



# The Land That Never Was: Sir Gregor MacGregor and the Most Audacious Fraud in History

*David Sinclair*

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Once upon a time, in the heart of Central America, there was a country named Poyais. It was exceptionally rich in resources, civilization, and culture and was ruled by the brave and enlightened Scottish soldier, Sir Gregor MacGregor, who became its ruler after his heroic exploits in the fight for South American independence. On a cold January morning in 1823, a group of Scottish immigrants looking for a new life set sail for this tropical Eden called Poyais. The only catch was that it didn't exist. A month later the ship landed on the swamp-infested Mosquito Coast and the settlers realized that they had become the victims of one of the most elaborate hoaxes in history. The land they had been sold was nonexistent, the banknotes and guidebooks they carried with them were forgeries, their documents were worthless. Poyais was a fiction. The man responsible? Sir Gregor MacGregor. Who was this eccentric, scurrilous man? And why is he such a lovable rogue?

## The Land That Never Was: Sir Gregor MacGregor and the Most Audacious Fraud in History Details

Date : Published December 28th 2004 by Da Capo Press (first published 2003)

ISBN : 9780306814112

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Format : Paperback 384 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Biography, Biography Memoir, Cultural, Scotland

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## From Reader Review The Land That Never Was: Sir Gregor MacGregor and the Most Audacious Fraud in History for online ebook

### Tom Darrow says

Amusing story about a self-styled nobleman who tricks people into buying land in an imaginary country in Central America. I enjoyed this book for several reasons... 1) it was an interesting biography of a larger than life character. 2) it does a good job at showing the chaotic nature of the post-Napoleonic world... where a person can make up a country and people don't know any better because the maps had changed so many times 3) it shows how gullible people can be at times.

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### Geoff Wyss says

Skip the turgid Foreward. After that, great stuff.

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### Bookmarks Magazine says

Sinclair opens his book with the moment that settlers realize they've been bamboozled and abandoned. He then backtracks to MacGregor's murky pre-Poyais history, where he fabricated military successes, an aristocratic past, and his great land fraud. In retelling this colorful history, Sinclair relies primarily on the records of one of MacGregor's enemies and the swindler's own pompous lies, but documents contemporary sources as well. Critics cite the story's structure, not its writing, as its strength; the morass of details might detract readers. Still, Sinclair offers remarkable insight into one of the great--if not the greatest--land scheme in history. It is, the *San Francisco Chronicle* notes, "a tale as pungent as the spices of Poyais, if only there was a Poyais."

This is an excerpt from a review published in Bookmarks magazine.

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### Jeffrey Johnson says

interesting story but not especially well written.

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### David R. says

Sinclair breathes a lot of life into the story of a glory-starved Scotsman who fails as a mercenary and conjures up a land fraud that persisted for years. It's astonishing how gullible so many people were in the face of this huckster despite the many clear indications. Sinclair might have given a little more attention to

the reasons why MacGregor charmed his victims so well, but it is a solid work.

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### **Luiza Salazar says**

The story of the man itself is very interesting, but the author goes into details about things we reaaaally don't need to know about in an attempt to contextualize things, but it just ends up making you lose focus of the main story.

It's an ok read, but not exactly a very entertaining one

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### **Kirsten says**

The story of Poyais, the gorgeous South American country that never existed... The tale is fascinating, but Sinclair sucks a lot of the interest out of it with a pedestrian writing style. He can't seem to distinguish between what is interesting detail and what is just excess. I was left feeling that the book was interesting in spite of, rather than because of, the way it was written.

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### **Caitlin says**

It's a really great story but seriously just read the wikipedia page. Like every bit of interest in this book is way more succinctly written there.

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### **Suzanne says**

This is an easy-reading account of the great Poyais fraud, although hampered somewhat by the patchiness of the sources about McGregor and his associates.

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### **Teachers Travelers says**

An amazing story! I could not believe it actually happened!

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### **Jen says**

Oh my dear God. I can't believe I finally finished this book. I don't even know how long I've been reading this book - at least 8 months, I'd say. The story *\*should\** be interesting. A professional soldier of Scottish descent swindles hundreds of Scots and Brits into giving him money and buying land in a country that does not even exist. He even puts the ones who bought land on a ship and sends them off to this fake country in South America. It sounds fascinating. In reality, this is like reading the driest history text book ever. Endless boring accounts of military maneuvers and family history - it's like reading the begats in the Bible. The very few pages that are spent discussing the actual con are relatively interesting, but I'd say those pages are maybe

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30-40 in a 300+ page book. I'm glad I know this history of this story, but I will NEVER read this book again and I will NEVER recommend it to anyone else. I'd like a writer with an interest in story to have a go at this. As for my copy, it's going straight onto BookMooch.

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### **Mike Goldstein says**

Read this book on a rec. It's not bad by any means, but I think my ratings trend wayyyy too high on here, so "The Land That Never Was" is going to be sacrificed in the name of regaining balance.

It's definitely an interesting story, and I got to learn a decent bit about Latin American wars of independence and the wanky way in which British people participated in them. The idea of joining a war voluntarily in order to get famous and make tons of money is obviously insane and worthy of condemnation. It's also pretty foreign to the modern context, and it's pretty interesting. I had read about "filibusters" from the antebellum South recently, so this followed from that.

My disappointments here:

- 1) I love history books. This was too light for my taste and I often wished the author would expand on interesting points that he hit upon during the narrative that were tangential to MacGregor's story. That's not the kind of book this is, though.
  - 2) Way too many assumptions and gaps in knowledge. I don't want to read "You'd have to assume" any more.
  - 3) Because of the lack of documentation, the book didn't spend as much time on Poyais as I expected it to. Instead, we got a LOT of content about MacGregor's other adventures, which was interesting, but not exactly what I signed up for.
  - 4) The first 60 or so pages were just content from the various (false) pamphlets MacGregor put out. After a few pages, reading about what actually happened was a lot more interesting than reading MacGregor's lies. Especially because we know they're lies from the very beginning.
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### **krin says**

This was an informative account showing how one persuasive man with a well-written, descriptive document exploited people's greed and gullibility. Other major topics include the independence movements in Central and South America in the early 19th century and the eagerness of Europeans to help militarily and financially. Sinclair wraps up the book nicely in his analysis of how MacGregor started becoming caught up in his own fantasy towards the end.

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