BOOK REVIEWS


Along with its companion volume, With Rifle and Plow, this book presents a full picture of the western Pennsylvania frontier up to about 1812. Pioneer Life in Western Pennsylvania is not only one of the few pieces of state or regional "social history" for children of high-school age that has yet been published in the United States; it is also, in the reviewer's opinion, the best of those few. Although the book is primarily a discussion of the conditions and ways of life on the frontier, an imaginative reconstruction of the whole cultural pattern of the period, it contains a great deal of narrative background. Thus the chapter "How the Settler Got His Land" gives information on the racial elements among the settlers, the growth of settlement, the establishment of counties, and the founding of towns; "The Log Church" is a brief history of early religious activities; and "From Indian Trail to Turnpike" gives a resume of the history of transportation in the region. Liberal quotations from diaries and travel accounts make the book vivid with a sense of contemporary life.

The book is amazingly detailed, treating, for instance, such relatively minor matters as how the rifle was loaded, how the flintlock rifle fired, and why the Conestoga wagon was built to sag in the center. The vivid style and the pen sketches by Clarence McWilliams, scattered marginally throughout the text, add to the interest and clarity of the work. A glossary explains terms likely to be unfamiliar, such as hyson skin, keeler, picayune, and trammel. An unusual feature in a book for children, a brief discussion of sources and materials entitled "The Road to the Past" may give the young reader some idea of the critical approach to historical materials.

The adult reader should not, however be warned away from this volume by the statement that it is a book for children. Like the best of children's books, it has great appeal for the adult and it will interest the grown-up quite as much as the child.

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