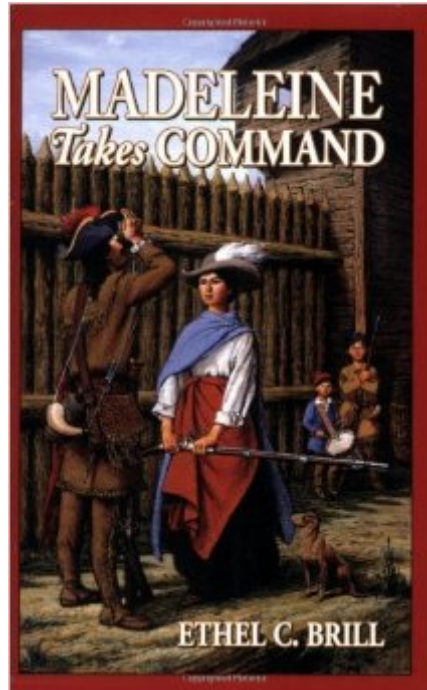


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Madeleine Takes Command (Living History Library)



Synopsis

This historical novel, set in 17th century New France, features Madeleine de Vercheres a teenage girl who takes up arms in defense of family, country, and faith against the Iroquois.

Book Information

Series: Living History Library

Paperback: 204 pages

Publisher: Bethlehem Books (April 1996)

Language: English

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Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 6 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (16 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #78,609 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #4 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > Canada #475 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories #755 inÂ Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction

Age Range: 10 and up

Grade Level: 5 and up

Customer Reviews

As a lover of historical fiction and a student of colonial North America, I cannot recommend this book highly enough. Originally written in 1946, "Madeleine Takes Command" is a true story of the 17th century Canadian frontier. With her parents away, it is up to 14 year old Madeleine de Vercheres and her two younger brothers to lead the defense of a small outpost against a surprise Mohawk attack. Based on actual events, this book gives us comfortable moderns a harrowing glimpse into the rough and perilous past. The characters are charming, sympathetic, and perfectly in keeping with those real people described in the Jesuit Relations and other primary sources of the time period. Though Madeleine is truly a courageous figure, at no time does she become "Xena, warrior princess," performing impossible feats of physical strength. Instead, she is able to preserve the family homestead with quick thinking, tireless energy, steady resolve, self-denial, an optimistic spirit, and devotion to family. This Bethlehem reprint is attractively presented and includes a dozen or so illustrations. It's perfect for kids ages 10 and up, and also an enjoyable read for an adult. It

makes great supplemental reading for the study of colonial North America and is highly recommended to homeschooling parents.

I was very impressed with this book. The story is strong, exciting and not a bit sentimental or over done. Madeleine is a wonderful heroine. MADELEINE VERCHERE'S story is based on a true account of colonial French Canada of the 1690's. 14-year-old Madeleine is left alone with two younger brothers at the Verchere family's fort and few others when the Iroquois Indians attack. We follow the brave and determined stratagems of Madeleine and her small circle. The qualities of courage, self-sacrifice, familial love and devotion abound. (Doesn't the mere mention of those character qualities make you feel desperate for our current generation??) Usually at the end of a book I'll say "yea, that was a good book but I would change this or that to make it better" I honestly can't think of anything I would change in this master re-telling of Madeleine Verchere. I wish Ethel C. Brill had written a dozen other books. She is a sharp writer and this is an excellent book.

Madeleine Takes Command was originally written in 1946 and is based on the true story about a 14 year old girl and her two younger brothers as they defend their family fort on the St. Lawrence River against an attack by the Iroquois. The story starts out in the fall of 1692 with Madeleine's father away in Quebec and her mother leaving to conduct business in Montreal. Madeleine is left in charge of her family's seigneurie. A seigneurie was a piece of land given in New France - Canada - belonging to the French King and managed by landlords. Tenant farmers called habitants farmed the land and paid taxes to the seigneur (landlord) assigned to each parcel. As Madeleine's mother states when embarking on a canoe to leave, "...one cannot put much trust in strange soldiers... That's why there must always be some member of the family left in charge." Even though Madeleine is only 14, as the eldest child of the seigneur, she needs to remain behind to keep an eye on things. Her two younger brothers, 12 and 10 years old, stay with her. One thing that struck me about this book was the level of responsibility put on the shoulders of such young children, and yet they were fully capable and trustworthy. Madeleine was left in charge of 10 militiamen as well as the seigneurie's habitants. When the Iroquois attack and kidnap or kill all but two of the militiamen, Madeleine is left with her two brothers, an 80 year old retired soldier who is her family's servant and the two remaining soldiers to guard the remaining women, children and the fort itself. The two soldiers turn out to be cowards who threaten to blow up the fort rather than be taken alive by the Mohawk Indians. Madeleine now not only has to manage the fort's defense, she also has to manage these two men who are a liability and unable to be fully trusted. Eventually she is joined by an additional

man and his family who narrowly escape capture as they arrive via their canoes on the river. Over the course of a week, the small band manages to keep the Indians at bay through a combination of sheer determination, wits and teamwork. Staying up for days on end with only short naps, the group makes it seem as if the fort is well guarded and filled with many more people than it really is. Madeleine proves to be a resourceful commander and is obeyed without question, despite her youth or the fact that she is a young woman (I say woman because she is most definitely not a child). Even her ten year old brother has an important part to play in the fort's defense and turns out to be a better man than the two adult soldiers who are nearly useless. Madeleine and her brothers were portrayed very realistically. They were afraid and yet brave. Certainly not perfect, you can see them struggling in various areas. Madeleine is a good leader. She isn't some super hero. Instead, she relies on those around her and very capably assigns them duties based on their various temperaments and abilities. Her quick thinking and devotion to do the right thing is the reason for her success, not her physical strength. The others around her all show different strengths and weaknesses. There is the wife of Monsieur Fontaine who lies around crying in the blockhouse all day and solid, dependable Nanette who makes sure the fort's defenders are well-fed with a hearty stew and yet doesn't question or argue with Madeleine when told NOT to come out at night, even though she wants to help. She sets an example for the other women and children. There is Louis who, though he disagrees with Madeleine at times, bends to her will even when conflicted. Little Alexander, who is scared out of his wits and honestly admits it, manages to hang on through the long nights, exhausted but courageous and determined to help in any way he can. There are also the adults who obey Madeleine's commands. Recognizing that there can only be one leader, they LET her lead. Any conflict in this area could mean the forfeit of all of their lives. They follow the chain of command, even when it would be easy to take it over themselves. We read this book for our history studies (Guesthollow's Awesome History Timeline Schedule) and learned a bit about French Canada and the dangers faced by colonists during this time period. The book also briefly mentions William of Orange, King of England and the conflict between England and France which was played out in the colonies as well. The Indians are portrayed as savages, however the Christian mission Indians turn out to be the saviors of many of the fort's captured farmers. This is not an overtly Christian book, even though it's published by Bethlehem Books. It does mention prayer as well as Madeleine finding brief comfort in her fort's chapel. It's clear that Madeleine's family are Catholic as there is mention once of thanking the "Virgin" or something along those lines. The book also portrays how things were run in New France and what steps were taken to fight the Indians in order to secure the colonist's land. It's clearly presented from the European side, with very little sympathy

towards the Indians. The book itself has 18 pen and ink illustrations that are old-fashioned and perfect accompaniments to the story. My favorite is on page 175 where it shows Madeleine resting her head on her arms on a table and sound asleep, when all she meant to do was get a quick bite to eat. The rest show pictures of things like the Indians, the colonists running into the fort, etc. While the book isn't my favorite writing style, my son found it to be engaging and looked forward my reading it out loud each night. While so many modern books have heroes with characteristics I would NOT want my son to emulate, I didn't find that to be the case in *Madeleine Takes Command*. This was a great choice for our history studies with a good dose of character training to boot. *Madeleine Takes Command* does this double duty with a heavy splash of adventure and a generous telling of history. It's a perfect book to read when studying the late 17th century and I highly recommend it for either homeschool studies, or just for your child's home library. My young, teen son rates it a very enthusiastic 5 stars.

This historical novel fills in a piece of the American history experience and Canada's background. It was a nice continuation of a book I read about Samuel de Champlain. I thoroughly enjoyed this book because it painted vivid images of what life must have been like about three hundred years ago in New France. Many parts of daily life, survival in a primitive world and what threatened their existence are found in the conversations of the characters. The main character Madeleine heroically faces problems from both external threats and taking care of the problems between her siblings especially the ones who were prejudice; she is the voice of reason. I think this book was also great because it had Christian world view. Finally reading it aloud to my mom was a helpful vocabulary study.

A well-written story of historical fiction for young readers that accurately recreates the world of 17th century New France (Canada). The heroine of the story is also very refreshing. Many books for children are heavy with a "message" which they force upon the reader through unbelievable characters and plots. Madeline, by contrast, is a true hero. She believes in her country, her family, her duty, and her God. She is afraid, but still acts. She is challenged and discouraged, but does not give up. A wonderful book.

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