

EXHIBIT REVIEW

“Clash of Empires: The British, French & Indian War, 1754–1763.” An exhibition by the Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center in association with the Smithsonian Institution, Pittsburgh, PA. On exhibit through May 2006. Website: www.pghhistory.org.

It started with a small skirmish in the backwoods of North America. By the time it ended, the fighting had spread from Manila in the Philippines to Madras in India, and from Martinique in the Caribbean to Minden on the continent of Europe. It is astonishing that a conflict of this magnitude has received such little attention in world history. Perhaps this is due to the fact that most view this war as an American war, rather than a conflict of global proportions. Instead, the Americans, in typically myopic fashion, have called it the French and Indian War, while the supercilious Europeans have labeled it the Seven Years' War and neither comes close to expressing the colossal amplitude of this war which lasted from 1754 to 1763. Conceivably, the eminent British historian,

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Lawrence Henry Gipson, came the closest when he referred to it as the Great War for Empire; for indeed, the contest centered upon the rivalry between Great Britain and France in their quest for world domination.

Now, a new exhibit at the Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center explores the global nature of this war while remaining rooted in the North American phase of the struggle. Titled, "Clash of Empires: The British, French & Indian War, 1754–1763," the exhibit brings together for the first time paintings, decorative arts, weapons, and artifacts from around the world to tell the epic story of this war and its consequences. One might expect that with the passage of 250 years, few artifacts would remain to give visitors a clear picture of the conflict. On the contrary, what is displayed provides a resonating echo of a war that had universal implications.

Curator R. Scott Stephenson makes the conflict come to life by focusing on the everyday people who participated. Through life-size figures sculpted by noted military artist Gary Embleton, visitors are introduced to many of the players, including: John Bush, an African American who served in Massachusetts' provincial army and had a knack for engraving powder horns; Tanaghrisson, an Iroquois vice regent to the Delaware, who delivered an impassioned speech calling upon the French to depart from Indian land; Private Martin Lucorney, a Hungarian immigrant who fought at Braddock's defeat and helped carry the wounded general from the battlefield; and an unidentified French officer who burned his regimental flag rather than surrender it to Jeffrey Amherst's victorious British army. In addition, the French and Indian War certainly seems less distant to visitors when they gaze upon the actual military coat worn by Charles Langlade, an agent for the British Indian Department or the medal given to Captain Hugh Mercer, a Pennsylvania provincial officer who participated in Armstrong's harrowing raid upon the Delaware village of Kittanning.

Not only will visitors find intimacy in this presentation, but they will also experience the dramatic sweep of the war. The first section of the exhibit contrasts the cultural differences that existed between the principle protagonists. The walls are adorned with portraits of French royal officials such as the Marquis de la Galissonnière and Baron de Longueuil, both governors of New France. On an opposing wall is an 18th century portrait of the Delaware leader Lapowinsa, a governor in his own right. Interspersed throughout this first section are numerous artifacts representing both European and Indian culture, such as a pair of Woodland Indian leggings that were found in Russia's Peter the Great Museum, and a portion of one of the lead plates deposited by a

French military expedition as it laid claim to the Ohio Country in 1749. Placards, written in both English and French, fully describe each item with clarity.

The second section of the exhibit takes the visitor to the Pennsylvania back-country where a young militia officer named George Washington first demanded that the French evacuate the region and later returned to the area to initiate the war by attacking a small French scouting party at a place forever known as Jumonville Glen. Washington's actions prompted a French counter-offensive that forces his surrender at Fort Necessity on July 4, 1754. This humiliating defeat is illustrated by contemporary artist Robert Griffing's magnificent mural, entitled "A Charming Field for an Encounter." Without a doubt, the most compelling artifact in this section is the original, four-page capitulation document signed by Washington himself that is on loan from the Royal Ontario Museum.

Visitors get a sense of the expanding and heightened nature of the war as they enter the next partition of the exhibit which displays artifacts from both the British and French armies that arrived in North America to take up the struggle. Included in this section are original weapons and accoutrements of the period such as a Brown Bess musket, British shot pouch, and a wine cup once owned by the French general, Marquis de Montcalm. Amidst the reproduction maps and artwork displayed on the walls is a stunning original tableau portrait of Sir William Johnson painted by the famous American artist Benjamin West.

Around the corner the audience comes upon the scene of one of the most legendary encounters of the war—Braddock's defeat at the Battle of the Monongahela. The engagement is presented in exacting detail as a scale diorama by artist Lee Howard and includes a tangle of British soldiers, Indians, supply wagons, caissons, horses, and even the colonial women who accompanied Braddock's march. Around the diorama are original tomahawks, wooden war clubs, knives, and tethers that the Indians used to bind their prisoners. Particularly striking are portraits of several battle participants—Colonel George Washington and Oneida chief Monacatotha, painted by contemporary Pittsburgh artist Robert Connell. Connell paints using a Venetian style that is reminiscent of 18th century artists. A small amphitheater is located to the side of this section where visitors can view a series of vignettes from the PBS documentary "The War That Made America." Clips from the film include General Braddock's death, the skirmish at Jumonville Glen, the captivity of Mary Jemison, and Washington's surrender at Fort Necessity.

Braddock's defeat unleashed a wave of terror against the Pennsylvania frontier as Indian war parties descended upon unsuspecting settlers. For nearly three years, the Scots-Irish and German farmers of the region were subjected to sporadic yet violent Indian raids. This aspect of the conflict is commemorated by one of the most unique artifacts in the entire exhibit: a cast iron stove plate from the Moravian Historical Society which bears the date 1756 and is emblazoned with the inscription "DIS IST DAS JAHR DA RIN WITET," meaning "This is the year in which rages..." The other half of this stove, located at the Mercer Museum in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, continues the verse with the German words "DER INCHIN SCHAR," or, "the Indian War Party."

The fighting on the Pennsylvania frontier came to a close in the late fall of 1758 when a massive army of more than six thousand men under the command of Brig. Gen. John Forbes seized Fort Duquesne without a struggle. This phase of the war is commemorated by a display of weapons used by the Highland soldiers who accompanied Forbes. Viewers will also be delighted to see the original portrait of Col. Henry Bouquet, painted by noted 18th century artist John Wollston. Bouquet, who came to America as a Swiss mercenary, served as Forbes' second in command during the campaign.

Having secured the Pennsylvania backcountry, the focus of the war shifted to the north where General Jeffrey Amherst pushed up the Lake George-Lake Champlain corridor toward Canada. In the meantime, another British force under General James Wolfe sailed up the St. Lawrence toward Quebec. These campaigns are remembered through the exhibit in a series of landscapes executed by Dominic Serres, a French maritime artist who actually painted for the British. The set of four paintings detail the ruined city of Quebec following the French capitulation of 1759. An impressive portrait of Lord Amherst, painted by Joshua Reynolds on loan from the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College, adorns one of the exhibit walls. The general is shown in full, medieval body armor complete with helmet. In the background of the portrait, Amherst's army descends the rapids of the St. Lawrence in shallow draft troopboats. In sharp contrast, a nearby display case contains an Indian pouch, elaborately decorated with porcupine quills, brass cones and hair that once belonged to the general.

As the fighting in North America drew to a close, men and resources were redeployed to other military theaters of operation. Visitors entering this portion of the exhibit are confronted with the global scope of the war as paintings commemorating British victories in India, West Africa, Cuba, and along the

coast of France are displayed. Of special interest are several examples of decorative arts, such as an earthenware punch bowl bearing the inscription "Success to the King of Prussia." The Prussians, with their brilliant commander, Frederick the Great, served as Britain's principal ally on the continent of Europe.

The final section of this unforgettable exhibit underscores Great Britain's difficulties in managing their new empire in North America. The exorbitant costs of the war forced British policymakers to economize and to seek new sources of revenue from the American colonists. In an effort to cut costs, General Amherst ordered drastic reductions in expenses for the Indian Department. Disgruntled tribes became convinced that such sharp cutbacks in arms, ammunition, and other trade goods meant that the British intended to wipe them out. The Indians also became enraged as waves of colonists spilled over the Appalachian Mountains to establish homesteads on Native land. These transgressions led to Pontiac's Rebellion, an Indian war that once again devastated the frontier and convinced the Americans that their sovereign, King George III, cared little about their safety and welfare. This is poignantly highlighted in the exhibit by another of Gary Embleton's remarkably life-like figures, that of a small child who had been taken captive and adopted by the Indians. Visitors exit the hall after viewing a reproduction of a 1772 portrait of Col. George Washington, painted by Charles Wilson Peale. The painting is noteworthy due to the fact that Washington is not adorned with the trappings of the British army that he had served so faithfully during the Great War for Empire. As if to underscore his true allegiance, he wears instead the blue coat and gorget of the Virginia Regiment.

This exhibit is enhanced by a beautifully illustrated catalog written by the curator, R. Scott Stephenson. The book features an interesting appendix which details the work of curators, designers, fabricators, and artists who made the effort possible. In addition, to observe the opening of the exhibition, the Western Pennsylvania Historical Society and the University of Pittsburgh Press have republished several out-of-print classics on the war, including, *Drums in the Forest* by Alfred Proctor James and Charles Morse Stotz and Stotz's much sought-after *Outposts of the War for Empire, The French and English in Western Pennsylvania: Their Armies, Their Forts, Their People, 1749-1764*.

"Clash of Empires: The British, French & Indian War, 1754-1763," will remain in Pittsburgh until May 2006, before moving on to the Canadian War Museum/Museum of Civilization in Ottawa. Afterward, it will return to the

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United States for exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution in 2008. It is doubtful that a collection of this magnitude will ever again be assembled to commemorate this important world conflict. Therefore, those interested in our early colonial history should make their way to the Forks of the Ohio to see this extraordinary ensemble.

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