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Madame Montour and the Fur Trade (1667-1752)

Simone Vincens

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The fascinating biography, Madame Montour et son temps by Simone Vincens, is now available in English under the title of Madame Montour and the Fur Trade (1667-1752). This book, which gives a French perspective to events, is a beautifully written and thoroughly researched account of an extraordinary woman as well as a unique presentation of events leading up to the French and Indian War.

The main theme of the book is the life of Isabelle Montour (1667-1752). This adventurous, self-reliant woman was the daughter of a French soldier and an Algonkin mother. The first third of her life was spent as a member of the French colony on the St. Lawrence River, the second third she lived on the fringes of French and Ottawan societies at the western outposts of Michilimackinac and Detroit, and the final third she lived as an Iroquois in the provinces of New York and Pennsylvania. Isabelle was fluent in several Indian languages as well as French and English; she became an influential interpreter-diplomat for the governors of New York and Pennsylvania. Much of her life was devoted to improving relations between Indians and Europeans.

As Madame Montour’s extraordinary life unfolds, we learn about European-Indian relations during the century leading up to the French and Indian War. This well-referenced history, told with drama and detail, covers the French-Iroquois hostilities on the Saint Lawrence River, the fur-trade center at Fort Michilimackinac, the political turmoil at Detroit, the immigration of western tribes into New York province, and the growing conflict between Pennsylvania merchants and French soldiers in the Ohio Valley. Isabelle Montour was involved in all these events.

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