The Divergent Paths of Frémont's "Three Marshalls"

Harvey L. Carter

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Mexico Historical Review by an authorized editor of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu, Isloane@salud.unm.edu, sarahrk@unm.edu.
It was after dark on Sunday, January 20, 1849, that two gaunt and weary riders rode into Taos, New Mexico, from the snow-covered San Luis Valley of Colorado. For two months they had battled without avail to force a passage over the Continental Divide along the direct line of the 38th parallel. Now they had abandoned the struggle with the elements and had ridden south for help to rescue the disorganized and demoralized remnants of the expedition that had hoped to find a direct westward route for a railroad from St. Louis to San Francisco. The older of the two men was thirty-seven. His full beard did not conceal the fatigue of body and dejection of mind that were evident in his face. His companion, a handsome and well-built man of thirty, retained his usual energy of manner and debonair attitude, despite the discouraging circumstances under which he and his leader found themselves at the moment.

The leader was, of course, John C. Frémont, whose glamorous career had received a sudden check just a year earlier as a result of his conviction by a court-martial for his refusal to recognize the authority of General S. W. Kearny in California during the Mexican War. Resigning from the army, he had attempted to refurbish his reputation by organizing with private funds a fourth exploration, which had now ended disastrously. His companion was Alexander Godey, veteran of two previous expeditions under Frémont and soon to be recognized as the unquestioned hero of the hour for his rescue of the starving and freezing men left stranded along the upper Rio Grande. Nothing ever discouraged or daunted
Godey; he was a man who never lost his cool. On the day after their arrival in Taos, he would be riding back, with thirty mules laden with provisions supplied by the army, in time to succor the men in the San Luis Valley and escort them safely to Taos. He was one of the three men of whom Frémont said, many years later when he wrote his memoirs, "under Napoleon, [they] might have become Marshalls, chosen as he chose men."2

On that cold night in January, when Godey rode with Frémont into Taos, the other two men of that famous trio were sitting snug and warm in Carlos Beaubien's store, talking to Beaubien's son-in-law, Lucien Maxwell, who was himself a member of Frémont's First and Third Expeditions. One of them was the renowned Kit Carson, who had guided for Frémont on all three of his previous expeditions and who had catapulted to fame as a result of the publicity given to his exploits. The other was Richard Owens, who had joined Frémont's Third Expedition at Carson's invitation and who had become the Captain of Company A of the California Battalion of Mounted Riflemen during the Mexican War. So changed was Frémont, as a result of the hardships of his last two months, that when he came into Beaubien's store, Owens did not recognize him. Maxwell, however, knew him despite the change, and soon Frémont was taking his ease at Carson's house, while Godey was engaged upon his rescue work. When this was finally completed, Frémont and Godey, with those of the Fourth Expedition who felt physically able and desired to continue their journey, set out for California by a southerly route on February 13, 1849. Carson and Owens rode with them as far as Santa Fe. This was the last time that Frémont's "three Marshalls" were together, although their past association had extended over a period of some fourteen years.

Frémont, during his stay in Taos, had exerted himself toward the goal of keeping the three together by endeavoring to persuade them all to join their fortunes with his own. Together they would develop the riches of his great Mariposa mining claim and cast their lot with the rising new state of California. Apparently he had persuaded Owens, for he wrote to his wife one week after his arrival in Taos, "Owens goes to Missouri in April to get married
and thence by water to California.” Nor had his arguments been
without their effect on Carson, for he added, “Carson is very
anxious to go there with me now, and afterwards remove his family
thither, but he cannot decide to break off from Maxwell and family
connections.” As it turned out, Owens did not marry in Missouri
and never returned to California. Carson sent his younger brother
Lindsay along with Frémont, and he and Maxwell drove a large
herd of sheep there four years later, but he never settled there.
Only Codey settled in the new state. The individuals who com­
posed Frémont’s famous trio were to follow divergent paths from
1849 to the ends of their lives. Fate had brought them together and
it was also fated that they should drift apart.

The careers of the three “Marshalls” exemplify in a most ad­
mirable way the choices that were open to all of the old-time
Mountain Men, of whom they are such conspicuous examples.
When the days of beaver trapping in the mountains ended and the
yearly rendezvous was no longer held, there were only three choices
to be made. They could press on to settle in Oregon or California,
go back to “the States” and seek to rejoin their families, or stay in
the mountains and try to eke out a living there. In 1841 all three
men, Codey, Owens, and Carson, had chosen the last alternative
and, aided by their association with Frémont, had continued with
it until 1849. Forced to choose again in 1849, each man chose his
separate way.

Let us briefly survey the lives of these men before 1849 and,
when that has been done, let us examine what is known about
their lives after that time. Such a review may enable us to deter­
mine which of the three paths available to the Mountain Men was
the easiest and which was the most difficult to follow, not only for
the three with whom we are concerned but perhaps for other mem­
bers of that vanished vanguard of advancing American civilization.

Codey was a St. Louis creole by birth. In his memoirs Carson tells
of trapping with Antoine Codey in the spring of 1836. His later
references to Codey as a member of Frémont’s Second Expedition
are made without use of a first name. Frémont tells of his employment of Alexander Godey as the Second Expedition prepared to leave Fort St. Vrain in 1843 and says that he had spent six or seven years as a trapper and hunter in the mountains. It has always been assumed that Antoine and Alexander Godey were one and the same person and it seems fairly certain that this is the case, despite the lack of positive proof. The St. Louis Cathedral baptismal records show that Antoine Goder, son of Jean Baptiste Goder and Eleanore Ladouceur, his wife, was baptized on April 5, 1819. His birth is recorded as having occurred on December 2, 1818. His godparents were Antoine Goder and Emilie Derouin but no middle name or initial is recorded. No other A. Goder is listed in the St. Louis Cathedral Records index, so this must be taken as strong evidence that Antoine and Alexander Godey are identical.

In the ledgers kept by Nathaniel Wyeth’s Columbia River Navigation and Fishing Company at Fort Hall, the first entry under the name of Antoine Godar (sometimes spelled Goda) is dated February 9, 1835, but a balance is brought forward for previous transactions, which makes it seem very likely that Godey first came to the mountains as a trapper with Wyeth in 1834, at which time he would have been but fifteen years of age. The account makes it clear that despite his youth Godey was not only an active trapper but a most successful hunter, who supplied meat to Fort Hall very regularly. For a buffalo or an elk he was paid six dollars; for a deer or an antelope, three dollars. The absence of any account entries for either Godey or Carson from December 25, 1835, to May 10, 1836, corresponds to the period during which they made a spring hunt on the Humboldt River in the employment of Thomas McKay of the Hudson’s Bay Company. Godey was employed as a hunter at Fort St. Vrain when he joined Frémont. Doubtless Carson was able to vouch for his skill and experience when Frémont employed him.

Along with Carson, Godey became the hero of the most celebrated exploit of Frémont’s Second Expedition, when they volunteered to pursue some thieving Indians in the Mojave Desert and came in with two scalps. Frémont said of Godey, “In courage and
Codey as a young man soon after he settled in California (F. F. Latta, *Godey in Kern County*)

Godey ca. 1878 (Century Magazine, 1891)
Kit Carson in 1861
Ross Collection, San Antonio, Texas
Courtesy Mary Lund Settle
Kit Carson in 1868
From a photograph preserved in the Frémont family
 Courtesy Donald E. Jackson and Mary Lee Spence
Only known likeness of Owens
_aetat. 75 or 80_
Courtesy Bessie A. White and
Richard F. Owings

Grave of Owens in
Circleville, Kansas
Courtesy C. M. Geis
professional skill he was a formidable rival to Carson, and constantly afterwards was among the best and most efficient of the party, and in difficult situations was of incalculable value.” He also referred to Godey as “insensible to danger” and to his qualities of “perfect coolness and stubborn resolution.” Again he referred to “his distinguishing qualities of resolute and aggressive courage” and further noted that “quick in deciding and prompt in acting, he also had the French élan and their gayety of courage.”

Godey became First Lieutenant in Company A of Frémont’s California Battalion of Mounted Riflemen and accompanied him to Washington but was not required to testify at the court-martial.10

Apparently Godey did not continue long in Frémont’s employ after their return to California in 1849, although Frémont stated that it was Godey who found the first hard rock gold specimens on his Mariposa property. It is known that he operated a ferry on the San Joaquin River near Firebaugh, California, during 1851 and 1852 and that he guided the Williamson Railroad Survey Party in the Kern River country in 1853.11 He seems to have been a resident of Los Angeles when, during Frémont’s presidential campaign in 1856, he was interviewed and dictated a letter defending Frémont against various charges made against him concerning failure of the Fourth Expedition and other matters.12 Probably through his friendship with Edward Fitzgerald Beale he was appointed Superintendent of Indian Affairs on the Tejon Reservation in 1862 but kept the position only two years because of disagreements with the California militia.13 About 1865, when Beale began his great El Tejon Ranch operation, Godey squatted on a ranch in the Upper Cuyama Valley, title to which had been refused by the courts to the Latiallade family who claimed it. Here he lived as a cattle rancher until 1879, when the Latiallade heirs made good their claim. At that time he sold his cattle and left without protest, and without attempting to collect for improvements he had made. He established himself on a smaller ranch property that he owned at San Emigdio but, in 1884, he moved from there to a tract that he bought near Bakersfield, known as Belmont Grove.14 It is known that he owned other property near
San José and that he applied for and received military bounty lands for his Mexican War service, in addition to his pension. 15

Godey had three sons by three different women with whom he had common-law connections. The eldest was Andres Godey (1853-1877), whose mother, Altagracia from San Fernando, left Godey after a few years. Andres did not get on well with his father and went to El Paso, Texas, in 1877 where he soon died of a fever. The second, Alexander Godey, Jr. (1857-1877), died of tuberculosis while attending Santa Clara College. His mother, called Doña China, had died earlier at Cuyama. The third, Antonio Godey (1868-1888), was the son of Soledad Cota, from Spain, who left Godey and remarried in San Francisco. Antonio went to Arizona and died in Tucson.

Godey's fourth marriage, a legal one, was with Maria Antonia Coronel of Los Angeles. It occurred in 1862 and ended in divorce, May 20, 1869. Godey is reported to have settled $10,000 in gold and some Los Angeles property on her at the time. His last wife was also a legal one. Morella Jiminez, who was but twenty-one when Godey died, inherited his property. 16

Godey's death occurred somewhat unexpectedly on January 19, 1889, at the Sisters Hospital in Los Angeles, whither he had gone for treatment only three days earlier. He was buried in the Union Cemetery at Bakersfield. The Kern County Californian devoted a full column to reporting his death and reviewing his career with Frémont. Linking his name with that of Carson, it correctly concluded, "Their like will never be seen again within our national limits because the conditions which developed them are no more." 17

Although Godey became a successful cattleman in California, it cannot be said that he ever changed the pattern of his earlier days. His marriages were with Mexican women, and in occupying himself with cattle raising he was identifying with the old California that existed before the American period. He was courteous and hospitable, generous and kind, so long as he could go his own way. His marriages were not very successful because he was never faithful to one woman. Women were his only weakness, however, for
he never drank or gambled to excess. His relations with Mexican and Indian employees were generally good. He kept in close touch with General Beale over the years and, when Frémont visited California in 1886, Godey traveled with him from San Francisco to Los Angeles.

Moderately tall, extremely handsome, with piercing dark eyes and curly black hair, he was a commanding figure to the end. But he was a figure out of the past and, though he accepted the changes that time brought to California, he was never a part of them. So much was he the representative of a bygone age that despite his good physical condition and his remarkable memory, many who knew him well believed him to be twenty years older than his actual age.

Turning our attention to Richard Owens, it must be observed that until now very little has been known of his career except for information given by Frémont and Carson in their memoirs. His full name was Richard Lemon Owings and he was the oldest child of Richard Owings, of Baltimore County, Maryland, where he was born October 14, 1812. His parents moved to Ohio when he was but a year and a half old. They settled on a farm near Zanesville, Ohio, where three girls and three boys were born to them. At the age of sixteen Dick Owens was apprenticed to a gunsmith named Ross. By the time he was twenty-one, he could not only make a flintlock rifle but he had become an expert shot with one, killing his first deer and his first bear in the wooded hills around Zanesville. In 1834 Caleb Wilkins returned to Zanesville and fired the imagination of Dick Owens with tales of trapping and hunting in the Rocky Mountains.

Wilkins and Owens took a boat at Marietta, traveled down the Ohio to St. Louis and up the Missouri to Independence, arriving there in April 1834. There they hired to Nathaniel Wyeth, who was outfitting his second expedition to the mountains. Owens was to receive $250 for eighteen months, with food and horses provided but he was to furnish his own gun and clothing. He had brought
with him a rifle of his own make, which he retained during all
the years that he remained in the west.24

After the establishment of Fort Hall, Owens and others accom­
panied Wyeth to Fort Walla Walla and returned to Fort Hall dur­
ing the winter under Captain Joseph Thing, who had been hired
by Wyeth in Oregon. In the spring of 1835, Captain Thing took
eighteen men on an expedition to establish relations with the
friendly Flatheads and Nez Perces on Salmon River, and Owens
got his first experience of Indian fighting. It was a rough introdudu­
tion, for after passing through Day’s Defile, they were forced to
alter the course of their journey by hostile Blackfeet. While
camped on Bitter Root River they were attacked by two large bands
of Blackfeet. Fortunately, the Blackfeet were armed chiefly with
bows and arrows so, with the help of the friendly Indians, they
were repelled. But the trappers lost all their trade goods and had to
return to Fort Hall.25

That fall, Owens was wounded in another fight, when the
Blackfeet attacked a trapping party under Joseph Gale at Pierre’s
Hole. The Indians fired from brush at the trappers who were on
open prairie. Owens got a ball in the shinbone, one through the calf,
and one through the thigh, all on the same leg, and an arrow in
the other foot. It was about a month after this that Owens and
Carson met for the first time. Owens was still on crutches.26

The Fort Hall account books contain the account of Lemmon
Owens for the period from December 20, 1834, to February 20,
1836, and with the knowledge that Lemon was Richard Owens’
middle name we may safely assume that the account was his. On two
or three occasions he bought half of a pack of playing cards, some
other trapper paying for the other half. Purchases of tobacco were
frequent but liquor was bought only occasionally and in small
amounts. The purchase of small quantities of beads and calico may
indicate that he had an interest in some of the Indian women. On
February 20, 1836, he outfitted himself for trapping on his own by
purchases of a horse, $70; six beaver traps, $72; a 3 point white
blanket, $15.50; a green capote, $20; and supplies of powder,
percussion caps, fusil balls, tobacco, and flour.27
Just where Owens operated as a free trapper is not precisely known but an Owens was at Fort St. Vrain in May 1837 and at the Powder River Camp of Lucien Fontenelle in February 1838. In the spring of 1839 Carson and Owens trapped the Black Hills of the Laramie River region. In August they encountered Doc Newell and other trappers “on muddy of Black’s fork” and they all went to Brown’s Hole in November to spend the winter at Fort Davy Crockett. While here Owens joined Philip Thompson, Bill New, Levin Mitchell and others in stealing horses from the Shoshones and later from California. Carson, Doc Newell, Joe Meek, and others did not approve of this and endeavored unsuccessfully to prevent it. It seems to have made no difference in the friendship of Carson and Owens, however, although they did not leave Fort Davy Crockett at the same time. Carson came to Bent’s Fort in 1841, and around the same time Owens established himself on Greenhorn Creek, south of Pueblo, Colorado. John Brown, who had a store there, tells us that Owens had an Indian wife and at least two children while at Greenhorn.

It was during his years at Greenhorn, sometime between 1841 and 1845, that Owens and John Burroughs, a trapper he had known at Fort Hall, had their desperate encounter with a grizzly bear, of which Dick Wootton has left us a vivid account. On suddenly meeting the bear, both men fired at him and both missed. The only tree available was a scraggy cedar. Dropping their guns both men ran for the tree. Owens was ahead and made it to temporary safety but the bear pulled Burroughs down and mauled him severely. Then, leaving Burroughs for dead, the bear went for Owens in the tree. He defended himself as best he could with a hunting knife. Meanwhile, Burroughs crawled to his gun, got it reloaded and finally was able to put a ball into the bear’s body without hitting Owens. The bear had Owens’ left hand in his mouth at the time and fell to the ground taking some fingers with him. Both men recovered well but bore the evidence of their fight with the bear for the rest of their lives.

Meanwhile, Carson guided Frémont on his first and second expeditions. Between the two he reestablished his association with
Owens, and married Josepha Jaramillo in Taos. In the spring of 1845 Carson and Owens “decided they had rambled long enough.” They bought some land from Lucien Maxwell near Cimarron, New Mexico, and started farming. In August, upon receiving word of Frémont’s third expedition, they sold out and both joined him.35

Both Carson and Godey accompanied three of Frémont’s expeditions but Owens was with only the third expedition.36 This being the case, it is clear that Owens impressed Frémont very greatly, for within a very short time he ranked Owens with the other two and continued to think of him in such terms for the rest of his life. Of Owens, Frémont wrote, “That Owens was a good man it is enough to say that he and Carson were friends. Cool, brave, and of good judgment; a good hunter and good shot; experienced in mountain life; he was an acquisition and proved valuable throughout the campaign.” Again he wrote of Owens as “Equal in courage to the others, and in coolness to Godey, [he] had the coup d’oeil of a chess player, covering the whole field with a glance that sees the best move.”37

Owens became Captain of Company A of the California Battalion of Mounted Riflemen when it was formed and later had charge of the artillery which was captured from the Mexicans.38 Frémont named the Owens Valley and River for him even though Owens was not with the detachment of the third expedition that explored it.39 Other exploits of Owens and Carson with this expedition need not concern us here. Like Godey, Owens accompanied Frémont to Washington but was not required to testify. On his way back to Taos in 1848, Owens was entertained for a week at Senator William Benton’s home in St. Louis.40

In 1849, that year of decision for Frémont’s “three marshalls,” Owens’ choice was the opposite of that made by Godey. In fact, it was the opposite to that made by several thousand Americans. Eighteen forty-nine was the year when everyone seemed to be heading for California, lured by the report of the gold discovery there. Owens, however, traveled east. True it is that he seems to have started west, for we find that on June 22, 1849, he was engaged at Pueblo, Colorado, to guide a pack train of gold seekers that had
split off from a wagon train. He was to be paid seven dollars a day, and he promised to take them to the diggings in sixty days. It is possible that he did guide them to Fort Bridger, but somewhere before they got to California, Owens, for reasons unknown, seems to have taken the back trail to the States. It may have been the girl he planned to marry in St. Louis who was the magnet that drew him in that direction. Or it may have been a desire to see his family. He was probably aware that they had moved from Ohio to Delaware County, Indiana. He may have known of the death of his mother sometime prior to 1850. At any rate, he seems to have returned to his family at this time.

The next certain knowledge of him that we have is that of his marriage on March 5, 1854, to Emily Miller of Marion, Indiana. The ceremony took place near Marion and was performed by the Reverend Charles Smith. It is probable that they lived for some years after that near Sweetser, Indiana, a few miles west of Marion and that Owens became a farmer. Here their two older sons, Richard L. and Nathan A. Owings were born, but before the end of the Civil War, in which Owens took no part, the family moved to Iowa, where a third son, William Franklin Owings was born in 1865. In 1872, Owens moved once more, settling this time near Circleville, Jackson County, Kansas.

The later years of Dick Owens were uneventful. He seldom talked about his early adventures in the Rocky Mountains. In his old age he reverted to the ways of his youth and repaired guns, did some hunting as long as he could, would locate a bee tree in the woods and sell the honey. He did not farm very extensively and it is probable that his early life was a detriment to his becoming a successful farmer. He was erect and alert to an advanced age. His neighbors respected him for his honesty and his warm friendship, but it is clear that, even more than Codey, he was regarded as a relic of a remote past, which his younger contemporaries could only comprehend with difficulty. The obituary notice in the county seat’s newspaper was a lengthy one, prepared in part on the basis of an interview before his death on June 11, 1902. It concluded, “He never accumulated much property or held
any high official position, but no estimate or value can be placed on the work he did as a pioneer in helping to bring to the attention of the world a great, vast unknown expanse of country that today is thickly settled and blooms as a garden.47 Owens had outlived all of the Mountain Men he had known in early life and of those associates from that early time only Jessie Benton Fremont outlived him, by six months. That indomitable lady had written of Carson’s last difficult days, she had known of Codey’s death and kept the knowledge from her ailing husband till his birthday had passed, but she was not aware of Owens’ death for he had made a complete break with his past in 1849, and maintained it for more than half a century.

The third and most celebrated member of Frémont’s trio, Kit Carson, was the oldest of the group, having been born in Madison County, Kentucky, on December 24, 1809. He grew up in Missouri, where the Carson family, paralleling the Owens family, had moved when he was about a year and a half old. At sixteen he ran off from the saddler to whom he had been apprenticed and made his way to Santa Fe with a wagon train. In the employ of Ewing Young he became a trapper and went all the way to California and back in 1829-1831. After that he trapped for various outfits or for himself in the Rockies until it was no longer possible to make a living at it. At a chance encounter with Frémont in 1842, he recommended himself as a guide and got the job. Frémont admired the energetic and competent little frontiersman tremendously and so described him in his reports that the dime novelists appropriated him as a character in their works and he achieved a fame that only a few people ever attain. By 1849 his name was a household word, synonymous with fearless daring and thorough knowledge of the American Far West wherever these subjects were topics of conversation.48

Carson’s choice in 1849 was to remain where he was. This was to follow the easiest way, the path of least resistance, but it proved
to be the best choice in the end. Carson, unlike Godsey and Owens, had married before 1849. His wife’s home and her relatives were in Taos; Carson’s good friend Maxwell was also there; and Carson himself chose to stay and make Taos his home rather than try to persuade his wife to move to California.

For four years he worked for Maxwell or in association with him, farming at Rayado, bringing out goods from Kansas City, trapping the Colorado Rockies, and driving sheep to California. Then in 1854 he became Indian Agent for the Ute, a job he retained until 1861. When the Indians were peaceful, they came into Taos and received their supplies. When they were hostile, Carson acted as a scout for the various army detachments that dealt with them. It can be said he was a better than average Indian Agent, but it must be remembered that the average was not high.

In 1856 Jesse Turley persuaded him to write his memoirs, in the hope of cashing in on his widespread fame. He dictated them to his secretary, John Mostin, and Turley placed the manuscript in the hands of Dr. D. C. Peters, who used it as the basis for his well-known biography of Carson. The result was added fame for Carson, but no financial returns for either him or Turley. 49

When the Civil War began, Carson became Colonel of the First New Mexico Volunteers and saw action during the Confederate invasion of New Mexico that earned him a brevet rank of Brigadier General of Volunteers. During 1863-1864, he conducted an efficient campaign against the Navajo under the direction of Major General James H. Carleton, and in the fall of 1864 he fought an effective battle against the Kiowa and Comanche at Adobe Walls. 50

For about a year he had command of Fort Garland, 1866-1867, but resigned his commission to settle at Boggsville, Colorado, where he became Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Colorado Territory. Troubled by an increasingly serious bronchial condition, he went East in early 1868, partly on business for the Ute and partly to consult medical men about his own health. While in Washington he visited his old friends the Frémonts. His Indian business was concluded successfully, but he could get no help or
hope for his own condition. His wife died in childbirth two days after he reached home, and he died a month later, May 23, 1868, at Fort Lyon, of an aneurism of the aorta.51

The situation of Frémont’s “three marshalls” in 1849 was that of men who had led active lives of adventure in their early years, winning fame but little financial reward. The problem was whether they could continue to enjoy the adventurous life and keep the fame it brought and, at the same time, to achieve financial success. If so, where and how could this best be done? If not, which of the three was to be given up in order to achieve the goal most desired?52

Godey chose to go with the advancing frontier. We may judge that to him a free and easy life of adventure with few restraints was most important. He was able to find such a life in the cattle ranching he undertook in the new environment. He never lacked for money and left some property but had no descendants who lived to benefit from it. His fame he allowed to decline. It meant little to him. He maintained his old contacts to some extent, but he did not bother to make new ones that would keep his fame alive. He was never interviewed by any of H. H. Bancroft’s busy recorders of pioneer history. In a general way this was the fate of most of the Mountain Men who settled in Oregon or California. An occasional one, like Joe Meek or George Yount, was interviewed, but others like William Wolfskill, Ewing Young, John L. Hatcher, Caleb Wilkins, and many more, were neglected by even those most conscious of history.

Dick Owens chose to return to his family in Indiana. We may judge that he had decided that he had had his fill of adventure and that what he wanted was a wife, a family, and a farm. Fame appealed to him even less than to Godey, for he did not bother to keep in touch with any of his old associates. But if he yearned for security or financial success, he was disappointed. The early life of adventure was a poor preparation for the steady toil and good management demanded of a successful farmer. Those who had never left the farms had a great advantage over a man who had been away
in the mountains for fifteen years. Even the usual recourse of the unsuccessful farmer failed for Owens, and he was no better off, apparently, in Iowa or Kansas than he had been in Indiana. His long life ended in both poverty and obscurity. Again, in general, this was the fate of Mountain Men who tried to take up where they had left off at home. Even those who wrote narratives of their adventures, like Zenas Leonard and Rufus Sage, cannot be said to have profited themselves much by it, either in money or in contemporary fame, though history has been the gainer. The silent ones like John Colter and Aaron Lewis ended in even greater obscurity than Owens.

Carson was more conscious of his fame, though his efforts to capitalize on it were unsuccessful. Except for the urging of Jesse Turley, he would probably never have thought of attempting it. By remaining in a familiar environment, he was able to continue his exploits and enhance his fame even during the Civil War when a whole new crop of heroes was gaining public acclaim. His life was not so free as that of Godey, and he often chafed under the restrictions of the military establishment. But he adjusted to it well enough to retain his laurels. No other name ever commanded more attention or respect than his in the area that he chose as his own. The adventurous life was still his but it was coupled with more responsibility. Financially, he made a good living but that was all, and it was this which impelled him to resign from the Army in 1867. He did not live long enough to find out whether he could have done better in civilian life, and his children were left with few material advantages.

Once again, we can say that those Mountain Men who made approximately the same choice as Carson and remained as close as possible to the scenes of their early success usually did well enough to make this appear the wisest choice. Jim Bridger, Andrew Drips, William Bent, Ceran St. Vrain, Dick Wootton, and others answer this description. Although some could be named who stayed on and sank into obscurity, this was frequently because of personal habits that prevented success.

The best choice of all, of course, was to get out early with
enough capital to ensure success. This choice was no longer available in 1849. Those who did it earlier, like William H. Ashley, Robert Campbell, Ramsay Crooks, and William Sublette, were the lucky ones, and even they found that, if they wished to make more money, the best way to do it was to remain in the fur trade as suppliers of goods and buyers of furs.

The Mountain Men had a saying, "If that's the way your stick floats, follow it." In 1849 the sticks cast upon the water by Godey, Owens, and Carson floated in three separate directions. The three men followed their divergent ways.
NOTES


3. Hafen and Hafen, p. 298.


6. The St. Louis Cathedral Records were kindly examined for me by Mrs. Frances H. Stadler, Archivist of the Missouri Historical Society. The birthdate, Dec. 2, 1818, differs from the one given by Godey on his pension application, which was Jan. 28, 1818. The Cathedral Records also record an older brother, born Nov. 20, 1816, which renders the Dec. 2, 1818 date for Godey's birth more probable than the one of Jan. 28, 1818. The U.S. manuscript census for St. Louis in 1830 records an Augustin Goda with one son between 15 and 20 and one between 20 and 30 years of age but these are too old to be considered. Godey stated in 1853 that he was 35 years old, and all other sources indicate 1818 as the year of his birth, regardless of what the precise date may have been.

7. A microfilm of the Fort Hall Account Books was kindly lent to me by Professor Richard Beidleman of Colorado College. Antoine Godar was a very active hunter and supplied a great deal of meat to Fort Hall. The detailed account begins Feb. 9, 1835, and ends Dec. 23, 1837. Most of 1836 seems to have been spent by Godey in trapping rather than hunting. There is an indication on p. 444 that Godey had accompanied Captain Wyeth to Fort Walla Walla in 1834.

8. *The Expeditions of John Charles Frémont*, edited by Donald Jackson and Mary Lee Spence (Champaign, 1970), vol. 1, p. 452. Frémont reported that he hired "Alexander Godey, a young man about 25 years of age, who had been in this country six or seven years, all of which time had been actively employed in hunting for the support of the posts, or in solitary trading expeditions among the Indians."


12. Hafen and Hafen, p. 263.
13. Latta, p. 33.
15. Copies of Godey's pension and bounty applications were furnished to me by the National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C. These applications use the name Alexander Godey on the earlier forms and Alexis Godey on the later ones. From a study of the signatures on these documents I have concluded that Godey signed Alex’r and that this signature was sometimes read as Alex'is, giving rise to the impression held by many who knew him in later years that his name was Alexis. Godey was illiterate but, like Carson, he learned to sign his name in later years. In all cases the 'r appears higher than the rest of the name in his signatures and sometimes could easily be mistaken for an is.
16. Latta, pp. 47-50. The detailed information concerning Godey's wives and sons was furnished to Mr. Latta by William F. Skinner, who had been brought up by Godey.
17. *Kern County Californian*, Jan. 26, 1889. This obituary notice unfortunately contains no information on Godey's life that had been gathered locally at the time and so adds nothing to our knowledge.
18. An article appeared in *Touring Topics*, June 1933, pp. 14-15, which accused Godey of having poisoned more than forty Indians in 1866 in order to gain possession of an Indian girl. The authority cited was a Mexican, who had not been born when the event was said to have transpired. His information had come from an ex-foreman on Godey's Cuyama Valley Ranch, named Leonardo Ramirez, who had worked for him 1874-1878, and left under suspicious circumstances. The story obviously rests upon the flimsiest sort of authority and should never have been published. William F. Skinner in a letter to *Touring Topics*, August 1933, p. 31, stated that no Indians were living in the Cuyama Valley in 1866 and this has been substantiated by other testimony. See also the discussion of this matter in F. F. Latta, pp. 41-46. In addition to being hearsay, the story contradicts everything else known about Godey and his character.
19. For a complete summary of this information see Harvey L. Carter, "Dick Owens" in *Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West*, edited by L. R. Hafen (Glendale, 1965-1972), vol. 5, pp. 283-90. At the time that I wrote this sketch of Owens, I could learn nothing of either his earlier or his later life. In 1969, after the publication of *'Dear Old Kit'* , I received a call from Mr. Albert Brown, of Arvada, Colorado, who had read the book and who was able to tell me that Owens was buried in Circleville, Kansas, and to put me in touch with his grandson, Richard F. Owings, of Aurora, Colorado. This provides an excellent example of how publication frequently leads to further knowledge.
20. The name was properly Owings and is so spelled by his descendants. Long usage of Owens in published accounts makes it inadvisable to attempt to change at this date. Most people pronounced and wrote it as Owens and it is apparent that members of the Owings family did not usually attempt to correct this practice. There is some difference of opinion among descendants as to whether the middle name was Lamon or Lemon but it appears to be the latter on his tombstone in the cemetery of Circleville, Kansas, which also gives the dates for his birth and death. These dates are confirmed by a letter of his granddaughter, Bessie A. White, to the author, Nov. 5, 1970.

21. “The Last Pathfinder” in the Holton Signal, June 18, 1902. Holton is the county seat of Jackson County, Kansas, where Owens died at his home near Circleville. This long and informative obituary was located for me by Nyle H. Miller, Secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society.

22. The 1830 U.S. census for Muskingum County, Ohio, (ms.) lists Richard Owens on a farm in Muskingum township; he and his wife are shown to have been between 40 and 50 years old, with two girls from 10 to 15 and one girl from 5 to 10; two boys from 5 to 10 and one boy under 5 years. The oldest son was at this time apprenticed to John Ross, a gunsmith in the town of Putnam, and is doubtless the male in the 15 to 20 age bracket who is enumerated in that household.

23. The Holton Signal gives the name as Calif Williams but there can be little doubt that Caleb Wilkins is meant since he went out with Wyeth in 1834 and his trading account is in the Fort Hall Account Books. It has not been known before that Wilkins was a trapper prior to 1834.

24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid. His granddaughter Bessie A. White recalls that he had a bad ankle that he told her was caused by an arrow wound. It is also mentioned in his pension application. See also Harvey L. Carter, 'Dear Old Kit', p. 75.

27. Fort Hall Account Books.
31. Ibid., p. 39.
32. Carter, 'Dear Old Kit', p. 79. The late Dale Morgan believed that Carson came to Bent's Fort in 1840 but the preponderance of evidence is for 1841.

34. Howard L. Conard, *Uncle Dick Wootton* (Chicago, 1890), pp. 160-62. All of the descendants of Dick Owens appear to know of this bear story, although not in any detail. Mr. M. G. Johnson of Circleville, Kansas, who as a small boy heard Owens himself tell the story, recalls that there was another man involved. Owens' mutilated left hand is visible in the picture supplied to me by his grandson, Mr. Richard F. Owings of Aurora, Colorado.


36. The obituary in the *Holton Signal* states that Owens was on Frémont's second expedition as well as the third one. Whether the reporter, who had interviewed Owens before his death, misunderstood him, or whether Owens remembered it that way in his old age is hard to say. Owens definitely was not on the payroll of the second expedition. Both Carson and Frémont are explicit in their statements that Owens first served with Frémont on the third expedition.


38. Copies of Owens' pension records were supplied to me by the National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C. Application was made in 1887 and Owens' signature is firm and readable. On a document of 1901, however, it is very shaky. Both are signed Owens rather than Owings, probably to avoid complications regarding his identity. A letter of Daniel Burket, Ashland, Kansas, Nov. 27, 1902, attests to Owens' death and states, "he is [sic] a brother to my wife."

39. There is a possibility that Owens had been through the Owens Valley on his horse-stealing expedition of 1840 and that Frémont took this into account in naming it.

40. The *Holton Signal*.

41. LeRoy R. Hafen, "Cherokee Gold Seekers in Colorado" in *Colorado Magazine*, vol. 15 (1938), p. 103. References to a Richard Owens in connection with the Santa Fe trade found in Louise Barry, *The Beginning of the West, 1540-1854* (Topeka, 1972) for the years 1850-1854 all refer to a Santa Fe merchant of that name who died in 1858.

42. The Owings family had settled in Union Township in the northern part of Delaware County, Indiana. The U.S. manuscript census record shows his mother to have been alive in 1840 but not in 1850. The enumerator in 1850 spelled the name Owings.

43. The date of marriage is that given by Mrs. Emily Owens on her application for a widow's pension. She was born in Coshocton County, Ohio, on Sept. 24, 1835, and died on July 8, 1926, near Circleville, Kansas, having been blind since her husband's death. It is from her obituary in the *Holton Signal*, July 15, 1926, that the fact of their Iowa residence before moving to Kansas is known.
44. The eldest son returned to Sweetser, Indiana, to live. In November, 1971, I had a very pleasant talk with his granddaughter, Mrs. Thelma Stevens, at her home in Sweetser. The second son settled in North Dakota. The youngest son continued to live at Circleville, Kansas most of his life, although he spent some early years in freighting at Saguache, Colorado.

45. The *Holton Signal*. Mr. Richard F. Owings, of Aurora, Colorado, has informed me that his father, William F. Owings, was born in Iowa in 1865 but he has no information as to the locality in that state that his grandfather had settled.

46. In November 1971, I called upon Mr. M. G. Johnson, at the Farmers State Bank, Circleville, Kansas, who as a boy knew Dick Owens and remembered his death very clearly. I am much indebted to him for his youthful impressions of the old man, on which my estimate of Owens' later years is based. Mr. Johnson's son-in-law, Mr. C. M. Geis, very kindly took me to the Circleville cemetery and photographed Owens' tombstone for me.

47. The *Holton Signal*. Owens stated in his application for pension that the house north of Circleville, in which he dwelt, had been built for him by his neighbor.

48. The process by which Carson's reputation was built is traced in Harvey L. Carter, *Dear Old Kit*, pp. 3-46.


52. My colleague Dr. Dennis Showalter suggests that the problem here described is very similar to that of professional athletes of today who achieve fame at an early age and are forced to retire to a less exciting and a less remunerative life as well as to one of obscurity. To a degree, the same may be said of another contemporary group, the astronauts. Members of both these groups, however, usually are in better financial shape than were the Mountain Men.