

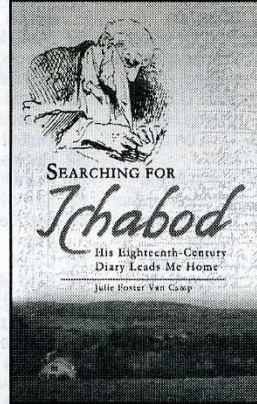
June 16, 2009

Searching for Ichabod

REVIEWED

BY HELEN SANDERS

"Searching for Ichabod" is not the usual dry genealogical tome one might expect to encounter. Immediately, the author engages us and takes us on the actual physical journey to find her long lost ancestor, a man named Ichabod Foster, and in so doing we live through her timely discoveries and her oddly helpful coincidences. Not only does Van Camp pull one into her personal story of her search through history, but she admits in the beginning of the book that she is not completely sure what is driving her to find Ichabod.



But driven she is. And nicely woven throughout the dates, the brothers and sisters, and the mothers in childbirth, is a good concrete re-telling of American history, as it applies to the territory of Ichabod's life. Traveling through Vermont and Maine, Van Camp meets individuals, and possibly several relatives and descendants, as she visits Otter Creek, finds the old marker for a 200 year old fort, and talks to librarians, county clerks, and gas station attendants.

Lopez Islander Julie Van Camp, the author of "Ichabod," commented, "You know, I realize this sounds nuts, but there were times when I was driving down the road that it actually seemed as if Ichabod was in the seat next to me."

And there are details in the book that illustrate nicely the amount of research Van Camp poured into this first work. She reports, commenting about Ichabod's journal, that 'Ichabod had used iron gall ink, made from tannin (most often extracted from galls or plant matter), vitriol (iron sulfate), gum, and water. The ingredients were inexpensive and readily available. Good iron gall ink was also stable in light.' There are literally hundreds of places in the book like this and it adds helpful detail to the narrative.

But Van Camp, while a concrete storyteller, also acknowledges throughout the book that events seemed to take on a life of their own. At one point, Van Camp is following Ichabod in his journey and she is searching for a small town named Brutus where his diary indicated he spent the night. Sure enough, Van Camp finds the small hollow of the town called Brutus on the only day of the week when the Old Brutus Historical Society is open for visitors. There, just the day before, donors had brought in a picture of the Phelps property, where Ichabod has spent the night on his journey north.

Combining mysterious moments of serendipity with a realistic and artfully written narrative, Van Camp brings her ancestor and all our ancestors to life with this book on Ichabod Foster.