



Blue Men and River Monsters: Folklore of the North

John Zimm, Michael Edmonds (Foreword)

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The north is a treasure trove of folklore. From magical creatures of the old country to legends of the mysterious and macabre, such lore is a fascinating record of the stories people held on to and the customs, foods, and cures that filled their lives. Collected in the 1930s as part of the Federal Writers' Program, a Depression-era works project, these are the stories of Norwegian and Swiss immigrants, Native American medicine men and storytellers, and pioneers with memories of the earliest days of settlement in the Old Northwest. In search of stories, legends, songs, and other scraps of traditional knowledge, researchers fanned out across Wisconsin and other states. The resulting handwritten notes, thousands of pages in length, capture history as people remembered it. Blue Men and River Monsters collects the most interesting and noteworthy of these tales, placing them alongside stunning artwork collected by the Federal Art Project in Wisconsin. Peruse these pages and discover a new history of the people and places of the old north.

Blue Men and River Monsters: Folklore of the North Details

Date : Published February 27th 2015 by Wisconsin Historical Society Press (first published October 14th 2014)

ISBN : 9780870206702

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Format : Paperback 288 pages

Genre : Folklore, History, Nonfiction, Folk Tales



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From Reader Review Blue Men and River Monsters: Folklore of the North for online ebook

Emily says

3.5 stars

I love the idea of people traveling around Wisconsin in the 30's, recording folklore and cultural traditions. This nicely organized book has something for every interest. I was initially excited about the ghost stories, but surprisingly, the stories I liked most in this book were the circus stories and the lumberjack stories.

I liked reading about old customs too. I loved how people used to have "bees" for when they wanted to work together to get something done. I had no idea people had bees for anything but quilting and spelling. It kind of makes me want to organize a Cleaning Emily's Basement Bee and see if I get any takers.

Because there's a little bit of everything, my appreciation of what I was reading went up and down the whole time. I could hear different voices as I read the different sections, and some were better storytellers than others. I was also surprised there weren't more Norwegian stories.

The wood engravings scattered throughout the book were striking, especially the work of Frank Utpatel. The artwork was a nice touch.

Travis says

I was drawn in by the title, but the book has rather little of blue men and river monsters in it. Only the first fifty pages cover myths and legends, the remaining 200+ pages being devoted to historical lore of a generally more mundane nature. I only read the first part, and even that wasn't particularly engaging. I'm sure this book could be of interest to people, especially those interested in reading about early Wisconsin folklore, but it just isn't what I feel like reading.

Shahara LeFay says

Read from library but must buy. An amazing bunch of Wisconsin lore. Definitely to interesting fiction in the next year or three!

Ben Smith says

I received this book for free from a Goodreads First Reads giveaway.

I thought that the folktales collected in the 30s were interesting, but due to the nature of the collection in can

be a bit disjointed at times.

Pat says

This is a collection of Wisconsin folklore anecdotes from Wisconsin citizens. It was originally collected as a WPA project in the 1930s. It also includes illustrations from Wisconsin artists from that time period.

I really enjoyed this book. The anecdotes varied from fantastical tales from the old world about gnomes and fairies to the more realistic tales about Wisconsin's early settlers and village life. Throw in a little bit of Native American folklore, and you have the recipe for a picture of what would make Wisconsin what it was in the 1930s. I thoroughly enjoyed this and recommend it to anyone interested in personal histories.

Wisconsin Alumni says

John Zimm '03
Editor

From the editor:

The north is a treasure trove of folklore. From magical creatures of the old country to legends of the mysterious and macabre, this lore is a record of the stories people held on to and the customs, foods, and cures that filled their lives.

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Anna says

Some sections dragged, while others were fascinating. The folklore section in particular evoked a time when people easily believed in weird, incredible things - a strong contrast to today's casual cynicism.
