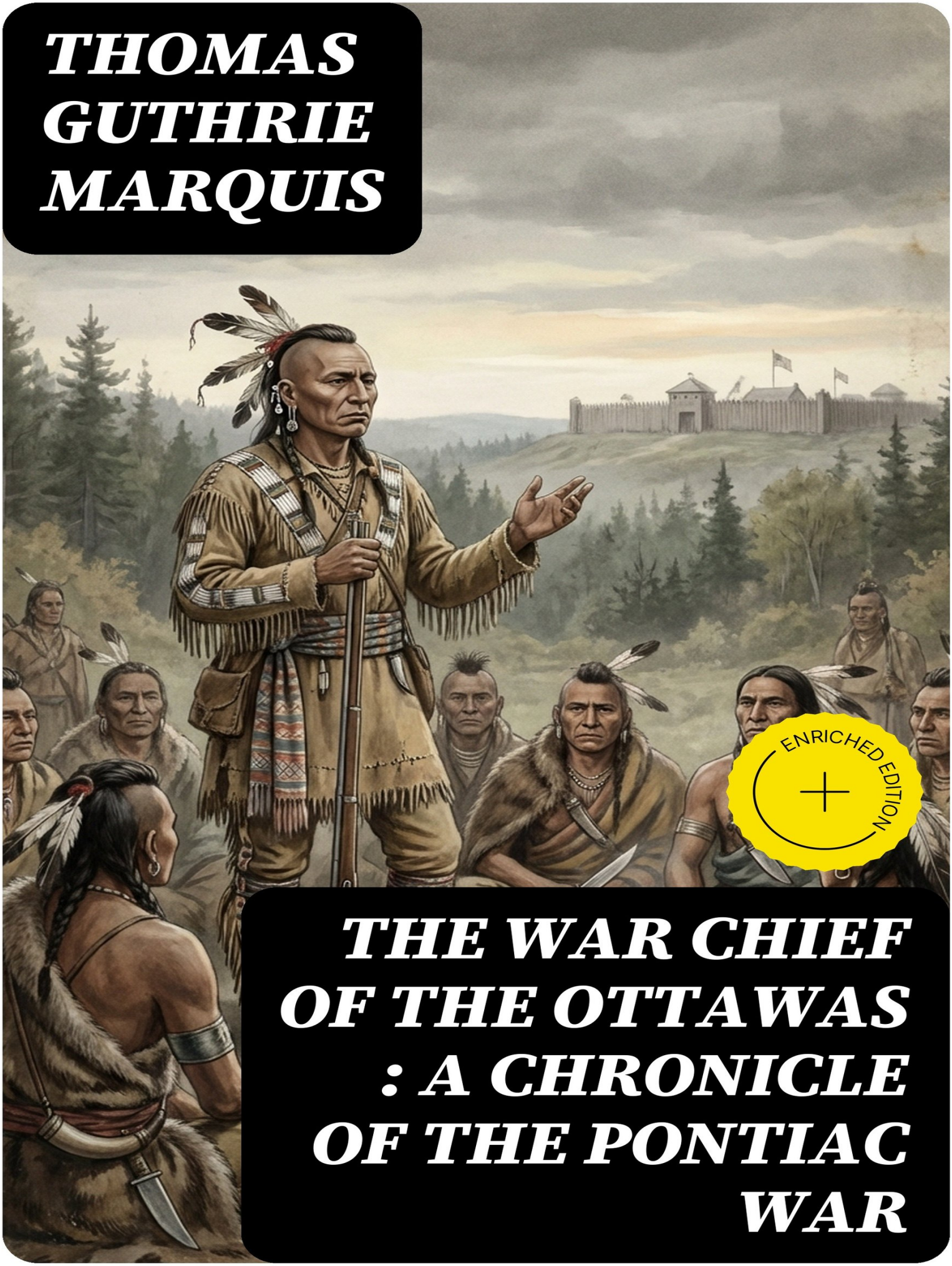
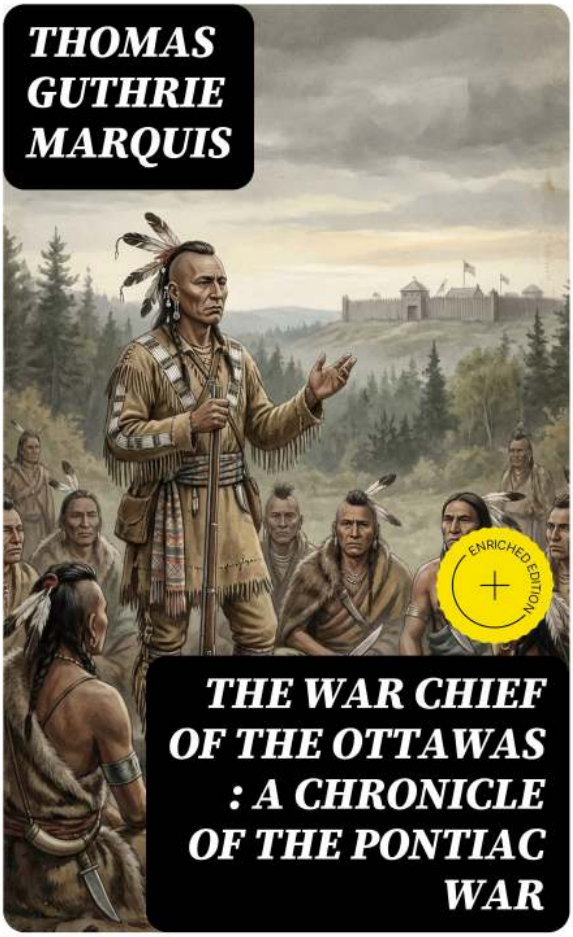
THOMAS GUTHRIE MARQUIS



THE WAR CHIEF OF THE OTTAWAS : A CHRONICLE OF THE PONTIAC WAR


THOMAS GUTHRIE MARQUIS
ENRICHED EDITION
THE WAR CHIEF OF THE OTTAWAS : A CHRONICLE OF THE PONTIAC WAR

Thomas Guthrie Marquis

The War Chief of the Ottawas : A chronicle of the Pontiac war

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Trevor Grimm

EAN 8596547017882

Edited and published by DigiCat, 2022

Table of Contents

The War Chief of the Ottawas : A chronicle of the Pontiac war

Main Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

THE TIMES AND THE MEN

There was rejoicing throughout the Thirteen Colonies, in the month of September 1760, when news arrived of the capitulation of Montreal[1]. Bonfires flamed forth and prayers were offered up in the churches and meeting-houses in gratitude for deliverance from a foe that for over a hundred years had harried and had caused the Indians to harry the frontier settlements. The French armies were defeated by land; the French fleets were beaten at sea[1q]. The troops of the enemy had been removed from North America, and so powerless was France on the ocean that, even if success should crown her arms on the European continent, where the Seven Years' War[3] was still raging, it would be impossible for her to transport a new force to America. The principal French forts in America were occupied by British troops. Louisbourg[2] had been razed to the ground; the British flag waved over Quebec, Montreal, and Niagara, and was soon to be raised on all the lesser forts in the territory known as Canada. The Mississippi valley from the Illinois river southward alone remained to France. Vincennes on the Wabash and Fort Chartres on the Mississippi were the only posts in the hinterland occupied by French troops. These posts were under the government of

Louisiana; but even these the American colonies were prepared to claim, basing the right on their 'sea to sea' charters.

The British in America had found the strip of land between the Alleghanies and the Atlantic far too narrow for a rapidly increasing population, but their advance westward had been barred by the French. Now, praise the Lord, the French were out of the way, and American traders and settlers could exploit the profitable fur-fields and the rich agricultural lands of the region beyond the mountains. True, the Indians were there, but these were not regarded as formidable foes. There was no longer any occasion to consider the Indians—so thought the colonists and the British officers in America. The red men had been a force to be reckoned with only because the French had supplied them with the sinews of war, but they might now be treated like other denizens of the forest—the bears, the wolves, and the wild cats. For this mistaken policy the British colonies were to pay a heavy price.

The French and the Indians, save for one exception, had been on terms of amity from the beginning. The reason for this was that the French had treated the Indians with studied kindness. The one exception was the Iroquois League or Six Nations**[4]**. Champlain, in the first years of his residence at Quebec, had joined the Algonquins and Hurons in an attack on them, which they never forgot; and, in spite of the noble efforts of French missionaries and a lavish bestowal of gifts, the Iroquois thorn remained in the side of New France. But with the other Indian tribes the French worked hand in hand, with the Cross and the priest ever in

advance of the trader's pack. French missionaries were the first white men to settle in the populous Huron country near Lake Simcoe. A missionary was the first European to catch a glimpse of Georgian Bay, and a missionary was probably the first of the French race to launch his canoe on the lordly Mississippi. As a father the priest watched over his wilderness flock; while the French traders fraternized with the red men, and often mated with dusky beauties. Many French traders, according to Sir William Johnson[5]—a good authority, of whom we shall learn more later-were 'gentlemen in manners, character, and dress,' and they treated the natives kindly. At the great centres of trade—Montreal, Three Rivers, and Quebec—the chiefs were royally received with roll of drum and salute of guns. The governor himself —the 'Big Mountain,' as they called him—would extend to them a welcoming hand and take part in their feastings and councils. At the inland trading-posts the Indians were given goods for their winter hunts on credit and loaded with presents by the officials. To such an extent did the custom of giving presents prevail that it became a heavy tax on the treasury of France, insignificant, however, compared with the alternative of keeping in the hinterland an armed force. The Indians, too, had fought side by side with the French in many notable engagements. They had aided Montcalm, and had assisted in such triumphs as the defeat of Braddock. They were not only friends of the French; they were sword companions.

The British colonists could not, of course, entertain friendly feelings towards the tribes which sided with their enemies and often devastated their homes and murdered

their people. But it must be admitted that, from the first, the British in America were far behind the French in christianlike conduct towards the native races. The colonial traders generally despised the Indians and treated them as of commercial value only, as gatherers of pelts, and held their lives in little more esteem than the lives of the animals that yielded the pelts. The missionary zeal of New England, compared with that of New France, was exceedingly mild. Rum was a leading article of trade**[2q]**. The Indians were often cheated out of their furs; in some instances they were slain and their packs stolen. Sir William Johnson described the British traders as 'men of no zeal or capacity: men who even sacrifice the credit of the nation to the basest purposes.' There were exceptions, of course, in such men as Alexander Henry and Johnson himself, who, besides being a wise official and a successful military commander, was one of the leading traders.

No sooner was New France vanquished than the British began building new forts and blockhouses in the hinterland. [Footnote: By the hinterland is meant, of course, the regions beyond the zone of settlement; roughly, all west of Montreal and the Alleghanies.] Since the French were no longer to be reckoned with, why were these forts needed? Evidently, the Indians thought, to keep the red children in subjection and to deprive them of their hunting-grounds! The gardens they saw in cultivation about the forts were to them the forerunners of general settlement. The French had been content with trade; the British appropriated lands for farming, and the coming of the white settler meant the disappearance of game. Indian chiefs saw in these forts and

cultivated strips of land a desire to exterminate the red man and steal his territory; and they were not far wrong.

Outside influences, as well, were at work among the Indians. Soon after the French armies departed, the inhabitants along the St Lawrence had learned to welcome the change of government. They were left to cultivate their farms in peace. The tax-gatherer was no longer squeezing from them their last sou as in the days of Bigot; nor were their sons, whose labour was needed on the farms and in the workshops, forced to take up arms. They had peace and plenty, and were content. But in the hinterland it was different. At Detroit, Michilimackinac, and other forts were French trading communities, which, being far from the seat of war and government, were slow to realize that they were no longer subjects of the French king. Hostile themselves, these French traders naturally encouraged the Indians in an attitude of hostility to the incoming British. They said that a French fleet and army were on their way to Canada to recover the territory. Even if Canada were lost, Louisiana was still French, and, if only the British could be kept out of the west, the trade that had hitherto gone down the St Lawrence might now go by way of the Mississippi.

The commander-in-chief of the British forces in North America, Sir Jeffery Amherst, despised the red men**[3q]**. They were 'only fit to live with the inhabitants of the woods, being more nearly allied to the Brute than to the Human creation.' Other British officers had much the same attitude. Colonel Henry Bouquet, on a suggestion made to him by Amherst that blankets infected with small-pox might be distributed to good purpose among the savages, not only