

Book Reviews

The Journals of Jonathan Carver and Related Documents, 1766-1770, edited by John Parker. Minnesota Historical Society Press, St. Paul, 1976. pp. 233. \$10.50.

Jonathan Carver's *Travels Through the Interior Parts of North America in the Years 1766, 1767, and 1768* was published in London in 1778. The book was a considerable success, going through numerous editions. Shortly after Carver's death, questions began to be raised about the authorship of the book. As the decades passed the questions became louder and even shrill. One critic dismissed Carver as "an ignorant shoemaker incapable of writing such a book on his own." It was clear that large parts of the book were copied verbatim from Charlevoix and La Hontan, earlier French travellers and writers. The plagiarism was incontestable: two thirds of the book was written by other men. But what of the remaining third? Carver's critics tend to dismiss the entire book while his supporters argue that the remaining third is a genuine and valuable account of an early western traveller. The controversy often descended to petty levels; for example, was Carver related to the Plymouth Carver or not? Carver's manuscript journals are in the British Museum, and obviously the answer to a good many of these questions should be sought in the manuscript journals. Most students of the problem agreed that the journals should be examined, but nothing was done. Finally John Parker, curator of the James Ford Bell library at the University of Minnesota undertook this task. Mr. Parker has done a splendid job. This book is everything that a scholar of early America could ask for. The editing is painstaking, clear and intelligent. All of the relevant Carver documents are printed. The places Carver mentions are located and described and their relevance explained, Mr. Parker and his associates, (Ray Demollie, assistant professor of Anthropology at Indiana University and Carolyn Gilman, an editor at the Minnesota Historical Society) show an encyclopedic knowledge of the old Northwest and its inhabitants. They have done an outstanding job: this is editing the way it should be done. The editors and publisher of this work deserve the highest praise.

Now, do the journals support the remaining third of Carver's book as a genuine and worthwhile early traveller's account? Yes, they do, although some small questions will always remain. Carver's account of Lake Superior is much fuller in the book than in the journal. It is likely that Carver verbally expanded upon some sections to his editor as the book was prepared for the press. This book was a Bicentennial Project of the Minnesota Historical Society. This reviewer shouts an enthusiastic, "well done!"

—Richard Sonderegger
Northern Michigan University

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