-

dren who lived within the networks of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century fur trade. The book is divided into three volumes, each concluding with a different

“Lineage of Timothy Kent,” and is chronologically limited to the years between 1618 and 1758 (865, 1637, 2176). Each of the twenty chapters, at roughly one hundred pages each, comprises a central life story and the stories of people associated with the central chapter figure, often through kinship, economic, or religious ties. The table of contents is remarkable in that it outlines the name, spouses, and professions of each chapter’s subject as a preview of

the dense detail to come. Fur trade historian Claiborne Skinner wrote the preface and thoughtfully prepares the reader for the unusual learning experience they encounter in Kent’s latest work. Skinner explains Kent’s experience and knowledge of fur trade history and preemptively dissects his “distinct historical style” of research (xx). Largely a family history of Kent’s ancestors, the series is also a revealing look at the lives of early European immigrants to North America through the documents they left behind.

Much of *Phantoms of the French Fur Trade* relies heavily on Kent’s earlier research and publications, bringing them together in the spirit of a magnum opus. As Skinner indicates in the preface, the publication is an intriguing amalgam of historical research methods and reflects Kent’s

## *Phantoms of the French Fur Trade*

*Twenty Men Who Worked in the Trade  
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*Volume III*

Timothy J. Kent



interests in both form and content. Kent’s predominant research interest is genealogical and this work began as an undertaking in family history. A fur trade reenactor for decades, part of Kent’s historical method is physical encounter and experience with North American and European landscapes. The publication’s many images, and indeed one cover image, are travel and reenactment photos of Kent and his family on both continents. Archival research, predominantly

in Quebec, and also in France, London, Manitoba, and Library and Archives Canada, provided much of the detail surrounding each chapter’s central and ancillary figures. Important historical and cultural context is furnished with the assistance of secondary historical sources, but the works chosen are outdated, if venerable. Missing from the analysis surrounding each chapter figure are the important interpretations of relevant fur trade scholarship, including Jennifer S.H. Brown, Sylvia VanKirk, Carolyn Podruchny, Heather Devine, Arthur Ray, and the many recent works on Indigenous and Metis people’s involvement in the fur trade. Kent is clear in his introduction, and Skinner further makes the point in the preface, that *Phantoms of the French Fur Trade* is a hybrid creature—not genealogy, academic history, or reenactment, but

a fusion of all three methods—a “blend of biography and history”(3). While an innovative methodological approach, and one that works to address concerns over the relevance of academic history, Kent’s is a methodological pragmatism that masks assumptions and relieves both the author and reader of difficult analytical tasks.

The title of *Phantoms of the French Fur Trade* is a reference to Kent’s interpretation that there is a general misconception that fur traders’ stories are unknowable, something he aspires to overcome in the publication by highlighting what he considers underutilized troves of francophone sources available to researchers (1). In this objective, Kent succeeds in bringing francophone sources into the hands of anglophone readers. His assertion that such sources are underutilized, though, belies the fact that francophone, as well as some anglophone, historians in both France and Canada (and beyond) have been working with them for decades, even centuries. Including in his analysis the works of recent francophone historians of New France and the fur trade would have strengthened Kent’s cultural analysis of what he deems “regional and local variants of the eastern French culture” (3). Nonetheless, Kent provides anglophone readers who may not otherwise access such resources with translations and interpretations of francophone sources that contribute colour and depth to fur trade history. For example, Kent’s work would be more historiographically relevant if it referenced recent scholarship on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century franco-North American culture and migrations such as those in Teasdale and Villerbu, *Une Amérique française, 1760-1860: dynamiques du corridor créole*, to provide important cultural and political context reflecting recent understandings of global geopolitics in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries that

would have made the engrossing detail of Kent’s writing better situated in larger social and political trends.<sup>a1</sup>

In his introduction, Kent asserts that this series is designed to showcase the lives of women and children, and “change the emphasis from male-dominated” fur trade history to one that is more inclusive of family experiences (2). This is a provocative statement to read after encountering the table of contents, which lists twenty men as the focal point of each chapter. Kent does not disappoint in his claim to detail the lives of women and children. Indeed, some of the most fascinating details of the books are those related to women and children, recounting marriages, births, baptisms, and family events documented in ecclesiastical and public records and in correspondence. Kent references the work of respected scholars in his analysis of francophone families in the fur trade, but would have again benefitted from incorporating more recent scholarship on the subject. Overall, however, the actions of women and children in the context of the fur trade make for engaging reading.

Finally, Kent articulates that *Phantoms of the French Fur Trade* provides a broader picture of the “colonization of New France” (4). In some ways this goal is achieved, but through the experiences of colonizers and with little regard for Indigenous experiences of the processes of colonization. Indigenous peoples are nameless “native warriors” whose motivation for entering the trade is insufficiently examined, in light of the considerable scholarship on the topic (1673 – 74, as one such example). Taking time to read and carefully understand Indigenous experiences of the fur trade in this period and its legacies would have provided Kent with a broader foundation from which to build his picture of the colonization of New France.

In the series, Timothy Kent brings together a genealogy project more than forty years in the making to tell the stories of people engaged in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century fur trade. He does so by intertwining family history with some academic resources and with the lived experience of a fur trade enthusiast and reenactor. He has “immersed” himself in the physical past from a very different physical present, often overlooking environmental and physical changes that have occurred over time (9). These subtleties tinge an ambitious undertaking with nostalgia, undermining the final product of Kent’s life’s work. *Phantoms of the French Fur Trade* is a wonderful contribution to fur trade his-

tory in that it approaches the subject from a personal perspective, drawing readers in to the details of Kent’s family trees that he has lovingly reconstructed through archival research and travel, with careful attention to the details of ancestors’ lives and experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> Guillaume Teasdale and Tangi Villerbu, eds. *Une Amérique française, 1760-1860: dynamiques du corridor créole*. Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2015. While the book covers the century following Kent’s work, chapters include contextualization of events occurring while his subjects lived.

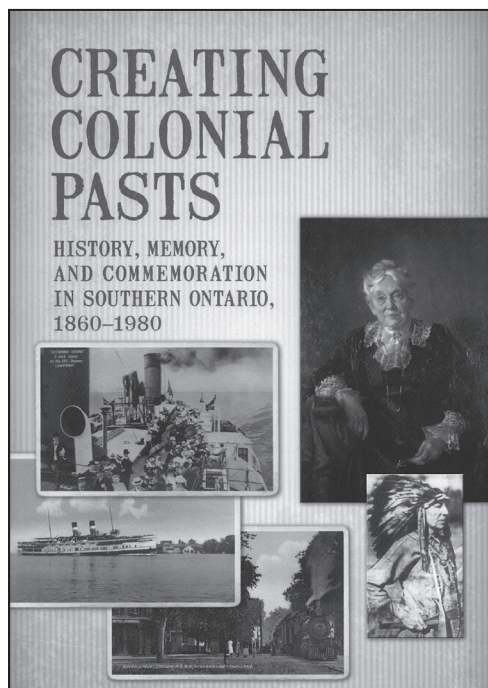
## *Creating Colonial Pasts*

### *History, Memory, and Commemoration in Southern Ontario, 1860-1980*

by Cecilia Morgan

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.  
217 pages. \$70.00 hardcover. ISBN 978-1-4426-4837. \$32.95 softcover. ISBN 978-1-4426-2615-7. \$32.95 ebook. ISBN 978-1-4426-1683-7 <[www.utppublishing.com](http://www.utppublishing.com)>

*Creating Colonial Pasts* is not your typical book, a characteristic that Cecilia Morgan acknowledges right from the beginning. By way of four examples drawn from Southern Ontario, Morgan “explores the ways in which individuals and groups struggled to define themselves and their contexts through the medium of historical narratives.”<sup>(10)</sup> Chapters are formed by reflections selected from Morgan’s career researching the breadth and depth of the archival record pertaining to Ontario’s



past. As she explains, her examples are drawn from webs of connections that, on occasion, have led her away from her core research. In this collection, she sets forth