

Iron Pioneers: The Marquette Trilogy: Book One

Tyler R. Tichelaar

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“Iron Pioneers,” the first volume in a trilogy by Tyler R. Tichelaar, explores the history and people of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula from 1849 to 1895. It follows the highs and lows of five founding families who live, die, laugh and cry in the growing settlement of Marquette.

A seventh-generation resident of the setting for his trilogy, Tichelaar brings an obvious love for the region to the telling of its history through a fictionalized account of the rapid growth of the community that grew up on the south shore of Lake Superior around iron ore deposits.

As Marquette evolves from a tiny village to a modern city, its residents are faced with harsh realities due to the unforgiving climate, economic downturns and emotional turmoil that were surely a reality for our ancestors who crossed an ocean and built a new life in a strange land. Spanning generations, during a time when the country was caught up in a Civil War, a president was assassinated and unity was a challenge – to say the least – “Iron Pioneers” portrays how people can come together and realize their dreams.

The author’s admiration and reverence for his ancestors’ place in American history is matched by his awe for the land they settled, as displayed in the following passage:

“The people would claim the land’s bountiful riches, but the land demanded a price in return – it protected itself with harsh winters that only the truly courageous men and women, those who admired Nature’s magnificence, were willing to face. The climate would drive many a coward away, while many a true child of Nature would find here a richness of spirit surpassing all the earth’s minerals.”

“Iron Pioneers” is full of diverse characters with various backgrounds, socio-economic status and life experience, all of which shape their response to the new circumstances to which they are forced to adapt. The pioneer life was not for everyone and Tichelaar reveals how some people thrived while others wilted under the pressures they faced as they worked towards building a prosperous life for themselves and future generations.

The first installment in this series is an interesting glimpse into the past; reminding us as we forge ahead that we all owe our ancestors a great deal. They carved out a path for us to follow and they would probably be shocked by where it has led us. Hopefully, for the most part, we have followed their examples well and continue to live their legacy as they would have wanted.