




La Salle: Explorer of the North American Frontier

By Anka Muhlstein



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The first biography of the great French explorer in twenty-five years focuses on his resolve, curiosity, and courage, on his actual explorations from Quebec to Louisiana, and his role in the overall exploration of North America.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Robert Chevalier de la Salle, the French historian Anka Muhlstein writes, stands indisputably among Europe's most accomplished explorers. In the 1670s and '80s he crossed over most of what is now French Canada and the middle United States and charted the length of the Mississippi River--almost always traveling on foot, almost always under dangerous circumstances. Thanks to his pioneering travels, in the next century "America seemed destined to be French, until the Seven Years' War in Europe resulted in a reordering of the New World." La Salle would not live to see this turnabout. Murdered by two of his servants for reasons that are still unclear, La Salle drifted into history's cluttered attic, and his deeds have been nearly forgotten. France has yet to erect a memorial to him while in the United States his name lives on as an old car make, an unfitting tribute to that indefatigable walker. Thanks to Muhlstein's fine study, he may one day earn his due.

From Publishers Weekly

Robert Cavelier de La Salle is largely forgotten in the annals of exploration in North America. Muhlstein (Baron James) resurrects him in this lively biography and adventure story that also portrays the struggle for power between lay and religious officials in Quebec. Educated by the Jesuits in France, La Salle resigned the priesthood and traveled to Quebec in 1667 to search for the Northwest Passage. He focused on the Great Lakes and rivers that led him to the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. The arrival in Quebec of a new governor, the Comte de Frontenac, in 1672 set the stage for La Salle's more extensive explorations, as the two men conspired to circumvent the powerful Jesuits. La Salle learned Indian languages and customs; Nika, an Iroquois, became his trusted guide. La Salle claimed Louisiana for King Louis XIV in 1682. On a return voyage from France in 1687, his ship got lost in the Mississippi Delta, and as the party struggled through swampland, LaSalle was murdered by two of his own men.

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From Library Journal

Although educated by the Jesuits, La Salle did not have the temperament for the priesthood and made his way to Canada in hopes of discovering the route to China. He soon gave up this idea in favor of a life as a fur trader and explorer of the interior of a little-known continent. Using published collections of documents, Muhlstein follows La Salle throughout his journeys, showing his difficulties with creditors as well as his friendly relations with the native tribes. She also details the ill-fated attempt to establish a French colony at the mouth of the Mississippi that led to La Salle's untimely death in a trap set by his own men. This well-written account is intended for general readers and undergraduates but will also be useful for specialists. The definitive biography remains to be written.

--*Stephen H. Peters, Northern Michigan Univ. Lib., Marquette*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Houston Boynton:

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Estela Gillard:

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Robert Barker:

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