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Book Reviews

Major General James Henry Carleton, 1814-1873, Western Frontier Dragoon. By Aurora Hunt. Frontier Military Series, Volume II. Glendale, California: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1958. $10.

James Henry Carleton was a figure of some importance and wide experience in the mid-nineteenth-century West. He served with distinction in northern Mexico in the Mexican War. Previous to and following this Carleton served at many frontier posts, performed escort duty along the Santa Fe Trail and engaged in operations against Indians. During the Civil War Carleton commanded the "column" of California volunteers which helped keep New Mexico secure from possible Confederate re-entry after the South's first invasion failed, and he himself served as military commander in New Mexico, 1862-1866. He wrote a book on the Battle of Buena Vista and reports (among others) on the ruins of Abo and Gran Quivira and on the Mountain Meadows Massacre, all important in various ways.

Miss Hunt had the opportunity to make an outstanding contribution in this volume, but did not succeed; she does too much in some respects and not enough in others. Her inclinations as a genealogist are manifest in her attention to "The Notable Carleton Family" (first chapter) and in sentimental remarks in the text. In the final chapter, however, she disposes of Carleton's last years very summarily, seemingly in haste to enlarge on the attainments of Carleton's older son, Henry Guy Carleton. The son should have been relegated to a footnote or appendix along with much other marginal and irrelevant material in this book; Carleton's last six years deserved thorough investigation by the author, but material in the National Archives and in contemporary newspapers was not adequately utilized. Research was also superficial in many other instances.

Author and publisher must share responsibility for smaller flaws: fifty-five by actual count in one reading. These flaws range from typographical errors and misspellings

(especially of Spanish names) to the omission of words and misuse of titles, and mistakes of historical fact. The prohibition movement did not begin in Maine in 1851 (p. 126). The Mormon Battalion did not fight battles in a military sense, not even one, en route to California or in California (p. 182). Arizona did not become "an integral part of the Territory of New Mexico" by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo or any other treaty (p. 223). Carleton could not have crossed the Jornada del Muerto "in the late afternoon sun" in his lifetime (p. 237). This reviewer knows of no claims made by Texas to Arizona or the Gadsden Purchase area prior to the Civil War (p. 253).

If there are advantages in having a person of no military experience write about military affairs, they do not appear in this book. Miss Hunt errs several times as to Carleton's rank, evidently does not understand the technicality of brevet rank, and confuses a court-martial and a court of inquiry (pp. 164n, 203, 204, 158n, 122). By contrast with Miss Hunt's earlier and better book on *The Army of the Pacific,* the publisher has reverted generally to more orthodox practices in capitalization, but unfortunately has abandoned diacritical marks in Spanish words (except p. 329). The fifty-five flaws do not include any instances of omission of diacritical marks, but do include misspellings of these words: Matamoros, Monterrey, Mescalero, Manzano, Picacho, Saltillo, Pimas, Dolores, Tijeras and Loretto (pp. 96, 99, 143, 147, 214, 216, 263, 264, 291, 338).

The book is described by the publisher as "refreshingly readable." This reviewer sees no justification for this statement. The text is marred by poor organization and clumsy transitions, much awkward sentence structure and poor word choice, as well as *non sequiturs,* redundancies and pronouns with doubtful antecedents. There are five maps, dim and apparently mostly reduced in size from the originals, with the result that they are unreadable to a considerable extent. The clearest map is of the "South part of Cumberland County, England, showing Carleton Hall." No "refreshing" reading is to be had in the erratic footnotes, but instead, glaring omissions and many inconsistencies.

Anyone who pays ten dollars for this book will likely feel that the State of California owes him a partial refund if he reads the chapter entitled, "An Unpaid Debt and White Crosses Marked 'Unknown.'" Carleton is used as a springboard for a plunge into a pool of polemic: a denunciation of the federal government, and especially the "defamatory pronouncement" of the United States Court of Claims of March 1954 which repudiated California's $7-½ million claim based on certain Civil War expenditures. Miss Hunt goes into much detail in this matter, summarizing legal briefs with obvious partiality and supporting herself with both Shakespeare and the Bible.

Texas Western College JOHN BLOOM

Owen Wister Out West: His Journals and Letters. Edited by Fanny Kemble Wister. University of Chicago Press. Pp. xix, 269. Index, ill. $5.00.

The Journals are those Owen Wister wrote on fifteen trips to the West from 1885 until *The Virginian* was published in 1902. The Letters, largely to his mother, are interspersed here and there and, edited to contain only western materials, assist in showing the development of Wister's thinking about the West.

The Journals, unknown to his family until long after his death, were begun merely as the jottings of an impressionable young man of twenty-five. As his interest in a literary career grew, they became more detailed to include impressions, character sketches, anecdotes, geography and incidents of sight and sound of value in writing. Observations are penetrating and frank. Some communities will treasure the record, others will try to forget it.

Although Wister traveled the West from Washington to Texas, Wyoming (the Wind River and Fort Washakie area particularly) was his favorite retreat. He was restored in spirit and body by the high plains and their characteristic "light that never was on land or sea, except in Wyoming." Arizona and the Southwest eventually also had a strong pull for him.

These Journals, linked with Wister's western stories, provide an important strand in the evolution of the western theme in American literature. Six years after his first trip Wister came to sense the significance of the West, and to love it to the extent that he wrote in his 1891 diary: "Did I believe in the efficacy of prayer, I should petition to be the hand that once for all chronicled and laid bare the virtues and vices of this extraordinary phase of social progress." In *The Virginian* and his *Harper's* articles, Wister did much to make the American cowboy a distinctive person of a stature he had not achieved before—and seldom since.

Edited skillfully by his daughter, who contributes short unifying essays, the book also serves as a biographical sketch of Wister. Here is chronicled the remarkable feat of a sensitive young man of wealth and family, a music major in Harvard, who at age twenty-two won praise from Franz Liszt both for his music and his French, winning the confidence of the western cowboy and the frontier military man. Oddly enough, Owen Wister and Theodore Roosevelt, both of whom did much to win recognition for the West as a theme for literature, were college mates and life-long friends.

The University of Chicago Press is to be congratulated upon this publication which is important both to the history and the literature of the western movement, and in its own right an interesting and highly readable book.

Montana State College MERRILL G. BURLINGAME

Mr. Hunt and the Fabulous Plan. By Cecil Pearl Dryden. Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1958. Pp. 343. $5.00.

On March 12, 1811, seven years after the Lewis and Clark expedition, Wilson Price Hunt accompanied by fifty-six men, one woman and two children launched their boats in the Missouri River at St. Louis for the infant settlement of Astoria.

Mr. Hunt and the Fabulous Plan is a fictionized narrative of the Hunt journey and John Jacob Astor's scheme for a fur trade empire in the Pacific Northwest. Initially the Hunt

party had intended to follow closely the Lewis and Clark Trail. However, when the Astorians arrived at an Aricara village, four hundred fifty miles up the Missouri, reports of Indian hostilities on up the river thwarted their original plan.

Exchanging their boats for horses at the Aricara villages, the party proceeded in a southwest direction across present-day South Dakota, Montana and Wyoming. They followed the Big Horn River to the Wind River, crossing Union Pass to the Green River. They rested a short time at Andrew Henry's Fort on the north fork of the Snake. Foolishly abandoning their horses, they set off on a turbulent, gruelling, portage-filled voyage down the Snake. The main party divided into two groups, traveling down opposite sides of the river. Finally on May 11, 1812, the last group of Hunt's party arrived at Astoria. Wilson Hunt wrote with some emotion in the end of his diary, "It was a very real pleasure for travellers harrassed by fatigue to rest in quiet and be surrounded by friends after so long a journey in the midst of savages of whom it is always prudent to be wary."

Seldom in the annals of American exploration has there been such an ill-planned expedition. One of the intriguing enigmas of western history is why the normally astute Astor chose Wilson P. Hunt as leader for such a project. His previous occupation as a St. Louis merchant hardly qualified him to lead the party. Vacillation and poor judgment were in evidence in Hunt's leadership, not only on the journey, but also in his tenure as "resident agent" on the Pacific coast.

Miss Dryden's fictionized account may be of interest to some general readers, but it will not intrigue the specialist in Western History. In the main her historical research has been sound but evidently uninspired, as there has been little attempt to present new material.

Her interpretations of the motives of Duncan MacDougall and Donald McKenzie in negotiating the sale of Astoria is more reliable than many previous explanations. W. J. Ghent, for instance, would have one believe that MacDougall was in collusion with the North West Company—a thesis that has become discounted most recently by Dorothy Johansen and Charles Gates in their *Empire of the Columbia.*

Judged as a piece of fiction, Miss Dryden's book is a rather undistinguished performance. Her narrative lags in a number of places, especially when she is relating the vicissitudes of Wilson P. Hunt at Astoria.

University of Wyoming GENE M. GRESSLEY

Then Came the Railroads: The Century from Steam to Diesel in the Southwest. By Ira G. Clark. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958. Pp. xv, 336. Maps, ill., bibliog., index. $5.75.

The literature of American railroads is filled with histories of individual lines, and with various popular and more general treatments of railroading on a national scale, but there are available few regional studies depicting the influence of rails upon the development of any of our economic empires. There is a reason for this. To study the growth and adventures of any given line is in itself a task of frustrating complexities, involving a knowledge of economics, statistics, law, engineering, human relations and a transportation vocabulary. The story of a single road is filled with numerous side-tracks, inter-relationships, and off-beat aspects, tantalizing and inviting, yet filled with all manner of derail possibilities that constantly threaten the author. The easiest way to avoid these pitfalls is to take the high road, and to write in terms so broad and so general as to keep from slipping beneath the surface. This diminishes the necessity of dealing with annoying details. The middle road, that of trying to show the impact of various railroads on a section of the country, as Clark does in this volume, is the most difficult, and offers the most problems and the fewest rewards of writing railroad history.

Then Came the Railroads has the feel of a large book that has been cut mercilessly to get it into the size package the publisher's customers can afford to buy. It might have been better if Dr. Clark had not tried to include so much at the outset. While it is more than commendable that he is fully aware of the necessity of treating such things as the growth of western towns, of the burgeoning economy of the country,

of the people who became users of the railroads, some of the chapters are so sketchy that they might well have been omitted, yielding space to other aspects of the story. The chapter entitled "Buffalo Hunters, Cowmen, and Farmers" is singled out as a case in point. And while the reviewer is engaged in criticism, it might be mentioned that a glaring deficiency of the book lies in its photographs, most of which represent the worst examples of railroad publicity department offerings.

The author has relied very heavily upon statistical sources. A quick glance at the notes will show a heavy proportion of references to Interstate Commerce Commission Valuation Reports, census figures and Congressional documents. The result is the usual difficulty of assimilation and a tendency to list, enumerate, and specify. The harvest is a large crop of names, places and dates. From time to time the lengthy names of railroads and their terminal points fall so thick and fast before the reader's eyes that he is almost overcome by a desire to flee back into the canal boat and Conestoga Wagon days. This state of affairs derives from no malicious intent upon the part of the author. He is caught in the crossfire of criticism by the general reader who would prefer to click over the rails in relaxed reading comfort, and the railroad fan, who tyrannically demands a complete account of every line, branch, spur and side-track. It is one of the occupational hazards of writing institutional history, the dubious reward for which is "damned if you do and damned if you don't," including a stand at the pillory while reviewers who could do no better themselves torment him who has labored long and hard to put together an enormously difficult story.

University of Colorado ROBERT G. ATHEARN

Pawnee Bill. By Glenn Shirley. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1958. Pp. 256. $5.00.

In recent years a spate of frontier biographies has inundated the readers and collectors of western Americana. Many of these have been mere rehashes of old subjects under new

or lurid titles and without claim to truth or honest endeavor.

Pawnee Bill is very definitely not one of these.

Glenn Shirley in his latest book has approached the subject of one of the last of the old plainsmen with sincerity and honesty. His scholarly research is evident in his comprehensive bibliography. He names personages, dates and places without resorting to the *circa* subterfuge.

In spite of the fact that interest centers upon Gordon William Lillie whose life embodied more closely packed adventure and drama than any of his contemporaries, the pages are replete with the running biographies of such men as Buffalo Bill, David L. Payne, Nate Salsbury and others.

Major Gordon Lillie was an unusual man in the closing years of the old frontier. Unlike his boyhood idol and later business partner, Buffalo Bill Cody, Lillie kept his feet upon the ground. He survived the vicissitudes of circus life and managed to retire with a whole skin. Unlike Buffalo Bill who was a poor business man, or as Lillie characterized the old showman, "Time smooths everything. Buffalo Bill died my friend. He was just an irresponsible boy," Major Lillie's dream of salvaging the buffalo became a reality. Pawnee Bill was never remembered as an Indian killer. He saw his friends the Pawnee as they were, men worthy of respect and friendship.

As a showman, business man, stock raiser and banker, Pawnee Bill had no equal. Even with business reverses and the irresponsibilities of his partner, Lillie seems to have held no grudges.

How history will evaluate Pawnee Bill is difficult to predict. Certainly in the make believe world of show business he has left ineradicable footsteps with his success in managing the last of the great "Bill shows."

It may be that at some future date a silly-looking Hollywood character with a wisp of flowing silk scarf tied under one ear and wearing a factory moulded cow boy hat, boasting two huge six guns and a gaudy shirt, boots and pants, will usurp the name and fame of Pawnee Bill. That is to be expected. Already the rising clouds of taurine dust stirred up in the TV corral by synthetic Kit Carsons, noted Indian chiefs

and frontier characters in general have tended to becloud and besmirch the names and fame of the originals. Let us hope this will not happen to Pawnee Bill.

In reading Glenn Shirley's biography of this remarkable man one is always conscious of the fact that here, in spite of the usual gaudy trappings of the circus of a bygone era, is the life drama of more than just a poseur in buckskins.

Pawnee Bill lived well into our own times, and when he died at his beloved Buffalo Ranch, February 3, 1942, at the age of eighty-two, there passed one of the last real makers of the old west. Today he sleeps peacefully in Highland cemetery, Oklahoma, beside the bodies of May, his wife of half a century, and Billy, his little son who never grew up.

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