

fathers and mothers, grandparents and great-grandparents. Often it is time that is continuous as well as personal, time with little sense of change. The historian will ask more insistently about change, wanting to blend change with continuities. There is less of change, at least concretely or analytically considered, less for the historian to lift and footnote in the next article or book. But perhaps some of the discontents many feel about the state of history today stem from its inattention to a sense of place, its abstract quality that seems too often embarrassed to bother to locate the grand themes and theses in a particular and distinctive place. Certainly historians need occasionally to read essays like these, to experience ideas and personal sentiments that cannot be measured or easily capsulated, to remind ourselves that history is about time and place and how human beings live in both. Finally, it needs to be said that these essays simply make good reading, reason enough to recommend *A Place of Sense*.

An Account of Upper Louisiana, by Nicolas de Finiels, edited by Carl J. Ekberg and William E. Foley, translated by Carl J. Ekberg. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989. ix, 153 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY THOMAS AUGE, CENTER FOR DUBUQUE HISTORY, LORAS COLLEGE

In 1797 the Spanish government commissioned Nicolas de Finiels, a French engineer and cartographer, to improve St. Louis's defenses. After spending some time at this enterprise, Finiels moved to New Orleans, where he remained in the service of Spain. With the retrocession of Louisiana to the French, Finiels wrote *An Account of Upper Louisiana* to inform the French of the prospects and possibilities of this region. The information that Finiels provides is in part a product of his own experiences and observations. When these failed him, he had recourse to written sources as well as many conversations with residents of upper Louisiana.

The editors of this account suggest that a strain of Romanticism runs through the narration. Certainly there are passages to support such a view. For the most part, however, this engineer, true to his vocation, supplies us with the useful and the practical. The account is readable and interesting, although at times he overwhelms the reader with detail.

The title is misleading. Finiels devotes many pages to areas outside of Louisiana. The principal subject of the account is Illinois country, the middle portion of the Mississippi River valley. The eastern

portion of that area was not in Louisiana but was a part of the United States. Furthermore, Finiels omits any references to the upper Mississippi River valley, which was, of course, a part of upper Louisiana. There were few white settlers there at the time, but that region contained what was potentially one of the most wealthy areas of the entire Mississippi valley. Some three hundred miles above St. Louis was the location of vast lead deposits, one of the richest in the entire world. Since the proprietor of those mines, Julien Dubuque, marketed thousands of pounds of lead annually, it is surprising that the observant Finiels did not note this source of potential wealth. Perhaps the reason for this omission was the growing importance of the Missouri River fur trade. Finiels supplies much information about that trade at a time when its center was moving westward up the Missouri River valley.

Finiels's description of St. Louis at the turn of the century is interesting and unexpected. Although founded some forty years earlier, it remains to Finiels a crude, frontier town with few amenities. If conditions in St. Louis do not please him, its residents do. Finiels describes the people of upper Louisiana as amiable, tolerant, fun-loving, and easy-going. Indeed, our practical engineer finds them too indolent, suggesting that only this prevents upper Louisiana from progressing.

Although Finiels's account of the Missouri River is based entirely on information given to him by others, it is valuable since it tells what was known about this region immediately prior to the Lewis and Clark expedition. In his description of the Indian tribes of the Missouri, he is especially harsh on the Osage, the trading partners of the Chouteaus, picturing them as cruel savages.

Finiels was also a fine cartographer. The editors claim that his map of the Illinois country in the eighteenth century is "undeniably the best ever done." Unfortunately the reader has no means of determining the validity of such a statement since the map was too large to be reproduced. The four portions of the map that are included are not enough to permit a judgment on its value.

An Account of Upper Louisiana is for the most part readable and interesting. The sixteen-page introduction is useful, the footnotes are informative, and the translation so satisfactory that one does not notice it.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.