THE FUR TRADE

THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS
A little 'bacca, ef its a plew a plug, an' Dupont an' Gilena, a Green River or so, an' he leaves for the Bayou Salade. Darn the white diggins while thar's buffler in the mountains.

John Hatcher, mountain man
The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings

Theme XV
Westward Expansion and the Extension of the National Boundaries to the Pacific
1830-1898

THE FUR TRADE

1960

United States Department of the Interior
Fred A. Seaton, Secretary

National Park Service
Conrad L. Wirth, Director
PREFACE

This study is one of a series being conducted by the National Park Service as a part of the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings. Because sites associated with western history have generally received less attention than those in the East, the theme "Westward Expansion and the Extension of the National Boundaries to the Pacific, 1830-1898," has been divided into a number of subthemes, one of which is the present study of the fur trade of the West.

The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings is a resumption of the Historic Sites Survey, which was begun in 1937 under the authority of the Historic Sites Act of 1935. During World War II it was necessary to suspend these studies. The Survey has now been resumed as part of the National Park Service MISSION 66 program.

When the Survey is completed, recommendations will be made to the Director of the National Park Service and to the Secretary of the Interior concerning sites which possess exceptional value in commemorating and illustrating the history of the United States. These evaluations will assist the National Park Service in preparing the National Recreation Plan, which will include sites that might be administered by the National Park Service in order to round out the historical and archeological interpretive program within the National Park System. The Survey will recommend and encourage programs of historical and archeological preservation within the National Park System and will recommend and encourage similar programs being carried out by state and local agencies.
This study of the fur trade and its sites is the work of three National Park Service historians: Ray H. Mattison, Region Two Office, Omaha; Robert M. Utley, Region Three Office, Santa Fe; and William C. Everhart, Region Four Office, San Francisco. Mr. Everhart served as coordinator for the theme study and wrote the historical narrative.

After completion, the study was presented to the Consulting Committee for the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings. The Committee consists of Dr. Waldo Leland, American Historical Association; Dr. S. K. Stevens, American Association for State and Local History; Dr. Louis Wright, Folger Library; Mr. Earl H. Reed, American Institute of Architects; Dr. Richard Howland, National Trust for Historic Preservation; Mr. Eric Gugler, American Scenic and Historical Preservation Society; Dr. J. O. Brew, Committee for the Recovery of Archeological Remains; and Mr. Frederick Johnson, Robert S. Peabody Foundation for American Archeology.

The overall Survey, as well as the theme study which follows, is under the general direction of John O. Littleton, Chief, National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, who works under the general supervision of Herbert E. Kahler, Chief Historian, Branch of History, and Daniel B. Beard, Chief, Division of Interpretation, of the National Park Service.

The work of the National Survey profits from the experience and knowledge of a considerable number of persons and organizations. Every effort is made to solicit the considered opinion of as many qualified people as possible in reaching final selection of the most significant sites. Assistance from the following is acknowledged:

Dr. William D. Aeschbacher, Superintendent, and Marvin Kiveet, Archeologist, Nebraska Historical Society, Lincoln; Maurice Frink,
Executive Secretary, State Historical Society of Colorado, Denver; Miss Lola M. Homsher, Executive Secretary, Wyoming State Historical Society, Cheyenne; Dr. A. R. Mortensen, Director, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City; Russell Reid, Superintendent, State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismarck; Will G. Robinson, Secretary, South Dakota State Historical Society, Pierre; Dr. K. Ross Toole, former Director, Historical Society of Montana, Helena; Mrs. Clara S. Beatty, Director, Nevada State Historical Society, Reno; Albert Culverwell, Historian, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, Olympia; Dr. Aubrey Neasham and Jack Dyson, Historians, California Division of Beaches and Parks, Sacramento; Dr. Carl P. Russell, Orinda, California; Thomas Vaughan, Director, Oregon Historical Society, Portland; H. J. Swinney, Director, and Dr. Merle Wells, Historian, Idaho Historical Society, Boise; and Arthur Woodward, formerly of the Los Angeles County Museum, Los Angeles, California.

The cover was prepared by artist William Berry, of the Western Museum Laboratory, National Park Service, San Francisco. Acknowledgment is made to Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, Missouri, and Scotts Bluff National Monument, Nebraska, for the use of fur trade illustrations, and to Lee Abel, also of the Western Museum Laboratory, who photographed many of these materials.
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INTRODUCTION

Two leading objects of commercial gain have given birth to wide and daring enterprise in the early history of the Americas: the precious metals of the south, and the rich peltries of the north. These two pursuits have thus in a manner been the pioneers and precursors of civilization.  

The story of the American fur trade of the West is an epic of adventure, the story of a scattered handful of fur trappers who explored the West in their far-flung quest for beaver. The span of the developed trade was less than twenty years, from the early 1820's to about 1840, but this era is as adventurous as any known in American history. The fur trappers were the legendary "mountain men," and Bernard De Voto declared this "the proudest of all the titles worn by Americans who lived their lives out beyond the settlements."  

From the early 1600's the beaver skin had been the basis of the fur trade, because of a quality unique to beaver underhair which made it the best of all furs for pelting. To supply the fashionable top hat to the dandies of London and New York, men daily risked their lives and waded the glacial mountain streams to set their traps. The nature of the fur trade--the pursuit of fur-bearing animals in the face of strenuous competition--demanded that new hunting areas be opened continuously, as the old grounds were trapped out. Inevitably, this search led trappers ever westward, to the Great Lakes region, up the Missouri River, and finally to the mountains of the West, where the fur trade reached its peak.  

2 Bernard De Voto, The Year of Decision, 1846 (Boston, 1942), 58.
Fur Trappers Rendezvous. An artist's version of life at the annual "Rocky Mountain Fair."

N. P. S. painting by Lockwood
The geographical heart of the trade was the Rocky Mountains, particularly the northern Rockies, in the region of Yellowstone Lake, the Grand Tetons, and Jackson Hole. The scenic grandeur of this area has made it today a vacation land; in the early 1800's it was an untouched, unmapped, unexplored wilderness, a region of lofty, heavily timbered mountain ranges, clear lakes, and snow-fed mountain streams. Here, in close proximity, rise the headwaters of the three great river systems of western United States— the Missouri, the Columbia, and the Colorado.

Fifty miles north of Yellowstone Lake is the Three Forks of the Missouri, and northward from the lake flows the historic Yellowstone. Southward from Jackson Lake the mighty Snake River follows its tortuous path to a juncture with the Columbia. Fifty miles southeast of Jackson Lake rises the Green River, major tributary of the Colorado. In this heartland of the fur trappers the Colorado system adjoins the Columbia, and for nearly 100 miles is not far from the Missouri system. From this strategic focal point, scene of the annual rendezvous and favorite wintering ground, the mountain men set out along the river systems in their never-ending search for beaver pelts.

The western trade is generally considered to have begun in 1806 with the return of the Lewis and Clark expedition from the Pacific. Previously, the maritime fur trade, a highly important phase of the business, had been opened in 1778 by the great British navigator, Captain James Cook, whose men traded for sea otter pelts with the Indians of the Pacific Coast. Fabulous prices received in China for the otter skins quickly brought fur ships of all nations to the Northwest. The maritime trade contributed significantly to the exploration of the Pacific coastal region;
TRANS-MISSISSIPPI TERRITORY, 1824-1840
THE AMERICAN FUR TRADE

Showing Routes, Areas &
Sites of certain Towns,
Posts and Rendezvous.

- Spanish Towns
- Hudsons Bay Posts
- Rendezvous Sites
- American Trading Posts
an American fur trader, Captain Robert Gray, in 1792 discovered the Columbia River, the legendary River of the West.

Before 1806, the limitless empire of plains, mountains, and desert, extending westward from the Great Bend of the Missouri River, was virtually unknown, unoccupied, and unexplored. Although Lewis and Clark greatly stimulated the interest of Americans in the West, they explored and reported upon only a small fraction of the enormous land mass beyond the Mississippi Valley. The actual exploration of this region was the work of the American fur trader, who roamed from the Canadian provinces on the north to the dry tablelands south of the Rio Grande. Traders forced their way into New Mexico, opening the Santa Fe Trail to American commerce, and Santa Fe became the center of the Southwest fur trade. Trappers discovered South Pass, gateway to the Far West, and were the first to take wagons beyond the Rocky Mountains. Trapping parties led by renowned mountain men were the first to enter California overland. The countless wagon trains on the Oregon trail were following the pathway of the mountain men.

It was the trapper and trader who first explored and established the routes of travel which are now, and always will be the avenues of commerce in that region. Between 1820 and 1840 they learned almost everything of importance about the geography of the West that was to be learned and acquired a better understanding of that geography than Americans as a whole acquired for at least another generation.3

The advance of the American fur traders had important political implications. Diverse nations—Spain, France, Britain, Russia, and the United States—were engaged in a war for empire, particularly in the Oregon

country, where boundaries were being debated by international conventions at the same time the disputed ground was being explored and exploited by trappers. The planting of Astoria in 1811 at the mouth of the Columbia established an American claim to the Northwest, and in later years the Hudson's Bay Company made a determined effort to thwart the United States claim to Oregon through the expansion of its own trapping operations. "Imperial Britain" during the fur trade era was the Hudson's Bay Company, and throughout the period "The British fur trade determined the conditions of British diplomacy with regard to Western America." ¹

The fur trade was carried on by true frontiersmen, weathered sons of Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia, who were in appearance indistinguishable from the Indian whose life they adopted. The men who sat around the flickering campfire under the towering peaks of the Tetons, many months' travel from the nearest outpost of civilization, yarning in their own colorful language of scalps the Blackfeet had lifted along the Yellowstone, of starving times along the Cache la Poudre, or of times of plenty on the Popo Agie, were members of a memorable fraternity.

They must have possessed some mysterious longings, preferring solitude and danger to the safety and security of the settlements. Perhaps they were not unmoved by the indescribable beauty of a land which had not known the despoiling hand of civilization—a land of high-walled canyons, virgin forests, cool, plunging streams, and the winesap air of the high mountain valleys. Undoubtedly everyone who reads of the early West longs to have seen it as it once was at the time the fur trappers first came

¹ John S. Galbraith, The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869 (Berkeley, 1957), 178.
Hazard of the Trade. Surprised by an Indian night attack, the trapper reaches for his rifle. Interruptions such as this explain why few mountain men survived more than a few years in the trade.

N. P. S. painting by Lockwood
up the Missouri to the Great Shining Mountains.

Their feats are now part of the legend of the West, and their names are part of American folklore—Jim Bridger, John Colter, Kit Carson, and Jedediah Smith. There were also Hugh Glass, who, mangled by a grizzly which tore away chunks of flesh and fed them to her cubs and deserted by his comrades, crawled a hundred miles on hands and knees to safety; Edward Rose, a man with nine lives, as ferocious in battle as the Indians he lived with; and Jim Beckwourth, influential chieftan of the Crow nation, whose precious amulet—a perforated bullet and two large beads worn about the neck—gave him no protection against poison administered by his own people.

The mountain men have been called a reckless breed of men. Acutely sensitive to the wilderness about them, able to read the weather, the track of moccasins, the sign of beaver, or the trace of Indian travois, they ranged for thousands of miles, unerringly arriving each year at the place appointed for the rendezvous. To survive, they developed a practiced cunning, learning to excel the Indian in every one of his wilderness skills, and to live among conditions which broke the spirit of later emigrants. They were all rawhide and mountain wisdom, but they were also brutal, at times half-savage, knowing the agonies of thirst and starvation, the dread of the hunted, the vengeance of the hunter. In warfare, they were as ruthless and treacherous as their enemies, the Blackfeet. "The scalp which decorated the Indian's coup-stick also hung from the trapper's belt, and for the same reason, as a badge of a warrior's courage."^5

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The trapper was both discoverer and explorer of the greater part of the trans-Mississippi West, and the fur trade and the exploration of Western America went hand in hand. The scattered few expeditions sent out by governments—headed by Spaniards such as Narvaez and Coronado, Americans such as Pike, Long, and Lewis and Clark—were the exceptions. Fremont gained fame as the "Pathfinder," yet every mile he traveled and every pass he marked had long since been trod by the mountain men. The most recent study of the role of the Army in the exploration of the West begins with the Fremont expedition of 1842. By then the fur trade era had ended.

It seemed to the early trappers that the supply of beaver was inexhaustible; each year they discovered new streams, and at rendezvous time furs were traded in great quantity. Yet, less than ten years after Ashley took his first band of trappers to the mountains in 1822, signs of the decline were obvious. No beaver stream in all the West had escaped the trap of the mountain men. Bitter rivalry for profits between the fur companies and the increasing number of trappers who entered the trade each year resulted in the near extinction of the beaver. When at the same time silk replaced beaver in the making of hats, the trade was finished.

Trapper, trader, hunter, explorer, Indian fighter, the mountain man was a new type of frontiersman. He has had no equal. Unlike the miner, the cattleman, or the pioneer farmer, he had no successor. When he quit the mountains, he left no trace of his presence.

But in his few allotted years the trapper set his impress forever upon the map of North America and the fate of the United States. He affected the destiny of nations; he changed the future of a continent; he bequeathed to later generations of Americans a tradition of heroic exploration comparable to that of the seaman of Elizabeth or the conquistadores of Spain.6

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6 Robert Glass Cleland, This Reckless Breed of Men (New York, 1952), 7.
The first export from the Pilgrim colony on Massachusetts Bay included a cargo of furs. From that time on the fur trade was in the vanguard of the western movement toward the Pacific. The fur trade brought forth many of the great cities of the continent. Montreal was literally built upon furs, New York was first a trading post, and Detroit and St. Louis were founded in the trade. Although an important enterprise of the British colonies along the Atlantic Coast, it was in Canada, under British and French stimulus, that the fur trade early achieved its importance, and here the traffic in pelts proved the most lucrative of all colonial enterprises. Searching for prime pelts, as well as souls, French traders and black-robed fathers by the end of the seventeenth century had penetrated the heart of the continent.

A vicious, cutthroat competition between British and French fur companies was ended when the French were ousted from North America by the Treaty of Paris in 1763. Although the British thenceforth dominated the trade, actual field operations were continued by French Canadians who had long since perfected the techniques of the wilderness trade.

To the early French should go the credit for being the first to catch the vision of the fur trade in America. It was as fur traders that Champlain and company explored the region of the Great Lakes; it was the lure of the beaver that made possible the exploration of the Mississippi by Joliet, Marquette, and La Salle, and the discovery of the Black Hills by La Verendrye. Before the fall of New France a chain of trading posts encircled the inland empire.
The French woodsman was uniquely fitted for the life of the trapper. Life in the wilds drew him from the settlements to join with the Indians in the search for beaver streams. The Indian ways were his ways; he took an Indian wife and reared his children in the Indian lodges. These rovers of the forest were a new type of pioneer, speaking two tongues, equally careless of danger or hardship, disdainful of any life but that of the frontier. The governor might ban his commerce, the priest openly deplored his pagan ways, but the coureur de bois was indifferent. To all Americans who went up the Missouri in search of the beaver, including Lewis and Clark, the French voyageur was indispensable. He was essentially an earlier likeness of the American mountain man.

British fur trade activities in the West, before the coming of the Americans, were carried on by two companies. In 1670 Charles II had granted a charter to a group known as the "Governor and Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Baye," known since as the Hudson's Bay Company. Somewhat irreverently, rival trappers often translated the well-known initials H.B.C., "Here Before Christ." The charter gave the Company ownership, the obligation of government, and the monopoly of trade rights over the vast area known as Rupert's Land, roughly all the land drained by waters emptying into Hudson's Bay. Eventually the Company ruled an area of more than 3,000,000 square miles, nearly one-fourth of the North American continent.

About the time of the American Revolution, the Company's rivals were not French, but a group of Montreal merchants, many of Scottish blood, who had joined into a simple partnership, calling themselves the North West Company. The Montreal organization was Canadian and colonial, whereas the
Down River to St. Louis. In such fashion furs gathered in the Rockies were floated down the Missouri to St. Louis, emporium of the fur trade.

N. P. S. painting by Lockwood
Hudson's Bay Company was English and had its roots in London. The former depended in the field upon the skilled French-Canadian voyageurs; many of the partners wintered in the great white land while commanding the trappers in the field; humble clerks needed only initiative and courage to become full-fledged partners. The Hudson's Bay Company was much more autocratic, imported its officials from the home country, and hired Orkney men and Iroquois Indians for trapping work. Owing in part to the tendency of the North West Company to conduct its trade in the spirit of Celtic chieftans at war, it proved a rugged competitor. The rivalry between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company produced one of the most brilliant feats of exploration of the age, one which led directly to American activity in the fur trade of the West.

Alexander Mackenzie, a founder and partner of the North West Company, in 1793 became the first white man to cross the North American continent north of Mexico, when he led a small party over the Canadian Rockies to the Pacific Ocean. From Mackenzie's voyage came his blueprint for British imperial expansion, published in 1801, in which he advised opening an overland route to the Pacific for the purposes of commerce, thereby binding the northern continent together under British commercial control.

Mackenzie argued that the fur trade could serve as the agent through which Britain could control the new empire, and ended his book with this challenge:

By opening this intercourse between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and forming regular establishments through the interior and at both extremes . . . the entire command of the fur trade
of North America might be obtained from 48° North to the pole . . . . Such would be the field for commercial enterprise and incalculable would be the produce of it.1

Many authorities believe Mackenzie's challenge had considerable influence upon the United States's interest in the future of the Far West. Coming to the attention of Jefferson, "the most astute geopolitical thinker of his time,"2 the volume made the President even more acutely aware of the Pacific Northwest's importance to the future destiny of the American Republic and of the inherent danger in the British advance toward the mouth of the Columbia River. The result was the Lewis and Clark expedition . . . ."3


3 Ross Cox, The Columbia River (Norman, 1957), xxiii.
No Feeding the Bears, Please. From the time of Lewis and Clark (both of whom were chased by grizzlies and narrowly escaped death), men assumed tales of savage attacks by grizzlies were exaggerated. They weren't. The animal invariably lived up to its scientific name, URSUS HORRIBLIS.

N. P. S. sketch by Macy
Jefferson's purpose in sending out the expedition, the writer flatly declares that President Jefferson's chief concern was the extension of the fur trade. "Nor was that exploration before, or after, the [Louisiana] purchase designed as a scientific exploring expedition, but rather that it was an undertaking to develop the fur trade along the Missouri in foreign territory."

Thomas Jefferson, who conceived the Lewis and Clark expedition, was a man of remarkable vision in many fields and fully comprehended the significance of the fur trade to the westward expansion of the United States. The activities of the aggressive North West Company convinced Jefferson that prompt American entry into the field was an absolute necessity to prevent ultimate British possession of the furs and permanent possession of the land on the basis of prior exploration and ultimate settlement.

In his message to Congress, requesting funds to launch the expedition, Jefferson indicated the primary purpose was to investigate a commercial opportunity of very great importance to the United States. It was his hope that a water route might be discovered, perhaps with a single portage at the mountains, which would provide easy communication between St. Louis and the mouth of the Columbia River and effectively take the fur trade away from the British.

That Meriwether Lewis considered the information he had obtained concerning the opportunities in the fur trade to be of exceptional importance is revealed in his report to Jefferson, written the day the expedition arrived back in St. Louis. In this initial summary of his findings he devoted more space to the fur trade potentialities of the country he had explored than to any other topic. Of the wealth in furs which he had seen,

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Lewis made the following comment:

That portion of the Continent watered by the Missouri and all its branches from the Cheyenne upwards is richer in beaver and Otter than any country on earth particularly that proportion of it's subsidiary streams lying within the Rocky Mountains . . . .

The news brought by Lewis and Clark had an impact upon followers of the fur trade similar to the effect which later gold discoveries had upon those who followed the mining frontier. Learning of the favorable conditions reported by the expedition—mountain streams teeming with beaver, an inexhaustible supply of game, friendly natives, and an all-water route to the rich trapping grounds—adventurous fur traders flocked into St. Louis during the winter of 1806-07, laden with whiskey and trading goods, impatiently waiting for the ice to break in the Missouri. Within a year more than 100 men were licensed to trade with the Indians along the Missouri, and probably an equal number were carrying on the trade illegally.

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The first man to envision the enormous possibilities of the Upper Missouri, and who quickly grasped the import of the information brought back by Lewis and Clark, was Manuel Lisa. A Spanish trader who had arrived in St. Louis during the last decade of the 1700's, Lisa possessed the shrewdest mind in the business and was the most successful bourgeois in the early period of the trade, "a fair representative of the Spaniard in the days of Cortes." Only six months after the return of Lewis and Clark, Lisa headed a party of forty-odd trappers which departed from St. Louis in the spring of 1807 on the 2,000-mile journey upriver. At the mouth of the Big Horn River Lisa built Fort Manuel, the first post of the mountain trade. Lisa's venture was an historic one,

the real forerunner of all subsequent fur trading expeditions within the Upper Missouri area. Lewis and Clark were the trail makers, Lisa the trade maker. The former laid the foundation of scientific geographic exploration of the far West, the latter, the foundation of a great industry in that same region, which, profiting by the information brought out by the first explorers, in turn contributed more than any other single agency to the prosecution of the work of discovery begun by them.\footnote{1}{Chittenden, \textit{The American Fur Trade}, I, 113.}

Lisa's men fanned out from Fort Manuel during the winter of 1807-08, traveling widely among the Indian tribes of the northern Rockies, trapping, hunting, and trading. They were the first of the American fur trappers of the West, and among them were four members of the Lewis and Clark expedition, two of whom, George Drouillard and John Colter, deserve\footnote{2}{Harrison C. Dale, ed., \textit{The Ashley-Smith Explorations and the Discovery of a Central Route to the Pacific, 1822-1829} (Cleveland, 1918), 26.}
special mention. Drouillard, hunter, woodsman, Indian fighter almost without equal, two years later was ambushed at Three Forks by the Blackfeet. Before the Indians killed him and took his scalp he fought back with such raging fury that his struggle became a part of the legend of the trade.

Few men in the mountain trade surpassed the feats of Colter, who experienced deeds and adventures in a wilderness country that would have enriched literature had there been anyone to write them down. Returning to St. Louis, after more than two years' absence, the Lewis and Clark party met two trappers, the first of many to come, following the trace of Lewis and Clark up the Missouri. The two trappers needed a guide; John Colter turned his back on civilization and led them back into the mountains.

The following spring he set out alone in a dugout down the Missouri River and met Lisa's party coming upstream. Again Colter turned back into the unknown—and this time into legend. Lisa sent him from Fort Manuel to find the surrounding Indians and bring them in to trade. Colter's journey was so remarkable as to defy belief. Carrying a thirty-pound pack, along with his rifle, ammunition and supplies, and traveling alone, Colter went upwards of 500 miles to the Crow nation and distinguished himself in a battle with the Blackfeet in which he was severely wounded in the leg. On his return he passed through the present Yellowstone National Park. His precise route has ever been disputed, but the leading authority of the fur trade termed his unsurpassed adventure "among the most celebrated performances in the history of American exploration."³

³Chittenden, The American Fur Trade, II, 717.
Historic Three Forks. Deep in the Blackfeet country of present Montana, the forks of the Missouri was a legendary site of the trade, first visited by Lewis and Clark in 1805.

N. P. S. photograph, 1958
Colter's most astounding exploit occurred the following spring, when Lisa dispatched him again to seek the Blackfeet. Accompanied by Potts, who had also been with Lewis and Clark, Colter reached the Three Forks of the Missouri, where the two men were jumped by a large war party of Blackfeet. Potts was killed, but Colter was stripped naked and led out onto the plain and ordered to save himself if he could. The fleetest Indians of the tribe started in pursuit. Running barefoot over cactus, running until blood gushed from his nostrils down over his chest, he distanced all his pursuers but one, then turned and killed the Indian with his own spear. His pursuers halted a moment around their dead companion, enabling Colter to reach the river. He dived into the icy water and took refuge under a matted raft of snags. The screeching Indians, "like so many devils," searched the banks and jumped upon the very logs under which he was hidden.

Colter remained under the raft until nightfall, when he swam down the river beyond sound of the Indians. Calmly taking his bearings by the stars, he headed back for Lisa's fort. Naked, without arms or food, his bare feet slashed and torn by cactus, he walked for seven days and nights—and reached the fort.  

Colter's career in the mountains, although more spectacular than most, benefited from early publicity and from his tales of the thermal phenomena of the Yellowstone country, termed by a disbelieving public, "Colter's Hell." The point is that most mountain men had experiences

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4 This remarkable account appears in John Bradbury, Travels in the Interior of America (Liverpool, 1819), The Early Western Travel Series, Reuben Thwaites, ed., vol. V, 44-7.
similar to those of Colter. It was part of the life.

Lisa returned to St. Louis in 1808 with a wealth in furs and a realization that only large companies could trade successfully in the northern Rockies, because the time and distance involved in reaching the trapping field required more capital than individual traders could command. He promptly began formation of an organization which took the name St. Louis Missouri Fur Company. Included among the backers were such men as Pierre and Auguste Chouteau, William Clark, and Andrew Henry. Lisa sought by heavier capitalization to revolutionize the trade; the earlier ventures had lacked stability and permanence. He hoped to erect a series of well-fortified posts or factories at strategic locations along the Upper Missouri, which would protect his men and supplies and serve as permanent headquarters for the trapping parties.

The new company began its operation in 1809, establishing a post at the Gros Ventre villages. The following year previous difficulties were disregarded, and a trading post was erected at Three Forks, deep in the heart of the Blackfeet country. The implacable Blackfeet relentlessly harried the fort, cutting off and killing the trapping parties which were sent out. Casualties were so heavy the fort was ordered abandoned.

One of the company stockholders, Major Henry, objected to withdrawing from the rich beaver country, and in the fall of 1810 with a small party of trappers he proceeded up the Madison fork of the Missouri. Henry crossed the Continental Divide, the first American to do so since Lewis and Clark, and raised a few log houses on a tributary of the Snake River. Henry's Fort was the first American trading post west of the Rocky Mountains.
Henry's Fort. The first American fur trading post west of the Rockies was established at this site on Henry's Fork of the Snake River, within sight of the Teton range.
But game was scarce, trappers had indifferent success, and the winter was severe. In the spring of 1811 the party scattered, most returning to St. Louis. A few preferred to remain and make their way in the mountains. They were almost the first of the mountain men, electing to remain in the wilderness and to take their chances with the hazards encountered.

The Missouri Fur Company abandoned its effort to establish trading posts in the interior. In later years the company reorganized several times but largely restricted its operation to the lower Missouri region. The firm, sometimes called "Manuel Lisa and Company," continued to dominate the St. Louis trade for many years. In the meantime, a new company entered the fur trade of the West, led by the man destined to one day control the trade—John Jacob Astor.
The news brought back by Lewis and Clark stimulated the grandiose schemes of a financial genius whose commercial alliances bound him as closely to St. Petersburg and Canton as to St. Louis or Montreal. Astor was an immigrant from Germany who quickly achieved fame and fortune. He had learned of the financial returns in the fur trade from a shipboard acquaintance. Entering the business, as a trading factor, rather than as a trapper or a field man, Astor exhibited an amazingly keen grasp of the industry and soon extended his operations into the area of the Great Lakes and Mississippi Valley, trading with the North West Company and relying upon Canadian voyageurs and trappers to supply him with furs.

The New York merchant prince was considerably irked by knowledge that powerful British interests, especially the North West Company, had a virtual monopoly over the trade, not only beyond the border of the United States but within her boundaries as well. Perhaps what hurt even more was that Astor was forced to buy his furs in Montreal at shocking prices. Astor much preferred a monopoly under his own direction, "which, he hoped, would bring the whole of the United States fur-trading territory under his control within four or five years, even as far west as the Pacific Ocean."¹

Astor's enterprise was conceived on an enormous scale for the times. In 1808 he received a charter from the New York legislature, capitalizing his newly formed American Fur Company at one million dollars. He formed a subsidiary, the Pacific Fur Company, to operate in the Oregon

Preparing Beaver Plews. Willow frames of this type were the traditional means of stretching and drying the beaver skins.

N. P. S. sketch by Mulcahy
country, and he associated with him in the venture men who were to become famous in the trade—Alexander McKay, Donald McKenzie, Wilson Price Hunt, Robert Stuart, and others. Adept in the ways of continental and world finance, Astor obtained the endorsement of President Jefferson, who hoped that Astor might prove the instrument for obtaining "exclusive possession" of the Indian commerce to the United States. Astor believed even more devoutly than Jefferson in the doctrine of exclusive possession. His biographer notes, "It was his purpose to concentrate the Western fur trade in the hands of only such American citizens as had been born in Waldorf, Germany, in 1763 and had arrived from London in the spring of 1784."

Astor's plan agreed in the main with that recommended by Meriwether Lewis. He proposed to establish a line of interior trading posts along the Missouri and Columbia Rivers, which would afford a distinct advantage over the Canadian traders by providing a more direct line of communication between the source of supply and the trading country. At the mouth of the Columbia Astor determined to establish his chief trading house, to be supplied by ship from New York. Here the furs would be collected from the interior, ultimately to be disposed of in the China trade. Astor intended also to develop a coastwise trade with Russian posts to the north.

Astor began his venture by sending out two expeditions, one by land and one by sea. His ship, the Tonquin, sailed from New York in September, 1810, under command of an unimaginative Yankee whose stubbornness and shortsightedness was ultimately to cost him his ship and his life. After a voyage marked by delay and misadventure, the Tonquin in March, 1811, crossed the Columbia River bar. Astoria was founded almost five years to the day after Lewis and Clark left Fort Clatsop, only a few miles distant.
A party of men was landed to construct the fort on the south side of the bay, and the Tonquin proceeded northward to meet its melancholy fate at the hands of the Nootka Sound Indians.

The "Overland" Astorians departed from St. Louis in the spring of 1811, under command of Wilson Price Hunt, a man with little experience on the frontier but with many years of service in the fur trade houses of St. Louis. The voyage was marked by needless meandering and considerable suffering. Hunt had intended to follow the Lewis and Clark route up the Missouri, but the hostility of the Blackfeet forced him to leave the river, acquire horses, and proceed overland, much of the way through unexplored country, crossing the Continental Divide and reaching Henry's Fort in October.

Hunt had quelled previous demands that the party turn the horses loose and return to the water route; while camped at Henry's Fort he gave in. Within ten days 15 canoes were built and loaded, and the Astorians embarked upon the rapid, treacherous current of the Snake River. After a fearful passage, during which a number of the canoes were lost, the party was forced to leave the river, now without horses or means of carrying their supplies and food. Pushing on against lamentable difficulties the party, divided into two sections, reached Astoria in January and February of 1812, making the second crossing of the North American continent by Americans.

The beginnings at Astoria were hopeful; in May of 1812 a supply ship arrived from New York with additional men and equipment. At this time an event occurred which emphasized that the planting of a tiny fur trading post 2,000 miles from civilization was not an insignificant, isolated
event, but a highly important phase of the war for empire in the Northwest.

The North West Company had been determinedly enlarging its system of trading houses in the Pacific West. The Nor'Westers knew almost as soon, perhaps sooner than the American Government, that Lewis and Clark had reached the Pacific. "Above all they wanted to know whether the Americans would lay claim to the rich fur trade of the Upper Missouri River and the territory west of the Rockies." Moving to secure footholds against the expanding American commercial interests, the Nor'Westers by 1809 had established posts in present-day Montana and Idaho, as well as others north of the present international boundary, and were strongly entrenching themselves in the Columbia basin.

Much of this pioneering work had been done by the great explorer, mapmaker, and fur trader, David Thompson. Learning of the plans of Astor, Thompson attempted to reach the mouth of the Columbia first and establish a trading post. But when Thompson floated down the estuary in July, 1811, he found the American flag already floating from the post flagpole. The North West Company had failed by four months to outflank the Pacific Fur Company, which was making a strong bid for a major share of the Oregon fur trade, and perhaps for Oregon itself.

The Astoria venture was doomed, however, by the War of 1812. When the Astorians learned that a British man-of-war was expected shortly to capture the post as a prize of war, they decided to sell out to the North West Company. The sale in October, 1813, ended the career of Astoria and for a time halted Astor's thrust to the West.

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In the spring of 1812 Robert Stuart left Astoria for the hazardous trek back to St. Louis. This journey of the "returning" Astorians is one of the milestones of American exploration. Stuart either used, or came extremely close to South Pass, "the most important geographic gateway in all western North America."\(^3\) Whether Stuart "discovered" South Pass, or whether that honor should go to a party of Ashley’s trappers in 1824 is still an unresolved question. Regardless, credit goes to the fur trapping fraternity.

But the accomplishments of the Americans at Astoria were not insignificant. Trapping parties ranged far into the interior and brought out substantial quantities of pelts. Trading posts were established as far east as the Continental Divide and northward into Canada. For a time it seemed the Astorians might get the upper hand; facing this strong challenge, the Nor'Westers increased the number of their own posts. But the war halted Astor's scheme for an empire in Oregon. Chittenden believed that had the Astoria enterprise succeeded, "the course of empire on the American continent would have been altogether different... and no part of the Pacific coast line would now belong to Great Britain."\(^4\)

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THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN FUR COMPANY

On March 20, 1822, the following announcement appeared in the St. Louis Missouri Republican:

To enterprising young men. The subscriber wishes to engage one hundred young men to ascend the Missouri river to its source, there to be employed for one, two, or three years. For particulars enquire of Major Andrew Henry, near the lead mines in the county of Washington, who will ascend with, and command, the party; or of the subscriber near St. Louis.

(Signed) William H. Ashley

This simple advertisement, one of the most significant incidents of the fur trade, announced the opening of a new era. What had gone before was prologue. Beginning with Ashley's first venture into the Rocky Mountains in 1822, the most important phase of the trade was begun. New and ambitious men entered the trade, considerable capital was invested, and bold schemes of exploration were planned.

Many factors contributed to the quickening of interest in the fur trade and the opening of the interior at this time. Still determined to control the western fur trade, Astor in 1822 established a Western Department in St. Louis, preparatory to expanding his operations into the Upper Missouri. The Hudson's Bay Company had absorbed the vigorous North

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1 The firm established by Ashley and continued by others, is generally referred to as the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, although this title—the greatest name in the fur trade of the West—was not officially used until late in the game. Ashley sold out to Smith, Jackson, and Sublette, who sold out to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, headed by Bridger, Sublette, Fitzpatrick, Fraeb, and Gervais.

2 Chittenden, American Fur Trade, I, 262.
Heading for Green River. William H. Jackson depicted the heavily laden supply caravan leaving St. Louis for the annual rendezvous.
West Company the previous year, and immediately began preparations to further expand its activities into the Rocky Mountains. In the Lower Missouri, smaller organizations such as the Missouri Fur Company and The Columbia Fur Company were scouring the country for furs.

One action which helped the St. Louis traders was the abolition of the Government trading posts, or factories, which had been established in 1796 by President Washington to combat British competition and to win the friendship of Indian tribes by furnishing good merchandise at fair prices. From the first, the free traders, who wanted the lucrative trade for themselves, had fought and evaded the system. The influence of such powerful figures as John Jacob Astor helped decide Congress in 1822 to refuse further appropriations for the factories. They closed soon afterwards, removing the last barrier to the free operations of fur companies.

Into this competitive struggle came William Ashley, Lieutenant Governor of Missouri, one of the most successful of the native traders, who was responsible for the opening of the great central heartland of the West and who revolutionized the conduct of the trade. Like many Virginians, he was a militia officer and dabbled in politics; a successful career as a St. Louis merchant gave him the capital to enter the fur trade. Andrew Henry, who had led the first American trappers across the Rockies in 1811, joined him in the bold enterprise and served as field captain.

In the spring of 1822 Ashley's first company of trappers, under Henry's command, left St. Louis for the Rocky Mountains. It was the most notable company of frontiersmen to strike for the interior since Lewis and Clark, and the collective exploits of these mountain
men have not been surpassed in the history of the West. In this party, and in that which Ashley sent out the following year, were most of the men who became the leaders in the trade: young Thomas Fitzpatrick, who received from the Indians his title of "Broken Hand"; William Sublette, of the famous family of trappers, called "Cut Face"—probably as a result of a scrape with the Indians; the unmatched explorer, Jedediah Smith; Jim Bridger, who knew the face of the West as well as any living man; along with Etienne Provost, James Clyman, and Hugh Glass. These, and the many more equally skilled but lesser known mountain men, constituted "the most significant group of continental explorers ever brought together." DeVoto holds their wilderness travels second only to those of Lewis and Clark in all the annals of America.

The first year was a difficult time. Along the Missouri one of the two large keelboats was snagged and lost, together with $10,000 worth of supplies. Horses which had been purchased for later use were run off by the Assiniboines. The attempt to reach the Three Forks of the Missouri had to be abandoned; the company halted at the mouth of the Yellowstone and erected a fort. From this base trapping operations were carried out, despite the ominous hostility of the Indians.

The following year, in 1823, Ashley himself led a company of reinforcements up the Missouri in two keelboats, the Rocky Mountains

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3 Dale, The Ashley-Smith Explorations, 84.

4 Year of Decision, 54.
Ashley reached the Arikara villages, a well-known landmark on the Missouri. The two villages contained about 600 warriors, who were becoming increasingly hostile to the passage of trapping parties. Several groups of trappers had been attacked in previous months. Although Ashley was seemingly welcomed by the Arikaras, his party was unexpectedly attacked during trading operations.

Ashley's battle with the Arikaras in June, 1823, was one of the most important of the engagements between Indians and trappers during the fur trade era. A part of his force was caught on the beach and nearly wiped out before the hard-pressed survivors managed to swim to the keelboats through a hail of arrows. Ashley retreated down river, having suffered heavy casualties--some 25 men killed and wounded.

In response to Ashley's request for aid, Colonel Henry Leavenworth at Fort Atkinson launched the first major Indian campaign on the Upper Missouri. A large force of soldiers, trappers, and Sioux allies attacked the Arikara villages, supported by artillery. The fighting could hardly be called spirited, since losses were almost non-existent; the only result was a series of charges and countercharges, including one that Leavenworth's campaign was "a disgrace to national arms."  

5 Sunder believes the 1823 party was not so distinguished as that of 1822, the former containing a goodly number of rejects from the "grog shops and other sinks of degradation" in St. Louis. "Falstaff's Battalion," according to a member of the party, was somewhat "genteel in comparison." John E. Sunder, Bill Sublette, Mountain Man (Norman, 1959), 34.

6 Ibid., 45.
TRADING POSTS OF THE FAR WEST

FT. QUAPPELLE
FT. LEWIS
FT. MANDAN
ASHLEY-HENRY POST
CLARK
LINDA VILLAGE
FT. SARPY
ASHER-HENRY POST
CLARK
FT. UNION
PHIPPS POST
FT. LISA
FT. MANDAN
CLARK
SCOTTS BLUFF
CHIMNEY ROCK
BELLEVUE POST
FT. LISA
BELLEVUE POST
FT. ST. VRAIN
FT. LUPTON
SANTA FE
BENTS FORT
SANTA FE
ST. LOUIS
LELAND
WASHINGTON
GREEN BAY
LAKE MICHIGAN
LAKE SUPERIOR

LEGEND
• TRADING POSTS
• LANDMARKS
• TRAILS
Far up river the field command under Henry was attacked by Blackfeet near Great Falls at almost the same time Ashley was engaged by the Arikaras. Henry lost a number of men; the company under Ashley was not able to proceed to the interior until early fall. So far the Missouri had proved a dangerous and unprofitable hunting ground. Losses in men and goods had been enormous.

But Ashley's trappers now began the series of explorations for beaver grounds which brought fortune to Ashley and established the fame of the mountain men. A party of trappers, including Smith and Fitzpatrick, crossed South Pass in the spring of 1824 and descended to the valley of the Green River, west of the Continental Divide. This newly discovered region was to become the center of the fur trade country, for it was fabulously rich in beaver.

Ashley, in St. Louis, received the stirring news of the discovery of new trapping grounds. He immediately led another party to the Rockies, which he crossed in mid-winter, reaching the Green River in April, 1825. From the assembled trappers he received reports of their far-flung quest for beaver pelts through a range of wilderness most of which was previously unknown to white men. The beaver supply seemed inexhaustible.

Ashley, who was responsible for many major changes in fur trade practices, was soon faced with the necessity of utilizing new methods, if the newly discovered but widely scattered beaver grounds were to be exploited. The traditional method had been to establish fortified trading posts, to which Indians and company trappers brought their furs. This system was unsuited to the new conditions. Returns from the Indians were
uncertain, for the natives often showed little inclination to wade icy streams "in the bowels of the earth, to satisfy the avarice of the whites."

Permanent posts were troublesome; they inevitably aroused resentment among the Indians and invited attack, especially those deep in the interior.

A new system was devised by Ashley to collect furs and supply his trappers. Instead of carrying his supplies by keelboat up the Missouri, Ashley sent his merchandise by packhorse caravan to a rendezvous site previously agreed upon. Here the trappers gathered each summer to sell their furs to the company and purchase supplies and trading goods. The rendezvous became the established system of the trade.

The first rendezvous was held on Henry's Fork of the Green River soon after Ashley's arrival. In a single day of hectic trading, Ashley exhausted his supplies. The furs which he purchased brought a fortune in St. Louis. The following season was equally successful, enabling Ashley to leave the mountains for good. In the space of a few years Ashley's trappers brought in some 500 packs of beaver, worth a quarter of a million dollars, but Ashley was one of the very few to become rich in the trade.
Ashley had other interests than the fur trade, and in 1826 he made his last trip to the mountains. At the rendezvous in Cache Valley that summer, he sold his interests to three of his young trappers, Smith, Sublette, and David E. Jackson. Ashley was newly married. Perhaps no other reason need be advanced to explain his determination to leave the mountains for the pleasures of civilization. But undoubtedly so shrewd a businessman as Ashley recognized the inevitable decline of the trade which would follow increasing competition for pelts.

By about 1825 the operations of the fur traders had carried their domain from the Rio Grande through the valley of the Great Salt Lake, to the Snake and Columbia Rivers. During the next few years, explorations by trappers carried them to the lower Colorado, to the coast of California, and north into Oregon. Most of the forays were by American traders, many from their southwestern headquarters in Santa Fe, but the brigades of the Hudson's Bay Company were also active. The "Great Company" partisans explored much of the northern area of the Great Basin, trapped the beaver streams of California, and even penetrated to the Gulf of California.

In this brief survey of the fur trade, it is not possible even to touch upon the numberless explorations carried out by trappers in the 1820's to every part of the country beyond the mountains.¹

¹Many of these explorations will be included in a separate report of the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings entitled "Great Explorers of the West."
Etienne Provost Entering Utah Valley. Provost, an early trapper, was one of the first to explore the Great Basin region.

Courtesy, Utah Historical Society
Each is well worthy of a book, and many have been so treated. Perhaps an idea of the magnitude of those journeys, known and unknown, the sufferings and hardships endured, the magnificent ability of the mountain men to track their way unerringly through the unknown, can be conveyed by examining the career of Jedediah Strong Smith.

Smith was one of the most unusual men in the Rocky Mountain fur trade. Only 23 years old when he joined Ashley's company in the historic expedition of 1822, Smith earned a partnership in four years. It is convincingly argued by his biographer that during the brief five years between 1826 and his death in 1831, Smith was the outstanding field man in the fur trade.²

Much is made of Smith's deeply religious nature, of the fact that he carried a Bible in his pack and was as faithful in prayers as a Baptist Sunday school teacher. Obviously, he was an unusual mountain man. He also mastered the techniques of trapping, of Indian warfare, and of survival in the wilderness; among men of courage and endurance, he was quickly accepted as a leader. Like all his companions, he lived daily with danger. Once he was seized and torn from his saddle by a grizzly bear; a companion who tried to repair the wounds found the bear had taken nearly all his head in his capacious mouth close to his left eye on one side and close to his right ear on the other and laid the skull bare to near the crown of the head leaving a white streak where his teeth passed one of his ears was torn from his head out to the outer rim after stitching all the other wounds in

²Dale Morgan, Jedediah Strong Smith and the Opening of the West (New York, 1953).
best way I was capbl . . . I put in my needle stitching it [the ear] through and through and over and over laying the lacerated parts together as nice as I could . . . .

With three years of such experiences behind him, Smith was a veteran of the profession when he led a company of 18 adventurers from the Bear River rendezvous in August, 1826, to quest westward in search of new hunting grounds. Perhaps he intended also to seek a route to the Pacific where a place of deposit might be discovered for the furs taken west of the Rocky Mountains. At that time California was but vaguely known through reports of New England sea otter hunters, whalers, and hide and tallow traders.

The expedition passed along the east side of Great Salt Lake and thence southward along the Virgin River, through a region so dry and desolate and barren of game that the men were forced to eat the leathery meat of their dying horses, and all suffered the agonies of thirst in the desert. Following the Colorado River for some distance, the party turned westward across the Mojave Desert. After traversing this grueling wasteland, Smith crossed the San Bernardino Mountains east of Cajon Pass and entered the Mexican province of California. His was the first party of white men to reach California overland.

In November the party arrived on the coast at San Gabriel Mission. Their arrival was an historic event, although unrecognized as such at the time. It was more than an epic journey of exploration,

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one that ranks Smith among the great American explorers. It also symbolized the completion of the age-old march of the American pioneers westward to the Pacific.

The Mexican governor of California was somewhat dismayed by the appearance of Smith's band of ragged but heavily armed trappers. The governor's order to leave the province by the same route he had entered was ignored by the Americans, and Smith moved down the San Joaquin, a region fabulously rich in game, trapping the mountain streams which emptied into the great central valley of California. Unable to lead his party back over the Sierra range because of deep snows, Smith left most of his men behind in California and with two companions set out for the appointed summer rendezvous on Bear River.

Through snow up to eight feet deep, Smith crossed the mountains in May, 1827, and reached the barren desert of Nevada. The privations of the mountains were soon forgotten in the sufferings which the explorers experienced as they headed east for Great Salt Lake across the desert.

There are deserts of varying degrees of desolation in the West. Smith and his men were crossing the worst. That between the Sierra and the Humboldt Sink is dangerous enough.

But the Great Salt Desert, stretching for 75 miles without water and without any vegetation whatever, reflecting from its salt encrusted surface all the heat of the summer sun, confusing the traveller with its beautiful mirages and choking him with its salt-laden winds; enmeshing his feet in its bottomless mire and sapping his energy with its shifting sand dunes, presents the most desolate and dangerous stretch of desert in America, with the exception of Death Valley itself.4

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4 Cleland, This Reckless Breed, 84.
Winter Forage. After the heavy snows arrived in the Rockies, the trappers were forced to cut cottonwood bark to keep their horses alive until the spring thaw.

N. P. S. sketch by Macy
Exhausted, delirious, the three men staggered over the blazing sand, burying themselves in the earth to gain respite from the glaring midday sun. Driven to the verge of madness by thirst and breathing alkali dust, they stumbled on. One man gave out and lay down to die; a few miles farther on water was reached, and the little band was saved.

In early July the three wanderers, little more than skeletons, reached the rendezvous in Bear Valley where the partners Sublette and Jackson were encamped. In his epic journey of exploration, Smith had covered not less than 2,000 miles. Lingering just long enough to regain his strength and arrange business affairs with his partners, Smith again set out for California to rejoin his company.

Smith's terse explanation of his willingness, if not eagerness, to once again undertake a journey which came so close on so many occasions to ending his life, possibly helps to explain why the mountain men remained in a trade which few survived. "I of course expected to find Beaver," wrote Smith, "which with us hunters is a primary object, but I was also led on by the love of novelty common to all, which is much increased by the pursuit of its gratification."5

But Smith's luck ran out, as it did eventually for most of the mountain men. En route to California, his party was attacked as it crossed the Colorado River by a band of Mojave Indians, and in a desperate fight 10 of his 18 men were killed. He also lost his horses and almost all of his food and supplies. After another agonizing desert

5Maurice S. Sullivan, ed., The Travels of Jedediah Smith (Santa Ana, California, 1934), 26.
crossing the survivors reached California and rejoined the men left
behind by Smith the preceding year. Spending the winter in California,
the party trapped north the following spring into Oregon. There the
expedition was ambushed by Umpqua Indians; only Smith and three of his
men escaped the massacre. Smith proceeded to Fort Vancouver where he
was well received by John McLoughlin and invited to spend the winter.
The next spring Smith again set out, this time with but a single com-
panion. He passed through the present state of Washington, across
Idaho into Montana, and thence south to the rendezvous at Pierre's
Hole, close by the "Pilot Knobs" of the Tetons.

The travels of Jedediah Smith are a saga of adventure, proof
of the incredible feats of exploration performed almost matter-of-factly
by mountain trappers. Smith's two expeditions to California had far-
reaching results, particularly in stimulating the interest of the
American Government and the fur traders in the Far West. Soon there-
after the Hudson's Bay Company began a successful 10 years of trapping
in California.

A few years later, in the spring of 1831 and after he had
left the Rocky Mountain trade, Smith led a caravan toward Santa Fe.
As he knelt alone seeking water in the sandy bed of the Cimarron
River, a band of Comanche Indians silently closed in behind him.
Jedediah Strong Smith, explorer, Christian, mountain man, had reached
the end of his long trail.

That journey, begun nine years before when Ashley led his
first group of trappers into the mountains, had taken Smith farther
across the American continent, through more unexplored country, and
had broken down more frontiers of geographic isolation, than had any other American of any generation.  

It must be admitted, however, that generally trappers contributed very little as map makers. A few, a very scant few letters and journals were published at the time, mostly in newspapers. Smith's account of his first expedition to California, written in a letter to General William Clark, was printed in the Missouri Republican in 1827, and although he is believed to have prepared maps, they have been lost. Actually, the fur trapper had no need of maps; the country was inscribed in his mind and was a part of his "lore."

He could draw maps, if he so desired. "With a buffalo-skin and a piece of charcoal, he will map out any portion of this immense region, and delineate mountains, streams, and the circular valleys called 'holes,' with wonderful accuracy," said an observer of Jim Bridger.  

In St. Louis, the geography of the West was street-corner gossip, and every spring hundreds of men departed for the distant land of the beaver streams, finding without hesitation places the cartographer even then could not spot within five degrees of longitude. And they did it with about as much concern as a man going to the barn. The West was their backyard.

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6 Cleland, This Reckless Breed, 120.

7 John W. Gunnison, The Mormons or Latter-Day Saints in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake (Philadelphia, 1852), 151.
THE SOUTHWEST

There were three gateways to the fur-trapping region, which roughly included all of the American West from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific. The main route was from St. Louis, which was the emporium of the fur trade. A second entrance was from the Northwest; this was used by the Hudson's Bay Company, with headquarters at Fort Vancouver. The third great center of the trade was in the Southwest, and in this region the trappers used Santa Fe and Taos as their headquarters.

Because of the early and extensive activities of the Spanish in the Southwest, this region was better known than the northern Rockies. In 1811 the atlas which accompanied Alexander von Humboldt's monumental Essai sur Nouvelle Espagne included a map which gave a remarkably accurate idea of the geography of the Rio Grande, the Gila, and the Colorado.

At the time of the Santa Fe trade, the Southwest was Mexican territory, and trapping was done, supposedly, only with a license issued by Mexican authorities. Neither the Spanish nor the Mexicans, either in the Southwest or in California, ever showed any great interest in trapping. Wading the cold mountain streams was not a sport which appealed to the warm-blooded Latin.

The historic overland trade between St. Louis and Santa Fe by way of the Santa Fe Trail, although a separate and distinct enterprise, was inseparably associated with the fur trade. Prominent St. Louis fur traders, including Manuel Lisa and Auguste Chouteau—an organizer of the Missouri Fur Company—had engaged in expeditions to Santa Fe many years before William Becknell officially opened the Santa Fe trade in 1821.
Santa Fe Trail Scene. Beginning in 1821, wagon trains each year made the long journey to Santa Fe, with furs from the southern Rockies providing a large part of the return cargo.
The first great wagon caravan to return from Santa Fe, in 1824, brought back a large consignment of furs, and in later years caravans on the Santa Fe Trail brought back chiefly silver, gold, mules, and furs.¹

The resourceful fur trappers had discovered the beaver streams of the Southwest well before 1821. As early as 1811 Manuel Lisa had sent trappers from his Missouri post to the upper waters of the Arkansas; some of these men continued on to Santa Fe. In 1814 Joseph Philibert led a company up the Arkansas, and in the years following 1815 Auguste Chouteau and Julius De Mun, with about 50 men, trapped the upper waters of the Arkansas and the Rio del Norte, and succeeded in sending one cargo of furs to St. Louis. But the fur trade of the Southwest did not get well under way until after 1821—almost at the same time it was launched in the north.²

Hill lists seven parties of trappers who came to Santa Fe in 1821 and 1822, and while some of the men were more intent upon trading than trapping, all brought beaver traps, and men from all parties engaged in fur trapping.³ There were noteworthy trappers among these early arrivals: William Becknell, William Wolfskill, Ewing Young, James Baird, Samuel Chambers, and Joseph Walker. Regardless of whether the mountain man operated in the Northwest, in the northern Rockies, or in the Southwest, his life in the wilderness varied little.

¹Cleland, This Reckless Breed, 121-41. The story of the Santa Fe Trail is the subject of a special study as a part of the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings.

²Joseph J. Hill, The History of Warner's Ranch and its Environs (Los Angeles, 1927), 63-4. For an excellent summary of the Southwestern fur trade, see Chapter VI and VII.

³Ibid., 64.
As in the case of the Rocky Mountain trade, the early period was a time of rich fur harvests. Although there were no large companies in the Southwest comparable to the Rocky Mountain Fur Company or the American Fur Company, there were in all probability hundreds of trappers in the region, and they soon advanced into the Colorado basin by way of the Gila, Salt, and San Juan Rivers. As early as 1826 "practically every stream in the basin had been trapped and re-trapped so many times that the beaver were becoming scarce."4

Mexican officials at first accepted the newcomers, hoping that they might provide a source of revenue to the Government. They soon became increasingly alarmed at the steady succession of rough-spoken trappers who arrived in Santa Fe, who were more often than not uncomplimentary in their references to Mexican authority, and who may or may not have taken the trouble to apply for licenses to trap before setting out for the interior. It seemed to the Mexican officials that the Americans showed such alarming energy in seeking out beaver and such a reluctance to pay the tax on the furs that the beaver must soon be trapped out without noticeably improving the status of the Mexican treasury. James Baird, who had become a Mexican citizen, complained to the authorities in 1826 that American trappers had taken beaver furs exceeding one hundred thousand pesos in value during the previous year and a half.5

4Joseph J. Hill, Ewing Young in the Fur Trade of the Far Southwest 1822-1834, 4.

5Hill, Warner's Ranch, 70.
The protest was made, with excellent provocation, that the Americans ignored the law, traded guns illegally to the Indians in return for furs, and hunted beaver without a license. But the grip of the government of Mexico upon the far province of New Mexico was not a firm one. The trappers ranged far into the interior, to the north, and west into California. Mexico could ill afford the officials or the soldiers to guard its frontiers and exact its lawful revenue. Local officials contented themselves with occasionally seizing the goods of an American merchant, or throwing a party of trappers into jail and inflicting heavy fines.

Life in Santa Fe and Taos was raw, crude, and boisterous. Here was a conglomeration of races, and behind the sun-baked adobe walls could be found games of chance and pleasures of the flesh. Tall Missouri trappers in buckskin hunting shirts strode the dusty walks, their long, matted hair hanging down from under slouching beaver hats. New Mexicans shielded from the blazing sun by broad-brimmed sombreros leaned against the adobe walls. The eternal serape was swung over their shoulders concealing their faces, a hand appearing from the folds only to remove the cigarro from their lips. They scowled at the brawny Americans clattering past—and feared for the safety of their wives.

Arrival of a band of American trappers was often the signal for a fandango, a colorful shindig with primitive overtones, most often held in the sala of a householder. The musical instruments consisted only of a distant relative of the guitar, and an Indian drum. Dusky maidens in silver jewelry and bright beads tripped the light fantastic with men who seized their partners in the fashion of a grizzly bear and proceeded to
whirl, jump, stamp, and whoop, using figures unknown to any but the inventor, who might borrow Indian deviations from the "scalp" and "buffalo" dances. Should a Mexican seek to join the happy throng, he was quickly sent sprawling by a trapper who warned, "Quit, you darned Spaniard! you can't shine in this crowd." 

Taos and Santa Fe, in the Southwest, took the place of the rendezvous in the Rocky Mountains. To these trapping centers came caravans from St. Louis with goods for the trade. Trappers came to Taos and Santa Fe to exchange their furs for supplies, and to let off steam; often they came for the purpose of taking back a helpmate. The belles of Nuevo Mexico were highly prized as the fairest of the wilderness maids, especially after they were induced to bathe, and it was not unusual for these buxom wenches to leave off the old tortilla-making for a spot of travel in the mountains.

One of the earliest and most famous of trappers to enter the Santa Fe trade was James Ohio Pattie, who, with his father Sylvester, set out for the Upper Missouri in 1823. The party had neglected to obtain licenses to trap upriver and instead turned south toward the Mexican provinces where such oversights were not of great import. During the long journey Pattie served his apprenticeship as a mountain man; the caravan was attacked by Arikaras and Crows, and along the Arkansas River as many as 200 grizzlies were sighted in a day's time, one of which killed a member of the party.

6 A good account of such a fracas is in George Ruxton, Life in the Far West (New York, 1859), 186-88.
Baling Furs. At trading posts this crude device was employed to compress the beaver skins into a pack small enough for transporting back to St. Louis.

N. P. S. painting by Lockwood
After sojournings in Santa Fe and Taos, Pattie joined a company of trappers and began his amazing career. Among all the adventures of the mountain men—Jedediah Smith staggering through the Mojave Desert, John Day going mad on the return from Astoria, Ashley navigating the unspeakable canyons of the Green River, John Colter's escape from the Blackfeet—the experiences of Pattie must be given equal rank. During the years from 1825 to 1832 Pattie seemed fated for near escapes from death and sudden reversals in fortune. Probably no trapper covered such a vast amount of country, for he roamed north to the Yellowstone, west to San Francisco, and south to Mexico City.\(^7\)

Another renowned trapper of the Southwest, whose reputation suffers only from lack of any detailed knowledge of his exploits, was James Ewing Young. This Tennessee frontiersman reached Santa Fe in 1821 with the original Becknell expedition, and for the next 14 years explored the Southwest as fur trapper and trader. One of his contributions was to introduce Kit Carson to the fur trade. Carson in 1826 ran away to join a caravan to Santa Fe, and Young took him on his first trip to the mountains. Carson found his perfect niche in the West; few mountain men surpassed him in mountain craft or in knowledge of the land, and he eventually became the personification of the Western frontiersman.

Partially as a result of Jedediah Smith's untimely death, Young eventually joined with fur trappers who had left the Rocky Mountain trade.

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\(^7\) In his account of this period, The Personal Narrative of James O. Pattie... (Cleveland, 1905), Pattie takes the leading role in many adventures of other men, but supplies a valuable description of the fur trade in the Southwest.
Smith, Jackson, and Sublette, believing the mountain trade was fast ending, had sold their interests at the 1830 rendezvous and retired to St. Louis. Their retirement was short-lived, and the following year the three joined forces to enter the Santa Fe trade. They gathered a company of nearly 100 men, among whom was Jonathan Warner, later to achieve prominence in California affairs. Warner had enlisted in the company both for the excitement and to improve his health. Smith, with whom he discussed his ambitions, gave him sober advice, warning him that by going to the mountains the chances were greatly in favor of finding death rather than health, and that if he escaped the former and found the latter the probabilities were that he would be ruined for anything else in life but such things as would be agreeable to the passions of a semi-savage.

The advice was prophetic, except that it was Smith, rather than Warner, who was killed on the trail to Santa Fe. Smith's death broke up the partnership, and Sublette returned to St. Louis. Jackson joined with David Waldo and Ewing Young, forming the firm of Jackson, Waldo, and Young, and the company sent a number of trapping parties into the southern Rockies and into California. These expeditions often combined exploring and trapping with trading, and, some say, with horse stealing.

In 1832 Young led a party to California, engaged in the sea otter trade along the coast, trapped down the San Joaquin, and encountered a large brigade of Hudson's Bay Company men under Michael La Framboise, which had already trapped the country north and west of the San Joaquin. Young continued north, passing along the northern California coast into

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8 Hill, Warner's Ranch, 94.
Oregon, then swinging south as far as the Gila River before returning to Los Angeles in 1834, after a long, but only moderately successful beaver hunt. Yet it was such expeditions as these from Santa Fe which attracted other American trapping parties into California.

Trading between Missouri, Santa Fe, and Chihuahua was rapidly increasing, and following the forays of trappers into California an extensive traffic was opened between Santa Fe and Los Angeles.

Hundreds of traders and trappers—the exact number will never be known—crossed the Mexican border with or without passports, paused for a few days (or a lifetime) at Taos or Santa Fe, continued their traffic and discoveries into Chihuahua, Sonora, and Durango, fanned out to the west as far as the Pacific; or, turning to the north, completed the grand circuit back to the Missouri settlements by way of the Green River Valley, the headwaters of the Missouri, the Platte, and the Missouri.9

The trappers were responsible for a half-dozen new trails from the Mexican province across the desert and mountain region into California. The expedition of William Wolfskin, in 1830-31, established a route which in later years was to be known as the Old Spanish Trail. The original Old Spanish Trail, used by the Spanish from the time of Rivera's exploration in 1765, ended in the Great Basin. Wolfskin continued the route into California; he headed northwest from Taos across the Colorado, following the Sevier and Virgin rivers to the Mojave Desert, reaching Los Angeles by way of Cajon Pass. Although roundabout and difficult, Wolfskin's route was frequently used, and the Old Spanish Trail was familiar to fur trappers, pioneers, and Forty-niners.

It is an overlooked fact that one of the greatest contributions of the mountain men, especially those in the Southwest, was as pioneer

9Cleland, This Reckless Breed, 209.
settlers. Along with the New England sailors in the "Boston" ships of the hide and tallow trade, the mountain men who came into California, mostly from the Southwest, share the credit for making known the resources of California, and for exciting the interest of Americans in the Pacific Coast, beginning with Smith's visit in 1826. The trading ships did contribute deserters to the early population of California; there were a few supercargoes who had established headquarters along the coast, and there were also a few businessmen, such as Thomas Larkin, who set up shop in California.

But accounts of visitors to California during the important decade of the 1830's are full of references to the presence of former trappers. Richard Henry Dana, at Monterey in 1835, spoke of the trappers and hunters who "arrive here from the Rocky Mountains." A considerable number of the outstanding trappers of the mountain and Southwest trade came to California and Oregon to reside, men such as George Yount, William Wolfskill, James Clyman, Ewing Young, Joe Meek, and Robert Newell. The Southwest, largely as a result of the fur trade, was a gateway to California.

It would be impossible to say what percentage of the American population of California at the time of the occupation consisted of former fur trappers. But the figure must have been rather high. Much of the aggressiveness and the discontent, which Mexican officials took account of and feared, was undoubtedly generated by former trappers who

10 Richard Henry Dana, Two Years Before the Mast (New York, 1840), 102.
had settled in California. Hill declared that "Most of the Anglo-Americans who came to Southern California before the war with Mexico, by which California became a part of the United States, came here in the capacity of beaver trappers."\[11\]

\[11\]Hill, Warner's Ranch, 63.
THE MARITIME FUR TRADE

During the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, the Pacific Northwest was explored by venturesome navigators--Spanish, British, French, Russian--seeking gold and the fabled water route through North America to Cathay. They found instead the pelt of the sea otter, and it proved a source of enormous wealth.

The sea otter possessed an especially wondrous fur, highly prized both by native chieftains of the Northwest and by Chinese mandarins who made them into royal robes. The adult pelt, about five to six feet in length, consisted of a thick, fine underfur of pure white, tipped to brownish black and sprinkled with silver hair. Only a breath of air was required to give the fur a shimmering effect. Men thrilled at the sight of the beautiful furs, and one famous trader remarked that "excepting a beautiful woman and a lovely infant," the sea otter skin was the most attractive object he had ever seen.¹ The aquatic mammals were found along rocky or islanded coasts where reefs, rocks, and kelp beds gave protection from the surf. British Columbia and Alaska were the first areas to be exploited; later otter were found on the California coast from the Farallon Islands to lower California.

The third and last voyage of Captain James Cook launched the maritime fur trade in the Pacific when it was found that otter skins, acquired for a trifling cost by Cook's seamen at Nootka Sound, were highly prized by the Hong merchants of Canton. Immediately, the

Governments of Spain, Russia, and France turned their attention to the fur trade of the Pacific Northwest. In 1785 the first trading voyage was made by the aptly named British vessel, the Sea Otter; the following year eight more English ships entered the lucrative trade. Meanwhile, Russian traders were exploiting the otter fields far to the north.

During the first decade British traders enjoyed a near monopoly along the shores of the Oregon country; between 1785 and 1794 there were 35 British vessels trading in the region. But from this point, British activity declined, due in part to the phenomenal growth of American activity on the coast. American traders dominated the trade after 1800, so much so that Indians referred to all ships as "Boston" ships. The fortunes of a dozen Boston merchant families were made from returns in the sea otter trade with China.

The maritime fur trade period of the Northwest coast lasted to the outbreak of the War of 1812, after which it largely disappeared. The center of the trade then shifted southward to California and across the Pacific to the Sandwich Islands, in part because of the near extinction of the otter in the Northwest. Soon the hide and tallow trade from the great herds of the California missions began to compete for the attention of the Boston ships. Sandalwood from the mid-Pacific islands began to enjoy a brief but booming market in Canton. As the emphasis shifted from the coastal fur trade, attention was focused on the potentiality of the great inland fur trade.

Maritime exploration of the northwestern Pacific Coast in connection with the sea otter trade completed the exploration up to

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the Arctic region and established this previously unknown hinterland as a vital and profitable link in the commerce of the world. There was additionally the realization that on the Columbia River would eventually be established the western depot of a rich trade which might span the continent and capture the untapped fur resources of the interior.

Out of this sea-otter trade came, also, a shift in the claims to the sovereignty over the Oregon country. Russia's claims were extended to Alaska; those of Spain all but vanished; those of the United States and Great Britain became paramount, and disagreements arising therefrom were eventually settled by treaty in 1846.2

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Acquisition of Astoria in 1813 by the North West Company had eliminated that organization's only rival in the Northwest, and for nearly a decade the Nor'Westers ruled New Caledonia and the Columbia Basin. During this period the North West Company made a major contribution to the fur trade by its introduction of the fur brigade. Because of Indian troubles, small trapping parties suffered mightily, and it was necessary to send out a party sufficiently large to insure protection from Indian attack. About 1816 formidable brigades were being sent annually into the Willamette Valley, and in 1818 the first brigade was dispatched to the Snake River region.

During these years the North West Company was engaged in a deadly rivalry with the powerful Hudson's Bay Company for the trade east of the Rocky Mountains. The Hudson's Bay Company was slow to meet the challenge of the energetic Nor'Westers who diverted more and more furs from London to Montreal. Soon the two companies were fighting one another in the characteristic fashion of the trade: establishing rival trading posts side by side, plying Indians with liquor, underbidding for furs, winning away rival employees, and seizing furs and supplies. The results were those familiar to fur trade competition—Indian warfare and pitched battles between the two companies.

The wasteful competition brought financial difficulties to both firms and by 1820 resulted in the "complete disorganization" of the trade.¹

The North West Company was unable to withstand the drive of the Hudson's Bay Company on the one hand and American fur interests on the other, and both companies were under considerable pressure from the British Government to unite. In 1821 the two companies merged, and the reorganized Hudson's Bay Company was granted a monopoly from Rupert's Land west to the Pacific. Infusion of that bold and vigorous business enterprise of the North West partners gave the Hudson's Bay Company increased vitality, and the union retained the best features of both companies.

The new Hudson's Bay Company had four frontiers on the Pacific: to the north it faced the activities of the Russian-American Company centered in Alaska; to the west lay the maritime fur area of the Pacific; to the south lay the area of Spanish authority in California. But the most important frontier was to the east. The region of eastern Washington and Oregon, and Idaho, was known as the Snake country, from the name given to the Indians of the area. Here the company met the most westerly extension of the American fur traders, who were constantly extending their Rocky Mountain operations.

The Russian threat, while perhaps never a serious one to ultimate American possession of the Pacific coastal region, was nevertheless viewed with concern. In 1812, only a year after the founding of Astoria, the Russian-American Company established Fort Ross, some 50 miles north of San Francisco, as the headquarters for its operations south of Alaska. The Russian traders desired to acquire California for Russia, and metal plates inscribed to assert Russian ownership were buried from Kodiak Island to Lower California. "The Tsarist government never lost hope, either, that a propitious moment would arrive, in the course of time, for asserting its
Breaking Camp. A party of trappers collects its pack train in preparation for resuming the hunt.
claims to the whole west coast of America." A direct cause for the issuance of the Monroe Doctrine was the expansion of Russian influence by her traders on the North American continent.

The Hudson's Bay Company became aware of the possibilities of California as a hunting ground about the same time as did the Rocky Mountain trappers. A Peter Skene Ogden expedition passed southward through Oregon and entered northern California in 1826, the same year Jedediah Smith became the first to enter California from the east. Smith's later sojourn at Fort Vancouver, after considerable trapping success to the south, undoubtedly influenced Hudson's Bay Company's expansion southward. By 1832 company brigades were entering California each year. From that date until well into the 1840's company trappers visited California each year, bringing back considerable quantities of beaver skins annually to the log warehouses of Fort Vancouver.

The strongest rival facing the Hudson's Bay Company was the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, whose trappers were constantly invading the territory coveted by British traders. Renewed interest in the Snake country trade on the part of the Hudson's Bay Company in part was influenced by the failure of the United States and Britain to reach agreement on the Oregon boundary question. Because ultimate settlement would unquestionably be strongly determined by actual occupation, the Hudson's Bay Company (in large part representing the British Government in North America) sought to control the Snake country. It was not only a source

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of furs, it was a region where American competition must be discouraged.\(^3\)

Governor Simpson, of the Northern Department, pressed for the expansion of the Snake country brigades. In 1823 the brigade returned with 4,000 pelts; still unsatisfied, Simpson directed Peter Skene Ogden to take over Spokane House, headquarters for the Snake brigades. In 1824 the take was nearly 5,000 pelts, making this operation the most profitable enterprise in the Columbia district.\(^4\)

An incident of the 1824 expedition reveals the international aspects of the trade. On this hunt, Ogden, a man of enormous corpulence who could outbrawl and outswear any of his subordinates, traveled farther south than any of his predecessors, crossing into Mexican territory where he met a group of American trappers under Johnson Gardner. Both American and British nationals were contemptuous of Mexican authority. Gardner coolly announced to Ogden's men they were in American territory and therefore relieved of all obligation to the Hudson's Bay Company. Twenty men accepted Gardner's offer of better terms, deserting Ogden and taking with them their horses and 700 beaver skins. The infuriated Ogden lamented "that damm'd all cursed day" which brought the Americans into his hunting preserve.

The Snake brigades were continually subjected to vicious attacks from Blackfeet and Piegans. The 1823 expedition led by the veteran ex-Nor'Wester Finan McDonald ran into a war party of Piegans, with a loss

\(^3\)Galbraith, The Hudson's Bay Company, 86.

of McDonald's chief assistant and five other men. Shaken by his near escape, McDonald reported on his return "when that Cuntre will see me again the Beaver will have Gould Skin." 5

The suspension of boundary negotiations between Great Britain and the United States in 1824 ended temporarily the possibility of Britain losing territory to the United States; the Hudson's Bay Company was assured the Oregon country would be jointly occupied for some time. The future plans of the Company were considerably influenced by the political necessity of strengthening the claim of Britain (and the Company) to the disputed area between the Columbia River and the forty-ninth parallel. The eventual loss of the region south of the Columbia was accepted, but the Company was determined to go to any extremes to insure ultimate British possession of the land north of the Columbia River.

Undoubtedly under considerable pressure from the British Government, the Hudson's Bay Company quickly put into effect its plan for the Columbia Department. Since the Snake River region lay to the south of the Columbia, it was to be ruthlessly exploited while the Snake brigades still had access to it. The next years saw intensive activity in the region by both American and British trappers. Ashley sent nearly 100 men into the Snake country in 1825-26, and 5 years later the number was more than 200. The region was shortly trapped out. By 1835 the Hudson's Bay Company brigade returned with only 200 pelts.

But the most important feature of the plan was politically inspired. It was the belief of Company directors—and of British Foreign

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5Galbraith, *Hudson's Bay Company*, 84.
Secretary George Canning—that "in the present day occupying the soil is considered as the best title." When British and American negotiators resumed boundary discussions, the Hudson's Bay Company intended that they would be faced with the fact of the Company "occupying the soil" along the north bank of the Columbia River. Fort George, on the south bank of the river was abandoned, and late in 1824 work was begun on a new post, Fort Vancouver, on the north bank about 100 miles from the mouth of the Columbia, and near its junction with the Willamette.

Fort Vancouver became the headquarters for all Hudson's Bay Company activities west of the Continental Divide. A center for lumbering, fishing, and agriculture, Fort Vancouver was the most important settlement in the Northwest, and from this post fur brigades ranged as far east as Utah and southward to the present Mexican border. The activities of its renowned Chief Factor, John McLoughlin, especially his hospitable treatment of American settlers, earned him the title of "Father of Oregon."

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6Mark, Fur Trade and Empire, 242.
LIFE IN THE MOUNTAINS

The fur trapper faced perhaps the most hazardous existence of all the frontier callings, but his most dangerous enemy was the Indian. The blood feud between the Indians and the mountain men began with the first appearance of the trappers in the hunting grounds of the Indians. The need for constant vigilance, the danger of ambush at any time, the stark necessity of outwitting the Indian in order to stay alive, these were the factors which made the mountain man a superb example of the American frontiersman. His skill was "a skill so effective that, living in an Indian country, he made a more successful adaptation to it than the Indian—and this without reference to his superior material equipment. There was no craft and no skill at which the mountain man did not come to excel the Indian."1

The country of the fur trade was Indian country; the invasion on a relatively large scale by the fur trappers opened the long, bloody chapter of Indian-white hostilities in the West. Major Benjamin O'Fallon, Indian agent for the region, watched apprehensively the passage of large parties sent up the Missouri by Ashley in the early 1820's. He predicted this intrusion would destroy the "harmony" with the Indians in the Upper Missouri, and wrote in protest to the Secretary of War. The New York American, commenting on Ashley's battle with the Arikaras in 1823, maintained the Indians had every right to "repel the approaches."2

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1 Bernard De Voto, Across The Wide Missouri (Cambridge, 1947), 160.
2 Sunder, Bill Sublette, 38, 45.
A few of the tribes encountered by the trappers could be classified as friendly. The Flatheads, or Salish, never were guilty of hostilities against trapper or passing emigrant. The Nez Perces of Idaho were for the most part friendly to the whites. Many tribes on occasion allied themselves with companies of fur traders in their incessant wars with enemy tribes. For this purpose the Cheyennes, Snakes, Gros Ventres, and Utes at times made common cause with the trappers. Almost all large trapping parties included friendly Indians who gave invaluable assistance in hunting, trapping, and fighting other Indians.

Meetings between Indians and trappers were likely to be savage and merciless encounters, especially if a few trappers were caught by themselves. Unmentionable cruelties, mutilation, torture, the scalping of the dead—these were practices which each side equally subscribed to wholeheartedly. It is generally agreed that only a small fraction of those trappers who entered the mountain trade ever survived the experience. Antoine Robidoux declared that of a force of 300 trappers and hunters in the Rocky Mountains 30 years before, there were only 3 survivors. James Ohio Pattie, a veteran of many trapping expeditions out of Santa Fe, recalled that of 116 men entering the mountains for the first time, only 16 were alive at the end of the first year.³

Many of the trappers acquired Indian wives, for in addition to the obvious advantage, the squaws were valuable around camp to cook,

³Cleland, This Reckless Breed of Men, 34.
Jerking Buffalo Meat. One of the staples of trappers on the move was buffalo meat, dried on racks in the sun. The dog stealing a strip of meat may have ended up on the rack himself, as puppy was considered a delicacy by the Indians.

N. P. S. sketch by Mulcahy
mend clothes, tan the hides, and keep up the endless, cheerful, idiot prattle of the housewife going about her accustomed chores. More than one Indian brave, unacquainted with the tenets of Dr. Freud, was puzzled by the seemingly incomprehensible ways of the Great Spirit which had resulted in the creation of white men but not white women. Obviously they had never before laid a finger on a female, the warrior reasoned, else how could you explain the frenzied eagerness of the white men to bed down with the nubile Indian maids? Some of the trappers were adopted into Indian tribes; a few legendary figures of the trade, such as Jim Beckwourth, Edward Rose, and Bill Williams, became powerful chiefs. Still, a single act of treachery was all that was needed to explode an uneasy peace into bloody warfare. When a mountain man smoked the peace pipe "one puff to the skies, one to the earth, two to the winds and waters on the right and left," he considered the peace and security afforded by the ritual to be of limited duration.

Living under precisely the same conditions as the Indian, the mountain man was at times a near savage himself. In dress, customs, and habits he was a brother to the Indian; in his battles he practiced the same cruelty and ferocity he expected to receive in return. His eating habits alone would instantly bar him from the society of those who sing his praises today. There were no delicate feeders in the mountains. He grew resigned to alternate periods of feast and famine and knew the agonies of starvation. But when game was plentiful he feasted, and never was he more content with his lot than when he had an abundant supply of cow buffalo—that rich, succulent meat which was the universal fare of the trapper. Accounts of feasts
in the mountains attest to the remarkable digestive system of the trapper and to his capacity for consuming fantastic quantities of meat at one sitting. Eight pounds of meat per man per day was considered a normal ration.

From the moment a shaggy, greasy, maitre d'hôtel hollered his shy invitation "hyar's the doin's, freeze into it, boys," there were no further courtesies at the banquet. Individuals often exhibited interesting culinary gambits during the preliminaries. Some drank the animal's hot blood as an appetizer. Others ate the liver raw, spicing its delicate flavor with the contents of the gall bladder. Still others preferred a thick potage made by mixing blood with marrow obtained by cracking the leg bone, an appetizing repast worthy of inclusion in the *Joy of Cooking*, and one that never failed to make the face of the wilderness gourmet "shine with grease and gladness."

Then the serious work began, amidst grunts, sighs, and frequent emissions of gas. The most prized delicacy of all, the meat of the hump ribs, which were propped row on row against the hot coals, was pulled away by hand and wolfed down by diners impervious to grease running down face and clothes. Included on the bill of fare was the "fleece," the inch-thick layer of fat just beneath the hide; the tongue, heart, and associated organs; the kidney fat, which might be boiled and used to wash down the heavy stuff; and the intestines, called "boudins." These were roasted until puffed with heat, then coiled on a blanket and gulped down, foot by foot, without benefit of mastication.

Occasionally a couple of trappers would engage in a bit of spirited competition by starting on opposite ends of a succulent pile.
of boudins arranged in tempting coils between them. The object was to work one's way towards the middle. Amid rude shouts of encouragement from fellow diners, the two rivals would gulp down yard after yard of greasy intestine. A favorite trick was to jerk one's head backward at an opportune moment, thus pulling a long stretch of the unchewed colon out of the opponent's gullet. This dishonest practice was frowned upon by spectators, however, and was inevitably met with cries of "feed fair."

Inevitably, in the manner of all American frontiersmen, the feasting was followed by storytelling. Grizzled trappers in blackened elkskins sat crosslegged in the flickering shadows of the campfire, pipe in mouth, touching the ground first with the bowl of the pipe, then turning the stem upward for good medicine. As the packmules nearby cropped grass, the mountain men told stories that would have enriched history, could they have been recorded: how Old Bill Williams would suddenly appear beside the trail with his doleful warning (Do'ee byar now?) of some tragedy to come; how "Broken Hand" Fitzpatrick lay hidden in a crevice while the Gros Ventres hunted him in vain; how a Delaware trapper had taunted the Arikaras as they slowly tore his body to pieces. As they talked they gestured in the sign language of the Indian, from whom they borrowed the colorful imagery that was characteristic of their speech. Experiences were calmly, almost indifferently related which frontier history can scarcely equal. They told of the hunt and the trail, of fighting Indians and escaping Indians. Stories were told of the uses of plants and the superior instinct of animals. But always they spoke of the far country and the trails which led where beaver
Mountain Man. One of that "reckless breed of men" who were the first to explore the West.

N. P. S. drawing by Stolz
could be found, and of new and richer grounds which would doubtless
be found before next "freezin'" time.

The mountain men spoke in their own distinctive vernacular,
which must have sounded like a strange tongue to the men newly arrived
from the settlements, for it was sprinkled with expressions borrowed
from fellow trappers--Spanish, French, and Indians--and from God knows
who. A fair example no doubt is the following description, taken from
Lewis H. Garrand's *Wah-To-Yah and the Taos Trail*, one of the finest and
truest accounts ever written of the life of the mountain men. The
teller of the story is reminded of an Indian attack in which he got
revenge with his knife and recovered his stolen rifle when a companion
asks, "Mind the time we took Pawnee topknots away to the Platte?"

Wagh! ef we didn't, an' give an ogwh-ogwh longside of their
darned screechin', I'm a niggur. This child doesn't let an
Injun count a coup on his cavyard always. They come mighty
nigh rubbin' a coup on his cavyard always. They come mighty
nigh rubbin' me out tother side of Spanish Peaks--woke up in
the mornin' jist afore day, the devils yellin' like mad. I
grabs my knife, keels one *turns his keel, or bottom, up*,
and made for timber, with four of thar cussed arrows in my
meatbag. The 'Paches took my beaver--five pack of the
prettiest in the mountains--an' two mules, but my traps was
hid in the creek. Sez I, hyar's a gone coon if they keep my
gun, so I follers thar trail an' at night crawls into camp,
'n' socks my big knife up to the Green River, first dig. I
takes tother Injun by the har and makes meat of him too.
Maybe thar wasn't coups counted an' a big dance on hand*
*ef I was alone. I got old bull-thrower, made medicine
over him, an' no darned niggur kin draw bead with him since.

The trapper was in the mountains to trap beaver, and his life
was regulated by the habits of the animal whose rich fur he sought.\textsuperscript{4} Trapping in the dead of winter was impossible; because of this, and because of the seasonal condition of the beaver pelts, there were two "hunts," one in the fall, one in the spring.

The fall hunt began a few weeks after the summer rendezvous broke up, when the beaver fur began to thicken with colder nights, and ended when winter iced over the streams. The warming sun which brought the spring thaw opened the spring hunt, lasting until the beaver began to molt, about the time the trappers began the long trek to the summer rendezvous. Between hunts the trappers wintered in the mountains, placing their camps in some sheltered valley where game was plentiful and cottonwood bark supplied feed for the pack animals. Some trappers joined the tribes of their Indian wives, and villages of friendly tribes often wintered near the trappers' camps.\textsuperscript{5}

The Indian, who claimed lineal descent from the bear, the wolf, and the deer, believed all animals to be wise, and ascribed to

\textsuperscript{4} The beaver skin was the prime mover of the fur trade, although other skins were also traded, including otter, elk, and deer; and buffalo robes later became a major source of wealth. The American Fur Company steamboat arrived back in St. Louis in 1831 from a trip up the Missouri, "with a full cargo of buffalo robes, furs, and peltries, besides ten thousand pounds of buffalo tongue." Chittenden, \textit{The American Fur Trade}, I, 340.

\textsuperscript{5} It was customary for a small party of trappers to report back to company headquarters in St. Louis during the winter hiatus, making their way through the snow-covered mountains with remarkable ease.
Beaver Lodge. Beaver at work, felling trees and carrying branches to their lodge. Full grown males weighed up to fifty pounds.
them human intelligence and the power of understanding speech. Of all the animals, he considered the beaver to be the wisest, and the Indian who prepared to trap beaver invoked religious rituals, amulets, and incantations to enable him to outsmart the beaver. The white trapper was not above incantations and personal magic himself when the hunt was going badly. According to an Indian legend, told in pantomime to Francis Parkman by an Oglala Sioux, beaver were actually white men. This was eminently logical, Red Water informed Parkman, because the beaver and the whites were the wisest people on earth.

The beaver inhabited most of the streams of the West, but was found in largest numbers in mountain streams, along meadows and flats where the quiet water could be dammed, and where there was an abundance of willow, aspen, and cottonwood to provide food and dam-building material. Weighing from 30 to 50 pounds when full-grown, the beaver had a fine-textured, glossy fur, much desired for coats and heavy collars but particularly prized for the making of hats. The tall, shinningly handsome beaver hat was responsible for the high prices paid for prime beaver pelts.

Bradbury, in conversations with trappers, learned a number of interesting stories which proved the beaver's sagacity, at least to the satisfaction of the trappers. "They state that an old beaver, who has escaped from a trap, can scarcely afterwards be caught, as travelling in situations where traps are usually placed, he carries a stick in his mouth, with which he probes the sides of the river, that the stick may be caught in the trap, and thus saves himself." Travels in the Interior of America, 125 n.

Francis Parkman, The Oregon Trail (New York, 1946), 189.
The beaver cuts green timber with his chisel-like front teeth; his purpose is to construct a dam and form a pond. In spite of legends to the contrary, the beaver has no ability to control the direction of fall. Like many equally ignorant humans, he is occasionally flattened beneath the falling tree. In the quiet water formed by his dam, the beaver lodge is constructed—a domed house of branches and twigs thickly plastered with mud. The beaver will sometimes choose swift water, tunneling into the bank and making his nest above the water line.

A skilled trapper knew the ways of the beaver intimately, knew how to recognize beaver sign, and knew the best place to set his traps and conceal the man scent. He trapped in secret, selecting his hunting ground by his own private medicine, or often paying an Indian medicine man for consultation. The traps were set at the natural runways to the paths and slides used by the beaver, or at the tunnel entrances. The trap was generally baited with castoreum, a sticky, yellow substance taken from the animal's preputial glands. This highly scented secretion was sometimes doctored by the trapper to increase its potency in attracting beaver. The specially constructed, highly expensive traps weighed five pounds and were the trapper's prize possessions.

In the murky half-light of dusk, the trapper set his traps, concealing his activity both from Indians and from fellow trappers, "for it was not good policy for a trapper to let too many know where he intends to set his traps particularly if his horse is not so fast as those of his companions." He waded into the stream from a safe

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distance to the selected place, carefully splashing water over his
trail to the bank. Carrying the set trap, he placed it at the proper
depth, attached to a trap pole by a ring and five-foot steel chain.
An attached float stick served to mark the carcass after the beaver
was caught and drowned.

The mountain men preferred to raise their traps just before
sunrise. The catch was skinned immediately, and after checking his
half-dozen traps, the trapper returned to camp, which was moved each
day. Only the cautious survived long in the mountains. Preparing the
pelt required considerable labor; the skin was stretched on a hooped
willow frame and dried in the sun. It was scraped or grained, to rid
it of all pieces of flesh. When dry, the skins were folded with the
fur inside and packed in bundles by a crude press. The standard meas­
urement of beaver pelts in quantity was the "pack," a compact bundle
of about 80 furs weighing some 100 pounds.

Undoubtedly the event of the year to which the mountain men
looked forward with keenest anticipation was the annual rendezvous.
The much-described rendezvous was the most colorful phase of the
Rocky Mountain fur trade, and the spectacle has often been likened
to the medieval fair. "It was a place of buying, selling, haggling,
cheating, gambling, fighting, drinking, palaverining, racing, shouting,
and carousing."9

After the first rendezvous in 1825, there was an annual
meeting each year until 1840, except for the year 1831 when trade

9Cleland, This Reckless Breed, 25.
FUR RENDEZVOUS SITES
1824-1839

LEGEND
- RENDEZVOUS
- FORTS
- PRESENT DAY TOWNS
- SCOTTS BLUFF NAT'L. MON.
goods failed to reach the mountains in time. There were 15 in all, 8 on the Green River and its tributaries, 3 on the Wind River, 2 on the Weber River, 1 on the Bear River, and 1 on the Snake River.  

The site of the rendezvous was selected a year in advance by the company which would be sending out its pack train of trading goods. These grounds to which trappers and Indians flocked by the hundreds were situated in spectacular surroundings—in view of the Wind River Mountains, sparkling under a mantle of snow, or along some meandering stream where the grass was lush and tall and the slopes bright with flaming wild flowers. There were brigades of company men, bands of free trappers, Spanish-speaking mountain men from the Southwest, and French-Canadian deserters from the Hudson's Bay Company. And there were villages of friendly Indians who threw up their skin lodges and prepared to trade their furs and just watch the fun.

The arrival of the long, heavily laden pack trains opened the business session. The companies which furnished the supplies, rather than the trappers, reaped the rewards of the trade. The caravans consisted of 200 or more horses and mules, each carrying up to 300 pounds of trade goods. Merchants who had braved the dangers of the long journey from St. Louis found considerable solace in charging

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10 Probably the best study of the fur trade rendezvous is in Carl P. Russell "Wilderness Rendezvous Period of the American Fur Trade," Oregon Historical Quarterly, XLII (1941).
prices for their goods which allowed them a profit sometimes surpassing 2,000 percent.11

Their wares were representative of the commerce of the globe: beaver traps and blankets from England, mirrors from Germany, beads from Italy, calicoes from France, powder from the Du Pont works in Delaware, lead from Missouri mines, rifles from the Hawken plant in St. Louis, and cask after cask of "Taos lightning," that celebrated 188-proof elixir with an uncontested reputation for increasing profits and producing hangovers, many of which lasted into Eternity.

Actually it had always been illegal to sell liquor to the Indians, and after 1832 it was illegal to take liquor into the Indian country. But traders were never able to conduct business without whiskey, and they found many ways to evade the law. It was common practice for caravans to receive permission to carry 20 gallons of liquor per man—for medicinal purposes.12

With no regrets at the price they were forced to pay, the trappers surrendered their furs, lying in coffee, sugar, and tobacco; blankets and shirts; and a few gaudy fineries for those who had Indian wives. When beaver was plentiful, the trappers still had money left,


12When Sublette took a caravan to the mountains in 1831, he received a special permit from William Clark, Superintendent of Indian Affairs in St. Louis, to carry 450 gallons of whiskey "for the special use of his boatmen." Since Sublette traveled by land and had no boatmen, one is almost tempted to suspect he had some other purpose in mind. Sunder, Bill Sublette, 102.
Taos Lightning. In a trade famous for villainous brews, the Taos product undoubtedly caused the most casualties.

N. P. S. sketch by Mulleshy
but this quickly disappeared when the flat casks of raw alcohol were brought out.

The lethal medicine often turned the scene into a roaring, riotous debauch as trappers vied with one another in singing, dancing, wrestling, or fighting, or gambled recklessly at the Indian game of "hand" until they had lost in a few hours what they had risked their lives to acquire—rifles, horses, traps, even their wives. But there were no misers or repentant sinners among the mountain men, for these were moments to be savored around the campfire during the long winters ahead. Few of the trappers ever saved enough money to return to civilization with a stake, and many never got out of debt to the company which supplied them.

The rendezvous lasted a few days, at most a few weeks. As the Indian tipis came down, long files of travois heavily loaded with camp supplies slanted over the far hills. The trappers prepared their outfits, renewed trap springs and gun flints, filled their "possible" sacks, and carefully packed away powder and lead, along with the stores of tea, sugar, and flour which could not be replaced for another year. With memories of drinking, gambling, and whoring to sustain their spirits for another season of trapping, they vanished silently into the mountains.
At the 1830 rendezvous, the firm of Smith, Jackson, and Sublette was prepared to sell out. During the four years since the partners had bought out Ashley, they had lost almost 50 men along with large quantities of furs, traps, horses, and equipment worth $45,000. The costs of the trade were increasing, higher prices were being charged for merchandise, and competition was ever more vicious. The entire return from the years 1826-29 was not enough to cover expenses and losses, and the firm was barely solvent. Only by virtue of a large take of furs in 1830 were the partners able to pay their debts and split a modest profit. They agreed the time was at hand to retire from the business, because of the "progressive exhaustion of the fur country," and because the bonanza years in the trade had attracted powerful competition.

Their interests were purchased by a group of experienced trappers, Thomas Fitzpatrick, James Bridger, Milton Sublette, Henry Fraeb, and Jean Baptiste Gervais. These well known mountain men organized under the name "Rocky Mountain Fur Company," the only time the firm which Ashley founded officially did business under that name. All were old hands in the trade, and they were determined to fight it out with all comers, including the American Fur Company. Fitzpatrick recruited experienced mountain men from as far away as Taos, and the firm placed its trust in

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the abilities of its large complement of hard-bitten mountain men, the most seasoned trappers in the business.3

The new company began operations auspiciously. The partners led a brigade of 200 men out of the rendezvous, a party so formidable it could afford to defy the Blackfeet in their own territory. With companies of trappers such as this one ranging for thousands of miles through the West each year, the beaver streams were thoroughly hunted in a comparatively short time. Fanning out into smaller groups, the brigade roved far into the interior, and during the fall hunt traveled more than 1,200 miles.4 The hunt was successful, but the partners soon learned that the American Fur Company, rather than the Blackfeet, was the most dangerous of all adversaries.

The second advance westward of the American Fur Company resulted in considerably more than a rivalry between competing fur companies. It was a bitter, ruthless struggle for monopolistic control of both the furs and the lucrative business of supplying the traders. The small operator was quickly crowded out of the field, and critics have since suggested that violence was the favorite method used by Astor's agents to destroy competition. As the fur trade became a highly specialized, well-organized business, such acts as Astor's war with the Hudson's Bay Company were little short of high drama. "There are few stories of bare-knuckle business


4Chittenden, The American Fur Trade, I, 293.
competition in American economic history to equal that of the fur trade after John Jacob Astor's revamped company took to the field in 1822.  

Rebuffed at Astoria in 1813, Astor had never abandoned his original design of controlling the American fur trade. His campaign was fought in the halls of Congress, as well as along the beaver streams of the West. Astor had never been accepted by the St. Louis fur interests, a formidable obstacle to anyone in the business, but the New York financier acquired the political support of such powerful figures as Lewis Cass of Michigan and Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri. Through such men Astor's company benefited from Congressional legislation, and in 1822 he gained the long-sought foothold in Missouri when he established a Western Department with headquarters in St. Louis.

Astor was by this time prospering mightily in New York real estate, and he was no longer able to give the fur trade his exclusive personal attention. He had acquired two able agents to push forward the interests of his company, both of whom were former competitors. Pierre Chouteau was a daring and resourceful St. Louis financier, ruthless and hard-driving in the Astor tradition. Kenneth McKenzie, "King of the Upper Missouri," was a shrewd and successful trader and a brilliant field executive, whose instructions were simple, to "ecraser toute opposition."

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5Thomas D. Clark, Frontier America (New York, 1959), 456.

6From this time on, the shadow of the American Fur Company lengthened across the domain of the mountain men. Thereafter the "Company" to the trappers always meant the American Fur Company; everything else was the "opposition."
Gathering together the best available trappers, and sending out exploring parties into the Three Forks and Yellowstone country, Chouteau and McKenzie began to build a system of fixed posts along the Missouri, from which bases the mountains could be successfully invaded. In 1829 McKenzie built Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone, on the threshold of the Blackfeet country, and the following year McKenzie counted coup when he established peaceful trade with the Blackfeet. Even the Hudson's Bay Company, whose trappers could not be kept out of any country they proposed to hunt, had lost so many men and outfits to the Blackfeet they approached only in great force. In 1831 McKenzie planted a trading post in the heart of the Blackfeet country, near the mouth of the Marias River, and the following year Fort Cass was built at the junction of the Yellowstone and the Big Horn—giving the American Fur Company a bridgehead in the country of the Crow nation.

The use of fixed trading posts was an important feature of the trade. These posts were essential to the Indian trade. They were not abandoned during the period of the rendezvous system, and they continued in operation long afterwards. According to Chittenden's listing, there were about 140 known posts west of St. Louis between 1807 and 1843.7 They were located generally along the interior rivers, with square or rectangular stockades containing living quarters, warehouses, storehouses, and workshops. William Sublette and Robert Campbell, who served as jobbers supplying the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, built Fort William on

7 The American Fur Trade, III, 947-74.
Fort William. The predecessor of Fort Laramie which was a fur trade post and way station on the Oregon Trail. From a painting by A. J. Nuller.

Courtesy, Mrs. Clyde Porter
the Platte River, en route to the annual trappers' rendezvous in 1834. Later called Fort Laramie, and located on the Oregon Trail, it became one of the most notable posts in the West.

Although the posts also hired men to trap, much of the trading was done with the Indians, who brought in furs to exchange for trade goods. Dealing with the more warlike tribes required the utmost in frontier skill. The post horses were a perpetual attraction for the Indians, who considered horse stealing an honorable and distinguished profession. Indians were generally admitted behind fort walls only in small groups and were kept well covered by watchful employees during trading operations. The chief trader had to know just what presents to give what chiefs, being careful to appear neither miserly nor overgenerous, able to decide when to accept a few insults to promote good will, and when to put laudanum in the alcohol to bring the negotiations to a sudden and successful conclusion.

Haggling over prices led to explosions. At Fort McKenzie a Blood killed one of the post's traders in a dispute over prices. It was a difficult position for the chief trader; the Indians had just arrived and trading had just begun. The Bloods said it was just one of those accidents, and as De Voto sagely observed, what the hell, business is business. The trading continued.8

Under the leadership of the American Fur Company, steamboats were introduced into the Upper Missouri trade. In 1832 the company's boat, the Yellowstone, reached Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone River,

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8 Across the Wide Missouri, 142.
and on its return averaged 100 miles a day. Steamboats did not reach Fort Benton, head of navigation on the Missouri, until much later, but they carried men and supplies during the peak of the fur trade era. The comparatively swift steamboat ended the slow, laborious labor of dragging heavy keelboats up the treacherous river by man power. From the time of Lewis and Clark, the bateaux, pirogues, and keelboats were inched upstream by poles, oars, sails, and the cordelle rope. Voyageurs struggled and slipped along the slimy, caving banks of the Missouri, hauling the craft upstream by the rope over their shoulders, to a rousing chorus of French boat songs.

The brigades of the American Fur Company were not yet ready to compete with the more experienced mountain men of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. McKenzie's partisans, men such as Joseph Robidoux, Lucien Fontenelle, Andrew Drips, and Henry Vanderburgh, were river traders who had yet to learn the mountain craft. McKenzie's solution was simple, and eventually successful. His brigades were sent out with instructions to attach themselves to the brigades of the opposition, to go where they went, and to trap where they trapped.

In the years following 1830, Drips, Vanderburgh, and Fontanelle followed opposition trappers through some of the most historic fur trapping sites of the mountains--Cache Valley, Bear Lake, Great Salt Lake, Ogden's Hole, Bear River Valley, the Snake River, and Ham's Fork. At first they took few furs, but as they watched the continuing struggle between the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, they absorbed lessons in geography, in bribery and deception, and in the hijacking of furs.
Pierre's Hole. Lying under the Tetons, Pierre's Hole was the scene of the 1832 rendezvous, which closed with the most celebrated of all battles between trappers and Indians.
Doggedly, Vanderburgh and Drips sought the rival trappers during the spring hunt of 1832, catching up with Jim Bridger in the Idaho lava fields. Old Cabe was unable to shake the now cagey Vanderburgh. Bridger's men moved across Idaho into Utah, and to every stream where they baited their traps, the rival trappers followed, floating their sticks in the same water.

The 1832 rendezvous was in Pierre's Hole, and as rendezvous time approached, both companies anxiously awaited their supply trains, en route from St. Louis. The one which reached the rendezvous first would have the fur harvest to itself. Successive parties were sent out by both companies to hurry along the pack trains, slowly wending overland toward the Tetons. On the morning of July 8, enveloped in a haze of dust, bridles jingling, mules braying, and a hundred rifles announcing the completion of the journey, the Rocky Mountain company train under Bill Sublette entered Pierre's Hole. The Rocky Mountain Fur Company won a rich race—the returning caravan departed with furs valued at $85,000—but it was a temporary victory. It was also the last bonanza fur harvest of the Rocky Mountains. 9

To those traders at the 1832 rendezvous who looked to the future, it must have been evident that the old order was changing. It was necessary only to look at the tents and tipis spread along the creeks in Pierre's Hole, the sizable remudas of horses and mules grazing in the green valley, to appreciate the emerging pattern. What was happening to the

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9The spectacular race to the rendezvous is described in Warren A. Ferris, Life in the Rocky Mountains, 1830-1835 (Salt Lake City, 1940), 65-7.
beaver had happened or would happen to almost every natural resource on
the frontier, be it gold or virgin forests or buffalo—all of which
seemed initially to be present in such enormous quantities that the supply
was inexhaustible, yet each of which was quickly drained away by the gold
seekers, the lumbermen, and the hide hunters.

In large encampments could be seen the several hundred trappers
of the two competing fur companies, rivalries temporarily forgotten as
the trappers renewed friendships, mended their buckskins, repaired arms
and traps, and accounted for companions who had failed to survive the
winter's hazards. Every day small groups of free trappers arrived. Joining
the rendezvous was the New England merchant and Oregon colonizer,
Nathaniel Wyeth, leading several dozen members of the Pacific Trading
Company, soon to receive a disastrous introduction to the ways of the
inland fur trade. The St. Louis firm of Gantt and Blackwell was repre-
sented by a brigade of trappers. Off by themselves were nearly 100
leathery mountain men from Taos, including the most eccentric of all the
clan, Old Bill Williams. Scattered about were the camps of the Nez Perces
and the Flatheads.

Not far away from the rendezvous was a company of well over a
hundred trappers, under Captain Bonneville. A West Pointer, who had become
interested in the fur trade while serving on the frontier, Bonneville had
secured a two-year leave from the Army, ostensibly for the purpose of
exploration. But his outfit was supplied by a New York merchant and former
Astorian, and it is generally agreed his purpose, like that of so many
others, was to break into the profitable fur trade. Thanks to the inventive
Bonneville's Bull Wagons. Although undistinguished by success in the fur trade, Captain Bonneville was the first man to take wagons through the South Pass, in 1832.

N. P. S. photograph by Macy
pen of Washington Irving, Bonneville was a "history-made" man, whose rather ordinary adventures were made famous by Irving. 10

The future of the trade was also evident to the Secretary of War, who predicted in his annual report for 1832, "This state of things will, before many years, lead to the entire destruction of the beaver." The partners of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company had reluctantly come to the same conclusion. The country was not big enough to support everyone. Before the rendezvous broke up, they offered to divide the mountain hunting grounds with the American Fur Company, each company to take half. But for Vanderburgh and Drips half was not enough, nor were they yet sufficiently mountain-wise to insure a fair division. With the resources of a powerful trust behind them, they decided instead to continue the fight, certain they could eventually bankrupt the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and control the entire trade.

The year 1832 was an important year, for it could be selected to mark the turning point in the Rocky Mountain fur trade. Powerful opposition threatened the domination of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. The American Fur Company was now firmly established in the mountains, Wyeth and Bonneville were joining the race for furs, and the Hudson's Bay Company continued its masterly campaigns from the Northwest.

The results of ruinous competition and the frenzied exploitation of the beaver were strikingly evident at the 1833 rendezvous at Horse Creek on the Green River. No trapper present could remember when the trade had been so poor. Captain Bonneville's men had less than 20 skins per man to show for a full year of trapping. Profits were scant. The only solution seemed to be the discovery of new beaver streams, but experienced trappers began to lose hope.

Facing financial ruin because of the meager yield of his trappers, Captain Bonneville decided at the 1833 rendezvous to recoup his losses by sending parties far afield. In so doing he made a solid contribution to the annals of Western adventure, for one of the bands was led by the six-foot Tennessee mountain man, Joseph Reddeford Walker, one of the most redoubtable pathfinders of the West, for whom three important landmarks are named.

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1 Chittenden, The American Fur Trade, I, 299.
3 Walker Pass, California; Walker River, in California and Nevada; and Walker Lake, Nevada.
Bonneville sent Walker with about 40 well-equipped men to trap and explore the country beyond the valley of the Great Salt Lake. Walker's odyssey was in many ways similar to that of Jedediah Smith. He crossed the Great Basin between the Green River and the Sierra Nevada, blazing a route later used by the forty-niners. The passage of the Sierra required nearly a month, the party wandering for weeks through heavy snow, subsisting on the black, tough meat of their dying horses. During their arduous search for a way out of the mountains, the trappers are believed to have traveled along the divide between the Tuolumne and Merced rivers, in the heart of present Yosemite National Park. They thus became the first white men to gaze into the enchanted valley of Yosemite. After breaking through the mountains, Walker spent the winter at Monterey, and in early spring of 1834 started the long journey homeward, crossing the mountains by Walker Pass. He retraced his trail across the Nevada and Utah desert and reached the 1834 rendezvous on Ham's Fork of the Green River.

Walker's report on the country he had seen indicated the fur trade was rapidly waning. Many streams were trapped out, so that not a single beaver remained. And Walker's exploration, added to the numberless

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4 Although most of Bonneville's purposes are shrouded in mystery, there seems little doubt that California was his ultimate destination. Leonard, whose journal gives an excellent account of the journey, apparently had no doubt where Walker was headed; he wrote, "I was anxious to go to the coast of the Pacific, and for that purpose hired with Mr. Walker as clerk." John C. Ewers, ed., Adventures of Zenas Leonard, Fur Trader (Norman, 1959), 64-5.

5 Carl P. Russell, One Hundred Years in Yosemite (Berkeley, 1947), 6-8.
A View of Fort Union. The post, one of the most famous forts of the trade, as painted by Charles Bodmer, an outstanding artist of the West.
searches which trappers had made for new hunting grounds, confirmed the inescapable fact that there were no new regions of prime beaver to be found, even if one searched westward to the Pacific.

Although his foresight may not have been typical of all trappers, Leonard looked to the future and saw that the wilderness domain of the mountain men would be settled, and within a short time. Writing from California in 1834, Walker's clerk considered the thousand miles of wilderness he had crossed and observed, "what a theme to contemplate its settlement and civilization."

Will the jurisdiction of the federal government ever succeed in civilizing the thousands of savages now roaming over these plains, and her hardy freeborn population here plant their homes, build their towns and cities, and say here shall the arts and sciences take root and flourish? Yes, here, even in this remote part of the great West before many years, will these hills and valleys be greeted with the enlivening sound, of the workman's hammer, and the merry whistle of the ploughboy. 6

Nathaniel Wyeth had contracted with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company to supply the organization with trade goods at the 1834 rendezvous. When his pack train arrived at Ham's Fork, Wyeth learned the partners, unwilling to share any financial returns from their small year's catch, had hurriedly dispatched their own caravan of trade goods from St. Louis. Their train had arrived just three days in advance of Wyeth, and they refused to purchase Wyeth's goods. Infuriated by this brazen repudiation of his contract, Wyeth is reported to have informed the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, "Gentlemen, I will roll a stone into your garden that you

6 Ewers, Adventures of Zenas Leonard, 94.
will never be able to get out." In order to save his investment, Wyeth built Fort Hall on the Snake, adding a new rival to the already crowded field.

Wyeth was not the only victim of such brutal tactics; during the previous winter Fitzpatrick had entered the Crow country on the Tongue River, where he and his men were promptly robbed by Indians of everything they owned. Fitzpatrick accused the American Fur Company of instigating the attack. The Indians readily admitted this was the case, and the company agent confessed likewise, but there was no restitution, only a determination on the part of the victims to turn the tables at the next opportunity. 8

The rivalry between the two giant fur companies ended in 1834. Realizing the trade could not support both operations, and aware that the American Fur Company's far-flung activities were on so large a scale as to make victory inevitable, the Rocky Mountain Fur Company partners agreed to sell out. The American Fur Company acquired not only the assets of its once-powerful rival, but hired the former partners and their trappers.

The life of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company was but 12 years, during which time company pack trains returned to St. Louis from the annual rendezvous loaded with more than one thousand packs of beaver worth a half million dollars. To list the people and the events associated with the company is to record the history of the Rocky Mountain fur trade. The

7 Frances F. Victor, The River of the West (Hartford, 1870), 164.

Rocky Mountain Fur Company was "the greatest name in the mountains," for during its short career it "opened up the mountain trade, pioneered in exploration and discovery beyond any others in the history of the West."9

9 De Voto, *Across the Wide Missouri*, xxvi.
THE LAST RENDEZVOUS

Now in control of the Rocky Mountain trade, the American Fur Company enjoyed a few relatively profitable years after 1834, but the end was near.1 In 1835 and 1836 the fur yield picked up slightly, but in the latter year few more than a hundred trappers arrived at the rendezvous—only a fraction of the number which had appeared several years before. Then in succeeding years bad fortune dogged the trade. The winter of 1836-37 was one of the most severe ever experienced in the mountains, taking a heavy toll of beaver. The following spring the American Fur Company's steamboat reached Fort Union with smallpox on board. The deadly plague spread like wildfire through the Indian tribes, taking a terrible toll. The survivors, crazed by the agonizing deaths of thousands upon thousands of their people, vented their rage upon the trappers. At the rendezvous that year a trapper bitterly complained of the miserly treatment of the American Fur Company traders, noting that "men who had been in the company a long time commenced leaving owing to the company being so hard."2

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1The astute Astor by this time had decided to withdraw from the Western trade. Writing from London in 1833, he noted, "I very much fear beaver will not sell very well very soon unless very fine. It appears that they make hats of silk in place of beaver." Chittenden, The American Fur Trade, I, 364. The following year Astor sold out; the Western Department was purchased by Pratte, Chouteau and Company, of St. Louis; a company headed by Ramsey Crooks acquired the Northern Department, which continued under the name of American Fur Company.

2Johansen, Robert Newell's Memoranda, 37.
The absorption of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company had not eliminated all competition for the American Fur Company. Wyeth built Fort Hall in 1834; and during the same year the Hudson's Bay Company strengthened its position in the Snake Country by constructing Fort Boise near the junction of the Snake and Boise Rivers. Three years later the Company purchased Fort Hall itself. But beaver were exceedingly scarce, and shortly the fur trading operations of the Hudson's Bay Company were to fall prey to that significant phase of American Manifest Destiny known as "Oregon fever."

The decline of the fur trade was due to many factors, reflecting the international aspects of the business. Most of the beaver fur went into production of the stylish beaver topper. The maritime fur trade of the Northwest coast found its most profitable market in China; but in bringing back cargoes of silks a new factor was introduced into the trade, with fatal results.

Even before the change to silk, hatmakers had begun to introduce seal, nutria from South America, and even rabbit fur in place of beaver fur. New machinery was introduced which made an acceptable felt from other, cheaper stocks. Just at the critical period of the fur trade, during the middle 1830's, fashion decreed that silk from China, rather than beaver from the Rocky Mountains, would be used in the making of hats. "That decision closed the chapter of the Western fur trade and concluded the era of the mountain men."3

At the peak of the industry, in the early 1830's, the price of beaver pelts in the mountains was about five dollars a pound, with

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3 Cleland, This Reckless Breed, 344.
Before the introduction of silk in 1840, Beaver hats were much prized. In their manufacture, only the soft under fur of the Beaver pelt was utilized. The pelt as it came from the trader was a rough greasy skin covered with coarse brown hair under which was the fine rich wool. The first step in hat making was to shave both guard hair and wool from the skin. The wool and hair were separated by a blowing process. The fine, loose fur was then applied to a revolving, perforated copper cone by means of suction. Felting was induced by applying hot water and manipulating by hand. More fur was added and the process continued. When the felt had become tough, the hood was removed from the cone and molded into the desired shape. Shellac forced into the felt from the inside gave it body. Fine fur applied to the outside and carefully worked produced the effect of a growth of fur. A high gloss was secured by brushing.

The Cause of it All. To provide civilized gentlemen with the stylish beaver hat, fur trappers risked their lives in the mountains of the West.
experienced trappers taking up to five hundred pounds of fur a year. By 1840, the price had dropped to one or two dollars a pound, and few trappers were able to bring one hundred fifty pounds of beaver pelts to the annual rendezvous.

The period of the decline of the fur trade coincided with the beginnings of settlement in Oregon. A leading figure of the Hudson's Bay Company observed, in 1838:

The interests of the Colony and Fur Trade will never harmonize, the former can flourish, only, through the protection of equal laws, the influence of free trade, the accession of respectable inhabitants, in short, by establishing a new order of things, while the fur Trade must suffer by each innovation.\(^4\)

Hudson's Bay Company trappers, who retired to farm the rich Willamette Valley, began the agricultural settlement of the Oregon country. Widespread public interest in Oregon dates to the story, highly sentimentalized, which appeared in eastern journals in 1833 telling of the request for missionaries made by a deputation of Nez Perce and Flathead Indians. Jason Lee led the first missionary party to Oregon the following year, joining a fur trade caravan for the journey.

Although McLoughlin at Fort Vancouver continued to send brigades into California and established a post on San Francisco Bay in 1841, he was convinced that the future of the fur trade lay north of the forty-ninth parallel; to the south "the fur trade was ending."\(^5\) While Forts Hall and Boise continued for several years to supply American trappers

\(^4\)Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company*, 12.

\(^5\)Winther, *Great Northwest*, 106.
and Indians with British goods, the two posts on the Oregon Trail were shortly to become important way stations for overland wagon trains bringing settlers to the Pacific slope.

The Hudson's Bay Company had successfully repelled efforts of American trappers to invade the Columbia River region during the 1830's, but it could do little to halt the missionaries and settlers. The missionary works of Whitman and Spalding had barely noticeable effect upon the spiritual salvation of their Indian charges, but American missionaries contributed greatly in attracting American settlers to the Oregon country. The "Great Reinforcement" of missionaries in 1841 was followed by the "Great Migration" of nearly 1,000 settlers in 1843. The writings of such men as Washington Irving, who wrote of the fur trade in Astoria and Captain Bonneville, and John C. Fremont, whose colorful official reports served as guidebooks to overland travel, did much to popularize the West. By 1845, an Independence, Missouri, newspaper joyously announced, "Whoo, ho! Go it boys! We're in a perfect Oregon fever." Many former trappers found employment in guiding the wagon trains over the Oregon Trail, through the region where the fur trade had but recently flourished.

By this time many of the veteran trappers were leaving the mountains. Their names appear on the rosters of American Fur Company posts on the Missouri. Some are listed as guides for government expeditions or for Army explorations. Others turn up as employees of Santa Fe traders, or as wagon train captains, leading the emigrants through South Pass to Oregon and California.

Nothing could have symbolized the great change which had taken place in the mountains any more than the scene at the 1839 rendezvous,
when a considerable portion of the trapping fraternity accepted an
invitation to turn from its ways of sin and listen to a sermon preached
by a missionary on his way to Oregon. This was obviously the end. Rumors
of previous years were verified in 1840. When the rendezvous broke up that
summer, the American Fur Company announced it was the last meeting. Hence-
forth trading would be carried on at the fixed posts.

The Rocky Mountain fur trade dragged on a few more years, but
there was no turning back. In 1843 Jim Bridger established Fort Bridger
on the Oregon Trail, the first trading post built west of the Mississippi
to serve overland emigrants. Chittenden holds this date marks the end
of the fur trade, and it is well chosen. The decision of Bridger—one
of the authentic free spirits of the trade—to do blacksmithing work for
wagon trains conveying farmers into the former domain of the trapper, cer-
tainly indicated the era of the fur trade was past. Bridger was born in
1804, the year Meriwether Lewis and William Clark set out from St. Louis
to become the first Americans to explore the far West. "Old Gabe," as
he was known to the mountain men, died in 1881, more than 30 years after
the California Gold Rush, and more than a decade after the completion of
the transcontinental railroad. In the annals of American history, the
western fur trade was but a brief interlude.

Looking back upon the once flourishing fur trade of the West,
old trappers who had seen it all must have had many memories of the trade:
of factors who ruled like feudal lords over stockaded demesnes, of

Fort Bridger. The establishment of this post on the Oregon Trail by Jim Bridger in 1843 marked the close of the trade, for it was the first post founded to aid overland emigrants.

Courtesy, Utah Historical Society
blacksmiths at their forges and engaged at the wedge fur presses, of
Indian ambush and solemn treaty, of Russian otter hunters and daring
Aleuts in frail skin craft poaching in the Spanish waters off Califor-
nia, of Lewis and Clark setting forth on their memorable expedition, of
Walker and his men fighting their way over the mighty wall of the Sierra
Nevada, and of rendezvous time when the riotous cries of the mountain men
resounded through the parks of the Rocky Mountains.

The old life was fast slipping away, leaving the trappers with
little more than dreams of days when bands of fat cow were everywhere and
the streams were rich with beaver, when plews brought six dollars and the
whiskey flowed like a merry mountain stream at the rendezvous. "What has
come of it, and whar's the dollars as ought to be in my possibles?" asked
Ruxton's mythical Killbuck, who for thirty years had knocked about the
mountains "from Missouri's head as far sothe as the starving Gila,"
trapping many a hundred pack of beaver.

Many's the time Killbuck, like a great many of his fellow trap-
pers, had pondered the meaning of the wild life he led. Was it a white
man's existence, never safe from the scalping knife of some darn brat
of an Indian? "Whar's the ind of this, I say? Is a man to be hunted
by Injuns all his days?"

Often he, and doubtless many another mountain man, had thought
of hitting the Taos trail and taking himself a squaw. Like others long
accustomed to lusty, dark-skinned playmates, he considered white girls
"too much like pictures." The problem was the same for all those who
had known the face of the mountain West long before it appeared on maps.
How could one return to the dull cramped life in the settlements, "amongst them big band of corncrackers to Missoura," when it meant giving up buffler meat for hog? In Ruxton's novel, the veteran trapper decides to stay, eternally hopeful for better days and a change in his fortunes.

The mountain man was the first to see, to explore, and to report upon the American West. Through him emigrants learned of the resources of that vast region beyond the wide Missouri. In the procession of civilization westward, the fur trapper was the first to advance, followed by the missionary, the miner, the soldier, the cattleman, and the pioneer farmer who used his trails through the wilderness to extend the boundaries of the United States to the Pacific. Killbuck, and his companions, lived a life none had been born to and which few survived. But for him it was the only life, and he refused to leave the mountains.

No; darn the settlements, I say. It won't shine, and whar's the dollars? However, beaver's 'bound to rise'; human natur can't go on selling beaver a dollar a pound; no, no, that ain't a going to shine much longer, I know. Them was the times when this child first went to the mountains: six dollars the plew—old 'un or kitten. Wagh! but it's bound to rise, I says agin; and hyar's a coon knows whar to lay his hand on a dozen pack right handy, and then he'll take the Taos trail, wagh!"

Clyman was a veteran mountain man who had crossed and recrossed the West many times. Camp's superb biography is a classic of western history. De Voto declared his *Year of Decision* owed more to this book than to any other.


The best work thus far on the Nor'Westers. Some authorities believe there is room for improvement.


The first and only serious attempt to write a comprehensive history of the fur trade of the West. Although restricted in view, it is the most valuable single work in the field and considered by many to be only a cut or two below Holy Writ.


Cleland defines the fur trade of the Southwest as including Jackson Hole and Fort Vancouver, but he provides one of the few accounts of events in the Southwest, along with exceptionally fine coverage of the details of the fur trapper's life. A sound and entertaining study.

Dale, Harrison C., ed., *The Ashley-Smith Explorations and the Discovery of a Central Route to the Pacific, 1822-1829*. Cleveland, 1918.

One of the best accounts of the early Ashley expeditions, including the documents dealing with Ashley, Smith, and other early traders.


No more gifted writer, historian, and lover of the West ever wrote a more vivid and dramatic account of the Rocky Mountain fur trade. His *Year of Decision 1846* (Boston, 1942), a companion piece, deals with the fur trade.


A new edition of the account of the mountain man who accompanied the Walker expedition to California, with an informative introduction by Ewers. Leonard's versions of incidents he observed do not always agree with other eyewitnesses.

One of the few valuable and reliable accounts of the exciting years of the trade, by a clerk of the American Fur Company. Brilliantly edited.


A scholarly, incisive study of the widespread activities of the Company which for much of the period was the agent of the British Government in the Northwest country.


Termed by De Voto one of the finest books ever written about the West, Garrard's book does for the mountain men what Andy Adams's Log of a Cowboy does for the cowboys.


Of several noteworthy biographies of the fur trappers, this is one of the best. Fitzpatrick must be considered among the handful of men usually described as the "outstanding" mountain men.


A unique contribution to the field, Hussey's study is concerned both with the tree and the forest: a superb account of the Hudson's Bay Company in the Northwest and an exhaustive inquiry into the history of Fort Vancouver's physical development.


Although Irving never saw the country about which he wrote, his accounts are almost always trustworthy; they are based on original sources, and his literary quality is unmatched. Nevertheless, historians have never quite accepted him as an equal.


Along with Cleland's book, this admirable account of the most important trading post in the Southwest has opened that area to students of the fur trade.

An admirable work of painstaking scholarship by one of the most respected of contemporary students of the fur trade. It is the definitive work on the early Rocky Mountain trade.

Porter, Kenneth W., John Jacob Astor. 2 vols., Cambridge, 1931.

Porter's study of the man who dominated the fur trade, in addition to describing the Astoria venture and the expansion of the American Fur Company into the Western trade, analyzes the financial struggles, which exhibited no less vicious methods than did the Indian-white hostilities.

Russell, Carl P., "Wilderness Rendezvous Period of the American Fur Trade." In Oregon Historical Quarterly. XLII, 1941.

Although brief, this is the finest account of the rendezvous system of the Rocky Mountain trade.


There are very few existing diaries or journals kept by mountain men. This is the best, by a man who was not only a trapper at the peak of the Rocky Mountain trade, but was also a keen observer and an able writer.


There are few books, possibly only Garrard's Wah-To-Yah and the Taos Trail, which supply descriptions of the life of the mountain men as true and sympathetic as does Ruxton in this autobiographical novel.


 Probably the best overall study of the fur trade as the most important factor in the exploration of the West.
A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE PRESENT CONDITION
OF SITES ASSOCIATED WITH THE FUR TRADE

In summarizing the significance of the fur trade, the statement is often made that when the trappers quit the trade, they left nothing behind, and the land was virtually unchanged. In general, this is an accurate description of the extent of fur trade sites in the West. The physical remains are few. Many of the sites where important events of the trade took place can be identified, but there is seldom any evidence remaining.

Sites associated with the fur trade can be divided into several kinds: sites of the annual rendezvous, such as Henry's Fork, Wyoming, or Bear Lake, Utah; sites of forts or trading posts, such as Bent's Fort, Colorado, or Astoria, Oregon; sites of important explorations, such as those along routes used by Jedediah Smith and Joseph Reddeford Walker in their treks to California; and sites of Indian activity, such as the Arikara villages, South Dakota, or Pierre's Hole Battlefield, Idaho.

There are no physical remains in any of the rendezvous sites. Sometimes it required but a few days to transact the business and celebrate the occasion; at most, the festivities lasted but a few weeks, and there was no need for building permanent structures. The rendezvous was held along rivers, or in large valleys, or "holes," located in some of the most spectacular country in the West. In many cases, it is difficult to locate the precise site within the valley where the affair was held.

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1 Alaska fur trade sites will be treated in a separate National Survey study of Alaska.
Monument to the Missionaries. En route to the Oregon Country in 1836, Marcus and Narcissa Whitman traveled with an American Fur Company Caravan. The monument commemorates the missionaries' visit to the Green River rendezvous of that year.

N. P. S. photograph, 1959
Because the meetings were attended by hundreds of trappers and Indians, the area of the rendezvous was no doubt widely scattered.

Some of the rendezvous sites, such as Cache Valley, Bear Lake, and Pierre's Hole, have been settled, and much of the unspoiled wilderness character of the area has been lost. Some of the places of rendezvous have changed but little: the Henry's Fork rendezvous site, in Wyoming, where the first rendezvous was held in 1825, is almost unchanged, as is the Green River rendezvous site, near Daniel, Wyoming, one of the most popular of all the places of rendezvous.

Although the rendezvous system, between 1825 and 1840, revolutionized the system of obtaining furs, fixed trading posts were a feature of the trade from the earliest days until well after the end of the rendezvous period. There were some 140 known posts established west of St. Louis during the years from 1807 to 1843. There are not, however, many preserved forts. A considerable number must be classified as "lost" sites. Most were located along rivers, especially the Missouri, or at the junctions of rivers, and inevitable floods destroyed the forts and often obliterated the sites. Among the important posts whose sites cannot at present be identified are Fort Lisa, near Omaha, and Forts Mitchell, Vermillion, Tecumseh, Defiance, and Manuel. The sites of most of the posts along the Yellowstone have been lost.

The Missouri River was a principal highway of commerce for the fur traders both during the early period when keelboats had to be cordelled upstream by hand and after 1831 when the American Fur Company introduced steamboats to carry its supplies. The present extensive program of flood control projects in the Missouri River Basin has resulted
in the inundation of a number of fur trade sites along the Missouri and its tributaries. Among those which have been flooded, or will eventually be under water, are Forts George, Manuel Lisa, and Berthold; and the Arikara villages.

The Indians, like the trappers, were nomadic, and few sites remain to mark the part played by the Indians in the fur trade, although certain geographic locations, such as the Three Forks of the Missouri, were the general scene of stirring incidents from the arrival of the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1805. The site of the most important single battle of the fur trade era, the so-called "Battle of Pierre's Hole," fought just after the rendezvous of 1832, has never been precisely identified. The site of the second most important engagement, Ashley's battle with the Arikaras in 1823, will be inundated.

Perhaps the most important single contribution of the mountain men was to the exploration of the Far West. The fur trappers explored a greater section of the country, but unfortunately wrote less about their travels, than any other group of American frontiersmen. Fremont received the imposing title of "Pathfinder," but all of his expeditions, and those of almost every other government exploring expedition, were guided by former fur trappers. The great gateway to the West, South Pass, was discovered by fur trappers. Many of the passes through the Sierra Nevada were discovered by trappers—Walker Pass and Carson Pass are named for two

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2 The Lewis and Clark expedition was a monumental episode in the history of the fur trade. Sites associated with that exploration are dealt with in a separate report of the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, entitled "The Lewis and Clark Expedition."
Spokane House. Site of the North West Fur Company post built in 1810, and of the rival Pacific Fur Company post established two years later.

N. P. S. photograph, 1955
of the greatest of the mountain men. Although most of their searchings were unrecorded, the trappers can probably be credited with discovering most of the geographic features of the Far West.

Sites associated with outstanding feats of exploration often cannot be identified because of a lack of specific information on the route taken. Walker's westbound route over the Sierra into California in 1832 has never been precisely located. Most of the sites visited by Jedediah Smith in his historic journey into California in 1826 can only be approximated. The route taken by such redoubtable explorers as Hoback, Rezner, and Robinson, and the epic journey of John Colter in 1807, have been the subject of intensive study by scholars; and, as with most explorations, different authorities hold to different routes.

Only recently has there been any considerable interest in the fur trade on the part of the general public, and consequently only a relatively few fur trade sites have been preserved. Many are not even marked. There are some sites in private ownership at which there are either evident surface remains or the excellent possibility of underground foundations and artifacts. Such places offer fine opportunities for interpreting the fur trade story and should be preserved before they are totally destroyed. At Fort McKenzie are to be found cellar pits, mounds, buffalo bones, and other remains which have attracted pothunters. Although there are no surface indications at Fort Pierre, one of the three largest posts in the West, the site has been identified and should be excavated. The site of Fort Hall, Idaho, a fur trade post and emigrant supply station on the Oregon Trail, is protected by its isolated position in the Fort Hall Indian reservation, but because of its remoteness is seldom see by visitors.
Several fur-trading posts are being preserved by state historical societies. The site of Bent's Old Fort, Colorado, one of the largest and most successful fur-trading establishments in the West, is being excavated by the State Historical Society of Colorado, and the adobe walls are being reconstructed. The remains of Fort Union, principal post on the Missouri, are administered by the State Historical Society of North Dakota. In Missouri, Jackson County is restoring Fort Osage, one of the most important of the Government fur factories.

Some modern cities developed from fur-trading posts and in the process obliterated all or most of the original sites. In Astoria, on the site of the original post, a small blockhouse has been reconstructed. In Point Defiance Park, Tacoma, Fort Nisqually has been reconstructed, and one of the original post buildings has been moved to the park. The remains of Fort Benton, one of the bastions and two of the post buildings, are being restored by the City of Fort Benton.

Two of the most famous fur trade commercial centers were St. Louis and Taos. The only building remaining in St. Louis with fur trade associations, is the Lisa warehouse, in the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial. Manuel Lisa built the "Rock House" in 1818, and it was used by many fur traders, including John Jacob Astor. In Taos, a base of operations for the fur trappers of the southern Rockies, some of the historic scene has survived, including the plaza of Don Fernando de Taos, the Kit Carson House, and the George Bent House.

There are relatively few museums wholly or in large part devoted to the fur trade. One of the few is The Museum of the Fur Trade, near Chadron, Nebraska, which occupies the site of one of the last trading posts
built by James Bordeaux, who was associated with the American Fur Company. The museum includes considerable fur-trade material, and there are restorations of the Bordeaux trading houses. The Hudson's Bay Company has established a museum in Winnipeg, which tells the history of "The Company's" far-flung operations.

The State of Washington preserves the sites of two important posts of the trade: Fort Okanogan, built by the Astorians and later acquired by the Hudson's Bay Company; and Spokane House where the North West Company, in 1810, and the Pacific Fur Company, in 1812, built rival posts. The only Russian fur-trading post in the United States outside of Alaska, Fort Ross, with several well preserved buildings, is administered by the California Division of Beaches and Parks. The Division also maintains Sutter's Fort, where John Sutter engaged in fur trading in addition to many other activities, and the Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park, through which Smith passed on his way to Fort Vancouver.

Important fur-trade sites are preserved by the National Park Service. Fort Laramie National Monument, Nebraska, contains the site of Fort John and possibly that of Fort William, the latter built by Sublette and Campbell in 1834, the former by the American Fur Company in 1841. Fort John was later called Fort Laramie. Jackson Hole, in Grand Teton National Park, was one of the favorite meeting places of the mountain men.

Fort Vancouver National Monument, on the Columbia River in Washington, was headquarters and supply depot for all activities of the Hudson's Bay Company west of the Rocky Mountains. Sitka National Monument, Alaska, contains the site of the fort in which the Sitka Indians were
besieged and defeated by Russian American Fur Company hunters. The McLoughlin House National Historic Site, Oregon, preserves the house built by Dr. John McLoughlin, Chief Factor at Fort Vancouver, upon his retirement from the Hudson's Bay Company.

Jefferson National Expansion Memorial was established to commemorate the westward expansion movement, in which the City of St. Louis served as the principal gateway. A substantial portion of the museum exhibits are devoted to the fur trade and to the Lewis and Clark expedition. The memorial includes the Manuel Lisa warehouse.
SITES OF EXCEPTIONAL SIGNIFICANCE
FORT UNION, NORTH DAKOTA

Location: Just east of Buford, North Dakota, on North Dakota-Montana Line (south of U. S. Highway 2)

Ownership: State of North Dakota

Historical Significance

The leading historian of the fur trade declared "Fort Union was the best built post on the Missouri, and with the possible exception of Bent's fort on the Arkansas, the best in the entire West."1 Located on the main water route into the region of the interior fur trade, Fort Union for almost four decades was the chief trading post on the Upper Missouri. The post, built in 1828, maintained a monopoly on the rich fur region now encompassing Montana, North Dakota, and part of Wyoming.

The establishment of Fort Union marked the opening gun in the campaign of John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company to take over the mountain trade from the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Already in command of the Lower Missouri and Great Lakes, Astor in 1828 moved into the Upper Missouri, and his field commander, Kenneth McKenzie, sent the keelboat Otter from the Mandan villages to the mouth of the Yellowstone River. Here Fort Union was constructed, at the strategic junction of the Missouri and the Yellowstone, a natural meeting point of the routes of travel from all parts of the territory beyond. It became the central and principal depot for the fur trade of the Upper Missouri.

1 Chittenden, The American Fur Trade, III, 959.
Site of Fort Union. Built in 1828, Fort Union soon became the principal fur trading center on the upper Missouri River.

N. P. S. photograph, 1948
First called Fort Floyd, the name was soon changed to Fort Union, in all probability because McKenzie had decided to establish a post on the Upper Missouri as a place to unite all the routes of the trade. The strongly built post was 240 by 220 feet, the shorter side facing the river, and was surrounded by a palisade of square hewn pickets about a foot thick and twenty feet high. The bastions... consisted of square houses 24 feet on a side and 30 feet high, built entirely of stone and surmounted with pyramidal roofs. There were two stories; the lower one was pierced for cannon and the upper had a balcony for better observation. The usual banquette extended around the inner wall of the fort. The entrance was large and was secured with a powerful gate which in 1837 was changed to a double gate on account of the dangerous disposition of the Indians owing to the smallpox scourge. On the opposite side of the square from the entrance was the house of the bourgeois, a well-built, commodious two-story structure with glass windows, fire-place and other "modern conveniences." Around the square were the barracks for employees, the store houses, work shops, stables, a cut stone powder magazine capable of holding 50,000 pounds, and a reception room for the Indians. In the center of the court was a tall flag staff around which were the leathern tents of half-breeds in the service of the company. Near the flag staff stood one or two cannon trained upon the entrance to the fort. Somewhere in the enclosure was the famous distillery of 1834. All of the buildings were of cottonwood lumber and every thing was of an unusually elaborate character. Nathaniel J. Wyeth, when he visited Union in 1833, declared that he had seen no British post that could compare with it.  

In addition to the above-mentioned distillery incident—in which Wyeth reported the illegal production of liquor at Fort Union, almost resulting in the American Fur Company losing its license to trade—Fort Union was the scene of many important events. In 1831 the arrival of a company steamboat at Fort Union marked the beginning introduction of steam river traffic on the Upper Missouri. It was the center of the smallpox

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2 Ibid, 959-960.
epidemic which in 1837 swept away thousands of Northern Plains Indians. During his Northwestern Expedition of 1864, General Sully garrisoned Fort Union. After passing into the hands of the Northwest Fur Company and Durfee and Peck in 1867, the post was dismantled and its materials used in the buildings of nearby Fort Buford.

**Condition of Site**

With the exception of a few cellar pits, there is very little surface evidence at the site of the fort. There apparently has been no archeological excavation, but such investigation should be carried out to definitely locate the post structures and recover artifacts. The site is owned by the State of North Dakota and administered by the State Historical Society.

GREEN RIVER RENDEZVOUS SITE, WYOMING

Location: At the junction of Horse Creek and the Green River, near Daniel, Wyoming.

Ownership: In private ownership.

**Historical Significance**

The center of the rendezvous system of the Rocky Mountain fur trade was in southwestern Wyoming. Of all the rendezvous sites, the most popular was the Green River, and of the 15 annual meetings held by the mountain men 8 were held on the Green River. The rendezvous of 1833, 1835, 1836, 1839, and 1840 were held at the junction of Horse Creek and the Green River.

The importance and function of the rendezvous is well known; certainly this annual gathering of trappers, traders, and Indian allies, constitutes the most colorful phase of the mountain trade. It was originated by General William Ashley, and it effectively revolutionized the trade. Instead of a system of fixed posts, to which Indians and trappers brought furs, Ashley introduced the system of establishing a meeting place each summer, to which company and free trappers brought their winter catch. Here they were met by the great supply caravan from St. Louis, which bought the furs and sold supplies to the mountain men. The rendezvous, lasting for a few days or at most a few weeks, gave the trappers their one chance of the year to celebrate; few failed to take advantage of the opportunity. The first rendezvous was held in 1825, the last in 1840.

To the several meetings on the Upper Snake River came the foremost figures of the Rocky Mountain trade. A partial list would include
Ashley, Robert Campbell, Jim Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Kit Carson, Jedediah Smith, Lucien Fontenelle, James Beckwourth, the Sublettes, Andrew Drips, and Nathaniel Wyeth. Captain Benjamin Bonneville built his trading post, Fort Bonneville, or "Fort Nonsense," a few miles up Horse Creek, in 1832.

The Upper Green River site is also associated with the opening of the Oregon country by missionaries who accompanied fur trade caravans for a part of their journey to the Pacific. In 1835, two noted Protestant missionaries and colonizers, Samuel Parker and Marcus Whitman, joined a caravan of the American Fur Company and accompanied it to the Green River rendezvous, where they met Flat Head and Nez Perce Indians who sought missionaries for their people. Whitman returned to the East with the supply caravan, and came west again with a missionary party the following year, accompanying the American Fur Trade train to the Green River rendezvous. Whitman was accompanied by his wife, Narcissa, and by the Spaldings. All proceeded with a Hudson's Bay Company brigade to the Northwest, where they established the Whitman and Spalding missions.

Responding to an Indian plea for "black robes," the Belgium-born Jesuit missionary, Father Pierre De Smet, in 1840 accompanied an American Fur Company caravan to the Upper Green River rendezvous, continuing on to the northern Rocky Mountain region where he continued his missionary work among the Indians for 30 years.

**Condition of Site**

The rendezvous area near Daniel, Wyoming, is almost unchanged from its condition when the fur trappers gathered there a century and a
quarter ago. At Rendezvous Park each year the local people re-stage a
trapers' "rendezvous." In the park is a marker to Narcissa Whitman and
Eliza Spalding, the first white women to enter present Wyoming and to
cross the Oregon Trail. About three miles east of Daniel is an altar com-
memorating the first mass in Wyoming, conducted by Father De Smet in 1840.

Site Documentation: Carl P. Russell, "Trapper Trails to the
Sisk-ke-dee," *Annals of Wyoming* (July, 1945), and "Wilderness Rendezvous
Period of the American Fur Trade," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* (March, 1941);
ASTORIA, OREGON

Location: In the City of Astoria.

Ownership: A small portion of the site has been set aside by the city.

Historical Significance

Although the site of Astoria has been almost completely covered by the modern city which bears its name, it is still one of the most significant sites of the American fur trade. Events of considerable importance took place at Astoria, but the fort itself was only a small part of the Astoria story. Launched by the most influential single figure of the American fur trade, representing in its inception and its later history both a formidable American claim to the Oregon country and a major attempt to break the British monopoly of the fur trade of the Northwest, Astoria symbolizes the powerful influence, commercial and political, exerted by the fur trade interests. Chittenden concludes that,

if the Astorian enterprise had succeeded the course of empire on the American continent would have been altogether different than it has been. With the valley of the Columbia and the neighboring shores of the Pacific occupied by American citizens instead of British subjects during the period of controversy over the Oregon Question, no part of the Pacific coast line would now belong to Great Britain. ¹

The reports brought back by Lewis and Clark of the wealth in beaver are credited with the entry of John Jacob Astor into the western trade. German-born, Astor came to America in 1784, showed his financial genius immediately, and by 1800 was shipping furs to the Orient from his

Astoria. The original fort site, now within the limits of the city of Astoria. Here John Jacob Astor launched his campaign to seize control of the trade of the Oregon country.
operations in the interior. Astor's plan in establishing Astoria has been called a vision of empire. A central headquarters was to be established at the mouth of the Columbia, to be supplied by ships from New York that would control the coastal trade and barter the Northwest furs in the Chinese market. A string of trading posts was to be established along the overland route and elsewhere to drain away the fur yields of the West.

The Pacific Fur Company, a subsidiary of his American Fur Company, was chartered to operate in the Oregon country, with a number of former North West Company traders joining the enterprise. Two expeditions were sent off, one by land, one by sea. The ship Tonquin, whose captain was an unhappy selection, reached the mouth of the Columbia in March, 1811. While the Tonquin proceeded northward, where it was captured and destroyed by natives at Nootka Sound, Astor's men began construction of the fort.

The land party made history, both on its westward journey and on its return trip. The Overland Astorians left St. Louis in the spring of 1811, under Wilson Price Hunt, following the Lewis and Clark route up the Missouri River; but the hostile Blackfeet forced them to leave the river at the Arikara villages and proceed overland. After a journey of exceptional hardships, the party reached Astoria early in 1812. Initially, the plan of Astor succeeded. Trapping parties scattered through the Columbia Basin and took many furs. Trading posts were built at strategic locations eastward to the Rockies and from the Willamette Valley into present Canada. The North West Company was forced to increase the number of its posts to meet the American challenge.

But the failure of supply ships to arrive, and the War of 1812, ended the career of Astoria. Faced with the certainty of capture by British
naval forces, the Astoria partners sold the post to the North West Company in 1813. But in the preceding year Robert Stuart, with a small party of veterans of Hunt's westward expedition, made an epic journey from Astoria to the East. Although the "discovery" of South Pass is assigned to a number of fur traders, the "returning Astorians" are rather generally credited with the finding of the South Pass gap in the Rockies, and they established the overland route which later became known as the Oregon Trail.

After British occupation, the name of the post was changed to Fort George. It was used by the British as their western depot until the boundary dispute controversy decided the Hudson's Bay Company leaders to move the post north of the Columbia River, leading to the founding of Fort Vancouver in 1825. Although abandoned then, Fort George was later reoccupied by the Company until well into the period of American rule. During the entire period of the Oregon boundary dispute, one of the principal arguments which the American Government advanced to prove its claim to Oregon was the establishment of the American settlement at Astoria.

**Condition of Site**

The site of the original fort is bounded roughly by Fifteenth, Sixteenth, Duane, and Exchange Streets, a short distance from the Columbia River. A small plot of ground at Fifteenth and Exchange Streets has escaped construction activities. Maintained by the city, it features a reconstructed blockhouse and an explanatory sign. The Astor Column, a cylindrical monument 125 feet high, on the summit of a nearby hill, has a spiral frieze 535 feet in length which depicts the exploration of the Columbia River and the founding of Astoria.
BENT'S OLD FORT, COLORADO

Location: North bank of Arkansas River, about eight miles east of La Junta, Otero County, Colorado (on U. S. Highway 50).

Ownership: Most of the fort site is owned by the State Historical Society.

Historical Significance

Bent's Fort, begun in 1828, was the largest and most important American trading post in the Southwest fur trade. Next to Fort Union, it was the largest fur-trading post in the trans-Mississippi West. The center of American life and civilization in the Southwest for 20 years, Bent's Fort was both a center of fur-trading operations and a way station and supply depot on the Santa Fe Trail.

The post was built jointly by Charles and William Bent, and by Ceran St. Vrain, one of the outstanding mountain men. It was begun in 1828, but the size of the project and the ravages of smallpox delayed completion until 1832. The adobe walls, about 100 by 180 feet, were 15 feet high and 6 feet wide at the bottom. Standing like a castle of the Middle Ages, it was much more than an ordinary trading post. Behind the protective walls the activities of a hundred employees—clerks, traders, trappers, mechanics, teamsters, and herders—gave the appearance of a busy community.

The fort became the great crossroads station of the Southwest, for it was located at the meeting of the north-south route between the Platte and Santa Fe, and the east-west route up the Arkansas River to the mountains. Trails used by fur traders in reaching the trapping grounds
Bent's Old Fort. Little remains of the largest trading post of the Southwest, which was also a supply depot on the Santa Fe Trail.

N. P. S. photograph, 1939
of the southern Rockies radiated out from the famous fort on the Arkansas. To Bent's Fort came the mountain men to exchange their beaver skins, to obtain supplies and traps for another season of trapping, to spin yarns, and to celebrate. Traders came to Bent's Fort to forward their fur shipments and obtain trading goods. Among the famous mountain men using Bent's Fort as a headquarters were Kit Carson, Jim Beckwourth, Old Bill Williams, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Richard Wooton, Joseph Walker, and Carlos Beaubien.

The firm of Bent, St. Vrain and Company was a large-scale operator in both the Indian and New Mexican trade. The firm also had a smaller post at the mouth of the Purgatoire, where beaver, deer, and buffalo skins were received from the surrounding tribes. William Bent served as resident manager of the main post and was particularly successful in dealing with the Indians. The other two partners directed their attention to the Santa Fe trade. The shrewd and enterprising St. Vrain, skilled both as a trader and mountain man, was well-known by trappers and Indians from the Snake River to Chihuahua.

In the early and middle forties, when traffic on the Santa Fe Trail was at its height, Bent's Fort assumed the proportions of a great Oriental caravansary and an Occidental mercantile house. Here it stood on the plains, the central point of interest, the isolated refuge of wanderers on a widespread danger-abounding region. Here dwelt the scout, guide, and protector of travelers in a strange land. Here, at intervals for several years, Kit Carson was a resident hunter, supplying the Fort with buffalo meat. Here, in 1846, General Kearny, on his memorable march from Fort Leavenworth to Santa Fe, halted for several days to arrange supplies for his soldiers.1

Condition of the Site

The fort was abandoned in 1849 after the firm of Bent, St. Vrain and Company dissolved. During the California Gold Rush the Federal Government offered to buy the fort from William Bent, but the price was so low Bent blew up his fort and built a new post farther down the Arkansas. The site has been excavated by the State Historical Society of Colorado, and foundations of the original buildings uncovered. Adobe walls have been reconstructed on the original foundations, and an extensive reconstruction project is planned. Considerable support is being given to an effort to establish the fort as a National Historic Site.

Site Documentation: David Lavendar, Bent's Fort (Garden City, 1954); Holie Mumey, Bent's Old Fort and Bent's New Fort on the Arkansas (Denver, 1956); Arthur J. Flynn, "Furs and Forts of the Rocky Mountain West," Colorado Magazine (March, 1932).
FORT ROSS, CALIFORNIA

Location: On Pacific Ocean, 60 miles north of San Francisco (State Highway 1)

Ownership: State of California (Division of Beaches and Parks)

Historical Significance

Fort Ross is a unique site among those which recall the international rivalry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for political control and a major share in the exploitation of the resources of the Pacific Coast region. Established in 1812, it was the largest single trading center of the Russians south of Alaska. Although founded as a part of the Russian American Fur Company's maritime fur-trading operations, Fort Ross represented a strong attempt by Russia to gain control of California. The direct cause for the issuing of the Monroe Doctrine by the United States was the continuing expansion of the Russians on the North American continent.

After the Bering explorations in the 1740's, the possibilities of the fur trade of the North Pacific were recognized, leading to the formation of the Russian American Fur Company and the occupation of Alaska. This company, in function, was similar to the Hudson's Bay Company, and in fact represented the Government of Russia in its operations in North America. One of its objectives was to gain California for the Russian empire.

A major consideration in the establishment of Fort Ross was to provide food supplies for the company's large-scale operations in Alaska. Additionally, the company sought trade relations with Spain in California and a southern headquarters for hunting the sea otter. After a number of
exploratory voyages, Ivan Alexandiorich Kuskof arrived in 1812 with about 100 Russians and nearly that many Aleutians to begin construction. A stockaded fort was built on a plain overlooking the Pacific, and eventually there may have been as many as 50 buildings and a population of 400.

The best port was at nearby Bodega Bay, and there warehouses and docks were built. Small outlying establishments were maintained on the Russian River and on the Farallon Islands. On extensive ranches from Bodega to Fort Ross, grain, vegetables, and livestock were raised to supply Alaska with food. From 1812 until 1841 Fort Ross was the center of Russian otter hunting, fur trading, and agriculture in Spanish California.

Although great quantities of food were shipped north, and considerable numbers of furs were taken by the Aleut hunters, the establishment was so large and costly it never proved profitable. But the planting of the post by the Russians vindicated the long Spanish fear of Russian expansion, and resulted in Spanish demands that Russia withdraw from Spanish territory. The provision of the Monroe Doctrine declaring against further expansion of foreign colonies in the New World was a warning to Russia against further extensions.

By 1840 it was evident that Fort Ross was a financial liability and that there was no hope of territorial acquisition in California. Negotiations for the buildings (Russia did not claim ownership of the land, only the right of settlement and trade) were opened with John Sutter, who purchased the holdings for $30,000 in 1841 and took much of the estate, including the cannon, to Sutter's Fort, his establishment on the Sacramento. The Russian evacuation was completed by the following year, ending the only attempt by Russia at colonization south of Alaska.
Condition of Site

Fort Ross is administered as a State Historical Monument by the California Division of Beaches and Parks. Included within the reconstructed stockade walls of the fort are several restored buildings. The restored chapel contains a considerable portion of the original structure and is an excellent example of Russian construction. The Commandant’s dwelling has also been restored, and two of the blockhouses have been reconstructed. The fort is located on a bluff overlooking the Pacific; State Highway 1 passes directly through the enclosure.
FORT OSAGE, MISSOURI

Location: In the town of Sibley, Jackson County, Missouri.
Ownership: Jackson County.

Historical Significance

Fort Osage, founded in 1808, was the first United States Army post west of the Mississippi, one of the most successful of the 28 trading houses operated from 1795 to 1822 by the Government factory program, and the only Government trading factory west of the Mississippi River. During its existence as a factory, or trading post, it was the western outpost of civilization on the Missouri River.

The factory system program was based upon the belief that it was wiser for the Government to conduct the Indian trade; this would guarantee the Indian a fair price for his goods and save him from the deadly effects of the free trader's alcohol. Most of the trading houses were east of the Mississippi River, and only one, Fort Osage, was located on the Missouri. In the early days of the fur trade, the Indians produced almost all the beaver and buffalo skins, and the Government trading posts were the centers of the trade, to which the Indians came to trade for their furs. Always unpopular with the free traders, the factory system was finally defeated in Congress in 1822.

Fort Osage was established by General William Clark only two years after his return from the Pacific in 1806. Passing the site in 1804, Lewis and Clark had noted it as a good location for a fort. It was founded both as a military post and a Government factory. The post was closed in
Fort Osage. The most successful of the government "factories", founded by William Clark two years after his return from the Pacific. An extensive reconstruction program is underway.
1813 as a result of the War of 1812, and the operation moved to Arrow Rock, but in 1815 Fort Osage was reopened, continuing in the Indian trade until 1822. After its abandonment, the post served as a Government storehouse until superseded by Fort Leavenworth in 1827.

The post was identified with many important events of the era. In 1803, at Fort Osage, the Government signed a treaty with the Osage Indians in which the tribe ceded to the United States most of its lands in Missouri. In 1811, the overland Astorians began their historic journey to the Pacific from Fort Osage. In 1821 the post was the western terminus of the frontier road beginning at St. Charles, Missouri. When the United States Commissioners, in 1825, began their survey of the Santa Fe Trail, Fort Osage was made the eastern terminus.

H. N. Brackenridge, who accompanied the Manuel Lisa expedition up the Missouri in 1811, described Fort Osage:

The fort is handsomely situated, about one hundred feet above the level of the river, which makes an elbow at this place, giving an extensive view up and down the river. Its form is triangular, its size but small, not calculated for more than a company of men. A group of buildings is formed by the factory, sutler's house, etc. . . . The lodges of the Little Osage, sixty in number, are within gun shot of the fort; but they are about to remove their villages to a prairie, three miles off.

**Condition of Site**

The site of Fort Osage is on the Missouri River, at the northern edge of the town of Sibley. An extensive project to reconstruct the fort, begun in 1947, is being carried on by Jackson County, aided by the technical advice of the Native Sons of Kansas City. The fort site has been excavated,
and considerable historical research has been done. The reconstructed buildings completed thus far are: three blockhouses, the factory, officers' quarters, interpreters' house, and soldiers' barracks. The Corps of Engineers has recently succeeded in shifting the course of the Missouri River to its old channel at the foot of the bluffs on which the fort site is located.

FORT LARAMIE NATIONAL MONUMENT, WYOMING

Fort Laramie National Monument contains the site of the fur-trading establishments, Fort John and perhaps the earlier Fort William. These two posts were similar in function on the Northern Plains and on the Oregon Trail to Bent's Old Fort along the Santa Fe Trail. In 1834 William Sublette and Robert Campbell established a log-stockaded post, known as Fort William, while en route to the trappers' rendezvous. During the following year the partners sold Fort William to Jim Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, and Milton Sublette. In 1838 the American Fur Company acquired the post.

With the abandonment of the rendezvous system, the post became increasingly important both to the buffalo robe trade and to overland trade on the Oregon Trail. In 1841 the American Fur Company replaced Fort William with a new adobe-walled post, which was called Fort John; later it became popularly known as "Fort Laramie." By the late 1840's the post was a favorite way station on the Oregon and Mormon Trails. In 1849 the Government purchased the trading post and converted it into a military establishment to protect the overland emigrants.

The monument features the military history of Fort Laramie. The site of Fort John has been identified by archeological excavation. The location of the site of the earlier Fort William has not been determined.
FORT VANCOUVER NATIONAL MONUMENT, WASHINGTON

Founded by the Hudson's Bay Company during the winter of 1824-1825 as a fur-trading post and supply depot, Fort Vancouver for the next 20 years was the most important settlement in the Pacific Northwest, from San Francisco to the Russian outposts in Alaska. Here were the headquarters for all the Hudson's Bay Company's activities west of the Rockies. From the Fort Vancouver warehouses were sent supplies for the many interior posts scattered over an enormous region of the Northwest and for the fur brigades which ranged as far as Utah and California in their search for beaver. The post also served as a supply base for the vessels and forts of the coastal trade. To Fort Vancouver came the entire fur yield of the western trade for shipment to England.

For many years the history of the Oregon country and the Hudson's Bay Company activities centering about Fort Vancouver were almost identical. With the arrival of American settlers in Oregon, hospitably received by Chief Factor John McLoughlin, and with the decline of the fur trade in the 1840's, the importance of Fort Vancouver was considerably reduced; and after the boundary settlement of 1846, the headquarters of the Hudson's Bay Company's Columbia Department were transferred to Vancouver Island.

The monument is located within the limits of Vancouver, Washington, across the Columbia River from Portland. Excavations carried out by the National Park Service have located remains of the stockade walls and have fixed the locations of most of the interior structures of the original post. A great number of artifacts were also uncovered.
Grand Teton National Park contains the beautiful valley known as Jackson Hole, described as "one of the most celebrated of all the mountain valleys," and as one of the "favorite haunts of the trappers." Jackson Hole was a strategic point from which trappers could reach the tributaries of the Missouri, the Columbia, and the Colorado rivers. It was difficult of access and relatively free of Indian incursions.

Many of the prominent names of the fur trade were associated with Jackson Hole. In 1807 John Colter, a member of the Lewis and Clark expedition, crossed through the region alone and evaluated it for its fur potentialities. In 1811-1812 the Astorians passed through this region en route to and on their return from the Pacific. Other fur traders and mountain men who operated in the region were William Sublette, James Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Jedediah Smith, Kit Carson, Captain Bonneville, Joseph Meek, Osborne Russell, and Warren E. Ferris.

The fur trade story of Jackson Hole and nearby regions is being featured in a new history museum which will be installed in Grand Teton National Park in 1960.
Jackson Hole. Focal point of the fur trade, Jackson Hole is seen beyond the Snake River, with the Teton range in the distance.

N. P. S. photograph, 1959
JEFFERSON NATIONAL EXPANSION MEMORIAL, MISSOURI

This national historic site was established to commemorate the westward growth of the United States, for much of which St. Louis was both commercial center and base of operations—the "Gateway to the West." The memorial contains the site of the colonial village of St. Louis, founded by French traders in 1764. Later St. Louis became the headquarters of the fur trade of the West, and on the site of the memorial were located the docks and warehouses of the fur traders. One building remains, the Lisa warehouse, built by the famous early trader in 1818. The museum of the memorial, now being developed, will include extensive exhibits dealing with all phases of the fur trade.
OTHER SITES CONSIDERED IN THE SURVEY

(The list which follows includes sites which are of considerable interest but which do not meet the criteria for national significance.)

CALIFORNIA

French Camp: A few miles south of Stockton is the site of a favorite camp of the Hudson's Bay Company brigades which trapped the central valley of California. Nearby were the rich beaver grounds along the San Joaquin River and adjoining sloughs. There are still evidences of beaver workmanship along French Camp Slough. Michael La Framboise, a leading trapper of the Hudson's Bay Company, was an annual visitor to the campsite, and it is believed Jedediah Smith may have camped there. French-Canadian trappers and their families lived at the camp until the time of the American occupation.

Sutter's Fort: Sutter engaged in a considerable number of commercial enterprises at New Helvetia. His establishment began as a rancho, but in addition to his great herds of cattle and horses, Sutter irrigated his land and raised wheat, built a gristmill, a distillery, and a tannery. Sutter had reached California originally by traveling over the Santa Fe Trail to New Mexico, and thence to the Rocky Mountains, where he joined a fur trapping party and learned the ways of the fur trade. At his trading post he engaged extensively in the fur trade, sending out trapping parties to hunt the beaver streams of California, and to gather elk skins from the Sierra. The remains of Sutter's Fort, in Sacramento, are administered as a State Historical Monument.

IDAHO

Fort Hall: Although Fort Hall is chiefly remembered for its important association with overland migration on the Oregon Trail, its early history was of the fur trade, and Chittenden termed it the most important trading post in the Snake River Valley. Nathaniel Wyeth contracted with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company to deliver supplies to the 1834 rendezvous, but he was betrayed, and his goods were not purchased. To recoup his investment, and to revenge himself upon his rivals, Wyeth and his men built Fort Hall on the Snake River in July, 1834. Osborne Russell was a member of the party. Wyeth had little success with his venture, especially in the face of competition from the Hudson's Bay Company. The British concern built a competing post, Fort Boise, in 1834, and three years later, in 1837, Wyeth sold out to the Hudson's Bay Company. Acquisition of these posts gave the Company a strong foothold in the Snake country, which before that time could be reached only by brigades. The Hudson's Bay Company continued to operate Fort Hall after the territory passed into the possession of the United States as a result of the 1846 boundary settlement, retaining possession until 1855.
Fort Hall. Only a few mounds remain of the trading post built on the Snake River by Nathaniel Wyeth in 1834.

N. P. S. photograph, 1958
The fort site is in a remote section of the Fort Hall Indian reservation, north of Pocatello. There are mound remains, and artifacts, and puncheon floors have been found on the site. At present there is no development of the fort site, which is difficult to reach.

Henry's Fort: In 1809 the first expedition of the Missouri Fur Company, numbering about 150 men, left St. Louis for the Rocky Mountains. Trapping was profitable in the Three Forks region, but successive attacks by the Blackfeet forced the company to withdraw. Unwilling to leave the region, Andrew Henry took a party across the Continental Divide in the fall of 1810 and built a small post on Henry's Fork of the Snake River. This was the first American trading post west of the Rocky Mountains. The winter was severe, however, and game scarce; as a result Henry abandoned the post the following spring. A number of his band decided to remain in the mountains, and these men became almost the first of the "reckless breed" to roam the Rocky Mountains in search of the beaver.

Later in 1811, Wilson Price Hunt's overland Astorians reached Henry's Fort on their way to the mouth of the Columbia. Here the expedition remained while canoes were built to attempt, unsuccessfully, the navigation of the Snake River. The site, near St. Anthony, has been nearly destroyed by farming operations. All but a small plot of ground has been bladed away. Artifacts have been found at the site.

Kullyspell House: Known also as Thompson's Trading Post, this establishment was a monument to the great geographer, explorer, and fur trader, David Thompson, who established the post in 1809 during those years when he explored and mapped vast regions of the Pacific Northwest for the North West Company. Kullyspell House, on Lake Pend Oreille, was the first attempt at settlement by white men in present Idaho. Two buildings were erected, one for trading and one for living quarters. The following year the post was moved to Spokane House. The site was lost for many years until the discovery in 1923 of stone remains, near Hope, believed to be the chimneys of the original post.

Pierre's Hole and Battlefield Site: One of the most consequential of all the rendezous of the mountain men was that of 1832, held in Pierre's Hole. About 30 miles long and 10 to 15 miles in width, this spectacular valley lies just west of the Teton Range; beyond these "Pilot Knobs" of the trappers lies Jackson Hole, in Grand Teton National Park. The year 1832 was a prosperous one for the fur trade. Pierre's Hole swarmed with trappers and Indians: there were company trappers from the Rocky Mountain and American fur companies, and from the firm of Gantt and Blackwell; Wyeth's party was present, en route to Oregon; present also were free trappers from all over the West, and hundreds of Flathead and Nez Percé Indians. The Rocky Mountain Fur Company took back from this rendezvous 165 packs of furs worth about $85,000. It was the last great harvest of furs in the mountain trade.

As the assembly began to disperse a large brigade, led by Milton Sublette and accompanied by Wyeth, met a war party of Gros Ventres numbering
perhaps 200. During the parlay, the trappers treacherously killed a Gros Ventre chieftain. The ensuing fight has been called the Battle of Pierre’s Hole, and it is the most famous of the battles of the fur trade era. The trappers and their Indian allies suffered about 25 casualties; the Gros Ventres had considerably more. Pierre's Hole is now settled, with small communities and ranching operations covering the valley. The precise site of the battle is still being debated by students of the fur trade.

MONTANA

Fort Benton: During the final phase of the fur trade era, Fort Benton was the most important post on the Missouri River above Fort Union. Originally established as Fort Lewis, in 1846, the post was rebuilt in 1850, as Fort Benton, by Alexander Culbertson of the American Fur Company. The later history of the post was particularly important. Located at the head of navigation on the Missouri River, it was the point of debarkation for thousands upon thousands of prospectors and a main supply depot during the gold-rush days in Montana of the 1860’s and 1870’s. The original adobe fort was 250 feet square, with two bastions. One of the bastions and parts of two other buildings are preserved in a park in the City of Fort Benton.

Fort Manuel: Known also as Manuel’s Fort and Fort Lisa, it was the first fur-trading post of the Upper Missouri and Rocky Mountain area. The post was established by and named for Manuel Lisa, who led the first company of fur trappers up the Missouri in 1807, the year following the return of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Lisa’s expedition was a historic venture in the trade. The post was located on the Yellowstone River, at the mouth of the Bighorn; two years later Lisa and his associates organized the Missouri Fur Company, the first large-scale business concern in the interior trade. The post was probably abandoned in 1811, after Lisa's celebrated race upriver with Wilson Price Hunt’s overland Astorians. The site of the post has never been definitely located.

Fort McKenzie: During the early 1830’s, Astor’s American Fur Company moved into the Rocky Mountain fur trade and began a campaign which soon forced the Rocky Mountain Fur Company to sell out. An important objective of Astor’s field commander, Kenneth McKenzie, known as the “King of the Missouri,” was to win over the trade of the Blackfeet. In 1832 Fort McKenzie was built; according to Chittenden the construction was "one of the thrilling episodes of the fur trades," for the work was done by a handful of trappers in the presence of thousands of Indians, many of whom were hostile and ready for violent measures. The post was an important factor in gaining the Blackfeet trade for the Astor interests. The site of Fort McKenzie is on the west bank of the Missouri River between the towns of Fort Benton and Lundy. There are considerable ground remains, including old cellar pits and mounds.
Site of Kullyspell House. David Thompson, the great geographer of the North West Company, built the post in 1809, within present Idaho. This photograph, taken in 1923, shows the Indian Klai-Too (Old Aleck) who discovered the site.

Courtesy, the Idaho Historical Society
NEBRASKA

Cabanne's Post: Very little information is available concerning this American Fur Company trading post established on the Missouri River between 1822 and 1826 by J. P. Cabanne. Moved downstream from its site near the present Omaha in the mid-1830's, Cabanne's Post is considered to have been the most important fur-trading establishment on the Missouri River below Fort Pierre. In 1833 Prince Maximilian visited the post on his trip to the interior, noting that it consisted of a row of buildings of various sizes, including Cabanne's dwelling, which was two stories high. Evidence of the post has been found in a plowed field at Hummel Park, Omaha, but the site has not been excavated.

Fort Lisa: Built about 1812 by Manuel Lisa, a founder of the Missouri Fur Company, the post was the principal trading establishment on the Missouri River during the early period of the trade. It probably was abandoned in 1823, just as the trade was being revolutionized by Ashley. The post commanded the trade of the Omaha, Oto, Pawnee, and other tribes of the region. During the War of 1812, Lisa made an important contribution to the American cause by helping to prevent the tribes from joining the British. The site of Fort Lisa, some half-dozen miles below old Council Bluffs, and about a mile above Cabanne's Post, awaits positive identification.

NEW MEXICO

Taos: From the early years of the Rocky Mountain fur trade, trappers found the village of Taos, on the northern rim of the Mexican province of New Mexico, an excellent base of operations for trapping the southern Rockies as well as for expeditions to the beaver streams in the Gila River country of southern New Mexico. During the 1820's and 1830's, the plaza of Don Fernando de Taos (in distinction from Ranchos de Taos and the Indian pueblo of Taos) attracted scores of famous trappers—the Robidoux and Bent brothers, Ewing, Ceran St. Vrain, Hugh Glass, Milton Sublette, Pegleg Smith, Kit Carson, Baptiste Isande, and Bill Williams—who purchased supplies, sold their furs, and enjoyed the Mexican fandango while partaking of the legendary "Taos lightning." Some trappers operated in defiance of Mexican law; others acquired Mexican citizenship and trapped under Mexican permit. Carson, Bent, and St. Vrain settled at or near Taos after the fur trade era closed.

Taos today is an art and tourist center which has retained the atmosphere of its historic past. The plaza of Don Fernando de Taos, with its blend of Spanish colonial and American territorial architecture, captures something of the flavor of the years when mountain men supplied a strong ingredient of frontier America to the static Mexican society, producing the unique Taos character. Among the historic sites and buildings with fur trade associations are the Kit Carson House, where Carson lived occasionally from 1858 to 1866; the George Bent House, in which Governor Bent was killed during the Taos insurrection of 1847; and the Kit Carson cemetery, where lies buried one of the most famous of the mountain men.
NORTH DAKOTA

Fort Clark: This was an important fur-trading post on the Missouri River built by the American Fur Company about 1830 and probably abandoned in the late 1850's or 1860's. Named for William Clark, it was a substantial structure, constructed in the general style of American Fur Company posts. Maximilian, Prince of Wied, and his artist companion, Charles Bodmer, spent the winter of 1833-34 at Fort Clark observing the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians of the vicinity. The smallpox epidemic which almost wiped out the Mandans struck at Fort Clark in 1837. The site, about one mile north of the village of Fort Clark, seems to have been undisturbed, and outlines of the old post are in evidence.

OREGON

Smith Massacre Site: In 1828, Jedediah Smith and his party of trappers explored northward from California into Oregon. Smith had made his historic journey into California in 1826; he left most of his companions behind on his return to the Rocky Mountains, but came back to California in 1827. Smith was passing up the Umpqua River with a large number of horses loaded with furs when his party was attacked by Indians. Only Smith and three companions escaped, making their way to Fort Vancouver, from which point Dr. McLoughlin engineered the recovery of most of the furs. The massacre site is near the Umpqua River bridge, on U. S. Highway 101.

Willamette Post: One of several trading posts established by the Astorians, the fort on the Willamette River, near the present Champoeg State Park, was founded in 1811 both as a post for the Indian trade and to supply game for the Astoria garrison. After the sale of Astoria, the post was occupied by the North West Company for about 10 years. Establishment of the Willamette Post opened the Willamette River Valley to the fur trade and was influential in bringing the first permanent settlers to the valley.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Arikara Villages: The two villages of the Arikaras, on the west bank of the Missouri River about nine miles above the mouth of the Grand River, were the scene of important episodes of fur-trade history, beginning with the arrival of the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804. The Astorians, in 1811, left the Missouri River at the villages and set out for the Pacific overland. In 1823, the Ashley company was attacked by the Arikaras and suffered severe casualties in one of the celebrated battles of the trade. In retaliation, General Henry Leavenworth with some 1,000 soldiers, trappers, and Sioux allies, attacked the villages, with remarkably little effect. Outlines of the Arikara earthlodges remain, but the village sites will be flooded with the construction of the Oahe Dam.
Bear Lake. The 1827 rendezvous of the fur trade was held on the shore of the lake, which lies on the Utah-Idaho border.

N. P. S. photograph, 4859
Fort Pierre (officially Fort Pierre Chouteau): Fort Tecumseh, the central establishment of the Columbia Fur Company, and predecessor of Fort Pierre was probably built in 1822. When the Company was absorbed by the American Fur Company in 1827, the fort became the principal establishment on the Missouri River below Fort Union. A new post was built several miles distant in 1832, and renamed Fort Pierre. Strategically located in the heart of the Sioux country, and controlling the trade of the Indians of the region, the fort became second in importance only to Fort Union among the fur-trading establishments on the Missouri. It served as the depot of supplies for the area between Fort Clark, North Dakota, and Cabanne's Post, in Nebraska. Fort Pierre declined with the passing of the fur-trade era and in 1855 was purchased by the Government for the garrisoning of General Harney's troops during his expedition against the Sioux. Within a few years the post was dismantled. There are no remains at the site of the post, about one mile west of Pierre.

**UTAH**

Bear Lake Rendezvous Site: The third and fourth annual rendezvous were held on the south shore of Bear Lake in 1827 and 1828. The third rendezvous began in June, 1827, with a battle between Blackfeet warriors and the Snakes, Utes, and trappers who had gathered for the fair. Early in July, Jedediah Smith arrived, completing his historic journey of exploration and discovery to California. The firm of Smith, Jackson, and Sublette sold about $23,000 worth of beaver and otter skins and purchased almost the same amount of supplies. The fourth rendezvous, in 1828, opened with another battle with the Blackfeet. Sublette accompanied the pack train to St. Louis and sold the year's catch for nearly $36,000, enough to meet all the debts of the firm and net $16,000 profit.

Both rendezvous were held in the valley, some three miles square, which adjoins Bear Lake on the south. The lake, valley and surrounding mountains present an almost unchanged appearance, but farming operations and the small hamlet of Laketown have impaired the setting of the actual rendezvous site.

Brown's Hole and the Fort Davy Crockett Site: Brown's Hole, which straddles the Utah-Colorado line, is a beautiful high valley cut in the Uintah Mountains by the Green River. It was a favorite wintering place of the fur trappers and Indians during the period of the Rocky Mountain trade. In 1837, Philip Thompson, William Craig, and a trapper known as Sinclair (or St. Clair) founded the trading post Fort Davy Crockett on the east bank of the Green River. Marcus Whitman, the Oregon missionary, Kit Carson, and other notable western travelers visited the post. In the early 1840's, Ute Indians destroyed the fort and probably murdered the inhabitants. Fremont camped in Brown's Hole in 1842 and noted the ashes which marked the site of the post. Sparsely settled, Brown's Hole is remote from civilization and is unspoiled. The site of Fort Davy Crockett, although still a subject of some controversy, has been marked by the State Historical Society of Colorado.
Fort Pierre. Occupying a strategic location in the Sioux country, Fort Pierre (Chouteau) was an important post on the Missouri. From a painting by Charles Budmer.
**Cache Valley Rendezvous Site:** An important wintering ground for both company and free trappers, Cache Valley was the site of the second annual rendezvous in 1826. At this rendezvous General William Ashley sold his interests to three renowned mountain men, Jedediah Smith, David E. Jackson, and William Sublette, who carried on the business Ashley had founded. Ashley's caravan returning from the rendezvous reached St. Louis in September, 1826, with the fruits of the rendezvous, 125 packs of beaver pelts valued at $60,000. Thus far the exact site of the rendezvous has not been identified. It lies along the Blacksmith Fork in Cache Valley, presumably between the present towns Hyrum and Logan. The valley is now settled and cultivated, and the character of the rendezvous site has been substantially changed.

**Fort Robidoux:** This trading post on the right bank of the Uintah River was founded by Antoine Robidoux, probably in 1832. It consisted of a cluster of log cabins protected by a log stockade. Until 1844 it was the center of the fur trade of the region, an outfitting point for trapping expeditions, and a way station for parties using the trails that crossed the area. The recorded visitors included Fremont, Kit Carson, Miles Goodyear, founder of Fort Buenaventura on Great Salt Lake, Marcus Whitman, who stopped in 1842 en route to the East to obtain support for his Oregon mission, and Joseph Williams, the Indiana Methodist, who found the "wickedness and idleness" of Fort Robidoux profoundly distressing. Robidoux abandoned the fort in the spring of 1845, and it was later burned by mountain man Jim Baker. The site is on the Uintah and Orvay Indian Reservation; it has been identified, but there are no visible remains.

**WASHINGTON**

**Fort Nisqually:** First permanent white settlement on Puget Sound, Fort Nisqually was the last of the Hudson's Bay Company posts to remain active within the present boundary of the United States. Fort Nisqually was built in 1833 and served both as a fur-trading center and as a source of supply for the northern posts. Dr. William Tolmie, Chief Factor, served a somewhat similar function in the Puget Sound region to that of the celebrated Dr. John McLoughlin at Fort Vancouver. The post was not abandoned until 1869, some 23 years after the settlement of the Oregon boundary dispute. The remains of the original fort have been moved to Point Defiance Park, Tacoma, where the post has been reconstructed.

**Fort Okanogan:** There were three fur-trading establishments under this name on Okanogan Point, at the mouth of the Okanogan and Columbia Rivers. The first Fort Okanogan was built by the Pacific Fur Company in 1811, during the short life of Astoria. In 1813 the fort, on the Okanogan River, was sold to the North West Company, which in 1816 built a more substantial post. Sometime after the absorption of the North West Company by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1821, the latter moved the fort across the point to the Columbia River, a distance of about one mile. Both sites have been acquired by the Washington State Historical Society, and extensive excavations were carried on for the Washington State Parks and Recreation
Cache Valley. A favorite wintering ground of the mountainmen. In the distance are the Wasatch Mountains.

N. P. S. photograph, 1939
Commission by the National Park Service, resulting in the location of the original fort site and the recovery of artifacts. The area is now a Washington State Park.

Spokane House: This trading post, near the present City of Spokane, established by the North West Company in 1810, was the first white settlement in the State of Washington, and was one of the earliest fur-trading posts to be founded in present United States west of the Rocky Mountains. Astor's Pacific Fur Company built a rival post, Spokane House, in 1812, and for a time the two companies traded side by side. The North West Company purchased the competing post in 1813, and for many years Spokane House was a busy center of trade. In 1826 the post was dismantled and moved to Fort Colville. The site of the two posts, administered by the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, has been excavated by the National Park Service. The location of the original structures has been established.

WYOMING

Henry's Fork Rendezvous Site: The first rendezvous of the fur trade was held on Henry's Fork, about 20 miles from its confluence with the Green River, in 1825. This rendezvous established the pattern for the annual meeting which lasted until 1840, a mountain fair which became the most colorful institution of the fur trade. With Fitzpatrick, Campbell, and Beckwourth, Ashley left St. Louis late in 1824, bringing recruits and supplies to his trapping parties in the mountains. Selecting the site in April, 1825, and caching the supplies, Ashley had a number of perilous adventures, including the navigation of the Green River, before returning with his trappers to the rendezvous site. This rendezvous set the pace for those to follow; there were about 800 people assembled, and the "whiskey flowed like water."

The precise location of the rendezvous has not been definitely established. Evidence suggests the probable site was between the villages of Burntfork and McKinnon, in a broad, flat section bordering Henry's Fork. There are scattered ranches in the area, but little change has taken place in the general appearance of the country.
Henry's Fork Rendezvous Site. This area is believed to be the site of the first rendezvous of the fur trade, held by Ashley in 1825.
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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Sites Also Noted</th>
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<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>San Gabriel Mission, Sonora Pass, Walker Pass</td>
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<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Bent's New Fort, Fort Lipton, Fort St. Vrain</td>
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<td>Idaho</td>
<td>Fort Boise, Pilot Knob</td>
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<td>Montana</td>
<td>Fort Alexander, Fort Assiniboine, Fort Cass, Fort Lewis, Fort Van Buren</td>
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<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>Fort George, Fort Manuel, Fort Tecumseh, Vermillion Post</td>
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<td>Utah</td>
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<td>Washington</td>
<td>Fort Colville, Fort Walla Walla (Nez Perce)</td>
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<td>Wyoming</td>
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The National Park Service has adopted the following criteria for selection of sites of exceptional value:

1. Structures or sites in which the broad cultural, political, economic, military, or social history of the Nation is best exemplified, and from which the visitor may grasp the larger patterns of our American heritage. Such sites are naturally the points or bases from which the broad aspects of prehistoric and historic American life can best be presented.

2. Structures or sites associated importantly with the lives of outstanding historic personages.

3. Structures or sites associated with important events which are symbolic of some great idea or ideal of the American people.

4. Structures which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type-specimen, exceptionally valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction; or a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius reflected his age.

5. Archeological sites which have produced information of major scientific importance by revealing new cultures or by shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States. Such sites are those which have produced or which may reasonably be expected to produce data which have affected theories, concepts, and ideas to a major degree.

6. All historical and archeological sites and structures in order to meet the standards of exceptional importance should have integrity; that is, there should not be doubts as to whether it is the original site or building, original material or workmanship, and original location. Intangible elements of feeling and association, although difficult to describe, may also be factors in weighing the integrity of a site or structure.

7. Structures or sites of recent historical importance relating to events or persons within 50 years, will not, as a rule, be eligible for consideration.
ADDENDUM

Special Study

THE BAILLY HOMESTEAD, PORTER COUNTY, INDIANA

The National Park Service Advisory Board at its April, 1959, meeting recommended that additional study be given to the Bailly Homestead site in the course of The National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings. The Bailly site falls within Theme XI, the Advance of the Frontier, 1763-1830, and has been evaluated in terms of the established criteria of exceptional value. The site has also been judged in terms of the other sites and structures which fall within the scope of the Frontier theme. No attempt has been made to duplicate the several studies of Bailly now available, but rather to apply these studies to the requirements of the National Survey.

Following, for convenient reference, is a brief biographical account of Joseph Bailly with emphasis on his role in the Northwest fur trade and the settlement of northern Indiana.¹ This biographical note is followed by an analysis of the criteria of exceptional value as they apply to the Bailly site.

Biographical Note

Joseph Bailly was born in Canada in 1774, and when 18 years old began his fur trading operations out of Mackinac, the bustling heart of the Northwestern fur empire. His most active trading period was from around the end of the 18th century up to the War of 1812. Bailly was one of the numerous Mackinac traders, many of whom had more extensive operations, as for example: William Burnett, probably the foremost of the group.

In the War of 1812, Bailly, loyal to his Canadian homeland, served as a lieutenant of Canadian Voyageurs and transported munitions and supplies for the British and Indians who harrassed the American frontier pushing westward from the Appalachians. Lieutenant Bailly was captured during the war but was released after a short captivity. He continued his trade operations during and after the war, and in 1818 became an American citizen.

Bailly's fortunes declined with the waning fur trade after the War of 1812. One student of the Indiana fur traders notes that "Bailly had had large trade interests at the wrong time, and had gone into debt."² He and his Indian wife lived in the Mackinac area until 1819, first on Mackinac Island, itself, and later on Drummond Island.

²Anson, The Fur Traders in Northern Indiana, 79; Sullivan, The Bailly Homestead, 3-5, has a careful appraisal of the extent of Bailly's fur operations. Sullivan agrees with Anson that these operations were far less profitable than some sources have claimed; the differences in interpretation stemming from a misunderstanding of the monetary system employed by the traders in their bookkeeping.
some miles distant, moving with the British garrison to that post at the end of the war.

In 1822 Bailly settled permanently at the Homestead site. Although he was probably the first white settler in the northwestern part of Indiana, the central and southern sections of the state had already been passed by the advancing line of westward settlement which had reached Illinois and, in places, had crossed the Mississippi River. Of this last period of Bailly's life one authority has written, "His Trail Creek (Bailly Homestead) operations were always small, and his chief interests seem to have been his family and the work of the Roman Catholic Church among the Indians."³ Bailly hoped to develop his town and invite Canadian settlers to make their home there. A few lots were sold but the colonization plan did not prosper. It is for his work with the Roman Church in the wilderness that Bailly is best remembered in these last years of his life. And, in that rude place Bailly's home was looked upon as an oasis of culture in the wilderness of northwestern Indiana.

In 1834, Bailly began construction of the main residence at the Homestead site, but died in the following year before the house was completed. Bailly's request that no effort be made by his survivors to carry out his plans for the settlement was respected and no further activities of importance centered on the homestead.

Analysis of the Criteria as They Apply to the Bailly Homestead

Following is the list of criteria of exceptional value with a discussion of the Bailly site in terms of each of these established standards. These criteria are the measuring stick by which every site considered in the Survey is evaluated.

1. Structures or sites in which the broad cultural, political, economic, military, or social history of the Nation is best exemplified, and from which the visitor may grasp the larger patterns of our American heritage. Such sites are naturally the points or bases from which the broad aspects of prehistoric and historic American life can best be presented.

The settlement of the successive frontier zones from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific is perhaps the major determinant in the development of the American Nation. Throughout the more than two centuries of frontier advance the fur trade opened the trails west and its agents and depots were the vanguard of the waves of settlement which crossed the continent.

a. Frontier Significance of the Bailly Site

Joseph Bailly’s settlement in northwestern Indiana probably was the first in that isolated section of the state. However, by 1820, two years before the permanent settlement at the Bailly site, the frontier had pushed across central and southern Indiana into Illinois and, in places, had leaped the Mississippi. And the Great Lakes, which were Bailly’s principal area of activity, had been known and occupied by white men longer than almost any other section of the country. In effect,

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then, that part of Indiana in which Bailly settled was simply a backwater bypassed by the main stream of settlement which had already advanced the frontier far to the west. It should also be noted that the story of the frontier settlement of Indiana is well preserved and interpreted by several exceptionally valuable sites and structures including the Territorial Capitol and related buildings at Vincennes and by the fine surviving structures of the New Harmony settlement, established seven years before the Bailly Homestead.

b. Fur Trade Significance of the Bailly Site

As noted in the biographical account, Bailly's fur operations at the Homestead site were relatively minor. The entire Indiana trade actually was a small part of the Northwest fur activity, and it should be remembered that for most of his active trading career, Bailly worked out of Mackinac. Mackinac was for almost 200 years the nerve center and principal depot of the Northwest fur trade, known to the explorers and traders of three nations, France, Great Britain, and the United States. Preserved on the Island are the surviving buildings of Astor's colorful and powerful American Fur Company, reflecting the period of the Island's greatest glory in the early years of the 19th century. Preservation and interpretation of the Astor buildings are an important aspect of planning for the Mackinac area by the Mackinac State Park Commission. Another area rich in remains of the fur trade is Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, like Mackinac a site whose origins date from the earliest explorations of the Great Lakes. Both Mackinac and Prairie du Chien far surpass the Bailly Homestead as significant frontier and fur trade sites.
Neither Bailly's settlement in northwestern Indiana or his fur activity at the Homestead site appear to be of sufficient significance in the frontier and fur trade story to justify their designation as having exceptional value under Criterion #1.

2. Structures or sites associated importantly with the lives of outstanding historic personages.

The points to be established here are first, whether Joseph Bailly is an outstanding personage in American history, and, second, the degree to which the Homestead site is importantly associated with Bailly.

For an evaluation of Bailly's significance in American history, two authorities who have made close studies of the Indiana fur trade and the Bailly family are cited here. From his many years of study relative to the Indiana fur traders, Dr. Bert Anson has concluded that "The little bands of Indian traders in northern Indiana in 1796 (and after, in the context of Dr. Anson's manuscript) are not of great significance when related to the national and international forces bearing upon the ultimate disposal of their scene of operations. . . ." Conceding that they made a few contributions important to an understanding of the American boundary problem, Dr. Anson further notes that the traders "sought out, explored, and initiated many of the transportation routes, village sites and Indian relationships in the area . . . ." These contributions are evaluated by Anson as "a matter of regional and local importance."

Mrs. Olga M. Schiemann, authority on Bailly history and author of an informative study on the Bailly family has written that "While

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5Anson, The Fur Traders in Northern Indiana, 18.
they (Bailly and his fellow traders) would not be judged great men in today's standards, still they were important men of that date..."

Mrs. Schiemann points out that the general story exemplified by the Indiana traders is known and comments, "it is to fill in that history we are working on the Bailly site."\(^6\)

The above seems a fair statement of Bailly's significance as it appears in the perspective of more than a century; he is a detail in a much broader story. In terms of the National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, sites credited as possessing exceptional value must tell the most significant aspects of a story rather than fill in the relatively minor details which interpret only a narrow aspect of any historical theme.

Dr. Anson, previously quoted, sums up the question of Bailly's significance in an analysis of the entire group of Indiana traders. "This group that operated in Indiana from 1796 to 1850 was remarkably successful. Though the group contained very few individuals of national prominence (and Bailly does not emerge as a nationally prominent individual in Dr. Anson's study), the majority were able to achieve strong financial positions."\(^7\) In the case of Bailly, despite his early successes in the fur trade, this last point is something of an overstatement.

\(^6\)Olga M. Schiemann to Earl H. Reed, Letter of May 23, 1958, copy in Region Five files.

\(^7\)Anson, The Fur Traders of Indiana, 291. Among the individuals whose operations were contemporary with, and surpassed, Bailly's was William Burnett, called by Anson, 23, footnote 10, "the most distinguished trader in the Great Lakes area."
In addition to Bailly's doubtful status as an historic personage of exceptional significance, it may be questioned whether the surviving Homestead structures are, in the terms of the criterion, "associated importantly" with Joseph Bailly. Only the main house, which was unfinished at the time of Bailly's death, and the log storehouse, now much altered according to the Historic American Building Survey Form for the site, even date from Bailly's lifetime.

The significance ascribed to Bailly by those authorities who have made detailed studies of the man, of the time and place in which he lived, and of the broader story of which he is a part, does not justify recognition of the individual as an outstanding historic personage. His minor place in the secondary accounts of the frontier movement and the Northwestern fur trade is not surprising, in view of the picture of the relatively unimportant man whose life can be traced in the primary sources. 8

Additionally, the structures preserved at the site, most of which were erected after Bailly's death, can hardly be said to be importantly associated with the man. As noted above, the only structures dated from Bailly's lifetime are the main house - incomplete at the time of Bailly's death - and a small log storehouse, much altered.

8 In the secondary sources consulted for information on Bailly, including histories of the fur trade, Indiana state histories and accounts of the Northwestern frontier, Bailly is mentioned not at all, or is listed as one of the numerous Mackinac traders of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Lack of secondary material does not necessarily indicate the historical status of any individual or event, but in this case the minor role ascribed to Bailly appears justified in the light of what may be gleaned from primary sources.
3. Structures or sites associated with important events which are symbolic of some great idea or ideal of the American people.

There is no specific and important event or series of events to which Bailly or the Homestead site can be related as a motivating or contributing influence.

4. Structures which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, exceptionally valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction; or of a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius reflected his age.

The applicable qualification here is the degree to which the Bailly structures can be authenticated as architectural type specimens. The site and its structures have been suggested as having architectural significance as an example of fur post planning. However, it should be emphasized again that only the main house and a greatly altered log storehouse are contemporary with Joseph Bailly. And, in 1834, when the main house was begun, Bailly was but a year from his death. His fur operations, never important at the Homestead site, had long ceased to be a major concern to Bailly. The work of the Catholic Church with the Indians was now his primary interest. For this reason it is difficult to recognize the Bailly structures as an exceptionally valuable architectural or historical specimen of fur post planning. Moreover, the Historic American Buildings Survey form on the Bailly structures notes that they have been "mutilated" in the years since they were built. When compared to the fine survivals of the fur trade and the Northwestern frontier preserved at Mackinac, Prairie du Chien, New Harmony, Vincennes and elsewhere, it is difficult to claim outstanding
architectural significance for the Bailly site as an example of the fur trade or frontier story.

5. Archeological standards not applicable.

6. All historical and archeological sites and structures, in order to meet the standards of exceptional importance, should have integrity; that is, there should not be doubts as to whether it is the original site or building, original material, or workmanship, and original location. Intangible elements of feeling and association, although difficult to describe, may also be factors in weighing the integrity of a site or structure.

The site's authenticity as being that location chosen and settled by Joseph Bailly is not questioned. However, the fact that the main structure was not begun until 1834 and was incomplete at the time of Bailly's death in the following year would seem to diminish its integrity as having close association with the man or with the significant and colorful story of the western frontier and the fur trade. The unfortunate mutilation described by the Historic American Buildings Survey form also detracts from the integrity of the structures as architectural specimens.

In summary, as a result of the evaluation of the Bailly Homestead site in the light of the established criteria, the site does not adequately fulfill any of the standards of exceptional value. It does, however, have some importance in the history of northwestern Indiana and it would appear most appropriate for the State to take proper measures to preserve and develop the site.

Prepared by
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Historic Sites Historian
SIGNIFICANT SITES of the FUR TRADE

- Astoria
- Fort Vancouver National Monument
- Fort Ross
- Fort Union
- Fort Union
- Fort Osage
- Fort Union
- Green River Rendezvous Site
- Fort Laramie National Monument
- Bent's Old Fort