

ILLUSIONS OF INDEPENDENCE:
THE TETON SIOUX AND THE AMERICAN FUR TRADE,
1804-1854

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INTRODUCTION

I

The nineteenth-century history of the Teton Sioux is a study of contradictions. For instance, while fur-trade scholar Hiram Martin Chittenden notes that “the Sioux were exceedingly troublesome in the early years of the fur trade and . . . came to be known as the pirates of the Missouri,” he subsequently concludes that they eventually “dropped their hostile attitude . . . and in later years gave the traders little or no trouble.”¹ And while Oglala Sioux historian Vine Deloria, Jr. claims that “[t]he Sioux, my own people, have a great tradition of conflict [and] were the only nation ever to annihilate the United States Cavalry three times in succession [.]”² Western historian Richard White observes that

the Sioux found the Americans to be useful, if dangerous, allies during their third period of expansion. For over three decades . . . the ambitions of the Sioux and the Americans proved generally complimentary, and as late as 1838 Joshua Pilcher, the American agent for the upper Missouri would write that ‘no Indians ever manifested a greater degree of friendship for the whites in general, or more respect for our Government, than the Sioux.’³

The “over three decades” referred to by White were the years from 1809 to 1854; in fact, for most of the American fur trade’s active years on the northern and central plains, the Teton Sioux maintained peaceful relations with American traders, officials, and settlers.

¹ Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*, 2 vols., with introduction and notes by Stallo Vinton and foreword by James P. Ronda (New York: Press of the Pioneers, 1935; reprint, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1986), 2: 851 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

² Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1969), 22.

³ Richard White, “The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *The Journal of American History* 65 (September 1978): 328.

Although this perceptual anomaly—i.e., the Sioux alternating between either accommodation or hostility—broadly informs this research, the larger significance of the Tetons' flexible foreign relations with American traders, trappers, government officials, and settlers lies in how those relations affected Teton occupation of the Platte River valley adjacent to the Oregon Trail throughout the 1830s and 1840s, an occupation which firmly established their military dominance of the north-central plains.

One of the purposes of this dissertation is to explain this phenomenon. Toward that end, three possibilities present themselves: (1) did the Western Sioux—primarily the Brules and Oglalas—follow American traders to the Platte; or (2) did those traders extend their operations west of the Missouri River to secure lucrative trade relations with the westward-expanding Sioux; or (3) was their simultaneous presence in the region, at least initially, largely unrelated to each group's discrete motivations, circumstances, and activities? This third possibility sustains a more sophisticated and intellectually-satisfying explanation for the simultaneous presence of the Teton Sioux and American fur traders in the Platte River valley from 1834 to 1854 and supports the central thesis of this dissertation.

The history of the Teton, or Western, Sioux in the first half of the nineteenth century is one of continuous expansion from the middle Missouri River westward to the headwaters of the Yellowstone River and south by southeast to below the South Platte and Republican rivers. Significantly, all seven divisions of the Tetons took part in the armed conquest of the northern and central plains. These divisions include: (1) Sitcangou (Brules), (2) Oglala, (3) Minneconjou, (4) Sihasapa (Blackfoot Sioux), (5) Ohenonpa

(Two Kettles), (6) Itaziptco (Without Bows or Sans Arcs), and, (7) Hunkpapa.⁴ Scholars have failed to answer satisfactorily whether the conquest of this enormous area throughout the first half of the nineteenth century by the mounted Tetons occurred prior to, simultaneously with, or as a consequence of the westward-expanding American fur trade in the years from 1804 to 1854. A second argument presented here is that the Tetons' occupation of the north-central plains from the Missouri to the Platte River valley was one of the *unintended* consequences of the activities of American fur traders throughout this region—activities largely unrelated to Teton migrations westward from the Missouri.

Although its etymology is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the term *Sioux* requires a brief explanation. As a collective label, it encompasses the seven traditional “council fires” or “bands” of the Dakota: (1) Bdewakanton, (2) Wahpekute, (3) Sisseton, (4) Wahpeton, (5) Yankton, (6) Yanktonai, (7) Teton. The first four of these bands speak the “D” dialect of the Dakota language and are known as the Eastern or Santee Sioux; the next two bands are the Middle Sioux, speaking the “N” dialect of that language; while the last band, also known as the Western Sioux, speak the “L” dialect of the same language. As derived from these three dialects, the Eastern, Middle, and Western Sioux are also known as *Dakota*, *Nakota*, and *Lakota*, respectively.⁵ As the subject of this dissertation focuses almost exclusively on the Teton band of the Dakota, the following conventions apply throughout: *Tetons*, *Teton Sioux*, *Western Sioux*, *Lakota*, and *Sioux* appear

⁴ Garrick Mallery, *Fourth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, “The Dakota Winter Counts,” 89-146; “Pictographs of the North American Indians, plates VI-LI, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D C, 1886; reprint, Garrick Mallery, *The Dakota and Corbuser Winter Counts*, Reprints in Anthropology, 36 vols. (Lincoln, NE: J&L Reprint Company, 1987), 97-98, (hereafter, *Dakota Winter Counts*).

⁵ James H. Howard, *Yanktonai Ethnohistory and the John K. Bear Winter Count* (Lincoln, NE: Augstums Printing Service, 1976), 4.

interchangeably in the text, unless specifically noted otherwise. To avoid confusion, the names of the seven divisions of the Tetons—*Brules*, *Oglalas*, *Minneconjous*, *Blackfoot Sioux*, *Two Kettles*, *Sans Arcs*, and *Hunkpapas*—appear in these, their most common forms; all seven of these divisions receive the designation of “tribes” rather than “bands,” the latter term being reserved for the smaller groups that, in the aggregate, comprised the tribes. Plural names denote nouns—e.g., the *Brules*—while singular names become adjectives—e.g., the *Brule Sioux*. Despite the intellectual controversy surrounding the term *Indians*, that word appears throughout the text in recognition of its general acceptance as a label for North America’s indigenous peoples.⁶ Finally, Indian names will generally appear in the form of their English translation.

A second purpose of this dissertation is to fill, at least partially, the need for a more complete history of the relationship between the Teton Sioux and the American fur trade from 1804 to 1854. Even though a number of excellent studies of the nineteenth-century Sioux exist, the authors of those works invariably favor the years from 1855 to 1890 at the expense of the earlier period. Two well-known examples are George E. Hyde’s *Spotted Tail’s Folk: A History of the Brule Sioux* (1961) and *Red Cloud’s Folk: A History of the Oglala Sioux Indians* (1937). Although Hyde briefly covers the Tetons’ eighteenth-century migration west across the Missouri River and their history during the first half of the nineteenth century, his studies primarily focus on the years from 1855 to 1881, and from 1855 to 1878, respectively. For instance, in *Spotted Tail’s Folk*, Hyde devotes a

⁶ For the reasoning behind these grammatical conventions, see George E. Hyde, *Red Cloud’s Folk: A History of the Oglala Sioux Indians*, with a foreword by Royal B. Hassrick (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), x (page citations are to the reprint edition), in which Hyde explains that he too uses “the English plural in writing tribal and band names: Oglalas, Tetons, Kiyuksas. The custom followed by many writers of using what may be termed the Indian plural and writing ‘one Oglala,’ ‘seven Oglala,’ is supposed for some reason to be scholarly; but surely this Indian grammatical form has no place in the writing of English prose. There is no more sense in writing ‘seven Oglala’ than in writing ‘seven Spaniard’ or ‘seven western state.’”

mere 62 pages out of 310 to the period from 1804 to 1854, and in *Red Cloud's Folk*, only 47 pages out of 303.⁷ A more recent—and jarring—illustration of this tendency to gloss over this critical half-century in the history of the Teton Sioux is Jeffrey Ostler's *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (2004). In it the author allots only a single chapter of 39 pages to the eventful period from 1804 to the mid-1850s; conversely, the 40 years from 1851 to 1890 receive 331 pages of text.⁸

Current historiographical trends suggest a renewed appreciation for the importance of the American fur trade during this earlier period to the histories of the Plains tribes. Historical geographer David J. Wishart, in his award-winning account of the nineteenth-century dispossession of Nebraska's agricultural tribes, dedicates 100 of 244 pages to the critical years from 1800 to 1854.⁹ Fur trade historian Barton H. Barbour recently offered his valuable study of Fort Union “as a lens for examining several aspects of the western fur trade . . . [and] as a vehicle for testing the validity of some historical interpretations of the trade.”¹⁰ And, a collaboration by anthropologist W. Raymond Wood, Joseph C. Porter, chief curator of the North Carolina Museum of History, and David C. Hunt, director of

⁷ George E. Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk: A History of the Brule Sioux*, 2 ed. (Norman: University of Nebraska Press, 1974), 1-62; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 33-80.

⁸ Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U. S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-39. Some scholars have, however, recognized this tendency to marginalize early nineteenth-century Plains Indian history. For example, in a 1982 article in the *Journal of American Studies*, Colin Calloway notes: “Older, white-oriented studies of Indian history tend to concentrate on the years when this [Plains Indian] culture was in decline and to neglect earlier periods and developments. Such an approach is understandable, and to some extent inevitable, given the historical sources available, but it conveys an inaccurate impression of the situation on the Great Plains prior to white settlement.” But where this dissertation focuses on the Teton Sioux and the *American fur trade* from 1804 to 1854, Calloway's “paper considers the Plains Indians in their heyday and examines *intertribal trade* [my italics] and warfare at a time when the spread of horses and guns was causing great upheavals in native power structures,” in Colin G. Calloway, “The Inter-tribal Balance of Power on the Great Plains, 1760-1850,” *Journal of American Studies* 16 (April 1982): 25.

⁹ David J. Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness: The Dispossession of the Nebraska Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 1-100.

¹⁰ Barton H. Barbour, *Fort Union and the Upper Missouri Fur Trade* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), xi. For another analysis of Fort Union and its impact on the upper Missouri fur trade see Erwin N. Thompson, *Fort Union Trading Post: Fur Trade Empire on the Upper Missouri* (Medora, ND: Theodore Roosevelt Nature and History Association, 1986).

the Stark Museum of Art, jointly published a volume entitled *Karl Bodmer's Studio Art* that, despite its title, includes a detailed narrative of the 1833-1834 journey of Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied and his party up the Missouri River as guests of the American Fur Company.¹¹ As part of this general trend toward interdisciplinary research into the relationship between the American fur trade and the Indian tribes west of the Mississippi River, research for this dissertation draws freely upon the following primary sources: (1) Indian winter counts and recorded oral testimonies of the indigenous participants; (2) journals of the trappers and traders; (3) government documents; and (4) period newspapers. Secondary sources include an abundance of scholarly literature from the disciplines of history, ethnohistory, historical geography, anthropology, archaeology, political economy, economic history, gender studies, foreign relations, public history, and material culture.

The fifty-year period selected for the topic of this dissertation is not an arbitrary choice; two pivotal events of profound historical significance to both the Teton Sioux and the American fur trade circumscribe this half century of Western history. In the spring of 1804, Thomas Jefferson's Corp of Discovery—more popularly known as the Lewis and

¹¹ W. Raymond Wood, Joseph C. Porter, and David C. Hunt, *Karl Bodmer's Studio Art* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), passim. For a sampling of the wide range of interdisciplinary studies that have enriched either American Indian history or American fur trade history or both from the fields of ethnohistory, archaeology, anthropology, economics, political economy, gender studies, public history, and material culture see John C. Ewers, *Indian Life on the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968); Richard E. Jensen, *The Fontenelle and Cabanne Trading Posts: The History and Archaeology of Two Missouri River Sites, 1822-1838*, Publications in Anthropology, Number 11 (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1998); Francis Jennings, "A Growing Partnership: Historians, Anthropologists and American Indian History," *Ethnohistory* 29 (Winter 1982): 21-34; W. Raymond Wood, "Integrating Ethnohistory and Archaeology at Fort Clark State Historic Site, North Dakota," *American Antiquity* 58 (July 1993): 544-559; James L. Clayton, "The Growth and Economic Significance of the American Fur Trade, 1790-1890," *Minnesota History* 40 (1966): 210-220; Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine, eds., *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women* (Washington, D C: University Press of America, 1983); James Austin Hanson, *Metal Weapons, Tools, and Ornaments of the Teton Dakota Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975); and Carl P. Russell, *Firearms, Traps, & Tools of the Mountain Men* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1967).

Clark expedition—departed St. Louis to begin its ascent of the Missouri River to explore the newly-acquired Louisiana Purchase. One important result of this expedition was that representatives of the United States encountered the Teton Sioux west of that river for the first time. And, in the summer of 1854, on the plains surrounding Fort Laramie, an encampment of Brules awaiting the distribution of annuities guaranteed them by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851 annihilated a detachment of the United States army in a tragic misunderstanding that initiated more than two decades of nearly continuous warfare between the Western Sioux and Americans.¹² Additionally, two unique and valuable primary sources bracket this period: Lewis and Clark’s meticulously-kept journals of their 1804-1806 expedition and American Fur Company trader Edwin Denig’s mid-nineteenth-century assessment of the Teton Sioux and four neighboring Indian tribes of the upper Missouri region.¹³

II

Four syntheses examining various aspects of the American fur trade provide the historical context for this dissertation—a context necessarily constructed from the cultural vantage point of Euro-American fur traders. Of these, the most important is

¹² A large body of literature partially or wholly devoted to the Plains Indian wars of the second half of the nineteenth century exists, in particular the work of Western historian Robert M. Utley who has managed to distill the subject to its essence and set the standard for outstanding scholarship for this sub-field in the following five volumes: *The Indian Frontier of the American West, 1846-1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984); *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848-1865* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1967); *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1973); *The Last Days of the Sioux Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); and *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993).

¹³ See Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., *The Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, 8 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1904-1905; Edwin Thompson Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri: Sioux, Arickaras, Assiniboines, Crees, Crows*, edited and with an introduction by John C. Ewers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961). For an assessment of Lewis and Clark’s extensive ethnographic contributions see James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 113-132. For an appraisal of Denig’s unique ethnological achievement see John C. Ewers, “Literate Fur Trader Edwin Thompson Denig,” *The Montana Magazine of History* 4 (Spring 1954): 1-12.

Hiram Martin Chittenden's *The American Fur Trade of the Far West* (1902), a work that inaugurated modern upper Missouri and Rocky Mountain fur trade historiography.

Chittenden was the first scholar to recognize that the American fur trade during the years from 1807 to 1843 represented a distinct period in the history of an industry that had existed since the early 1500s. He fashioned a chronological narrative of the American fur trade—with St. Louis as the business center for the rival companies, their employees, and the free trappers, and with the Rocky Mountains and the Missouri River watershed as the fields of action—and provided an organizing structure for its history that had not previously existed.¹⁴

Chittenden systemized his unique and monumental two-volume effort into five major sections; it remains the only historical synthesis of the American fur trade confined to the years from 1807 to 1843. The first section examines certain features of the fur trade such as its business character, the effects of competition, the liquor traffic, trading posts, trapping, life in the wilderness, and the traders' relations with the Indians. The second, and by far the largest, section includes the following discussions: trans-Mississippi geography and St. Louis; a chronological narrative history of the Pryor expedition of 1807; the activities of Manuel Lisa and the Missouri Fur Company; the Astorians; the Rocky Mountain Fur Company; Captain Bonneville and Nathaniel J. Wyeth; and accounts of both the Oregon Trail and the Santa Fe Trade. The third and fourth sections illustrate contemporary events connected with but discrete from the fur trade as well as colorful incidents and characters associated with it. The final section provides a natural history of the trans-Mississippi West, including its nineteenth-century Indian tribes. The

¹⁴ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: xiii-xiv.

breadth of Chittenden's scholarship provides both an inspiration and a conceptual framework for researchers investigating the American fur trade.

The original structure of *The American Fur Trade* "united a blizzard of facts and events [and] for two generations of historians after 1902, [Chittenden's] perspective remained the agenda for fur trade scholarship."¹⁵ He was the first historian to place the seemingly disconnected events on the upper Missouri and in the lands west of St. Louis into a larger historical context. Although he struggled at first to construct that context, Chittenden finally settled on the fortunes of the rival fur companies and the lively exploits of the mountain men between 1807 and 1843 as the story that mattered.¹⁶ Two of his later studies address trans-Mississippi history from 1844 to 1854.¹⁷

Chittenden anticipated the focus of much of Western history through the 1960s. He wrote a clear narrative that captured the courage and resourcefulness of the mountain men that, nevertheless, romanticized neither them nor their time. Unlike many later fur trade historians, he understood that *the fur trade was an Indian trade*. And, by exploring material culture such as food, tools, and weapons, he established a foundation from which to examine further the cultural and ecological consequences of the American fur trade on its Indian consumers.¹⁸

Far less influential to American fur trade scholarship than Chittenden's *The American Fur Trade* is Paul Chrisler Phillips's two-volume, posthumously-published synthesis entitled *The Fur Trade* (1961). A sweeping study of the North American fur trade from

¹⁵ Ibid., 1: xiv.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See Hiram Martin Chittenden, *History of Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River*, 2 vols. (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1903); and Hiram Martin Chittenden and Alfred T. Richardson, eds., *Life, Letters, and Travels of Father Pierre-Jean DeSmet, 1801-1873* (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1905).

¹⁸ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: xv.

the sixteenth century to the 1840s, Phillips's single-minded effort led him to archives all over the world and consumed nearly the last thirty years of his life. Unfortunately, the work contains so many errors of fact and unsupported generalizations, particularly those sections that deal with the Canadian fur trade, that many fur trade scholars have found little in it to praise.¹⁹ Unlike Chittenden, Phillips devotes little space to the exploits and personalities of the men in field; rather, *The Fur Trade* takes as its primary theme the centuries-long imperialistic struggle between the European powers and, later, the United States for possession of the North American continent. Although Phillips's approach generally focuses on the political, economic, and diplomatic aspects of the fur trade in contrast to this dissertation's ethnohistorical orientation, portions of Phillips's work remain a useful supplement to Chittenden's *The American Fur Trade*.

Historical-geographer David J. Wishart presents an interdisciplinary overview of American fur trade operations in *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis* (1979). Wishart's study opens, naturally enough, with a geographical overview of the trans-Mississippi West. The enormous area over which the fur companies operated included the northern Glaciated and southern Unglaciated Missouri Plateaus, the Northern, Middle, and Southern Rocky Mountains, the Wyoming Basin, the Colorado Plateaus, the Columbia Basin, and the Great Basin and Range.²⁰ Wishart makes no claim for environmental determinism, but does concede that "the traders and trappers, limited in technology and therefore in practical options, formulated

¹⁹ Several of the more pointed critiques appear in the following reviews: W. J. Eccles, review of *The Fur Trade*, by Paul Chrisler Phillips, *The Journal of Southern History* (February 1962): 98-99; LeRoy R. Hafen, review of *The Fur Trade*, by Paul Chrisler Phillips, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (March 1962): 689-690; and A. P. Nasatir, review of *The Fur Trade*, by Paul Chrisler Phillips, *Pacific Historical Review* (February 1962): 67-69.

²⁰ David J. Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West, 1807-1840: A Geographical Synthesis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979, reprint, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1994), 24 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

their strategies within a rather rigidly-defined [geographical] context.”²¹ And, he correctly maintains that while the sedentary village life of the horticultural Arikaras, Mandans, and Hidatsas suffered progressive deterioration during the period, the “nomadic peoples, on the other hand, were able to adopt a more independent stance toward the fur trade and they experienced a flowering of their power and culture during the first half of the nineteenth century.”²²

Wishart’s *Fur Trade of the American West* contains an economic examination of its subject in which he describes the production strategy and annual cycle of operations of the upper Missouri fur trade. According to the author’s perceptive analysis, the Missouri Fur Company under the leadership of Manuel Lisa sought to monopolize the Indian trade on the lower Missouri while simultaneously sending trapping parties upriver and into the Rockies in the years from 1807 to 1826. The American Fur Company (AFC) then dominated the upper Missouri fur trade from 1826 to 1840 and beyond, although an outbreak of smallpox among the Indians in 1837-1838, changes in the ecosystem, and outside competition eventually forced the AFC to concentrate its operations on the upriver bison robe trade. Under the American Fur Company, “the system was a tightly controlled unit, carefully supervised and organized, united by a continuous movement of furs, goods, and people, and regulated by information feedback which focused on St. Louis, the main decision-making centre.”²³

Wishart also investigates both the production strategy and annual cycle of operations of the Rocky Mountain trapping system. The author observes that the activities of John Jacob Astor’s Pacific Fur Company in the years from 1810 to 1813 foreshadowed the

²¹ Ibid., 27.

²² Ibid., 21.

²³ Ibid., 79-80.

later Rocky Mountain trapping system of William H. Ashley in much the same way that the Missouri Fur Company had pioneered trapping and trading operations on the upper Missouri. From 1823 to 1826, Ashley and Andrew Henry established the Rocky Mountain trapping system, distinguished by American trappers who remained in the mountains year-round and then exchanged their furs for supplies at the annual rendezvous initiated by Ashley in 1825. And as Wishart explains: “the Upper Missouri Fur Trade, [like] the Rocky Mountain Trapping System may be visualized as a production network, characterized by a distinctive infrastructure and linked through St. Louis . . . [to] the sources of supplies and equipment in the eastern United States and Europe.”²⁴ The central thesis of this dissertation argues that the Teton Sioux became dependent upon this unseen and, by the Indians, unimagined global economy for the Euro-American goods that, beginning in the 1830s, provided them with their “illusions of independence.”

The final synthesis considered here is John E. Sunder’s *The Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri, 1840-1865* (1965). Sunder’s narrative begins in 1840, precisely where Wishart’s chronology ends, and focuses primarily on Pierre Chouteau, Jr.’s upper Missouri fur trade empire. As scholar Paul L. Hedren observes in his foreword to Sunder’s study: “Wishart’s and Sunder’s works have become indispensable companions, providing a tandem start-to-finish look at the broadest aspects of the business, places and people of the Upper Missouri fur trade. [A]s a mate to the Wishart volume . . . [it] serves history exceedingly well.”²⁵

²⁴ Ibid., 175-177.

²⁵ John E. Sunder, *The Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri, 1840-1865*, with a foreword by Paul L. Hedren (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), x-xi (page citations are to the reprint edition).

III

The research methods and narrative style of this dissertation follow closely the ethnohistorical scholarship of western historian James P. Ronda in *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (1984). In this well-received study, Ronda offers “exploration ethnohistory, a deliberate effort to probe the complexity of Indian-white encounters in North America by examining a memorable venture that has come to represent the westward movement.”²⁶ By his ethnohistorical method, the author seeks to redress Bernard DeVoto’s lament that “a dismaying amount of our history has been written without regard to the Indians.”²⁷ Thus, Ronda moves beyond William Goetzmann’s one-dimensional label of Lewis and Clark as “diplomats in buckskin” by recognizing that their expedition was “a human community living in the midst of other human communities.”²⁸ The word *among* in the book’s title illustrates the depth of Ronda’s ethnohistorical narrative as the full range of daily interactions between the explorers and the Indians they encountered emerges—“from high policy to personal liaisons, from careful collection of ethnographic data to the sharing of food and songs around a blazing fire.”²⁹

Ronda’s ethnohistorical approach is clearly interdisciplinary. He first examined the rich documentary evidence left behind by several of the expedition’s members. Lewis, Clark, Sergeants John Ordway, Charles Floyd, and Patrick Gass, and Private Joseph Whitehouse all contributed lengthy and insightful commentaries about the Indians they

²⁶ James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984; reprint, with a new introduction by the author, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), xviii-xix (page citations are to the reprint edition).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, xviii.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

met along the way. The author correctly insists that, despite the cultural biases of the Lewis and Clark expedition records, collectively they represent an invaluable store of ethnographic data for cautious scholars.³⁰ Ronda then blended written records with the findings of anthropologists and archaeologists such as site reports and culture element distributions—combining the explorers’ perceptions with the Indians’ sensibilities—to provide the fullest possible context for the human interactions he describes.³¹

In his influential article entitled “The Winning of the West: The Expansion of the Western Sioux in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,”³² Richard White argues that

the history of the northern and central American Great Plains in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is far more complicated than the tragic retreat of the Indians in the face of an inexorable white advance. From the perspective of most northern and central plains tribes the crucial invasion during this period was not necessarily that of the whites at all. These tribes had few illusions about American whites and the danger they represented, but the Sioux remained their most feared enemy.³³

³⁰ The debate over the intrinsic value of the written records left by Euro-American observers of nineteenth-century Indian cultures continues. At one extreme is ethnohistorian Raymond J. DeMallie who, in referring specifically to the Sioux, marginalizes contemporary Euro-American records because the “authors of these documents—travelers, traders, colonial administrators, military officers, missionaries, Indian agents—represented a cultural tradition very different from that of the Sioux. Even when these observers were sympathetic to Indians, they usually failed to understand enough of native culture to empathize with Sioux perspectives.” Completely ignoring the voluminous records and journals kept by American fur traders, DeMallie claims inaccurately “that the literature on Sioux history largely centers on warfare and diplomacy, the two modes in which Euro-Americans dealt with Plains Indians from the late-eighteenth through the nineteenth century;” see Raymond J. DeMallie, “‘These Have No Ears:’ Narrative and the Ethnohistorical Method,” *Ethnohistory* 40 (Autumn 1993): 515-516. At the opposite extreme is fur trade scholar Barton H. Barbour who maintains that the fur traders faithfully recorded what they observed of Indian culture and, in a subtle reference to the New Western historians, claims to avoid looking for “ulterior motives, hidden agendas, and other strange extractions visible—and comprehensible—mainly to readers with an avant-garde approach to historical scholarship;” see Barbour, *Fort Union and the Upper Missouri Fur Trade*, xiii. While not endorsing Barbour’s uncritical acceptance of the written record, James Ronda also contends that, regarding “the kinds of obvious cultural biases” contained in the written record “scholars have long since learned to deal with [them] in documentary analysis;” see Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, xviii. Ronda’s moderate, thoughtfully-reasoned position toward documentary evidence is the one accepted for this study.

³¹ Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, xviii-xix.

³² Just how influential is evident in Clyde A. Milner II, Walter Nugent, Elliott West, Karen R. Merrill, Philip J. Deloria, and Richard White, “A Historian Who Has Changed Our Thinking: A Roundtable on the Work of Richard White,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 33 (Summer 2002): 139-140.

³³ White, “The Winning of the West,” 320-321.

White identifies three distinct waves of Teton expansion: “initially a movement during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries onto the prairies east of the Missouri, then a conquest of the Middle Missouri during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and finally, a sweep west and south from the Missouri during the early and mid-nineteenth century.”³⁴ He then lists a number of biological, cultural, and ecological advantages that favored the Western Sioux in their advance: (1) a high birth-rate; (2) an in-migration of Santee, Yankton, and Yanktonai Sioux into Teton bands; (3) a nomadic lifestyle; (4) a loose political organization; (5) a secure resource base; and, (6) consistent access to Euro-American goods.³⁵ White also argues that the conquest of the northern and central plains by the mounted Teton occurred simultaneously with the expansion of the St. Louis-based, American fur trade in the opening decades of the nineteenth century. Both the American traders and the Sioux set out to “win the West” during this third period of Teton expansion as each group gradually achieved its aim through mutual trade and accommodation.

In “The Winning of the West,” White dismisses those historians who “have attributed the movement of the Sioux beyond the Black Hills into the Platte River drainage to manipulations of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company” as purveyors of a “myth.”³⁶ He states unequivocally that “in fact, traders followed the Sioux; the Sioux did not follow the traders.”³⁷ White then briefly traces the historiographical development of this “myth” and claims that the only evidence to support it is a single letter from Lucien Fontenelle to

³⁴ Ibid., 321.

³⁵ Ibid., *passim*.

³⁶ White, “The Winning of the West,” 334.

³⁷ Ibid.

Pierre Chouteau, Jr. written several months after William Sublette ordered the construction of Fort Laramie (Fort William).³⁸

More than two decades after White published his thesis of Teton migrations, English scholar Kingsley M. Bray, using previously unexplored primary sources, claimed to have “refined” White’s thesis by demonstrating that the Oglala presence on the North Platte prior to 1834 had been seasonal (i.e., summer); and only after the establishment of Fort Laramie did the Oglalas occupy that region year-round. Bray achieved his “nuanced understanding of these events” by uncovering the “seasonal pulse of band and tribal movements.”³⁹ Ironically, by “refining” White’s thesis, Bray also reestablished the historical validity of the “myth” so disparaged by White. Therefore, when Vine Deloria, Jr. notes in his introduction to a new edition of Mari Sandoz’s *Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas* (2004) that the “trading posts and forts along [the Platte River valley] attracted the Indian fur and hide trade away from the Missouri [emphasis added], where there were few whites, to the southern plains, where thousands of immigrants crossed the plains every year,”⁴⁰ this most recent iteration of earlier scholars’ accounts of the

³⁸ Ibid. For the specific works cited by White, see Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, I, 308-309; Hyde, *Red Cloud’s Folk*, 43-46; Bernard DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947), 224; Robert H. Trennert, Jr., *Alternative to Extinction: Federal Indian Policy and the Beginnings of the Reservation System, 1846-51* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975), 161; Lucien Fontenelle to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., September 17, 1834; quoted in Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, I: 309. John C. Ewers also contends that “[a]fter the establishment of Fort Laramie on the North Platte in 1834, the Oglalas moved southwestward and traded at that post,” in Edwin Thompson Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri*, ed. and with an introduction by John C. Ewers (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 20. Beginning with its initial construction in 1834 at the behest of William Sublette and lasting until its abandonment in the late nineteenth century, the fort was popularly known as “Fort Laramie;” this despite its other “official” designations at various times as either “Fort William” or “Fort John.” To avoid unnecessary confusion, the name “Fort Laramie” appears consistently throughout this study; often, but not always, followed by the “official” name in (parentheses) for clarification.

³⁹ Kingsley M. Bray, “The Oglala Lakota and the Establishment of Fort Laramie,” *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 36 (Winter 2000): 3-18.

⁴⁰ Mari Sandoz, *Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas*, with an introduction by Vine Deloria Jr. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942; reprint, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 2004), viii-ix (page citations are to the reprint edition).

Oglalas' 1830s migration from the Missouri to the Platte appears entirely consistent with Bray's conclusions. Sandoz herself wrote of the time when "the Oglalas followed Bull Bear southward from the Black Hills country *to his traders* [emphasis added] twenty years before (i.e., 1834)."⁴¹ Although Sandoz published *Crazy Horse* without footnotes, upon rereading it nearly fifty years after he first "rush[ed] through it on my way to learning all there was to know about the Sioux Indians,"⁴² a skeptical Deloria found himself "stunned at the wealth of detail contained in each line of text—material that must have come from her conversations over time with a large number of elders . . . and later skillfully woven into a chronicle of the times that overflows with authenticity."⁴³ Nevertheless, despite the superior scholarship that characterizes this long-standing debate over whether the traders followed the Sioux or the Sioux followed the traders to the Platte River valley, analyzing the historical significance of the relationship between the Western Sioux and the American fur trade from 1834 to 1854 requires a much broader perspective than this debate's narrow focus on fur trade activities and Teton migrations limited to the Fort Laramie region.

That broader perspective emerged from the literature as early as 1854. It was in that year that a twenty-one year veteran of the upper Missouri fur trade by the name of Edwin Thompson Denig completed his manuscript entitled *Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri*, a manuscript that remained unpublished until its inclusion in the *Forty-sixth Annual Report* of the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1930. In it, Denig accurately describes the "very extensive" territory claimed by the Teton Sioux west and southwest of the

⁴¹ Ibid., 45.

⁴² Ibid., v.

⁴³ Ibid., vi.

Missouri River in the mid-1850s.⁴⁴ Significantly, that territory encompassed both Fort Pierre at the confluence of the Bad (Teton) and Missouri rivers and Fort Laramie near the junction of Laramie's Fork and the North Platte.

Of even greater significance to the relationship between the Teton Sioux and the American fur trade was the trail connecting Fort Pierre with Fort Laramie and first surveyed by Lieutenant Gouverneur Kemble Warren of the United States Army in 1855.⁴⁵ This trail followed the northern portion of a much older trade route that began in New Mexico, followed the foothills of the Rocky Mountains to the mouth of Laramie's Fork on the North Platte, and then paralleled first White River and then Bad (Teton) River to the Missouri. The Kiowas and Kiowa-Apaches had originally used it to drive horse herds obtained in the Spanish Southwest to the Arikaras living along the upper Missouri—and even in 1855 it still retained the name “the old Spanish trail.”⁴⁶ It was during the years from 1837 to 1849 that this trail—better known as the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail—connected the Teton Sioux to a global, market economy, supplied them with a multitude of Euro-American trade goods, goods for which they ultimately came to depend, first for their successful conquest of the central plains, and ultimately for their continued existence as free-ranging, nomadic hunters, and created for them merely “illusions of independence.”

⁴⁴ Denig, *Five Indian Tribes*, 3.

⁴⁵ “Report of Lieutenant G. K. Warren, Topographical Engineer of the ‘Sioux Expedition,’ Of Explorations in the Dakota Country, 1855, Plot of the Route from Fort Laramie to Fort Pierre, August 1849,” P & R File, Map 31, Records Group 92, National Archives and Records Administration, “Journal 1855,” Box 5, Warren Papers; quoted in Charles E. Hanson, Jr., “The Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail,” *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 1 (Summer 1965): 5. Warren served as General William S. Harney's topographical engineer on his expedition to punish the Sioux for their annihilation of Second lieutenant J. L. Grattan's command at Fort Laramie in the summer of 1854.

⁴⁶ Charles E. Hanson, Jr., “Fur Trade Activities in the Fort Laramie Region,” *Journal of the West* 26 (1987): 13; James A. Hanson, “A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail,” *Nebraska History* 68 (January 1987): 3.

IV

Chapter One, “Prelude: Turmoil on the Upper Missouri, 1804-1815,” opens with the last years of the eighteenth century during which French and Spanish traders regularly ascended the Missouri from St. Louis, eventually securing for themselves the Teton trade in furs at the expense of their British rivals in the North West Company. That trade, however, was no longer in beaver pelts, but was instead in buffalo robes and hides and dried meat.⁴⁷ Because, by this time, they had become mounted nomads pursuing the enormous herds of buffalo ranging along the Missouri, the Western Sioux avoided trapping and were, therefore, only infrequent suppliers of fine furs such as beaver and otter. And, as they preferred to use their short heavy bows rather than trade guns for hunting buffalo, they simply exchanged a small number of deerskins and buffalo robes for basic items they could not produce themselves such as metal knives and pots and wool blankets.⁴⁸ This late eighteenth-century trade with St. Louis-based European traders had two important consequences: it conditioned the Western Sioux to the concept that high-quality trade goods moving by keelboat up the Missouri could be as dependable a source of such products as those brought by the British overland from Canada; and, it

⁴⁷ Examples abound in the literature of the use of both “buffalo” and “bison” to name that magnificent and irascible animal: for instance, Western historian Frank Gilbert Roe and zoologist Tom McHugh freely employ the popular term, “buffalo,” in their 1951 and 1972 studies, respectively, of the animal, even including that name in their titles; see Frank Gilbert Roe, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in its Wild Habitat* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951); Tom McHugh, *The Time of the Buffalo* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972); conversely, more recent studies of the species tend to use the proper scientific term, “bison,” more or less exclusively; see Dan Flores, “Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850,” *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 465-485; Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). In recognition of the popular acceptance of the term, “buffalo,” and the more correct scientific label, “bison,” both names appear indiscriminately throughout this dissertation in wanton disregard of either convention.

⁴⁸ Annie Heloise Abel, ed., *Tabeau's Narrative of Loisel's Expedition to the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), 123, 168-169.; Charles E. Hanson, Jr., “The Early Fur Trade in Northwestern Nebraska,” *Nebraska History* 57 (January 1976): 296; White, “The Winning of the West,” 324-325.

eventually freed the Tetons from the necessity of making their annual pilgrimage to the Dakota Rendezvous, that heretofore indispensable source of European trade goods held well east of the Missouri River and hosted by their Yanktonai kinsmen.

Chapter One then studies the Lewis and Clark expedition's 1804 clash with the Brules. The expedition's members were the first Americans to encounter the Tetons—several villages of Brules—in the fall of 1804 camped below the confluence of the Bad (Teton) and Missouri rivers—an area later known as the Fort Pierre Plain. Although expedition leaders Meriwether Lewis and William Clark clearly understood the necessity to open negotiations in accordance with their instructions from President Thomas Jefferson, the intelligence they received from French traders in St. Louis warning of the Tetons' aggressive behavior toward whites on the Missouri added elements of uncertainty to those discussions.⁴⁹ But, despite the expedition's high expectations for Lewis and Clark's initial talks with the Sioux, the captains' encounters with the Brules ended badly,

⁴⁹ The source of Sioux hostility to American traders venturing up the Missouri River was the precarious nature of the Tetons' trade relations with the horticultural Mandans, Hidatsas, and, in particular, the Arikaras. As James Ronda, in *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, 48-49, observes: "Arikara farmers were part of the Missouri Trade System. Their towns were the locale's focal point for the system while the Mandan and Hidatsa villages on the Knife River served as the upper exchange centers. The villagers were engaged in supplying the agricultural needs of the nomads. They grew corn, raised horses, and processed hides in return for a wide variety of merchandise and foodstuffs The often troubled relationship between the Arikara villages and Teton Sioux bands was an uneasy symbiosis. From a Teton perspective, some sort of control had to be maintained over the Arikaras. As Teton population expanded west of the Missouri, reliable sources of food had to be found. The overriding Sioux need was for the Arikaras' food products and horses. [E]very . . . late summer and early fall, Sioux bands flocked to the Arikara towns bringing meat, fat, and hides from the plains and European-manufactured goods from the Dakota Rendezvous." The Sioux quite naturally felt that they could not tolerate competition from St. Louis-based American traders. For more on the intertribal Missouri Trade System, see John C. Ewers, "The Indian Trade of the Upper Missouri before Lewis and Clark," in *Indian Life on the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 14-33; William R. Swagerty, "Protohistoric Trade in Western North America: Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Considerations," in *Columbian Consequences, Volume 3: The Spanish Borderlands in Pan-American Perspective*, ed. David Hurst Thomas (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 471-499; W. Raymond Wood, "Plains Trade in Prehistoric and Protohistoric Intertribal Relations," in *Anthropology on the Great Plains*, eds. W. Raymond Wood and Margot Liberty (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 98-109; and William R. Swagerty, "Indian Trade in the Trans-Mississippi West to 1870," in *The Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 4, *History of Indian-White Relations*, ed. Wilcomb E. Washburn (Washington DC, 1988), 351-374.

prompting Clark's bitter evaluation of the Tetons as "the vilest miscreants of the savage race [who] must ever remain the pirates of the Missouri."⁵⁰ Teton depredations against traders along the upper Missouri in the years immediately following the Lewis and Clark expedition's return to St. Louis in 1806 seemed to fulfill Clark's dire predictions.

Chapter One continues with a discussion of the Oglalas, who, although they were becoming firmly established in the Black Hills country, also began trading and hunting on the North Platte, as well as continuing to follow the Bad (Teton) River down to the Missouri each spring where, along with their Brule and Saone kinsmen, they harassed and robbed American traders heading upriver to the Arlikaras, Mandans, and Hidatsas.⁵¹ For instance, in 1810, a trapper named Carson shot and killed the Sioux chief Blue Blanket across the river from an Arikara village. The Tetons retaliated by killing three white men later that same year. It was more than just revenge that motivated them; their desire to dominate trade on the upper Missouri was equally important. And, some months later, in the summer of 1811, those same Tetons intercepted a sizeable party of Astorians—employees of New York entrepreneur John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company—that included the killer of Blue Blanket. Carson's presence greatly agitated the Sioux, who announced they would not let the traders proceed upriver with their goods. to the Arikaras, Mandans, and Hidatsas. The Astorians escaped only through the timely intervention of a combined force of three hundred warriors from the Arikaras, Mandans, and Hidatsas.⁵² The chapter then continues with a narrative account of the brief

⁵⁰ Thwaites, *Journals of Lewis and Clark*, 1: 62-63, 4: 98; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, 28, 40.

⁵¹ Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 33-34.

⁵² John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior of America in the years 1809, 1810, and 1811* [1817], 2d ed., with a foreword by Donald Jackson (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1819; reprint, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1986), 103-114 (page citations are to the reprint edition); Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 35-36.

association between Pacific Fur and Manuel Lisa's Missouri Fur Company resulting from their confrontations with the Sioux.

Beginning with his first trading expedition up the Missouri in 1807, the Spaniard Manuel Lisa gradually transformed Teton relations with American fur traders. The ambitious field operations of Lisa's Missouri Fur Company reflected his vision of an upper Missouri trading empire, and by 1814 no American exercised a stronger influence with the western Indians except the Blackfoot. Appointed agent for those Indians residing along the Missouri above the Kansas River by William Clark, during the War of 1812, Lisa secured the loyalty of the Tetons at a council held at the mouth of the James River in the fall of 1814. Despite Lisa's diplomatic triumph, however, the war disrupted the western fur trade to such an extent that Lisa restricted his operations to the lower Missouri until 1819.⁵³

Chapter Two, "Establishing a Foothold: Recovery, Retreat, and a Shift to the West, 1815-1824," explores the demise of the Missouri Fur Company, explores the postwar recovery of the St. Louis-based American fur trade, and examines the gradual occupation of the upper Missouri region by rival fur companies. Immediately following the end of the War of 1812, French merchants in St. Louis pursued the Teton trade until 1817. Sioux winter counts recount part of that story: in 1809, Registre Loisel's post on Cedar Island opposite the mouth of Bad (Teton) River burned to the ground killing a trader the Indians called Little Beaver; in 1815-16, the Sans Arcs built dirt lodges (trading posts) and lived in them all winter; and, in 1817-18, trading posts appeared at the future sites of Ft. Pierre

⁵³ Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 42-45; Richard Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa and the Opening of the Missouri Fur Trade* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 151-156; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 146-147; Julius W. Pratt, "Fur Trade Strategy and the American Left Flank in the War of 1812," *The American Historical Review* 40 (January 1935): 262-266.

and Ft. Thompson. The latter post, built by Joseph LaFramboise, a trader the Sioux called Choze, became the first trading installation on the Fort Pierre Plain and operated continuously thereafter until the Columbia Fur Company raised Fort Tecumseh a short distance upriver in 1822.⁵⁴

Sioux winter counts for the year 1823-24 record the event that ushered in a new era in the American fur trade: the Arikara campaign of 1823. This campaign—which marked the first time the United States army entered combat west of the Mississippi River—hastened the continued expansion of both the Tetons and American traders into the north-central plains west of the Missouri, reinforced the good relations that had developed between them, and implanted a feeling of contempt for the United States government among the Western Sioux that persisted for decades. The circumstances leading up to the campaign began with the arrival at the Arikara villages of a trapping and trading expedition commanded by St. Louis entrepreneur and militia general, William H. Ashley. Attacked by the Arikaras without warning, the traders suffered twenty-three casualties. Reinforced by traders from the Missouri Fur Company under sub-agent for the Sioux, Joshua Pilcher, Colonel Henry Leavenworth's Missouri Legion, and hundreds of Yankton and Teton Sioux warriors, Ashley carried the fight to the Arikaras, who nevertheless managed to negotiate a treaty that required only the return of his property and recognition of American sovereignty on the Missouri. Ashley subsequently abandoned all thoughts of proceeding upriver and, instead, turned westward for the Rocky Mountains. That decision ultimately led to the American fur trade's most colorful and celebrated feature: the mountain rendezvous.

⁵⁴ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 106, 109; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 35-6; Harold H. Schuler, *Fort Pierre Chouteau* (Vermillion: University of South Dakota Press, 1990), 9.

Chapter Three, “Competition, Consolidation, and Expansion: Lure of the Central Rockies and the Rise of the Company, 1824-1832,” recounts the formation of the illustrious fur-trade partnership between Andrew Henry and William H. Ashley, two men whose business strategies created conditions that brought bands of Teton Sioux to the Platte River valley permanently. The chapter includes discussions of the government-sponsored Atkinson-O’Fallon of 1825, the establishment of the Upper Missouri Outfit, and the last days of Fort Tecumseh, the centerpiece of the Columbia Fur Company and the headquarters of its president, Kenneth McKenzie, from 1822 to 1829. Under McKenzie’s able management, the fort became the major trading center for the Yankton, Yanktonai, and Teton Sioux and the hub of a fur trade domain that eventually included seven major trading posts and a number of smaller winter trading places. In 1827, John Jacob Astor’s American Fur Company (AFC)—known simply as “The Company” in recognition of its dominance of the American fur trade—purchased the Columbia Fur Company, renamed it the Upper Missouri Outfit (UMO) and retained McKenzie as its chief agent, and made it accountable to the AFC’s Western Department headquarters in St. Louis. Also in that year, the American Fur Company engaged Bernard Pratte & Company to manage its Western Department, with Pierre Chouteau, Jr., one of the company’s partners, as chief agent.⁵⁵

The chapter continues with the founding of Fort Pierre and a critical evaluation of the career of one of its most celebrated visitors, the artist George Catlin. An unusually high Missouri River threatened Fort Tecumseh in the spring of 1831 and forced Chouteau to order the construction of a new fort on higher ground on the Fort Pierre Plain. Christened Fort Pierre in his honor, its builders located it two miles north of old Fort Tecumseh with

⁵⁵ Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 12-13.

ready access to wood, water, pasture, and, most importantly, the Missouri River waterway. As they had at both Forts LaFramboise and Tecumseh, the Sioux became the foremost trading partners at Fort Pierre.⁵⁶ And, it was there that Catlin both exposed the illicit traffic in liquor on the upper Missouri and captured a number of prominent Sioux on canvas.

Chapter Four, “Transitions: The Rise of Fort Laramie and the Teton Occupation of the Platte River Valley, 1832-1837,” examines a number of critical developments in the upper Missouri fur trade during this period: the absorption of the Columbia Fur Company into the American Fur Company; the early career of Pierre Chouteau, Jr.; the 1832 voyage of the steamboat, *Yellow Stone*; artists and royalty in the upper Missouri country; the founding of Fort Laramie and the year-round occupation of the Platte River valley by bands of Teton Sioux; and the impact of the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail on the westernmost Tetons and their conquest of the north-central plains.

The establishment of Fort Laramie in 1834 proved to be a highly favorable development for the Teton Sioux—particularly for certain bands of Oglalas and Brules—as the sizeable concentrations of Indians trading at the succession of posts located on the Fort Pierre Plain had significantly reduced the buffalo herds in that region. As a consequence of this reduction in their resource base, the Oglalas and the Brules continued their westward migration in pursuit of more substantial herds and, as a result, forced many of the traders at Fort Pierre to follow them. In response to these traders’ complaints, the American Fur Company eventually divided the trade territory between

⁵⁶ Ibid., 32.

the two forts at a point along the White River, a move that both increased Fort Laramie's relative importance and further encouraged the westernmost Sioux to trade there.⁵⁷

Eighteen thirty-four marked a turning point in the history of both the Teton Sioux and the American fur trade for several reasons. First, Congress completely restructured federal Indian policy by reorganizing the Indian Office, clarifying the duties of Indian agents, and passing legislation to regulate the Indian trade in the lands west of the Mississippi River.⁵⁸ Second, John Jacob Astor retired from the fur trade, and the American Fur Company sold its Western Department to Pratte, Chouteau and Company with the stipulations that the AFC furnish the trade goods and market the furs of the Western Department's new owners.⁵⁹ Third, the Rocky Mountain fur trade began to decline due to lack of demand for beaver pelts. This highly significant development occurred simultaneously with the decision by William Sublette and Robert Campbell—partners in the St. Louis Fur Company, which they had formed during the winter of 1832-33—to construct a trading fort at the junction of Laramie's Fork and the North Platte River. That decision had everything to do with the mountain trade and virtually nothing to do with Teton Sioux migrations to the plains surrounding the Platte River valley.

Throughout the spring, summer, and fall of 1833, the St. Louis Fur Company, under the direction of Sublette and Campbell, challenged the American Fur Company for control of the upper Missouri fur trade by constructing nearly a dozen trading posts in the immediate vicinity of AFC posts along the river; the most important of these was Fort William, located three miles below Fort Union. But, by virtue of its considerable

⁵⁷ Hanson, "A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail," 4-5.

⁵⁸ Robert A. Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction: Federal Indian Policy and the Beginnings of the Reservation System, 1846-51* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975), 3-5.

⁵⁹ Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 15.

financial reserves, the American Fur Company, still under the direction of Kenneth McKenzie, forced Sublette and Campbell to offer their Missouri River posts for sale to the AFC. Nevertheless, Sublette was able to extract a concession from McKenzie that the American Fur Company abandon the Rocky Mountain trade and restrict its future operations to the Missouri River. Sublette and Campbell were thus left free to concentrate on the fur trade in the mountains; only Nathaniel Wyatt remained a threat to their business plans to supply the mountain outfits with trade goods and then transport their furs to St. Louis.⁶⁰

Subsequent developments induced Sublette and Campbell to sell Fort William to Fontenelle, Fitzpatrick and Company in 1835. Ownership of the fort changed hands again a year later when Pratte, Chouteau and Company purchased it. And although that firm would eventually rebuild the fort of adobe brick in 1841 and rechristen the new structure Fort John, the traders had, almost from the beginning, called it Fort Laramie. With the acquisition of the fort in 1836 by Pratte, Chouteau and Company—generally known as the American Fur Company—the AFC had positioned itself to extend the Teton Sioux trade into the Platte River valley by utilizing a portion of “the old Spanish trail”—the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail.⁶¹

The American Fur Company trader generally recognized as the originator of the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail was a hard-driving, often violent man by the name of Frederick LaBoue—“Grey Eyes” to the Sioux. Although Sublette and Campbell had supplied Fort William [Fort Laramie] by way of the five hundred mile-long Platte River road, that route

⁶⁰ Fred R. Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous: A History of the Fur Trade Rendezvous, 1825-1840* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1976; reprint, Layton, UT: Gibbs M. Smith, Inc., 1985), 80, 98-99 (page citations are to the reprint edition); Hanson, “Fur Trade Activities in the Fort Laramie Region, 1834-1849,” 8; Hanson, “A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail,” 4.

⁶¹ Hanson, “Fur Trade Activities in the Fort Laramie Region,” 9; Hanson, “A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail,” 3.

proved too costly and was, therefore, a primary reason for their decision to sell out to Fontenelle, Fitzpatrick and Company, which experienced similar financial difficulties using the same route. LaBoue, on the other hand, conceived the complementary ideas of utilizing Fort Pierre as both the main supply depot and fur storehouse for Fort Laramie—an option not available to the previous owners of the fort—and of transporting those supplies and furs over the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail. The overland route between the two posts was two hundred miles shorter than the Platte River road; Fort Pierre possessed critical supplies, skilled labor, food stocks, and warehousing facilities needed by the traders at Fort Laramie. The American Fur Company already absorbed water transportation costs to and from Fort Pierre as part of its larger operation supplying the Upper Missouri Outfit's numerous posts along the Missouri.

Chapter Five, "The Golden Years: The Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail and The Teton Ascendency, 1837-1846," investigates the impact of the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail on the Western Sioux; the devastation caused by and the geo-political ramifications of the upper Missouri smallpox epidemic of 1837; the intertribal warfare between the Western Sioux and their numerous enemies; the winter-count record of Teton expansion into the rich buffalo hunting grounds to the south and west of Fort Laramie; aspects of the buffalo robe and hide trade and its nineteenth-century transformation of Teton political economy; and continuing efforts to eliminate the illicit trafficking in alcoholic spirits in Indian country.

As an integral feature of the American Fur Company's trade with the westernmost Teton Sioux, the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail remained in year-round use from 1837 to 1849. And, although it connected the Teton Sioux to a global market economy that

provided them with what had become indispensable Euro-American trade goods, their continuing reliance on those goods made the Sioux willing participants in a Western-style cycle of surplus production for exchange that left them with only illusions of independence. Indeed, as early as 1829, United States government officials had observed that “since the introduction of these articles among the Indians, a corresponding change has taken place in their modes of life, and many of the tribes could not subsist, were they deprived of their accustomed supplies.”⁶²

The establishment of Fort Laramie in 1834, followed by the inauguration of the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail in 1837, positioned the Teton Sioux for their conquest of the north-central plains; by 1840, throughout their entire domain, they would never be more than a short distance from a trader and his supply of goods. Fort Pierre remained the Tetons’ principal trade outlet, but Fort Laramie steadily gained importance throughout the 1840s. Additionally, many bands of the northernmost Tetons had ready access to Fort Union—yet another major trade depot founded in 1829 by Kenneth McKenzie at the mouth of the Yellowstone. Therefore, at all three forts, at a number of smaller posts, and at numerous wintering places, American fur traders were able to conduct an extremely profitable business with the Tetons, who received an astonishing variety of trade goods in exchange for their average annual output of tens of thousands of buffalo robes. A partial list of the Tetons’ favorite trade goods includes the following: Northwest trade guns, gunpowder, powder horns, flints, knives, battle axes, tomahawks, lances, colored blankets, tobacco, coffee, sugar, salt, pepper, metal awls and scrapers, metal arrow points,

⁶² Ibid., 5; Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 80; *Senate Journal*, 20th Cong., 2nd sess. 9 February, 1829, 5; quoted in Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 112.

cloth and ready-made clothing, needles, beads, buttons, combs, mirrors, vermilion, and, of course, liquor.⁶³

Chapter Six, “A Collision of Cultures: Emigrants in the Platte River Valley, the Sale of Fort Laramie, ‘the Great Treaty Council of 1851,’ and the Grattan Affair, 1846-1854,” investigates the Tetons’ ever-increasing apprehension as first a trickle and later a flood of white emigrants along the Oregon Trail ravaged the fragile ecosystem of the Platte River valley and surrounding plains. Despite the mounting friction between Indians and emigrants, however, business between the Tetons and American fur traders peaked throughout the 1840s, providing the Sioux with enormous quantities of trade goods that both eased their daily lives and made possible the maximum extension of their range and military power by the 1850s. At the height of that power, they controlled the north-central plains from the Rocky Mountain Front to the Missouri and from the Platte River valley to the Yellowstone. Strategically located, the Tetons’ domain provided access to the Southwest, Great Lakes, and Canadian plains’ trading networks; and, beginning in the 1840s, it also straddled the most important road used by non-trading white emigrants, the Oregon Trail.⁶⁴

By the time of the Fort Laramie Peace Conference of 1851, the Teton Sioux had reached the peak of their military, political, and economic power. In 1848, the United States government, in tacit recognition of that power and seeking to safeguard white emigrants traveling through Sioux lands, had built Fort Kearney in what would become the state of Nebraska, and then purchased Fort Laramie the next year from Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Company—the name to which Chouteau had changed Pratte, Chouteau

⁶³ James Austin Hanson, *Metal Weapons, Tools, and Ornaments of the Teton Dakota Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 8-9; Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 115-120.

⁶⁴ Hanson, *Metal Weapons, Tools, and Ornaments*, 9.

and Company after Pratte died. For five years following the sale of Fort Laramie to the United States Army, veteran fur trader James Bordeaux occupied an unstockaded trading post at a site roughly eight miles downriver from the fort along the Oregon Trail that a succession of traders had used since 1837. As an independent entrepreneur, Bordeaux conducted a lively and profitable business with the same bands of Brules and Oglalas that had frequented the Platte River valley since the mid-1830s, thus normalizing Teton Sioux trade relations in that region that might otherwise have rapidly deteriorated.⁶⁵

Chapter Six ends with the tragic confrontation in the summer of 1854 between a group of Mormon emigrants and the bands of Sioux camped along the Oregon Trail adjacent to Fort Laramie that initiated more than two decades of intermittent warfare. As a wagon train of emigrants passed the Sioux camped along the Oregon Trail, a cow bolted from its Mormon owner who, afraid to enter the Indian camps, left the animal behind, there to be shot by a Minneconjou visitor to the Oglalas. After the aggrieved owner complained, Fort Laramie's commander somewhat reluctantly detailed twenty-nine men under Second-Lieutenant J. L. Grattan to the Sioux camps. Unwisely, Grattan tried to arrest the Minneconjou, and, in the ensuing struggle, Brule chief Brave Bear and all of the troopers perished.

An Afterword outlines the general disruption of the Sioux trade caused by General William S. Harney's 1855 campaign to punish the Sioux and force the southern Tetons away from the Oregon Trail. The outbreak of open warfare persuaded Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Company to sell Fort Pierre to the Army that same year.⁶⁶ Although Army freighters would continue to use the Fort-Pierre—Fort Laramie Trail, by 1855 the Tetons

⁶⁵ White, "The Winning of the West," 340; Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 132; Charles E. Hanson, Jr., "James Bordeaux, *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 2 (Spring 1966): 6.

⁶⁶ Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 72-78; Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 133; Hanson, "A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail," 8.

had lost the services of their two most important trading establishments and finally confronted the consequences of their fifty-year submersion in the Euro-American market economy.

CHAPTER ONE

“PRELUDE:

TURMOIL ON THE UPPER MISSOURI, 1804-1815”

I

Prior to the mid-seventeenth century, all seven of the greater Sioux “council fires” roamed the southern two-thirds of the present state of Minnesota. Then, toward the latter part of that century, the westernmost Sioux—Yanktons, Yanktonais, and Tetons—began a migration westward onto the prairies east of the Missouri River. The Tetons seemingly led the way as, even at that early date, they had acquired the name “*gens des Prairies*” (Prairie people) from the French.⁶⁷

Throughout the eighteenth century, these western Sioux trapped beaver in the winter to trade for Northwest guns and other goods obtained from British traders at the annual spring trade fairs held by their eastern Santee relatives. As late as 1796, trader Jean Baptiste Truteau observed that “the Sioux are those who hunt for the beaver and other good peltries of the Upper Missouri . . . which they exchange for merchandise with the other [Santee] Sioux situated on the St. Peter’s and Des Moines Rivers.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Howard, *Yanktonai Ethnohistory*, 4-5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 6-7; Abel, *Tabeau’s Narrative*, 120-123; Abraham P. Nasatir, ed., *Before Lewis and Clark: Documents Illustrating the History of the Missouri*, 2vols., with an introduction by James P. Ronda (St. Louis: St. Louis Historical Documents Foundation, 1952; reprint, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1990), II: 165-67 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

Truteau was a member of the Company of Explorers of the Upper Missouri to which the Spanish government, as part of its concerted effort in the years after 1763 to capture the Missouri River Indian trade, had licensed to raise a trading post on that river in what would become northeastern Nebraska.⁶⁹ Other French and Spanish traders, Auguste Chouteau among them, likewise received licenses from Spanish officials in St. Louis, eventually securing for themselves a portion of the Teton trade in furs at the expense of their British rivals in the North West Company. That trade, however, was no longer in beaver pelts, but rather in buffalo robes and hides and pemmican. Thus, even before the arrival of Lewis and Clark on the upper Missouri in 1804, the altered nature of the fur trade had precipitated a new wave of Teton expansion toward the buffalo ranges west and southwest of the Missouri.⁷⁰ The Yanktonais did not follow them because they assumed a middleman role in the late eighteenth century. Their villages along the James River hosted an annual grand trade fair known as the Dakota Rendezvous that lasted well into the nineteenth century. There, the Tetons continued to trade horses, deerskins, buffalo robes, and dried meat for basic necessities such as metal knives and kettles and cloth blankets.⁷¹

In addition to their goods, the French and Spanish traders also brought with them European pathogens—particularly smallpox—that permanently upset the balance of power along the upper Missouri. First, a series of epidemics in 1779-80, 1780-81, and 1801-1802 reduced the Arikaras from thirty-two villages to two and from four thousand

⁶⁹ Charles E. Hanson, Jr., *The Northwest Gun*, Nebraska Historical Society: Publications in Anthropology, no. 2 (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1995), 8-9.

⁷⁰ Abel, *Tabeau's Narrative*, 123, 168-169; White, "The Winning of the West," 324-325.

⁷¹ Howard, "Yanktonai Ethnohistory," 25; White, "The Winning of the West," 323; Charles E. Hanson, Jr., "The Early Fur Trade in Northwestern Nebraska," *Nebraska History* 57 (January 1976): 296; here Hanson maintains that as the Tetons acquired increasing numbers of horses and began to pursue the buffalo year-round, this had the effect of decreasing their reliance on the fur trade to secure firearms as the short heavy bow became their preferred buffalo-hunting weapon.

warriors to five hundred. Subsequently, the Mandans and Hidatsas suffered devastating losses as well. On the lower Missouri, disease broke the power of the once-powerful Omahas by reducing them from seven hundred to three hundred warriors with their notorious chief Blackbird being one of the casualties. But in contrast to these tribes of sedentary village farmers, the nomadic Tetons escaped the epidemics. Dispersed in their small, wandering bands, they generally avoided the outbreaks. And, with their way no longer barred by the horticulturalists, the Western Sioux crossed the Missouri and began to penetrate the high plains just west of that river. The Brules pushed into the lands along White River; the Oglalas hunted between the Bad (Teton) and Cheyenne rivers; and, the Saones occupied an area bounded by the Cheyenne and Heart rivers.⁷² Coinciding with the end of this period of Sioux expansion, the United States government dispatched a major expedition to explore the upper reaches of the Missouri River watershed, of which the new buffalo range of the Tetons was a part.

II

On 23 September 1804, the Lewis and Clark expedition first encountered the Western Sioux—several villages of Brules—camped below the confluence of the Bad (Teton) and Missouri Rivers. Although Captains William Clark and Meriwether Lewis clearly understood the necessity of opening negotiations in accordance with their instructions, the intelligence they had received in St. Louis from French traders warning of the Tetons' aggressive behavior toward whites on the Missouri added an element of uncertainty to the

⁷² Abel, *Tableau's Narrative*, 123-124; Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 103; Nasatir, *Before Lewis and Clark*, I: 299; White, "The Winning of the West," 325. Although the etymology of the term *Saones* has been a matter of endless conjecture, it collectively refers to the Minneconjous, Blackfoot Sioux, Two Kettles, Sans Arcs, and Hunkpapas; for example, in Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk*, 4-5, the author explains that "[w]hen the first of the Sioux crossed west of the Missouri, they were in two groups: the *Sichangu* or Brules (Spotted Tail's people), and the Oglalas (Red Cloud's Folk). The remaining Tetons in the lands east of the Missouri, who were known as Sanona or Saones, were in five groups [i.e., the five Teton divisions listed immediately above] and were called by the Brules and Oglalas the "Nations of the North."

talks. The tension felt by the two captains only increased the next day when hunter and expedition member John Colter reported that the Brules had stolen one of the expedition's horses. Subsequently, Lewis and Clark prepared for the council by assembling a generous supply of trade goods as gifts and by readying their weapons for action.⁷³

The stakes each side brought to the negotiations were high. Although Jefferson had directed Lewis and Clark to promote intertribal peace and to forge trade contacts with all of the Indians along the expedition's route, the president had assigned the highest priority to conferences with the Sioux in recognition of their military power and economic promise. For example, his instructions to Lewis regarding Indians in general had admonished him "to be neighborly, friendly & useful to them & of our disposition to a commercial intercourse with them; confer with them on the points most convenient as mutual emporiums, and the articles of most desirable interchange for them & us."⁷⁴ But, using language that specified the forging of good relations with the Sioux as the expedition's main diplomatic objective, Jefferson had written: "On that nation we wish *most particularly* [emphasis added] to make a friendly impression, because of their immense power, and because we learn they are very desirous of being on most friendly terms with us."⁷⁵

Throughout the negotiations, Lewis and Clark faced three daunting challenges: first, to command the respect of shrewd tribal statesmen backed by superior military force; second, to assure them that the St. Louis-based American fur trade did not threaten the

⁷³ Thwaites, *Journals of Lewis and Clark*, I: 62-63; James Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 28.

⁷⁴ Jefferson's Instructions to Lewis, 20 June 1803, *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, with Related Documents, 1783-1854*, ed. Donald Jackson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 61.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 165-166.

status quo of upper Missouri geo-politics; and, third, to persuade them to abandon all trade with British North West Company traders at their posts on the Des Moines and St. Peter's rivers. The Brule chiefs—Black Buffalo, the Partisan, and Buffalo Medicine—likewise stood poised to defend their peoples' interests: the right to trade for British goods with their Sisseton and Yankton kinsmen at the annual Dakota Rendezvous on the James River, the maintenance of Teton control of the upper Missouri trade, thus ensuring a steady supply of agricultural products from the village farmers, particularly the Arikaras, and, the freedom to conduct foreign policy without American interference. A fourth, subtler interest also motivated the chiefs: each man's determination to enhance his own standing as a statesman and leader within the Brules at the expense of the others.⁷⁶

On Tuesday, 25 September, the council opened hopefully enough on a small sand bar in the Bad (Teton) River with a ritual exchange of food. But as the talks commenced, Lewis and Clark quickly realized that their interpreter, Pierre Cruzatte, did not possess

⁷⁶ Thwaites, *Journals of Lewis and Clark*, 4: 45-98; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, 31-32; Abel, *Tabeau's Narrative*, 121-123, 131. In J. Wendel Cox, "A World Together, A World Apart: The United States and the Arikaras, 1803-1851" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1998), 52-53, the author unravels the intricacies of the upper Missouri trade networks encountered by Lewis and Clark: "By the mid-eighteenth century, . . . three [Sioux] divisions had moved across the Missouri River in two distinct paths: the Yankton and Yanktonai in an arc that passed directly by the Missouri River villages of the Arikaras in present northern South Dakota, and the Teton in a similar arc further south, between the Arikaras and the Skiri Pawnees. Unlike other nations of the northern Plains, these Sioux divisions did not withdraw from the region previously occupied, but retained close connections to eastern relatives. The four eastern Sioux divisions—the Mdewankantonwans, Sissetonwans, Wapehtonwans, and Wahpekutes—remained in the Mississippi and Minnesota river valleys, providing an invaluable connection to European and American trade on the Mississippi and the Great Lakes. Together these eastern and western divisions formed a loose Sioux confederacy, sharing a marked confidence and devotion to the maintenance of their communities and the extension of their power. By the early nineteenth century, they had come to dominate relationships with the Mandans, Hidatsas, and the Arikaras to a degree that would remain unchanged for almost three-quarters of a century. The Arikaras . . . provided [the Sioux] a variety of produce from the fields that surrounded their villages, including corn, beans, squash, and tobacco. . . . The [Teton] Sioux, with their connections to eastern bands . . . were likely the most stable, secure, and substantial source of [Euro-American trade goods] for the Arikaras before the establishment of a regular American trade on the upper Missouri in the early 1820s. Lewis and Clark described the trade between the Arikara and the Sioux as "partial"—a term that did not imply that Sioux trade was only a part of the trade maintained by the Arikaras (although it was), but that Arikara trade favored the Sioux." see also Thwaites, *Journals of Lewis and Clark*, 4: 89.

the language skills to translate the chiefs' subtle oratory accurately. Nevertheless, after the ritual smoking of the pipe, the explorers pressed on with a short speech delivered by Lewis, followed by a parade of uniformed members of the expedition and a round of generous gift-giving, all calculated to evoke American military and economic power. When they offered their finest gifts to only one of the Indians, however, Lewis and Clark made their first serious diplomatic error. In the best tradition of Euro-American Indian diplomacy, the two captains appointed a single leader—in this case, Black Buffalo—as a client chief with the sole authority to represent and command the tribe. The concept of executive power concentrated in a single individual was incompatible with Brule politics, however, and, thus, the explorers badly miscalculated a second time by inadvertently slighting the other headmen, particularly the Partisan.⁷⁷

The council then rapidly dissolved into a chaotic series of blunders and near-violence. First, the Brules demanded that either the expedition return downstream or purchase its continued passage with additional presents. Next, after transferring the proceedings to one of the pirogues, Lewis and Clark opened a bottle of whiskey from which the chiefs drank liberally. As they began to feel the effects of the alcohol, the Partisan became extremely belligerent; meanwhile, Clark, fearing serious trouble, quickly returned the Indians to shore. Once there, the chief immediately justified Clark's fears by seizing the boat with several heavily-armed warriors and repeating his demand that the expedition go no further upriver. Black Buffalo's timely intervention may have prevented a fight; but, even he exchanged heated words with Clark before the danger subsided. More likely, it was the two scatterguns that the explorers had taken the precaution to mount on the keelboat, loaded with buckshot, and trained on the Indians huddled on the pirogue that

⁷⁷ Ibid., I: 129-133, 164; Ibid., 31-32.

ultimately convinced the Brules to restrain themselves.⁷⁸ In the end, Clark flatly terminated the negotiations after the chiefs refused to shake his hand.⁷⁹

The Brules apparently resolved to salvage the situation with a feast and dance in one of their villages on the night of 26 September. The evening featured culinary delights such as roasted buffalo and dog, the solemn smoking of the pipe, Indian oratory, and mixed dancing. The Sioux also presented Lewis and Clark with young women, an offer the latter evidently declined.⁸⁰ Despite this apparent snub, however, Black Buffalo and the Partisan accompanied the captains back to their boat to spend the night, the tensions of the previous day seemingly forgotten.⁸¹

If Lewis and Clark felt relief the next morning, they also understood that the Brules had no intention of letting the expedition continue upriver unmolested. Pierre Cruzatte related a warning from some Omaha prisoners in the Sioux villages that their captors intended to stop the Americans from trading directly with the Arikaras, Mandans, and Hidatsas in their earth-lodge villages further upstream. Failing that, both Black Buffalo and the Partisan planned to reassert their dignity and authority with their own people by forcing the explorers to distribute more gifts. But, even though all of the Brules waited menacingly at the riverbank the next morning in a final attempt to induce the Americans to stay, Lewis and Clark refused to back down before this blatant display of power. The standoff ended only after Black Buffalo, apparently unwilling to risk casualties among

⁷⁸ Carl P. Russell, *Firearms, Traps, & Tools of the Mountain Men* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1967), 45.

⁷⁹ Thwaites, *Journals of Lewis and Clark*, 1: 164-165; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, 33-34.

⁸⁰ For an illuminating discussion of the inter-cultural phenomenon of Indian men offering their women to Euro-Americans, see Walter O'Meara, *Daughters of the Country* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 136-149.

⁸¹ Thwaites, *Journals of Lewis and Clark*, 1: 166-169; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, 35-37.

the women and children, accepted additional gifts of tobacco as a parting gesture of the Americans' goodwill.⁸²

As representatives of the United States government charged with negotiating concessions from the Teton Sioux, Lewis and Clark had failed utterly. For instance, the Brules refused outright to send a delegation to meet with Jefferson, a cherished goal of the president. An even more ominous development concerned the treatment that the Tetons would accord American fur traders in the future. While the Brules had decided against carrying their bluff to the point of open hostilities with the numerous and heavily-armed Corps of Discovery, smaller parties of traders with fewer guns hauling their goods up the Missouri could expect nothing from the Tetons but continued harassment and extortion.⁸³ Clark's subsequent evaluation of them as "the vilest miscreants of the savage race [who] must ever remain the pirates of the Missouri" both reflected the futility of his and Lewis's efforts and accurately predicted the nature of Teton-American relations until 1815.⁸⁴

III

In the years following the Brules' first encounter with Americans west of the Missouri River, the Oglalas expanded westward and reestablished themselves on the plains east of the Black Hills, hunting buffalo there in the summer and wintering near Bear Butte. Saones from Cheyenne River and their Cheyenne allies followed closely behind the Oglalas. In a continuation of the intertribal warfare between the Tetons and the Uto-Aztecan Kiowas, this combined Sioux-Cheyenne advance drove the Kiowas

⁸² Ibid., 1: 168-171; Ibid., 38-40.

⁸³ For detailed descriptions of the high-quality firearms carried by the members of the Lewis and Clark expedition, see Russell, *Firearms, Tools, and Traps of the Mountain Men*, 34-51.

⁸⁴ Thwaites, ed., *Journals of Lewis and Clark*, 4: 98; Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, 40.

permanently from the Black Hills country. They continued, however, to trade Spanish goods and horses from the Southwest with the Cheyennes along the North Platte River at the mouth of Horse Creek.⁸⁵

By 1815, these annual trade fairs had attracted the Western Sioux to the upper Platte country for the first time. But, despite the best efforts of the Cheyennes to broker a peace among the Kiowas and the Sioux, a clash between a Brule and a Kiowa ended in the latter's death and ignited a general war that forced the Kiowas to move far south. The Kiowas, joined by some friendly Cheyennes and Arapahos, eventually retreated all the way to the Red River.⁸⁶

As the Oglalas became firmly established in the Black Hills country in the first two decades of the nineteenth century—as well as trading and hunting on the North Platte—they nevertheless continued to follow the Bad (Teton) River down to the Missouri each spring. There, with their Brule and Saone kinsmen, they freely harassed and robbed American traders heading upriver to the Arikaras, Mandans, and Hidatsas. And although the Oglalas generally held their annual Sun Dance either out near the Black Hills or on the Missouri, depending on their mood, their general orientation was to the west, because it was during these years that they began sending large war parties against the Crows—campaigns that presaged the Tetons' conquest of the Powder River country in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.⁸⁷

In 1807, Teton warriors participated as allies of the Arikaras in the fight that prevented Ensign Nathaniel Pryor from returning the Mandan chief Sheheke to his village upriver from the Arikaras. The chief had accompanied Lewis and Clark to St. Louis on

⁸⁵ Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 33.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

the return leg of their journey for the purpose of eventually meeting with President Jefferson; as a condition of the trip, however, the government had promised Sheheke a military escort home. Therefore, on 18 May 1807, a mixed contingent of fourteen soldiers commanded by Pryor, a former sergeant in the Corps of Discovery, and twenty-three traders led by Pierre Chouteau, Jr. departed St. Louis intent upon returning Sheheke safely to his people. The party proceeded upriver unmolested until it reached an Arikara village, where the Arikaras and their Sioux allies fired on the Americans, killing three men and wounding several others. A Hunkpapa warrior named Red Shirt also died in the deadly exchange; Sioux winter counts attribute his death to the Arikaras. In the wake of this disaster, the joint expedition returned to St. Louis, its mission unfulfilled.⁸⁸

The death of Red Shirt so angered the Oglalas that six hundred warriors stopped and tried to rob a water-borne party of eighty men led by Ramsay Crooks and Robert McClellan in the summer of 1807. The two men had recently become partners and that same year made their first attempt to trade on the upper Missouri. But, after meeting Pryor on his retreat to St. Louis and listening to his dire warning of the Tetons' hostile attitude toward American traders, the partners returned to their trading post at Council Bluffs and remained there until 1809.⁸⁹ Emboldened by the successful ascent of the Missouri the next year by a party of Missouri Fur Company traders, Crooks and McClellan set out again only to suffer the indignity of being forced to turn back by a

⁸⁸ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 119-123; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 35; Richard Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa and the Opening of the Missouri Fur Trade* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 50-51; Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 105-106. Here also Mallery explains that a winter count "was not intended to be a continuous history, or even to record the most important event of each year, but to exhibit some one of special peculiarity. It would indeed have been impossible to have graphically distinguished the many battles, treaties, horse-stealings, big hunts, etc., so most of them were omitted and other events of greater individuality and better adapted for portrayal were taken for the calendar, the criterion being not that they were of national moment, but that they were of general notoriety, or perhaps of special interest to the recorders."

⁸⁹ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 161; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 35.

band of hostile Oglalas; they did, however, return to Council Bluffs with most of their merchandise.⁹⁰

IV

In the preface to his landmark survey of the American fur trade, Hiram Martin Chittenden proclaims:

There are few more impressive incidents in the history of the West than the meeting, by Lewis and Clark, when nearly home from their journey across the continent, of numerous parties of traders wending their way to the heart of the wilderness which these explorers had just left. There could be no doubt in this manifestation of a common purpose which way the course of empire was tending.⁹¹

With that brief phrase—“the course of empire”—Chittenden captured the essence of the stakes that confronted fur traders as they headed west in the wake of Lewis and Clark. So central is this idea to understanding the history of the American fur trade that one historian even appropriated the phrase for the title of his own work on the subject.⁹²

The hidden significance of that struggle for empire lies buried within the corporate strategies developed by the fur companies themselves. The traders engaged in business practices characterized by cutthroat field tactics that often proved counterproductive for all parties involved. Men died by the score, fortunes literally vanished overnight, and national boundaries solidified or evaporated because of the success or failure of traders in the field charged with executing ruthless strategies. Surprisingly, considering the vastness of the geographical setting—virtually the entire western half of the then largely-unexplored North American continent—and the financial constraints that led to chronic shortages of men and equipment, cooperation between fur-trading enterprises remained

⁹⁰ Ibid., I: 161.

⁹¹ Ibid., I: xxvii.

⁹² See Bernard DeVoto, *The Course of Empire* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1952).

elusive. For example, the murderous rivalry that existed between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company throughout the first two decades of the nineteenth century climaxed in 1821 with the murder of several Hudson's Bay men by employees of the North West Company—an incident that led the British crown to order their merger. And, in the 1830s, the bitter duel for control of the Central Rockies waged by the American Fur Company and the Rocky Mountain Fur Company ended only after the latter abandoned the field entirely.⁹³

Yet collaboration between rival fur trade companies did infrequently occur. One such episode took place on the upper Missouri in the late spring and early summer of 1811 and involved large numbers of Teton Sioux. For a brief time in June and July of that year, John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company, commanded in the field by Wilson Price Hunt and Donald McKenzie, found themselves reluctantly allied with the St. Louis-based Missouri Fur Company captained by the notorious Spaniard, Manuel Lisa. Although James P. Ronda summarized the predominant scholarly consensus when he concluded that their informal collaboration "had no lasting consequences for either [company]," the

⁹³ For accounts of this aspect of the fur trade see: Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*; DeVoto, *Course of Empire*; Bernard DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947); Don Berry, *A Majority of Scoundrels: An Informal History of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961); Fred R. Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous: A History of the Fur Trade Rendezvous, 1825-1840* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1976; reprint, Layton, UT: Gibbs M. Smith, 1985); David Lavender, *The Fist in the Wilderness*, with an introduction by David J. Wishart (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964; reprint, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1998); E.E. Rich, *Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870*, 3 vols., (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961); Marjorie Wilkins Campbell, *The North West Company* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1957); Richard M. Clokey, *William H. Ashley: Enterprise and Politics in the Trans-Mississippi West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980); Dale L. Morgan, ed., *The West of William H. Ashley: The International Struggle for the Fur Trade of the Missouri, the Rocky Mountains, and the Columbia, with Explorations beyond the Continental Divide, Recorded in the Diaries and Letters of William H. Ashley and his Contemporaries, 1822-1838* (Denver, CO: The Old West Publishing Company, 1964); Robert Glass Cleland, *This Reckless Breed of Men: The Trappers and Fur Traders of the Southwest* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950); David Weber, *The Taos Trappers: The Fur Trade in the Far Southwest, 1540-1846* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971); John E. Sunder, *The Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri, 1840-1865* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965); James P. Ronda, *Astoria and Empire* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990); Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*; Douglas Walter Bond, *Manuel Lisa* (New York: Argosy-Antiquarian, 1964); Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*.

alliance did succeed in neutralizing the hostility of hundreds of Teton Sioux attempting to deny both companies access to the upper Missouri and in securing a joint diplomatic victory over the horticultural Arikaras.⁹⁴ That victory owed much to command decisions made by both Hunt and Lisa, decisions which served to allay mutual suspicions, combine their limited resources, and coordinate each of their expedition's objectives. On 8 March 1809, the *Missouri Gazette* reported:

The Missouri Fur Company, lately formed here, has every prospect of becoming a force of incalculable advantage, not only to the individuals engaged in the enterprise, but the community at large. Their extensive preparations, and the respectable force they intend to ascend the Missouri with, may bid defiance to any hostile band they meet with. The streams which descend from the Rocky Mountains afford the finest hunting, and here we learn they intend to build their fort.⁹⁵

Only days earlier, and with “great expectations,” the partners of the newly-created St. Louis Missouri Fur Company—later popularly shortened simply to the Missouri Fur Company—had signed their Articles of Agreement on 3 March 1809. The partners represented many of the ablest traders in the West. The group included Pierre Chouteau, Sr., Auguste Chouteau, Jr., Manuel Lisa, Pierre Menard, Reuben Lewis (Meriwether's brother), Sylvester Labadie, William Clark, Andrew Henry, Benjamin Wilkinson (brother of the former governor), William Morrison, and Dennis Fitzhugh.⁹⁶ And, significantly, the history of the Missouri Fur Company is inseparable from any study of Lisa's long and eventful career in the American fur trade.

Manuel Lisa was born of Spanish heritage in New Orleans on 8 September 1772. His father, Christopher Lisa, had come to Louisiana as a Spanish government official in 1763.

⁹⁴ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: xvii.

⁹⁵ *Missouri Gazette* (St. Louis) 8 March 1809; quoted in Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 74.

⁹⁶ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 138.

By 1790 at the latest, the young Manuel had established himself in St. Louis as a fur trader of some note. Indeed, Lisa's acquisition of the exclusive rights to trade with the Osage Indians at the expense of Pierre Chouteau, Sr.—a veteran St. Louis trader who had exploited that select concession for the two preceding decades—provides evidence of both Lisa's growing entrepreneurial abilities and rising reputation.⁹⁷

Lisa's experiences with the Osages contributed to his later strategy of accommodating all of the tribes along the Missouri, thus keeping the river route open and allowing access to the Three Forks of the Missouri. Thomas Biddle captured the essence of that strategy in a letter to Colonel Henry Atkinson: "The objectives of this [Missouri Fur C]ompany appear to have been to monopolize the trade among the lower tribes of the Missouri, who understand the art of trapping, and to send a large party to the headwaters of the Missouri capable of defending and trapping beaver themselves."⁹⁸ Unfortunately for American traders and trappers of this period, however, the powerful Blackfoot⁹⁹ considered the Three Forks region their exclusive domain. Although the British had managed to retain

⁹⁷ Ibid., 1: 126-127.

⁹⁸ Thomas Biddle, St. Louis, to Colonel Henry Atkinson, 1819, *Indian Trade Papers*, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis; quoted in Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 42.

⁹⁹ In Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 2: 839, the author explains that "[t]here were included under the general term Blackfeet [Blackfoot] four distinct bands [tribes]; the Blackfeet [Blackfoot] proper (*Siksikau*), the Piegan (*Pikuni*), the Bloods (*Kainah*), and the Grosventres of the Prairies or the Falls Indians (*Atsina*), numbering all told about 14,000 souls [from 1807-1843]. By the fur traders these Indians were all included under the general term Blackfeet [Blackfoot], for they dwelt in the same country, spoke similar dialects, and much resembled each other in personal appearance. But to those well acquainted with them there was always a well-recognized distinction. With two of the bands in particular the trader became intimately acquainted, although for exactly opposite reasons. The Piegans were peaceably disposed to the whites as a general thing, and the first successful trading post established in Blackfoot territory was built at the mouth of the Marias River, the usual habitat of this band, and was honored with their name. It was with the Piegans that the principal trade in this part of the country was conducted. The Grosventres of the Prairies, on the other hand, were the most relentlessly hostile tribe ever encountered by the whites in any part of the West, if not in any part of America, and the trapper always understood that to meet with one of these Indians meant instant and deadly hostility. The greater part of the many conflicts between the whites and the Blackfeet [Blackfoot] were with this tribe." The terms "Blackfoot" and "Blackfeet" generally appear interchangeably in the literature; throughout this dissertation, the term "Blackfoot" collectively denotes the four tribes described above. For another excellent study of the Blackfoot and their encounters with American traders and trappers during this period see John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958).

the tribe's goodwill by fervently avoiding that country and instead encouraging the Blackfoot to travel to British posts on the Saskatchewan River to trade, the Americans, inflamed by Lewis and Clark's reports concerning the great quantity of beaver at the Three Forks, found the lure irresistible and the risks acceptable.¹⁰⁰

Therefore, in the spring of 1810, Major Andrew Henry and thirty-two employees of the Missouri Fur Company built a post between the Jefferson and Madison rivers with the intention of harvesting the Three Fork's wealth in beaver. The Blackfoot quickly retaliated and soon forced Henry and his men to retreat to the other side of the Continental Divide to trap and spend the winter of 1810-11 hopefully free from harassment by those Indians. Although the trappers had already accumulated thirty packs of beaver,¹⁰¹ they had done so only at the staggering cost of twenty men killed.¹⁰²

Manuel Lisa responded to this setback the following spring by organizing a relief expedition to resupply Henry and his men and bring their packs of beaver to St. Louis; also, as the partners had scheduled the company for either reorganization or dissolution in 1812, Lisa hoped to show a profit before that day arrived. In the midst of the reorganization, Charles Gratiot (acting as agent for Sylvester Labadie) wrote to John

¹⁰⁰ Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 43-45.

¹⁰¹ In Russell, *Firearms, Traps, & Tools of the Mountain Men*, 156-157, the author provides an excellent description of packs of beaver: "As the accumulating dried beaver pelts piled up in camps, they were pressed into compact bundles to facilitate handling. Dried pelts of the usual size weighed about [one and one-half] pounds each. They were folded once, fur side in, and pressed into a pack encased within a wrapper of dry deerskin. In the field, the camp attendants commonly employed the 'chain, pole, and sapling' press However, these presses were not as efficient as the larger ones in the trading post[s], but nevertheless they compressed the furs sufficiently to permit their transportation in handy 'pieces' or pack saddles or in small boats. About sixty pelts went into each pack; thus a pack weighed from 90- 100 pounds and was worth between \$300 and \$600, depending upon the market at the time. Under normal circumstances two packs constituted a load for a pack animal. The pack trains carried their valuable cargoes to points on one or another of the Missouri tributaries served by dugouts, bullboats, scows, or other small craft that could descend to the river where larger boats plied."

¹⁰² Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 45-46.

Jacob Astor in New York. The letter reveals that the Missouri Fur Company partners at least discussed including Astor in their venture:

I have been engaged for some time past in the settlement and dissolution of the Missouri Fur Company At the request of all the parties I was chosen to draw the articles for a new act of association The capital of the present company with a moderate valuation is estimated at thirty thousand dollars divided in ten equal shares. I have proposed to extend the ten shares to fifteen . . . that an offer should be made to you of the five shares with proposition that you should contract to furnish on commission the equipments necessary for the trade of the Upper Missouri, and to make the sales of furs which would be received in return. This proposition has met with the approbation of some of the members, but I fear will be opposed by others. When I made this proposition I contemplated that you wished to draw the fur trade into your hands. *In this view I considered that you would be of great service to each other* [emphasis added] or likewise the measure might facilitate the operations of Mr. Hunt, as you could by that means have a communication open again from his place to the Columbia.¹⁰³

Manuel Lisa did not record his thoughts regarding Gratiot's proposition.

Washington Irving, the Pacific Fur Company's most celebrated historian, awarded to Lewis and Clark the honor of having inspired John Jacob Astor's dream of a fur-trading empire centered at the mouth of the Columbia River. As Irving explained it, Astor's vision included a series of trading posts strung along both the Missouri and Columbia to collect the furs of the interior. After depositing the furs at the main establishment, it would resupply the subsidiary posts. A ship sent annually to the main establishment from New York would deliver supplies, reinforcements, and trade goods for the Indians. Laden with the finest furs, the ship would then sail to Canton, after which it would return to New York on the final leg of the round trip loaded with merchandise from China and the

¹⁰³ Charles Gratiot, St. Louis, to John Jacob Astor, 14 December 1811, Charles Gratiot Papers, MHMA; quoted in Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, I: 156.

proceeds from the sale of the furs.¹⁰⁴ And, although Irving only briefly mentioned the explorer Alexander Mackenzie, modern scholars now trace Astoria's origins at least as far back as the publication of Mackenzie's book, *Voyages from Montreal*, a copy of which Thomas Jefferson had ordered in 1802. In it, Mackenzie implores the British government to construct a line of fortified posts all the way from Lake Winnipeg to the Pacific Ocean. Jefferson became only too aware that without swift action on his part, the British crown would soon preemptively seize all of western North America and, by 1803, the president had moved quickly to organize the Lewis and Clark expedition.¹⁰⁵

Despite the fact that scholars have alternately traced Astoria's origins to the explorations of Peter Pond, David Thompson, Alexander Mackenzie, and Lewis and Clark, John Jacob Astor did, in fact, create his Pacific Fur Company following the successful conclusion of the Lewis and Clark expedition, though he never recorded the exact date.¹⁰⁶ It may have been in March 1810, when he and a group of Canadian investors signed the preliminary articles establishing the Pacific Fur Company as the western affiliate of Astor's American Fur Company. Regardless of the precise date, by the spring of 1810, the Pacific Fur Company set out to make Astoria a reality.¹⁰⁷

As described by Irving, Astor's plan included a line of trading posts from the upper Missouri to the mouth of the Columbia, where his employees would raise the main establishment. To that end, the *Tonquin* sailed from New York on 8 September 1810 destined for the Pacific. The ship arrived at the mouth of the Columbia on 22 March 1811

¹⁰⁴ Edgeley W. Todd, ed., *Astoria; Or, Anecdotes of an Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains*, with an introduction by Edgeley W. Todd, The American Exploration and Travel Series, no. 44 (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1836; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 28-30.

¹⁰⁵ James P. Ronda, "Dreams and Discoveries: Exploring the American West, 1760-1815," *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (January 1989): 149-150.

¹⁰⁶ For an excellent, relatively-recent account of Astoria's origins see James P. Ronda, *Astoria and Empire* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 1-36.

¹⁰⁷ Ronda, *Astoria and Empire*, 87.

and construction of the post—christened “Astoria”—commenced on 18 May. Shortly after the *Tonquin* set sail, a Pacific Fur Company expedition began its ascent of the Missouri. Led by Wilson Price Hunt and the ex-Nor’Wester Donald McKenzie, the party departed St. Louis on 21 October 1810. Hunt planned to follow Lewis and Clark’s route to the Pacific while making contact with the Indian tribes along the way and selecting suitable sites for Astor’s proposed chain of trading posts. The expedition would then rendezvous with the traders already established on the Pacific.¹⁰⁸

Astor clearly understood the benefits of commercial alliances, and throughout his long career he strove to minimize the negative effects of competition on his business interests. In 1809, he offered the North West Company a one-third interest in the Pacific Fur Company in return for a one-half interest in the Michilimackinac Company.¹⁰⁹ And, on 20 December 1812, Astor signed a trade agreement linking the Pacific Fur Company to the Russian-American Company.¹¹⁰ Predating both of these efforts is a letter he sent to Auguste Chouteau early in 1800. In it, Astor suggested a commercial relationship with the St. Louis fur traders.¹¹¹ Astor biographer Kenneth W. Porter recognized the importance of the letter in connecting Astor’s methods to his ambitions:

This letter reveals Astor as making collections at St. Louis as the agent of a London firm and as offering his services in purchasing merchandise and disposing of furs for the St. Louis traders. It is one of the earliest evidences of that expansionist policy which a few years later resulted in the founding of Astoria. Auguste Chouteau and Charles Gratiot were leading figures in the St. Louis fur trade.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 116-117.

¹⁰⁹ Ronda, *Astoria and Empire*, 55.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹¹¹ John Jacob Astor, New York, to Auguste Chouteau, 28 January 1800, Chouteau Family Papers, MHMA; quoted in Kenneth W. Porter, *John Jacob Astor: Business Man*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931; reprint, New York: Russell and Russell, 1966), I: 389.

¹¹² Porter, *John Jacob Astor*, 1: 389.

Porter is referring to Chouteau having become a partner in the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company in 1809.

The most perceptive analysis of the demise of the Missouri Fur Company in 1814 appears in Chittenden's *Fur Trade of the American West*:

Looking back from this distance [1902] at the history of the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company, it is apparent that the primary cause of its failure was the top-heavy character of its organization. Capitalized at less than fifty thousand dollars, it embraced every trader of distinction in St. Louis, all of whom bore an active part in the administration of affairs either at home or in the field. It was not to be expected that such an arrangement could be as effective as if a single individual had controlled its management. Another error on the part of the St. Louis traders was their unwillingness to permit Mr. Astor to have any share in their business. They excluded the very man who would have been able to carry them through their initial misfortunes to ultimate success.¹¹³

The company's shortage of capital crippled it throughout the period of its reorganization in the winter of 1811-12.¹¹⁴ Additionally, the company's Articles of Agreement contained numerous restrictions designed to keep the partners honest. These almost paranoid restrictions had the unfortunate result of preventing the Missouri Fur Company from capitalizing on its many relative advantages.¹¹⁵ Contractual restrictions aside, it is difficult to overlook the fact that Astor—"the first business man in America to attain colossal wealth"¹¹⁶—unquestionably possessed the resources that might have prevented the Missouri Fur Company's breakup in 1814.

In contrast to the factors that led to the dissolution of the Missouri Fur Company, those responsible for the end of the Pacific Fur Company do not emerge in such a neat

¹¹³ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 145.

¹¹⁴ Walter B. Douglas and Abraham P. Nasatir, *Manuel Lisa* (1911; reprint, New York: Argosy-Antiquarian LTD, 1964), 367-368.

¹¹⁵ Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 70.

¹¹⁶ Porter, *John Jacob Astor*, 1: xvii.

and orderly pattern. Irving never laid the blame for Astoria's failure on Astor. Instead, the author pointed to Astor's subordinates and claimed that they disobeyed his orders, neglected his instructions, and lacked his dynamic spirit. Irving also took into account the loss of the *Tonquin*, the voyage of the *Beaver*—which effectively removed Hunt from command precisely when Astor most required his leadership—and the War of 1812.¹¹⁷ And, finally, the fact that so many Canadians comprised Astoria's rank and file casts doubt about their allegiance both to the United States and Astoria after war broke out with Great Britain. Then again, however, perhaps no group of men could have borne the hardships created by the war.¹¹⁸ An extract from the post's Abandonment Resolution dated 1 July 1813 is revealing:

We are now destitute of the necessary supplies to carry on Trade, and we have no hopes of receiving more. We are yet entirely ignorant of the coast, on which we always had great dependence. The interior parts of the country turn out far short of our expectations. Its yearly produce in furs is very far from being equal to the expenses the trade incurs; much less will it be able to recover the losses already sustained, or stand against a powerful opposition and support itself. In fine, circumstances are against us on every hand and nothing operates to lead us into a conclusion that we can succeed.¹¹⁹

Complementing Chittenden's discussion of the end of the Missouri Fur Company, an analysis of Astoria's collapse also appears in his *American Fur Trade of the Far West*. Here, the author maintains that the preeminent—and wholly preventable—reason for the loss of Astoria centered on the absence of a meaningful St. Louis connection. Of course, any St. Louis connection Astor might have cultivated meant at least a business alliance and at most an outright partnership with the Missouri Fur Company. The chief benefits

¹¹⁷ Irving, *Astoria*, 503-504.

¹¹⁸ Porter, *John Jacob Astor*, 1:243.

¹¹⁹ Abandonment Resolution, 1 July 1813, Pacific Fur Company Letterbook, Fur Trade Ledgers, MHMA, quoted in Ronda, *Astoria and Empire*, 282-283.

that Astor and Hunt might have realized by working with Lisa and his other partners included a secure land-line of operations—safe from the depredations of Great Britain’s navy—and a stiffening infusion of loyal Americans into Astoria’s complement of questionable Canadians.¹²⁰ As he addresses the importance of an overland route, David J. Wishart considers the problem of resupply from a historical geographer’s perspective:

The key to [Astoria’s] entire [resupply] system, particularly when the sea route proved to be unreliable, was the discovery of an effective overland routeway that would allow ‘rapid’ communication between Astoria and St. Louis (and thence to New York). This was accomplished by Robert Stuart on an eastward journey from Astoria to St. Louis, beginning on 29 June 1812 and ending on 30 April 1813. Stuart was probably the first Euro-American to use South Pass and the Platte overland trail, but it was not an effective discovery, and South Pass had to be rediscovered by Ashley’s men in 1824.¹²¹

Of course, by then, it was more than ten years too late for the Astorians.

V

Despite the absence of a formal, enduring association between the Missouri and Pacific Fur Companies, a temporary and somewhat reluctant partnership arranged by their respective captains, Manuel Lisa and Wilson Price Hunt, emerged as one result of a keelboat race that began in St. Louis and ended on the upper Missouri in the spring of 1811. The story of that race is one of the more colorful episodes in the history of the American fur trade. It is especially noteworthy for the fur traders’ encounters with bands of Teton Sioux determined to prevent the Americans from proceeding upriver and trading with the Arikaras.

¹²⁰ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 228-237.

¹²¹ Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 119. In a citation on p. 167 of the same volume, Wishart further explains that “Robert Stuart’s journal was not published in the United States until 1836, when Irving incorporated it into his study of the Astorians. However, the St. Louis, and even the national, newspapers reported Stuart’s discoveries in 1813, albeit rather vaguely. The concept of South Pass and the central route was known in 1813. It remained for William Ashley and his men to put the concept into operation.”

Although Lisa and Hunt left no surviving record of those events, two educated men with literary ability and the patience to apply it accompanied the expeditions. Hunt's Astorians included English naturalist John Bradbury. Earlier, he had so impressed Thomas Jefferson that the president wrote a letter of introduction to Meriwether Lewis in St. Louis.¹²² And, when an American traveler named Henry Marie Brackenridge met Lisa prior to that trader's departure from St. Louis, Brackenridge suddenly found himself employed by the audacious Spaniard as a hunter.¹²³ Brackenridge later published the account of his adventures in two works entitled *Views of Louisiana* and the later *Journal of a Voyage Up the Missouri River, in 1811*. Irving relied heavily on both of these works as well as on Bradbury's *Travels in the Interior of America, in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811* for his own account of the keelboat race in *Astoria*.¹²⁴

On 3 September 1810, Hunt, McKenzie, and the remainder of the Astorians—including Ramsay Crooks and Robert McClellan—arrived in St. Louis fresh from recruiting ventures at Montreal and Michilimackinac. By the first week of October, they had completed most of the preparations for their ascent upriver. Unfortunately for Hunt and the others, however, travel up the Missouri became increasingly difficult due to the onset of winter. After departing St. Louis on 21 October, they struggled upriver for three weeks until they reached the mouth of the Nodaway River on 16 November. Hunt then wisely chose to settle into winter quarters there and proceed upriver in the spring.¹²⁵

¹²² Ronda, *Astoria and Empire*, 133.

¹²³ Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 109.

¹²⁴ Irving, *Astoria*, 143.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 136-137; John Bradbury, *Travels in the Interior Parts of America in the Years 1809, 1810, and 1811*, 2d ed. (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1819; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 37 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

Manuel Lisa and his partners in the Missouri Fur Company made the decision on 12 September 1810 to send a relief expedition to Andrew Henry and his men trapping in the Rockies in response to the perceived threat posed by the Astorians.¹²⁶ That winter, Lisa procured a small, well-built keelboat armed with a swivel and two brass blunderbusses. The boat also contained a false cabin to hide the Missouri Fur Company's limited supply of trade goods from any roving bands of Sioux.¹²⁷ Lisa commanded a crew of twenty-two; Baptiste Charbonneau and Charbonneau's wife, Sacagawea, both of whom had recently accompanied the Lewis and Clark expedition, and Brackenridge completed the party's complement.¹²⁸

The expedition departed St. Charles on 2 April 1811 under clear skies.¹²⁹ Lisa resolved to overtake the Astorians if at all possible to combine their forces for the hazardous trip through Sioux territory. He also feared that Hunt, prodded by Crooks and McClellan, might divert the hostility of the Sioux onto the much smaller Missouri Fur Company expedition. Crooks and McClellan had been complaining bitterly for two years that Lisa had persuaded the Sioux to prevent the two partners and their men from ascending the Missouri in 1809.¹³⁰ As he passed the mouth of the Osage River on 11 April, Lisa had already gained two days on Hunt.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Ronda, *Astoria and Empire*, 132.

¹²⁷ Henry Marie Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana, Together with a Journal of a Voyage up the Missouri River in 1811* (Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear, and Eichbaum, 1814; reprint, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1962), 201 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 200-201.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹³⁰ Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 109. In Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 162, the author describes how "Crooks and McClellan always claimed that this miscarriage of their plans was due to the machinations of the St. Louis Fur Company, whose active agent in accomplishing it was Manuel Lisa. They asserted that Lisa, in order to facilitate his own passage through this hostile country, had told the Sioux that another expedition was on its way with the express purpose of trading with them, and that they must not permit it to

Hunt, Crooks, and the men they had recruited during the winter in St. Louis returned to their winter camp on 17 April 1811. Four days later, sixty men, interpreter Pierre Dorion's wife, and the Dorions' two children left the Nodaway and set sail up the Missouri.¹³² Nevertheless, the gap between the two parties had narrowed as Lisa's crew camped just below Fort Osage on 21 April. They were now only some ten or twelve days behind the Astorians.¹³³

Six days later, Lisa met some traders who had recently passed through Sioux country. They informed him that the Indians appeared "peaceably disposed." The traders had also seen Hunt and estimated that Lisa would catch up with the former either at or just above the Platte River.¹³⁴

The Astorians sailed by the Omahas on 15 May. Lisa passed them four days later and decided to send two men overland with a letter for Hunt urging him to remain at the Ponca village until the two parties could combine their forces for the remainder of the

pass. This may or may not have been true. Certainly, the character of the traders, and the measures often resorted to in their competition are quite in keeping with such a course; but of direct evidence there is none. Even if it were true, the motive was probably not so much to secure a free passage to the Missouri Fur Company, for they had force enough to secure that, as to prevent competition in the upper country." A much less charitable opinion of Lisa appears in an eyewitness account by one Thomas James, an employee of Lisa's who accompanied him on his 1809 voyage up the Missouri. In Thomas James, *Three Years Among the Indians and Mexicans*, ed. Milo Milton Quaife (Waterloo, IL: War Eagle Press, 1846; reprint, Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons, 1953), 47, James remembered that "Lisa we thoroughly detested and despised, both for his acts and his reputation. There were many tales afloat concerning villainies said to have been perpetrated by him on the frontiers. These may have been wholly false or greatly exaggerated, but in his looks there was no deception. Rascality sat on every feature of his dark complexioned, Mexican face—gleamed from his black, Spanish eyes, and seemed enthroned in a forehead 'villainous low.'" But in a note on p. 137 to the edition of Chittenden, *American Fur Trade* cited in this dissertation, annotator Stallo Vinton explains that "James, too had a grievance, for he considered himself badly used. After a quarrel with Lisa during the trip up the Missouri, his gun was taken from him. James' vicious characterizations of almost everybody he mentions in connection with this [1809] expedition, caused his book, published in 1846, to be suppressed."

¹³¹ Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana*, 218.

¹³² Bradbury, *Travels*, 70.

¹³³ Ronda, *Astoria and Empire*, 145.

¹³⁴ Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana*, 220.

ascent.¹³⁵ Intercepted at the Ponca village on 24 May by Lisa's emissaries, Hunt concocted a ruse to put some distance between himself and the Spaniard. He convinced Lisa's men that he would wait and then cleverly decided to inform the Sioux that the boat downriver contained their trade goods. Lisa arrived at the Ponca village expecting to see the Astorians, but they had long since departed; he then pressed on with renewed determination.¹³⁶

If Lisa's objective had been to unite with Hunt and the Astorians before both expeditions reached the Sioux villages, the Spaniard missed catching Hunt by a single day. On 31 May, the Astorians narrowly escaped a tense confrontation with approximately six hundred Sioux warriors due primarily to Hunt's resolute leadership, skill at negotiating, and, perhaps most importantly, his willingness to distribute gifts.¹³⁷ A second encounter with chiefs of the "Okanandans" (Oglalas) and "Sahonies" (Saones) two days later, although it thoroughly alarmed Hunt, elicited no further exchange of presents because, as he put it, "he had given all he intended to give, and would give no more [and] that he was much displeased by their importunity, and if they or any of their nation again followed us with similar demands, he would consider them as enemies and treat them as such."¹³⁸ Circumstances thus forced Lisa to make his way past the Sioux

¹³⁵ Ibid., 230-231; Bradbury, *Travels*, 96-97.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 234-235.

¹³⁷ Bradbury, *Travels*, 103-110. The author calculated the number of Sioux the Astorians faced by attributing two warriors to each of the 280 combined lodges of Yanktons, Brules, and Minneconjous "encamped about a league from us."

¹³⁸ Ibid., 112. In a note on p. 104 of the same volume, Donald Jackson explains that Bradbury "follows the nomenclature of Lewis and Clark as given in their *Statistical View* (London 1807)." For an excellent discussion of the bands which comprised the Oglalas, see Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 30. Useful descriptions of the several Oglala bands also appear in Sandoz, *Crazy Horse*; passim. On p. ix of his introduction to that work Vine Deloria, Jr. even claims that "Sandoz's account of the Plains Indians . . . surpasses other such works in terms of its accuracy and clarity. Thankfully, Sandoz clarifies the relationship among the various bands of Oglala and Brule Sioux that led to the eventual capitulation of the Tetons. Other historians tend to describe these tribes as if they were a unified group capable of responding in a unified manner. Sandoz divides these tribes into their respective bands and families and demonstrates that there was a considerable

unaided. He just barely managed to do so by admitting to the Indians that, although he was indeed their trader, his company had recently become impoverished; but, if the Sioux would allow him passage upriver to trade, he would return in three months and rebuild their trading post. After concluding these negotiations by passing out a few presents, Lisa realized with relief that the Sioux had relented and his party was free to continue upriver.¹³⁹

Although Lewis and Clark had managed to maintain amicable relations with the Arikaras during the “Mandan Winter” of 1804-1805, those relations had deteriorated badly following the failure of the 1807 expedition commanded by Ensign Nathaniel Pryor to return the Mandan chief, Sheheke, to his people.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, after his rather dispirited return to St. Louis, Pryor had estimated that he would need at least four hundred men to force his way past the Arikaras.¹⁴¹ The state of American-Arikara relations had changed little since then as Lisa and Hunt initiated a somewhat reluctant Missouri River partnership.

On 2 June 1811, Lisa and his Missouri Fur Company traders at last affected a rendezvous with the Astorians commanded by Hunt near Cedar Island, twelve hundred miles above the mouth of the Missouri.¹⁴² Ever suspicious of Lisa’s intentions, Hunt initially removed his party five or six miles upriver from Lisa’s approaching boat. Eventually, the two parties met, although Brackenridge later recorded: “It was with real

difference between, for example, the northern and southern Oglalas.” Regarding the term “Sahonies” [Saones], Hyde, on p. 12 of *Red Cloud’s Folk*, explains “that Saone (or *Sanyona*) was a nickname which the Oglalas and Brules had applied to five Teton tribes: the Minneconjous, Sans Arcs, Two Kettles, Hunkpapas, and Blackfoot-Sioux.” See also White, “The Winning of the West,” 321.

¹³⁹ Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana*, 237.

¹⁴⁰ Ronda, *Astoria and Empire*, 156. For an exhaustively-researched, comprehensive account of American-Arikara foreign relations during this period, see Cox, “A World Together, A World Apart.”

¹⁴¹ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, I: 199-123.

¹⁴² Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana*, 238; Bradbury, *Travels*, 117.

pleasure I took my friend Bradbury by the hand; I have reason to believe our meeting was much more cordial than that of the two commanders.”¹⁴³ Later too, Bradbury remembered:

On my return to the boats, I found that some of the leaders of our party [i.e., Crook and McClellan] were extremely apprehensive of treachery on the part of Mr. Lisa, who being now no longer in fear of the Sioux, they suspected had an intention of quitting us shortly, and of doing us an injury with the Aricaras. Independent of this feeling, it had required all the address of Mr. Hunt to prevent Mr. M’Clellan or Mr. Crooks from calling him to account for instigating the Sioux to treat them ill the preceding year.¹⁴⁴

On 5 June, the situation turned violent. After Pierre Dorion struck Lisa over a questionable debt incurred earlier by Dorion at Fort Mandan, the volatile Spaniard and the interpreter attempted to kill one another with knives and pistols. Crooks and McClellan prepared to enter the fray in Dorion’s behalf. Hunt prevented them from intervening; but it remained for Bradbury and Brackenridge finally to convince the temperamental Lisa to forgive the insult and return to his boat unavenged.¹⁴⁵

By 1811 at the latest, the horticultural Arikaras, Mandans, and Hidatsas had formed at least a temporary military alliance for their mutual defense.¹⁴⁶ The sudden arrival of the Astorians at the horticulturalists’ villages, however, threw the coalition into disarray. While the Mandans desired closer ties to St. Louis-based traders, the Hidatsas wished to remain loyal to the British North West Company—and the Arikaras suddenly found themselves uncomfortably suspended between these two incompatible positions. As a

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Bradbury, *Travels*, 119.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 121-122; Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana*, 241-242.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 113. Bradbury’s first encounter with a combined Arikara-Mandan-Hidatsa war party numbering some three hundred warriors is convincing evidence that they had indeed formed an alliance. Significantly, however, that alliance had emerged only in the years following Lewis and Clark’s failure to broker a peace among those same three tribes in 1804; see Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, chap. three; Cox, “A World Together, A World Apart,” 93-104.

gesture of solidarity with their British traders, the Hidatsas seemed to be preparing with hundreds of warriors for an assault on Hunt's party; subsequently, Hunt and Lisa decided to enlist the aid of the Arikaras as arbitrators.¹⁴⁷

Negotiations to determine the traders' fate opened on 12 June in the lodge of LeGauche, an Arikara chief. Despite the misgivings of Crooks and McClellan, Lisa performed admirably. Somewhat out of character, he calmly explained to LeGauche and roughly twenty Arikara headmen that the Astorians were his friends and that if the Indians attacked either party, they would face the combined firepower of both companies. Pleased with Lisa's demonstration of solidarity, Hunt added that the Astorians had not come to trade but only wished to join their friends "at the great salt lake in the west" and would need to purchase horses for an overland journey.¹⁴⁸ The exchange continued smoothly as the Arikaras agreed to sell the required number of horses. The negotiations then concluded successfully with the Americans distributing gifts of tobacco followed by the ritual smoking of the pipe. In light of future Arikara depredations, Lisa and Hunt's brief association had accomplished much, if only temporarily.¹⁴⁹

Of more lasting significance, however, were the many ways that the two companies captained by Lisa and Hunt foreshadowed so many features of the later American fur trade. For example, Lisa consistently supplied the lower Missouri tribes with quality goods distributed from permanent trading houses and, by doing so, ensured his access to

¹⁴⁷ Ronda, *Astoria and Empire*, 157.

¹⁴⁸ Bradbury, *Travels*, 130.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 127-131; Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana*, 345-346; Ronda, *Astoria and Empire*, 159-160. Chittenden details how the Arikaras attacked a Missouri River trading expedition in 1816 or 1817, killing one of the whites; raided two Missouri Fur Company trading posts in 1820; robbed a party of whites and attacked the Missouri Fur Company post built for the Sioux trade on Cedar Island in March of 1823; and, in May of the same year, resisted the "enterprising young men" under William H. Ashley and Andrew Henry so fiercely that Ashley retreated downriver with loss, abandoned all thought of proceeding upriver, and headed overland to the Rocky Mountains, where he subsequently established the rendezvous system in the heart of the Rockies; see Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 263.

the fur riches of the Three Forks area. Lisa also recognized the value of the Teton buffalo robe and hide trade and always—even after his fortunes declined following the War of 1812—maintained a post among them. And, finally, having penetrated all the way to the Blackfoot country, Missouri Fur Company trappers under Andrew Henry built a fort at the Three Forks. Although grievous losses inflicted by that tribe eventually forced Henry’s men to abandon that post, one party returned to Fort Raymond, located at the confluence of the Bighorn and Yellowstone rivers, while the others crossed over the Continental Divide, built the first American trading fort on the Pacific slope, and spent the winter there in relative safety. The next spring, some of these men met Hunt as they were returning to St. Louis by way of the Missouri and informed him of routes across the Continental Divide superior to those pioneered by Lewis and Clark, routes that lay south of Blackfoot lands. On the basis of that new information, Hunt, anticipating the Henry-Ashley partnership by nearly fifteen years, stopped his ascent of the Missouri at the Arikara villages, purchased horses from them, and headed overland toward the Rockies and then across the Continental Divide by one of these new routes. Later, Pacific Fur Company employees under the direction of Robert Stuart headed east in the summer and fall of 1812 following the loss of Astoria to the British, and became the first whites to traverse South Pass. Their achievement, however, went largely unheralded, as the credit for “discovering” South Pass later went to one of Henry and Ashley’s men, Jedediah Smith, the first white to cross it from east to west.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Biddle, St. Louis, to Colonel Henry Atkinson, 1819, Henry Atkinson Papers, MHMA; quoted in Wishart, *The Fur Trade of the American West*, 42-43; Morgan, *The West of William H. Ashley*, xxxviii-xxxix; Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 92.

VI

Of more enduring significance to United States foreign relations, however, was Lisa's successful diplomacy during the War of 1812 with those same Tetons who had tried to bar his passage upriver in 1811. Lisa's encounters with the Sioux in the spring and summer of 1812 established his claim to be *their* Missouri River trader and fostered an atmosphere of mutual economic cooperation that later induced the Tetons to ally themselves with the United States more or less continuously from 1814 to 1854. This foreign relations triumph had its origins in the far-sighted statesmanship of William Clark, newly-appointed Governor of Missouri Territory.

By 1814, no American exercised a stronger influence with the western Indians, excepting the Blackfoot, than Manuel Lisa. Therefore, in the summer of that year, Governor Clark drew on his authority as Indian agent to appoint Auguste Chouteau sub-agent for the Osages and Lisa agent for the tribes on the Missouri above the Kansas River.¹⁵¹ Clark made the appointments for the express purpose of bolstering those tribes' allegiance to the United States for the duration of the conflict with Great Britain.¹⁵² To

¹⁵¹ For Clark's reasoning behind his retention of the duties of Indian agent for all of the tribes in Missouri Territory as well as for those tribes residing west of the Mississippi River in the Louisiana Purchase north of the state of Louisiana, see Jay H. Buckley, *William Clark: Indian Diplomat* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 90-91. For the historical context of British agitation of the Indians inhabiting the Mississippi and Missouri River watersheds during the War of 1812, see Buckley, *William Clark*, chap. four; William H. Foley, *Wilderness Journey: The Life of William Clark* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004); Colin Calloway, *Crown and Calumet: British-Indian Relations, 1783-1815* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); Robert S. Allen, "His Majesty's Indian Allies: Native Peoples, the British Crown and the War of 1812," *Michigan Historical Review* 14 (Fall 1988): 1-24; Gary C. Anderson, "American Agents vs. British Traders: Prelude to the War of 1812 in the Far West," in Ronald Lora, ed., *The American West: Essays in Honor of W. Eugene Hollon* (Toledo, OH: University of Toledo, 1980), 3-24; Julius W. Pratt, "Fur Trade Strategy and the American Left Flank in the War of 1812," *American Historical Review* 40 (January 1935): 249-249; Kate L. Gregg, "The War of 1812 on the Missouri Frontier," *Missouri Historical Review* (October 1938-July 1939): 328-329; and Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 151-160.

¹⁵² William Clark, St. Louis, to John Armstrong, 20 August 1814, Clarence E. Carter and John Porter Bloom, comps. and eds., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, 28 vols. (Washington, DC.: Government Printing Office, 1934-1975), 14: 786.

that end, Lisa departed St. Louis that fall with \$1,335 in trade goods and Tamaha, a one-eyed chief of the Tetons. At a council the following spring held at the mouth of James River and attended by large numbers of Yanktons and Tetons, Lisa convinced the Indians both of British deceit and American integrity. The results of that council had national implications: despite British trader Robert Dickson's strenuous efforts to incite the Santees and other Mississippi River tribes to attack American settlements, including St. Louis, the Tetons' new-found allegiance to the United States was simply too powerful a deterrent to hostility on the part of Great Britain's Indian allies.

In the wake of this diplomatic success, Lisa returned triumphantly to St. Louis in June 1815 accompanied by several Teton chiefs, including Clark's old nemesis of 1804, the Partisan. Undoubtedly because of the disruptions along the Missouri resulting from the war, Lisa thereafter restricted his operations to his post at Council Bluffs until 1819.¹⁵³ But for the Tetons, an almost symbolic act on the part of Governor Clark seemed to presage the nature of Teton-American relations for the next four decades: for Tamaha's services to the United States throughout the recent conflict, Clark expressed the nation's gratitude by bestowing upon the chief a splendid officer's uniform, a medal, an official written citation, and a United States government commission as a chief of the greater Sioux nation.¹⁵⁴

From 1812 to 1819, the limited success of Lisa's constricted fur trade operations contrasted sharply with his diplomatic triumphs. Following the outbreak of hostilities and due in large measure to British agitation of the upper Missouri tribes, Lisa realistically abandoned all thoughts of trapping in the Blackfoot country or anywhere else on the other

¹⁵³ Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 42-45; Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 151-156; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, I: 146-147; and Pratt, "Fur Trade Strategy," 262-266.

¹⁵⁴ Buckley, *William Clark*, 102.

side of the Continental Divide and had even withdrawn his traders from the territories of the Crows and the upper Missouri villagers. Finally reaching the nadir of his career in the spring of 1813, Lisa maintained only two trading houses: a single post below the Grand Detour managed by Louis Bissonette for the Sioux, and another at Council Bluffs under the direction of Michael Immel for the Omahas.¹⁵⁵

VII

The members of the first government-sponsored expedition into the newly-acquired territory of the Louisiana Purchase optimistically opened negotiations with several Teton Sioux bands camped along the Missouri River in compliance with their instructions from President Thomas Jefferson. Appointed by the president to lead his “Corps for Northwestern Discovery,” Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark dutifully engaged several bands of Brule Sioux in talks that not only failed to establish American sovereignty over the area, but undoubtedly encouraged Teton aggression toward all Americans following Jefferson’s expedition.

In the years during which the Teton Sioux and American fur traders first interacted in the upper Missouri country, mutual caution, suspicion, and distrust, combined with the region’s fluid geopolitics, created conditions that both preserved the Tetons’ control of boat traffic headed upriver from St. Louis and eventually forced the Americans to restrict their efforts, for a time at least, to the lower Missouri. Throughout the eighteenth century, as the leading bands of Tetons migrated westward from their ancestral lands, they retained close trade relations with their eastern kinsmen that allowed the westernmost Tetons to distance themselves, at least initially, from St. Louis-based sources of Euro-American trade goods.

¹⁵⁵ Morgan, *The West of William H. Ashley*, xli.

Before the upheavals resulting from the War of 1812 forced American fur traders to abandon the upper Missouri fur trade to French traders from St. Louis, Manuel Lisa's Missouri Fur Company and John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company prefigured many of the production, distribution, and field strategies that enabled later firms to exploit the trans-Mississippi West's wealth in furs so successfully. And, despite initial misgivings, the two companies cooperated briefly in the spring of 1811 to overcome successive challenges to their upriver passage from the Indians along the Missouri. Nevertheless, by 1814, the Pacific Fur Company had dissolved after the forced sale of its trading establishment on the Pacific Coast to the North West Company, while Lisa had retreated to his few remaining posts on the lower Missouri.

Manuel Lisa's most lasting contribution to the security of American settlements in Louisiana, as well as to the eventual recovery of the region's American fur trade, was his war-time diplomacy among the Teton Sioux. Commissioned by Governor William Clark to serve as Indian agent for tribes residing above the Kansas River, Lisa simultaneously convinced the Sioux of British treachery and American veracity. The Sioux subsequently pledged their loyalty to the United States in a treaty concluded at Potages de Sioux in the summer of 1815.

CHAPTER TWO

“ESTABLISHING A FOOTHOLD:

RECOVERY, RETREAT AND A SHIFT TO THE WEST, 1815-1824”

I

Long before the War of 1812, French merchants from St. Louis vigorously pursued the Teton trade along the Missouri River. Although they had been doing so since the last years of the eighteenth century, the abandonment of the upper Missouri country by the Americans following the outbreak of hostilities with Great Britain in 1812 opened up expansive new opportunities for St. Louis-based French traders to monopolize that trade—particularly with the Brules and Oglalas. Ever since the Lewis and Clark expedition, the only whites the Western Sioux had tolerated along the Missouri were the French. A prime reason for this tolerance was their Gallic forbearance for the Teton habit of stopping white traders’ keelboats heading upriver and simply stealing the trade goods outright or of setting a rate of exchange which greatly favored the Indians.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Hyde, *Red Cloud’s Folk*, 34-35. St. Louis-based French traders were, of course, not the only Europeans working the upper Missouri country at this time, although it is true that they had the Teton trade largely to themselves. Competing British fur traders operating out of Canada also continued to vie for the lucrative trade of the upper Missouri Indians, particularly that of the horticultural Mandans and Hidatsas; see *American State Papers, Documents, Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States*, Indian Affairs, 2 vols. (Washington, D. C.: Gales and Seaton, 1815-1827), 2: 335; Dale L. Morgan, ed., *The West of William H. Ashley* (Denver: Old West Publishing Company, 1964), xxix-xxxviii.

The situation for American traders proceeding upriver from St. Louis eased somewhat in the wake of Manuel Lisa's successful wartime diplomacy with the Sioux but, at least until the early 1820s, French traders predominated.

Perhaps the earliest Missouri River trading establishment devoted exclusively to the Teton trade was that built by Registre Loisel—a French trader called “Little Beaver” by the Sioux—near the mouth of Bad (Teton) River on Cedar Island. No Ears records the year of its construction in 1802 in his winter count.¹⁵⁷ Chittenden describes the post as having been “about thirty-five miles below Fort Pierre” and “65 to 70 feet square, with the usual bastions. The pickets were about 14 feet high. There was a building inside 45 x 32 feet divided into four equal rooms.”¹⁵⁸ According to several Teton winter counts, Loisel had arrived among them sometime between 1794 and 1797 and judging by the name by which they first knew him—“The Good White Man”—he must have earned both their trust and friendship.¹⁵⁹ Then, in the summer of 1809, several disgruntled bands of Tetons stopped a Missouri Fur Company expedition on its way to relieve the firm's

¹⁵⁷ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 133-134; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 2: 929; Abel, *Tabeau's Narrative*, 25-27. In Walker, *Lakota Society*, 122-123, the author, writing specifically of the Oglalas, describes their notion of time and the utility of their winter counts: “The Oglalas have no name for time alone but their word *etu* expresses the concept of a time, as, for instance, the term *anpetu* means daytime. They reckon their time by *anpetu*, daytime; *hanyetu*, nighttime; *wiyetu*, moon time (month); *makoncagayetu*, earth-changing-time (season); and *omakayetu*, world-time (year). Days and nights were not given permanent names or numbers nor recorded in any way. A moon was the time from the first appearance of the new moon in the west after the sun had set until the last appearance of the old moon in the east before the sun rose. There were thirteen moons and four seasons. The four seasons were: *wietu*, sun-time (spring); *bloketu*, male-time, or potato-time (summer); *ptanyetu*, changeable-time (autumn); and *waniyetu*, snow-existing-time (winter). The winter season completed the year, and in speaking of the past, a winter meant a completed year. For this reason the Oglalas designated the past by winters instead of years. And the nearest that they could specify a particular time was of a moon of a season of a winter. They recorded these winters by pictography of some notable event occurring during that year that was a matter of common knowledge to the people, which designations were maintained in their order of sequence. This made a calendar.”

¹⁵⁸ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 2: 929.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 133; Walker, *Lakota Society*, 129-130; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 25. For other possible candidates for “The Good White Man,” including Jean-Baptiste Truteau, Jacques D'Eglise, James Mackay, Jacques Clamorgan, et al.—all partners in The Company of Commerce for the Discovery of the Nations of the Upper Missouri—see Abel, *Tabeau's Narrative*, 7-19. Hyde, however, dismisses Truteau as a possible candidate.

trappers at Fort Raymond, a trading post built at the confluence of the Yellowstone and Bighorn Rivers in the spring of 1807 and meant to capture the Crow trade. To the Missouri Fur Company men, the Sioux conveyed their disappointment that an earlier American promise to send a trader to live among them had not been kept. As a visible expression of their dissatisfaction with the Americans, those bands now flew British flags over their camps. Both to regain the Tetons' goodwill and to ease his way upriver, Lisa sent some of his employees to occupy Loisel's Cedar Island location and reestablish American trade there with the Sioux.¹⁶⁰

Numerous Sioux winter counts record Little Beaver's death in the destruction by fire of Loisel's old log post on Cedar Island sometime between 1808 and 1810. They include those of the following winter count keepers: The Flame (or The Blaze), born a Two Kettles, he usually lived with the Sans Arcs; Lone Dog, a Yanktonai Sioux; The Swan (or The Little Swan), a Minneconjou chief; Battiste [alternately, Baptiste] Good, a Brule; White Cow Killer; American Horse; Cloud Shield; No Ears; and Iron Crow, all Oglalas. The *Louisiana Gazette* of 10 May 1810 also reported that fire had consumed that important trading post along with anywhere from \$12,000 to \$15,000 worth of furs.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, there is some confusion over whether Loisel, a.k.a. "Little Beaver," was

¹⁶⁰ Upon Lisa's return to St. Louis, the *Louisiana Gazette*, St. Louis, 26 October 1811, reported: "Mr. Manuel Lisa saw all the Sioux bands below the big bend established a trading house for them and left them well satisfied. It is to be hoped that when trading houses shall be regularly established that these marauders, will become reconciled to a more peaceably and friendly deportment;" quoted in Morgan, *The West of William H. Ashley*, xli; James, *Three Years Among the Indians and Mexicans*, 5; Pierre Chouteau to William Eustis, 14 December 1809, Pierre Chouteau Letterbook, 142, MHMA, Pierre Menard to Adrien Langlois, 7 October 1809, Kaskaskia Papers, MHMA; Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 83; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 35; and Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 42. In his account of one of the feasts held by the Sioux for the Missouri Fur Company men, James expresses his revulsion at the Indians' custom of serving roast dog, a favored delicacy, to honored visitors. Repulsed at the mere sight of a dog's paw hanging over the edge of each bowl to identify its contents, James hastily removed himself from the festivities.

¹⁶¹ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 93-94, 106, 129-130, 135; James R. Walker, *Lakota Society*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 132; *Louisiana Gazette*, St. Louis, 10 May 1810 (also known as the *Missouri Gazette*, among still other names); Morgan, *The West of William H. Ashley*, xli.

first called “The Good White Man” by the Sioux and whether he died in 1804, 1808, or 1809. Battiste Good even claimed that Little Beaver was an Englishman. But as all of the Sioux chroniclers except Battiste Good agree that Little Beaver was a French trader who died in 1808-1809 or 1809-1810—and Hyde makes the very reasonable argument that Loisel may have stayed on as Lisa’s factor after the Missouri Fur Company men took over the Frenchman’s post—Loisel is probably the “Little Beaver” who died in the fire on Cedar Island in 1809. Chittenden corroborates both Hyde and the winter count keepers with the statement that “[Loisel’s post] was probably the real Fort aux Cedres which is so known in the narratives of the times. Several authorities speak of it as an old Missouri Fur Company trading post, but if so it was possibly the one which burned in the spring of 1810, for no such post is mentioned by Bradbury or Breckinridge in 1811 or by Leavenworth in 1823.”¹⁶²

Sioux chroniclers also recorded the building by the Sans Arcs of “dirt lodges” in which they lived throughout the winter of 1815-1816. These “dirt lodges” were undoubtedly trading posts managed by St. Louis-based, French merchants as the Americans had yet to return to the upper Missouri country. Hyde, however, recommends accepting the veracity of these records with caution because, as he says, there is “very little information on the Tetons at this period, and the winter-count outline is not as useful as it might be, for by the time these counts were interpreted, soon after the year 1877, the count-keepers themselves were very hazy as to the meaning of many of the pictographs.”¹⁶³ Nevertheless, there seems to be no other reasonable explanation for the

¹⁶² Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 93-94; Walker, *Lakota Society*, 132; Hyde, *Red Cloud’s Folk*, 35; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 2: 929. In Nasatir, *Before Lewis and Clark*, 2: 736, Nasatir claims that Little Beaver died in October 1804.

¹⁶³ Hyde, *Red Cloud’s Folk*, 35; Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 89-100; Walker, *Lakota Society*, 111-122.

Sans Arcs' "dirt lodges" other than that they were log structures similar in design to the post described above by Chittenden and built to accommodate French entrepreneurs coming upriver from St. Louis and their Sioux trading partners.

Many of the westernmost Teton bands were in considerable flux during this period. For instance, the Kiyuksas first became associated with the Oglalas at this time. This move coincided with the successful effort by Bull Bear, one of that band's leading warriors, to become head-chief of the entire tribe. In this endeavor, he received the aid of Red Water and his band of Brules who likewise joined the Oglalas. Lone Man's Brules also merged with the Oglalas. Lone Man was the father of Red Cloud, one of the more famous of the later Oglala chiefs.¹⁶⁴ One of this band's more renowned men was the elder Man-Afraid-of His-Horse, the chief whose son of the same name played such a prominent role among the Tetons in the decades following the Grattan disaster of 1854. The most probable year of his birth was 1814-1815.¹⁶⁵

Although a great deal of information is missing regarding the erection of two forts along the Missouri River in the years 1817-1818 and 1819-1820, it is almost certain that French fur traders Joseph LaFramboise and Louis La Conte were instrumental in the construction of one of them ten miles above the future site of Fort Thompson, as well as of another on the Fort Pierre Plain near the subsequent location of Fort Pierre. Confusion arises from the fact that Battiste Good credits LaFramboise, the French-Ottawa trader he calls "Choze," with being responsible for building both forts, though not in the same

¹⁶⁴ Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 34; Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 111, 136-137; Walker, *Lakota Society*, 135. Corroborated by many of the Sioux winter counts, Hyde here maintains that the year of Red Cloud's birth is indisputable as a flaming meteorite fell out of the sky from the east, making a great noise and turning the sky red, hence the derivation of the chief's name.

¹⁶⁵ Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 34. For additional information on Lakota divisions and Oglala bands, see Walker, *Lakota Society*, 18-21; Sandoz, *Crazy Horse*, passim.

year. Alternatively, Lone Dog ascribes the raising of the latter post—referred to hereafter as Fort LaFramboise—in 1819-1820 to La Conte; other surviving winter counts do nothing to clear up the discrepancy. Fur trade historians, too, have failed to establish definitively the early history of the two forts; the written record is simply too slim. What is certain, however, is that Fort LaFramboise became the first important trading installation on the Fort Pierre Plain and operated continuously thereafter until the Columbia Fur Company raised Fort Tecumseh a short distance upriver in 1822.¹⁶⁶

II

Manuel Lisa reorganized the Missouri Fur Company one final time in 1819 with a new set of partners who planned eventually to return to the upper Missouri country. Not even Lisa's death in 1820 deterred them from sending a trapping expedition to the mountains. In its wake, one of the ablest of the partners, the energetic Joshua Pilcher, assumed leadership of the company.¹⁶⁷

Beginning with his arrival in St. Louis in the fall of 1814, Joshua Pilcher's first years in Missouri Territory were interesting. Pilcher initially entered into a short-lived business partnership with one N. S. Anderson. Following his death in the summer of 1816, Pilcher

¹⁶⁶ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 106, 109; Walker, *Lakota Society*, 134; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 35-36; Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 8-9; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, II: 930.

¹⁶⁷ Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 151-156; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, I: 147; Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, II: 393; Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 46-48. In Morgan, *The West of William H. Ashley*, xlix, the author neatly summarizes Lisa's various partnerships and reorganizations involving his corporate fur-trading ventures: "The original [1808-1809] St. Louis Missouri Fur Company gave way in March, 1812, to a new Missouri Fur Company, which was to have continued until December, 1818. Steps were taken to dissolve the successor firm in the latter part of 1813, and action became final in January, 1814. The following June Lisa entered into partnership with Theodore Hunt (a firm variously called 'Manuel Lisa & Co.,' 'Lisa & Hunt,' and 'Missouri Fur Company'), and this partnership continued until it expired by limitation in June, 1817. Lisa next entered into a more broadly based partnership with John P. Cabanne including such associates as Bernard Pratte, John O'Fallon, Theodore Hunt, Bartholomew Berthold, and Pierre Chouteau, Jr. Cabanne & Co. broke up in turn, and in 1819 a new Missouri Fur Company was organized. A copy of its articles of association and co-partnership was furnished the government by Thomas Hempstead under cover of a letter to John C. Calhoun, April 7, 1822 (National Archives, Records of the War Department, Office of the Secretary, H-288 (15) 1822)."

went into business with veteran St. Louis banker, politician, and merchant, Thomas F. Riddick. In the autumn of 1816, the two friends entered into the auction business, an endeavor that evidently brought them considerable financial success. During the next three years Pilcher's business interests varied from lead mining to banking to land speculation, none of which brought him either satisfaction or financial security. Pilcher helped organize the first permanent Masonic Lodge in Missouri as its First or Charter Master, although one of his Masonic associations nearly resulted in a duel over a young woman with fellow Mason Stephen F. Austin, at the time a Missouri Territorial Assemblyman and later founder of the first Anglo-American colony in Texas. Pilcher also at this time became a trusted friend and loyal political supporter of Thomas Hart Benton. Then, in 1819 Pilcher "crossed the great divide in his [life and] career—from merchandising and banking to the fur trade."¹⁶⁸

In 1819, a combination of favorable developments at last convinced Lisa once again to hazard his fortunes in the upper Missouri fur trade: the Convention of 1818, which solidified the border between Canada and the United States to the Continental Divide, congressional prohibitions against British trade south of that border, the Yellowstone Expedition of 1819-20,¹⁶⁹ and a postwar economic boom that helped to swell global fur markets. Lisa therefore reorganized the Missouri Fur Company as a four-year association between himself as the older and more experienced director of field operations—as well as the holder of six of the company's thirty shares—and several younger partners.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ John E. Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher: Fur Trader and Indian Agent* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), 18-27.

¹⁶⁹ Chittenden devotes an entire chapter to this ill-fated expedition; see Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 2: 560-583.

¹⁷⁰ Lisa was the only one of the original 1807 Missouri Fur Company stockholders involved in the 1819 reorganization. His new partners included Lisa's brother-in-law Thomas Hempstead, Andrew Woods, Masonic brothers, Joseph Perkins and Pilcher himself, all four of whom received four shares, Kit Carson's

In the late fall of 1819, Pilcher accompanied Lisa and his wife to Fort Lisa at Council Bluffs where, due to rapidly failing health, Lisa restricted his activities to the fort throughout the winter of 1819-20. Pilcher meanwhile gained considerable experience that winter trading with the Indians in the vicinity of Council Bluffs. He also gradually assumed a greater role in directing Missouri Fur Company operations both at the fort and in the field, while Thomas Hempstead continued to manage company finances from St. Louis. Both of these arrangements remained in force following Lisa's death in August 1820 and the drafting by the company's remaining shareholders of a new four-year partnership agreement that took effect in September of that same year.¹⁷¹

Under Pilcher's able direction, the prospects of the Missouri Fur Company soon improved. First, he authorized the construction of Fort Benton at the mouth of the Bighorn River in the fall of 1821 and, somewhat later, the construction of Fort Recovery just north of the mouth of White River. The following spring "180 adventurers" under the command of St. Louisan Robert Jones and Michael Immel, a former army officer, departed St. Charles for the splendid beaver country of the Crows. And, by the fall of 1822, the company's prospects brightened even further as the Jones and Immel expedition's harvest of twenty-five thousand dollars worth of furs arrived at St. Louis.¹⁷²

In addition to the men attached to Jones and Immel, Pilcher also dispatched three hundred traders under William Henry Vanderburgh, Moses Carson, Lucien Fontenelle, and Andrew Drips to the company's posts on the Missouri. Based largely on the

brother, Moses B. Carson, and John B. Zenoni, each of whom took two shares; the company assigned the other four shares later; see Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 172-173; Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 29; Paul C. Phillips, "William Henry Vanderburgh: Fur Trader," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 30 (December 1943): 381.

¹⁷¹ Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 30-33.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 36; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 146-147.

perception of Pilcher's high moral character and ethical field practices, the Missouri Fur Company's good business reputation and sound credit rating allowed Hempstead, by posting a \$5,000 bond, both to renew the company's trading license and to ship trade goods from St. Louis to Council Bluffs first before shipping them on to more distant posts.¹⁷³ Thus stocked, the company's traders collected \$42,000 worth of furs before the onset of winter.¹⁷⁴

But, disaster struck the following year. In the spring of 1823, Jones and Immel and more than thirty men left Fort Benton determined to trap the beaver-rich Blackfoot country. Later, following a successful spring hunt—the trappers collected some fifty-odd packs of beaver—the party headed for the Yellowstone River and Fort Benton.¹⁷⁵ Then, on the last day of May 1823, forty Blackfoot warriors ambushed the party in a narrow pass. The trappers lost most of their equipment, all of their horses and traps, thirty-five

¹⁷³ See Colonel Henry Atkinson to John C. Calhoun, Secretary of War, St. Louis, 30 November 1821; in National Archives, Records of the War Department, Office of the Secretary, Letters Received, A-57 (15) 1821; quoted in Morgan, *The West of William H. Ashley*, liv. This letter provides a good indication of how favorably the United States government viewed Pilcher and the Missouri Fur Company. Referring to a previous letter to Calhoun, Atkinson writes: "In the first place, my remarks in that letter were intended to apply more particularly to the vendors, or retailers of goods to the Indians than to the principles engaged in the trade, and now to state, that the character of the trade has materially changed since the winter of 19-20, particularly as it relates to the Missouri Fur Company, one of the principal partners, Mr. Pilcher, who manages the business above, and has resided in the Indian country since then, is considered, and as I believe in every respect entitled to the highest consideration for integrity & uprightness of character—His uniform disposition, as evinced on many occasions, to promote the views of the government in the discharge of his duties, as well as observing a strict conformity with the laws regulating intercourse with the Indians, are the strongest evidences of his sincerity & intention, to act correctly—and the young men engaged as clerks & vendors for the company, many of whom are known to me, have the confidence of the community here, and possess intelligence & enterprise."

¹⁷⁴ Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 36-37.

¹⁷⁵ Referring to the differences between the trappers' spring and fall hunts, Hiram Martin Chittenden makes clear in a chapter entitled "Characteristic Features of the Fur Trade," in *American Fur Trade*, 1: 41-42, that "[f]ew terms are more familiar in the nomenclature of the fur trade than *spring* and *fall hunts* [italics in the original]. Most of the beaver fur was taken in these two seasons. In the summer the fur was not in good condition, and the trapper improved this period of enforced inactivity to visit the annual rendezvous or some trading post, to settle his accounts for the year, to secure a new equipment, and to return to the theater of his approaching fall hunt. In the winter the climate was too severe for work, the peril of travel was extreme, the streams were frozen over, and the beaver was hibernating in his lodge. The trapper again made a virtue of necessity, selected some safe and sheltered retreat, and whiled away the long and lonely winters as best he could. The severity of the winter seemed to add quality to the fur, and skins taken in the spring hunts were better than those taken in the fall."

packs of beaver valued at fifteen thousand dollars, seven men killed—including Jones and Immel—and four men wounded. The Missouri Fur Company never recovered from this setback, although it survived for a few more years under the name “Pilcher and Company.” Thereafter, Pilcher confined its operations to the lower Missouri below the Omahas.¹⁷⁶

Well before this disaster, however, rival firms had begun to threaten Pilcher’s upper Missouri operations. First, traders employed by the French Fur Company of Bartholomew Berthold, Bernard Pratte, Sr., and Pierre Chouteau, Jr., abruptly challenged the Missouri Fur Company for control of the Indian trade—particularly the Sioux trade with the construction of Fort Lookout [Fort Kiowa] just north of Fort Recovery—all along the upper Missouri from Council Bluffs to the Mandan villages.¹⁷⁷ Second, the American Fur Company had at last established its Western Department at St. Louis, having both removed a major source of government interference with the disbanding of the United States factory system and by commencing negotiations for a business

¹⁷⁶ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 148-151; Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 394-395; Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 40; Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*, (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953; reprint, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1964), 63-64 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

¹⁷⁷ Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 37. Fortunately, in Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1953; reprint, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1964), 376 (page citations are to the reprint edition), the author eliminates the confusion surrounding the multiple names used to identify this historically-significant trading establishment: “Fort Lookout, Fort Kiowa, and Brazeau’s Fort are one and the same. It would appear that Joseph Brazeau was chosen to head the French Company’s upriver movement when negotiations with Wilson Price Hunt fell through, and it would also appear that he had the *dit* name ‘Cayewa,’ ‘Keiwars,’ or ‘Keewaws,’ as variously spelled. He was licensed to trade on the Missouri as early as 1811 and on June 23, 1814, was licensed to trade ‘with the Teton and Yankton Sioux at Cedar Island on the Missouri.’ Next year he was again licensed to trade ‘with the Mahas, Panis, Ricaras, Yankton & Teton Sioux.’ As he founded Fort Lookout for the French Company, apparently in the fall of 1822, it came to be generally known by his own and his *dit* name; both persisted for a year after his final return to St. Louis.” See also *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, 2: 201-203; Carter, *Territorial Papers of the United States*, 15: 85; Edgar Wesley, ed., “Diary of James Kennerly,” *Missouri Historical Society Collections*, 6: 71-72; *National Intelligencer* (Washington), 18 September 1823; J. T. Scharf, *History of St. Louis City and County* (Philadelphia, 1883), 168-169; Thomas Maitland Marshall, ed., *The Life and Papers of Frederick Bates*, Publications of the Missouri Historical Society (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society, 1926; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1975), 2: 281; “Journal of the Atkinson-O’Fallon Expedition,” *North Dakota Historical Quarterly* 4 (October 1929): 5-56.

association with one of the more successful and powerful St. Louis outfits, David Stone and Company or, alternatively, Stone, Bostwick and Company.¹⁷⁸ Third, the new partnership of Andrew Henry and William H. Ashley threatened the Missouri Fur Company from two different and somewhat unanticipated directions: the new partners planned to compete with Hempstead in St. Louis for boats and supplies; and, by dispatching brigades of free-ranging trappers in the mountains to harvest furs under contract to Henry and Ashley, they hoped to eliminate the need for the type of fur trade system characterized by fixed trading posts manned by company employees dependent for their returns upon Indian trappers.¹⁷⁹ And, fourth, the Columbia Fur Company emerged as a formidable competitor along the Missouri River from Council Bluffs to the Mandan villages.

¹⁷⁸ Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*, 1: 14-17, 313-323; Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 399-403; Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 52-53. For an excellent overview of the United States government's short-lived attempt to trade directly with the Indians, see Royal B. Way, "The United States Factory System for Trading with the Indians, 1796-1822," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 6 (September 1919): 220-235. The American Fur Company did, in fact, successfully incorporate David Stone and Company into its upper Missouri operations in February 1823; see Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 325.

¹⁷⁹ Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 37; Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 48. Arguably, the most famous partnership in the nineteenth-century history of the American fur trade was that of Andrew Henry and William H. Ashley. While scholars readily concede that Henry was both senior to and vastly more experienced in the fur trade than Ashley—Henry having been one of the founding partners of the Missouri Fur Company in 1807, as well as having spent several trapping seasons in the Rocky Mountains prior to his association with Ashley—fur trade historians generally either place Ashley's name before Henry's or omit the latter altogether. For a small sampling of these works, see Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade*; Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*; Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*. Henry biographers Linda Harper White and Fred R. Gowans have addressed this tendency as well as some of the misconceptions resulting from it that have emerged in the literature concerning Henry and Ashley's partnership: "Because of a lack of records, Henry's achievements and his role in the development of the fur trade have been overshadowed and in many ways obscured by his better known partners, William H. Ashley in particular. From the beginning, [however,] Henry was the partner most involved in the company; not only did most of the [partnership's] innovations probably come from Henry, based on his ideas and views developed from his experience in the fur trade, he was the partner who was to spend the next several years in the mountains, devoting all his energies to the success of the venture. Although devoted to the company, Ashley remained involved in St. Louis politics, real estate, and other business. Thus, with Henry's ideas and experience and Ashley's business sense, the two partners made plans for their fur company;" see Linda Harper White and Fred R. Gowans, "Traders to Trappers: Andrew Henry and the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 43 (Winter 1993): 59; and Linda Harper White and Fred R. Gowans, "Traders to Trappers: Andrew Henry and the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade: Part 2," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 43 (Summer 1993): 57.

III

The Columbia Fur Company formed out of the wreckage left by the fusion of the Hudson's Bay Company with the North West Company in 1821—an amalgamation ordered by the British crown for the purpose of ending the long-standing and mutually-ruinous competition between the two companies. One result of that merger was that many of their employees had been released from service, a development which inspired Joseph Renville to induce a number of the more experienced men to join with him in forming a new fur-trading company. In the years leading up to the War of 1812, Renville had been one of the British traders operating out of a post located south of the Canadian border along the Red River of the North. Although he later served honorably as a British officer during that war, Renville's subsequent return to United States territory and his Red River post initially cost him financially as the crown refused veterans their pensions if they left Canadian soil. Nevertheless, Renville had positioned himself admirably to enter the American fur trade along with the experienced traders who accepted his offer: Kenneth McKenzie, William Laidlaw; Honore Picotte, James Kipp, and J. P. Tilton.¹⁸⁰

Attempting to circumvent a United States law of 1816 that prohibited foreign nationals from participating in the fur trade, the partners invited an American named Daniel Lamont to join their new firm and, although they legally titled it Tilton and Company, the name Columbia Fur Company attached itself to the concern almost from the beginning.¹⁸¹ The company began operations in 1822 with very little capital. But while Chittenden explains its ultimate success on “the bold, experienced, and enterprising

¹⁸⁰ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 326; Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 407-408; Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 9.

¹⁸¹ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 326; Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 408. Here Phillips contends that, although Lamont may actually have been a Canadian, he did apparently have relatives in the United States; while Chittenden suggests that the partners may have bestowed the name Columbia Fur Company “in token of the ambitious schemes of the new company and their purpose to carry their trade to the Pacific....”

men [who] rapidly extended their trade over a wide tract of country,” Phillips accounts for the company’s success by focusing on financing. He believes that, because obtaining credit from John Jacob Astor and the “hostile” American Fur Company was unlikely, the St. Louis-based importing business of Collier and Powell advanced trade goods to the Columbia Fur Company for the coming year to retaliate against Astor for his “inroads into its [Collier and Powell’s] business.”¹⁸²

The Columbia Fur Company commenced its trading ventures in the upper Mississippi River valley, but soon thereafter began to extend its reach into the upper Missouri country. In its first year of operation, the company located its most important supply depot at Lake Traverse between the St. Peter’s (Minnesota) River and the Red River of the North. Additionally, the firm maintained two subsidiary posts in the upper Mississippi country: one at Prairie du Chien on the Mississippi River; and a second stand on the western shore of Lake Michigan at Green Bay. Then in 1823, two of the partners, James Kipp and J. P. Tilton, built a trading house for the Mandans on the south shore of the Missouri near the future site of Fort Clark. Additionally, Columbia Fur maintained posts along the lower stretches of that river at the mouths of the Niobrara, James, and Vermillion rivers, as well as one at Council Bluffs. Undoubtedly, however, the most important of the firm’s trading establishments was Fort Tecumseh, built slightly above the mouth of the Bad (Teton) River in 1822. The company supplied all of its Missouri River posts either overland from Lake Traverse or by keelboat from St. Louis.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 326; Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 408-409; Phillips additionally supports his claim by pointing out that the firm of Collier and Powell “a few years later, was in close association with McKenzie.”

¹⁸³ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 326-327; Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 409-410; Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 9; Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 49-50. Adding to the confusion surrounding the naming of the Missouri River’s tributaries, Chittenden notes that the traders sometimes called the Bad (Teton) River the Little Missouri. And, in his brief discussion here of the eventual range of the Columbia Fur Company,

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Columbia Fur Company's Fort Tecumseh—predecessor to Fort Pierre—to the history of the Teton Sioux and the American fur trade. Fort Tecumseh served as the headquarters of company president Kenneth McKenzie from 1822 to 1829. Under his adept management, the fort became the major trading center for the Yankton, Yanktonai, and Teton Sioux and the hub of a fur trade domain that eventually included the seven Missouri River trading posts described above as well as a number of smaller winter trading places.¹⁸⁴

Although no records of Fort Tecumseh's original dimensions survive, Columbia Fur Company employees undoubtedly constructed it in accordance with the general characteristics of early fur trade forts—including those of Fort Pierre and Fort Laramie—as described by Chittenden. He first notes that “their primary purpose was trade, but in a land of savage and treacherous inhabitants they served the purpose of protection as well. Their construction was therefore adapted to both ends.” He then provides a physical description of the forts' defenses:

The ground plan of the typical trading post was always a rectangle, sometimes square, but generally a little longer in one direction than another. The sides varied in length from one to four hundred feet . . . [and] to ensure protection

Wishart notes that “[b]y 1826 [the company] had built trading facilities for the Arikara, Mandan, Hidatsa, Teton, Yankton, Ponca and Omaha Indians.”

¹⁸⁴ Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 11-12; and on pp. 40-43, the author offers concise definitions of these three different types of trading establishments. Schuler explains that forts were “the regional headquarters and supplier[s] to a system of smaller trading posts and seasonal trading places which were scattered across the plains. Because of harsh weather and primitive transportation systems, these posts and winter camps became crucial elements of the fur trade system as it evolved in the Upper Missouri region. The trading post was smaller than a fort, but was usually in operation year round. In some instances it had a stockade. Larger posts had several employees and served large areas. A fort received orders for supplies and trade goods from the posts and distributed them in the spring and fall. Posts generally carried a much smaller inventory than forts, and much of their business was seasonal. Most furs from the posts were delivered to the main fort for processing. The trading place, or seasonal camp, was much smaller than the post, and usually consisted of a tepee or small cabin out of which one trader, perhaps with an assistant, would do business during the winter months. The trading places were necessary to give the Sioux a place to trade the long-haired robes from their winter hunts. Trading procedures were similar to those at the forts; however, the amounts and kinds of trade goods available [were] limited to that which could be carried on a few pack horses. In the spring the trader would deliver the robes and skins he had acquired to the main fort.”

the fort was enclosed with strong walls of wood or adobe. The typical fort was protected by wooden palisades or pickets varying from twelve to eighteen feet high and from four to eight inches thick. [A] plank walk was bracketed to the inside of the pickets about four feet below the top so that sentinels could walk there and observe the ground outside. In case of attack the defenders could mount this walk and fire over the palisades or through the loopholes provided for the purpose. The main reliance for defense consisted of two bastions, or blockhouses, as they were commonly called, placed at diagonally opposite corners of the fort. They were square in plan, fifteen to eighteen feet on a side, with two stories, and were generally covered with a roof. The lower floor was a few feet above the level of the ground and was loopholed for the small cannon which all the more important posts possessed. Above the artillery floor was another for the musketry defense with about three loopholes on each exposed face. The blockhouse stood entirely outside the main enclosure, its inner corner joining the corner of the fort so that it flanked two sides; that is the defenders in each bastion could fire along the outer face of the two sides of the fort and thus prevent any attempt to scale or demolish the walls. A “fort” thus constructed was really very strong and was practically impregnable to an enemy without artillery.¹⁸⁵

Chittenden finally remarks that “the garrison could look with indifference upon any attack, however formidable, so long as they used reasonable precaution and were supplied with provisions and ammunition. There is no record of a successful siege of a stockaded fort in the entire history of the fur trade west of the Mississippi.”¹⁸⁶

As vital as the forts’ defensive capabilities were to successful field operations, the fur companies’ profits depended upon how well their forts facilitated trade. Thus, Chittenden also notes that with the “necessary prerequisite of defense having been satisfied, the other arrangements of the fort related to the purposes of trade.” And, he continues:

The entrance was through a strong and heavy door provided with a wicket through which the doorkeeper could examine a person applying for admittance. In the more elaborate posts there was a double door, with a room and a trading counter between them. The Indians were admitted only to this

¹⁸⁵ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 46.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1: 47.

space for the purposes of trade. In the single-door posts trading was sometimes conducted through the wicket when there was a suspicion of danger. On the opposite side of the enclosure from the entrance stood the house of the bourgeois [chief executive] usually the most pretentious building in the post. Nearby stood the office and the house of the clerks. Along one side of the quadrangle stood the barracks of the engages [manual laborers] while across the square were the storehouses for the merchandise, provisions, furs, and peltries. There were also buildings for shops, of which the blacksmith shop was most important. A fur press was a necessary part of the establishment. The buildings usually stood with their back walls on the line of the enclosure and for the distance covered by them they sometimes replaced the pickets. In the center of the enclosure was a large square court in which ordinarily stood a piece of artillery trained upon the entrance, and a flag staff from which the ensign of the republic daily floated to the prairie breeze.¹⁸⁷

Having thus detailed the forts' interior structures, along with their functions and highly efficient placement, Chittenden then describes the areas immediately surrounding the forts:

Close to the fort, and itself protected by a strong enclosure, with a communication through the walls of the fort, there was often to be found a small field in which common vegetables were raised for the garrison.¹⁸⁸ Then there was always some protection for the horses which were the great object of the Indian forays. Sometimes the corral was outside and close to the fort; but in many cases the stock was brought within the walls. On the plains around the post there was scarcely ever absent the characteristic tent of the Indian, and at certain seasons they were scattered by hundreds in every direction. Near most of the larger river posts there was some spot selected where timber was abundant at which the pickets and lumber for the post were manufactured, the mackinaw boats and canoes built, and such other work done as the establishment required. The description[s] given above [apply]

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ For additional information about the gardens maintained at nineteenth-century fur trade posts see David Wishart, "Agriculture at the Trading Posts on the Upper Missouri Prior to 1843," *Agricultural History* 47 (January 1973): 57-62; and Charles E. Hanson, Jr., "The Indian Garden Project," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 2 (Fall 1966): 3-6; writing in this article about the period garden planted every year at the Museum of the Fur Trade, located just east of Chadron Nebraska, Hanson explains that "with these types of corn, beans, squash, pumpkins, tobacco, and melons, the garden provides a fair example of the century-old summer squaw garden on the High Plains. Preserving these crops and keeping the strains pure for the future has been an absorbing project for the museum staff. To us this has simply been another effort to accurately portray the 'West that Was.'"

only to the larger posts. There were besides a great number of smaller posts, which were intended for temporary occupancy only and were accordingly of a much less pretentious character. In many cases the resources of the traders did not permit of anything except the most primitive structures. Generally these posts or houses were simply log buildings, perhaps two or three huddled together, but often only one.¹⁸⁹

In a final passage that suggests one of the key factors for the material dependence of the Western Sioux on the American fur trade that developed beginning in the 1820s—specifically, their ability to acquire Euro-American trade goods at numerous locations throughout the Tetons' expanding domain—Chittenden explains:

In the Upper Missouri country the smaller posts were not independent establishments but were connected with some larger post from which they received supplies, equipment, and men and to which they sent the produce of their trade. [Fort] Union and [Fort] Pierre are the most prominent examples of the larger posts, to each of which there were connected a number of smaller establishments.¹⁹⁰

From its inception, the Columbia Fur Company's profits from its upper Missouri posts derived principally from the buffalo robe trade; and, beginning in the 1820s, one of its first concerns was to encourage the Indians' production of tanned buffalo robes. Prior to that decade, however, Missouri River traders had not traded for them in appreciable quantities once the French had quit making cloth out of buffalo wool in the final years of the eighteenth century; nor was there a domestic American market for them in New York or elsewhere. Even as late as 1826, the accounts of the American Fur Company's

¹⁸⁹ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 47-48. For an example of one of the more significant of the Missouri River forts, see the National Park Service's extraordinary reconstruction of old Fort Union—historically-accurate down to the smallest detail—on its original site at the mouth of the Yellowstone River; see also Paul L. Hedren, "Why We Reconstructed Fort Union," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 23 (August 1992): 349-354; for an example of one of the small posts referred to by Chittenden, see the Museum of the Fur Trade's outstanding restoration of Bordeaux Trading Post on Bordeaux Creek just east of Chadron, Nebraska; see also Charles E. Hanson, Jr. and Veronica Sue Walters, "The Chadron Creek Trading Post," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 12 (Summer 1976): 1-19.

¹⁹⁰ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 48.

Western Department indicate no purchases of buffalo robes, although Astor's associates at Stone, Bostwick and Company may have acquired enough robes to satisfy the local St. Louis market.¹⁹¹

The advent of the Columbia Fur Company on the upper Missouri, however, coincided with an expanding market for buffalo robes in the cities of the Atlantic seaboard; and that market continued to flourish until the near-extinction of the bison in the late nineteenth century. Charles E. Hanson, Jr., in his capacity as Director of the Museum of the Fur Trade, Chadron, Nebraska, and writing of the period from 1834 to 1849, laments that "it is still difficult for those with only a casual interest in the fur trade to realize that the trade we are talking about [i.e., fur trade activities in the Fort Laramie region] was primarily the [buffalo] robe trade. The medium of exchange was the winter skin of the cow buffalo expertly Indian-tanned and sent east for use as sleigh and carriage robes and bed coverings."¹⁹² And, fur trade scholar Paul L. Hedren somewhat more pointedly addresses several myths that have become deeply embedded in the popular imagination:

One of the unshakable modern beliefs about the American fur trade is that this was the near exclusive realm of a small band of hearty adventurers who, outfitted in gay, Indian-like regalia, plied keen mountain skills in chilled but captivatingly beautiful high valleys, trapping for beaver and other furs, and earning a modest profit that always was blindly dissipated at a boisterous summer rendezvous. Such a great embellishment is built upon kernels of truth, and right or wrong, stretched fact or not, it fires the public imagination. Sometimes, of course, popular notions get shattered by reality, both at the hands of historians who staff fur trade historic sites and museums, and by books like John E. Sunder's *The Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri, 1840-*

¹⁹¹ Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 416; here, too, the author claims that, at least prior to the middle of the 1820s, the "Indians were generally averse to killing these animals except for food, shelter, and clothing [and the] traders generally found the same reluctance of Indians to kill the bison beyond the need for food." Phillips later concedes, however, that the "attraction of trading goods and the Indians' great need for them doubtless broke down some of this feeling."

¹⁹² Charles E. Hanson, Jr., "Fur Trade Activities in the Fort Laramie Region," *Journal of the West* 26 (1987): 12.

1865. In the high-stakes but potentially high-return western fur trade, the steady demand for tanned bison robes supported fur men long after attention had shifted from beaver and mountaineers. Moreover, *this was an Indian trade, conducted at permanent posts on reliable transportation routes, with profits determined by the skillful negotiations of agents and clerks wearing white shirts, black cravats, and vests, not fringed buckskins* [emphasis added]. And nowhere was this enterprise more yielding than in the Upper Missouri country of Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana.¹⁹³

And, in the upper Missouri country referred to by Hedren, the Columbia Fur Company became the first of the major firms to exploit the bison robe trade, while Fort Tecumseh functioned as the company's operational center, and the Teton Sioux emerged as its most important producers and consumers.

IV

By May 1822, John Jacob Astor, American Fur Company agent Ramsay Crooks, and their political ally, Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, had at last succeeded in pressuring Congress to eliminate the United States factory system for trading with the Indians.¹⁹⁴ Established in 1796 both to ensure fair trading practices and to assert benign political influence with the nation's free-ranging Indian tribes, private trading companies had bitterly opposed the factory system.¹⁹⁵ In his survey of it, scholar Royal B. Way captures its tragic legacy in this incisive passage:

This early effort of the government to assume its social responsibilities, however, must always be commendable. The popular failure to support the government in its undertaking to control the heartless commercial individualism of its citizens is easily understood by any student of western American history, but is none the less regrettable. Because of it the government had to turn to new methods of dealing with the Indian question, to

¹⁹³ Sunder, *Fur Trade on the Upper Missouri*, ix-x.

¹⁹⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 17th Cong., 1st sess., 317, 361, 417.

¹⁹⁵ An excellent study of this unique enterprise appears in Royal B. Way, "The United States System for Trading with the Indians, 1796-1822," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 6 (September 1919): 220-235.

be met at every turn with the opposition of a mercenary public opinion which insisted, to a shameful degree, upon the prostitution of the Indian service for personal and partisan advantages.¹⁹⁶

With this lone element of public competition removed from the Indian trade, the American Fur Company moved swiftly to challenge the remaining privately-owned firms already operating on the upper Missouri.

Although the business maneuvers orchestrated by Crooks and Astor in the founding of the American Fur Company's St. Louis-based Western Department are outside the scope of this study, the fact that it firmly established itself in that city in 1822 is critical to understanding the Company's eventual domination of the upper Missouri fur trade.¹⁹⁷ For only from St. Louis could the Company have first penetrated and then gradually dominated that trade. The result of an administrative reorganization that shaped the upper Missouri fur trade for the duration of its existence, beginning in 1822, American Fur Company posts on the Missouri, lower Mississippi, and Illinois Rivers came under the purview of the Western Department directed by Samuel Abbott, while the Northern

¹⁹⁶ Way, "United States System for Trading with the Indians," 235.

¹⁹⁷ Nevertheless, excerpts of two letters written by John Jacob Astor's principal business agent in the American Fur Company, Ramsay Crooks, reveal much about his—and by extension, his company's—determination to dominate the industry. In a 30 November 1821 letter to Astor, Crooks wrote: "Preliminary arrangements are made for the prosecuting of the trade of St. Louis and the Missouri next season. Berthold and Chouteau with all their advantages, have suffered the firm of Stone and Co. to get the better of them more effectually than could have been believed, and as there is no injunction to the contrary, we may as well come in for a share of the business You now do no business with them worth attending to, and any scruples we have heretofore entertained in regard to embarking in their portion of the trade ought not to be indulged in any longer. Besides, their apathy or bad management in opposing stone begins to enlarge *his* views, and has already tempted him to commence a competition with our outposts on the lower Mississippi; so that, independent of other considerations, self defense will lead us into the field against him. I shall not, however, for the first year attempt much. My intention is merely to supply our lower Mississippi and Illinois river outfits from St. Louis, and tamper with the Missouri traders on a moderate scale, in order to secure them for the following year Without being very sanguine, I feel so favorably toward the undertaking as to make me enter it with great confidence of success." And again, on 23 April 1822, Crooks wrote to Astor: "I regret beyond measure that our fastidiousness about interfering with our St. Louis friends induced us to postpone until the present time any attempt to participate in the Missouri trade." Both letters reprinted in Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 320-321.

Department, managed by Robert Stuart from his headquarters at Michilimackinac, controlled all of the Great Lakes and upper Mississippi River posts.¹⁹⁸

In the years immediately following the establishment of its Western Department, the American Fur Company began to eliminate its competition by using either one or the other of two well-tested methods: the first involved negotiating with a rival firm for the purpose of eventually incorporating it, the second required that the AFC accept short-term losses to undercut industry prices and drive the opposition from the field. After 1823, the American Fur Company's competition on the upper Missouri primarily included the firms of Stone, Bostwick and Company (or David Stone and Company), the French Fur Company (or Berthold, Pratte and Chouteau; later, Bernard Pratte and Company), and the Columbia Fur Company (also referred to as the "English Company"). For these principal rivals on the upper Missouri, the American Fur Company employed the former method. As for the Missouri Fur Company, from 1823 until its demise, the firm limited its trade to tribes along the lower Missouri under the name Pilcher and Company—and Crooks, therefore, no longer considered it a threat—while new partners Andrew Henry and William H. Ashley confined their field operations to the Central Rockies and, thus, did not interfere or compete with trade along the upper Missouri.¹⁹⁹

Stone, Bostwick and Company succumbed first. In a letter dated 8 February 1823 Crooks wrote to Stuart from New York that, as of 1 April 1823, Stone, Bostwick and Company would be responsible for managing the Western Department at St. Louis for a period of three-and-one-half years, assisted by both Abbott and Crooks. Stuart, who was

¹⁹⁸ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 321; Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 402; Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 52; Oglesby, "The Fur Trade as Business," 119-127.

¹⁹⁹ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 324-325; Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 402; Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*; 52-53; Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 27-28, 318, 374; Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 12.

to “take charge of the Detroit Department,” subsequently wrote to David Stone welcoming his firm into the American Fur Company and suggesting that “if the junction had been formed five years ago, there would have been cause for mutual congratulations.”²⁰⁰

The agreement with Stone, Bostwick and Company expired on 1 October 1826, and, although Crooks extended it for one year, Astor, long dissatisfied with that company’s desultory performance and suspicious of Stone and Bostwick’s conduct, bought out its contract and transferred management of the Western Department to the French Fur Company of Bartholomew Berthold, Bernard Pratte, and Pierre Chouteau, Jr.—with Chouteau as chief agent—effective 1 January 1827.²⁰¹ Paul C. Phillips explains how Chouteau later earned the respect of both Crooks and Astor by either eliminating or absorbing into the Western Department all but one of its St. Louis rivals:

With Bernard Pratte was associated Pierre Chouteau, Jr., a third-generation descendant of the St. Louis Chouteaus. Chouteau, in his new role as trader and with the support of Pratte and his fortune, soon attained unusual prestige. It was he who managed trade with the Otos and Sioux, from whom he purchased great quantities of beaver skins and buffalo robes. So successful was he that during the seasons of 1825-26 and 1826-27, Pratte and Company obtained one-half the skins brought to St. Louis. With the rise of this company, the other small concerns that had been trading at St. Louis passed out of existence. Some of the members joined Pratte’s organization and became prominent in affairs of the Western Department.²⁰²

By late 1827, therefore, the only serious threat to Crooks and Astor’s interests remaining on the upper Missouri was the Columbia Fur Company with its principal establishment at Fort Tecumseh. In a letter to Ramsay Crooks dated as early as 1826, Robert Stuart

²⁰⁰ Quoted in Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 325.

²⁰¹ A fine account of this episode is in Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 402-406.

²⁰² Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 406. See also Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 325; Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 13; Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 53; Stan Hoig, *The Chouteaus: First Family of the Fur Trade* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 164-166.

highlighted the threat and then suggested one possible way to neutralize it: “McKenzie & Co. [Columbia Fur Company] damage us \$5000 annually. I do not know how much to offer them to get out for others will come in. Why not employ them as clerks & furnish them goods & give them a district?”²⁰³ Crooks eventually adopted Stuart’s solution.

V

Sioux winter counts for the year 1823-24 record the episode that ushered in a new era in the American fur trade—the Arikara campaign of 1823. Its consequences were many: it reinforced the good relations that had developed between the Western Sioux and American fur traders; it precipitated the simultaneous expansion of both groups further west; and it implanted feelings of contempt among the Indians for the United States government and its army that persisted for decades. The counts tell of “whites and Dakotas fight[ing] the Rees [Arikaras]”; of “white soldiers [making] their first appearance in the region”; and, that “United States troops fought Ree [Arikara] Indians.”²⁰⁴ White accounts of the fight contain more detail, but are no more accurate.

The United States army first engaged in combat west of the Mississippi River in this campaign. The events leading up to it began in May 1823 with the arrival before the Missouri River Arikara villages of a trapping and trading expedition commanded by St. Louis entrepreneur William H. Ashley. Although he suspected that the Arikaras might be in a vengeful mood following the recent loss of two of their warriors following a raid downriver on the Missouri Fur Company trading post for the Sioux, Ashley attempted to trade with the Arikaras for horses to carry his men on to the Yellowstone country.

Ignoring the suspicions of seasoned trapper Edward Rose, Ashley negotiated with the

²⁰³ Stuart to Crooks, 26 September 1826, American Fur Company “Letter Books,” 3 vols., State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, 3: 372; quoted in Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 413.

²⁰⁴ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 111-112; Walker, *Lakota Society*, 135.

Indians throughout the next day. But, at dawn on 2 June the Arikaras attacked his men without warning and, in fifteen minutes of fighting, killed all of the trappers' horses and either killed or wounded twenty-three men. Ashley and the survivors retreated downstream.²⁰⁵

With his remaining men safely encamped on an island in the Missouri, Ashley dispatched Jedediah Smith to the Yellowstone to inform the general's partner, Andrew Henry, of the disaster; Ashley also sent a message to Indian agent Benjamin O'Fallon at Council Bluffs for reinforcements. Colonel Henry Leavenworth, commander of the troops at Fort Atkinson, organized a relief force of 220 infantrymen, 2 six-pounder cannon, several swivel guns, and 3 keelboats and headed upriver on 22 June. Meanwhile, O'Fallon had appointed Joshua Pilcher sub-agent for both the Yankton and Teton Sioux during the crisis. Pilcher, still trying to recover from the shock of the Jones and Immel catastrophe, outfitted two keelboats, added a five-and-a-half inch howitzer from the fort, and overtook Leavenworth on 27 June.²⁰⁶

After a period of reorganization at Fort Recovery, the self-styled Missouri Legion, comprising Ashley's survivors, augmented now by the arrival of Henry and his men, Pilcher' trappers, Leavenworth's command, and roughly eight hundred Yankton and Teton Sioux—making a total of eleven hundred men—finally approached the Arikara villages on 9 August. Although the Arikaras fielded anywhere from six to eight hundred fighting men, they prepared no extraordinary defense measures other than to take refuge

²⁰⁵ Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 50-58; Morgan, *The West of William H. Ashley*, 24-56; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 263-266; Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 42; John C. Ewers, ed., *Adventures of Zenas Leonard, Fur Trader* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), xi; Cox, "A World Together, A World Apart," ?; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 36.

²⁰⁶ Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 59-62; Morgan, *The West of William H. Ashley*, 24-56; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 2: 584-588; Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 42-43; Ewers, *Zenas Leonard*, xi; Cox, "A World Together, A World Apart," ?; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 36.

inside their fortified towns. The Sioux attacked first, suffering two men killed and seven wounded, but killing thirteen of their enemies who had sortied out into the open. With the rest of the Missouri Legion approaching, the Arikaras retreated inside their villages while the Sioux contented themselves with raiding the Arikaras' cornfields along the river.²⁰⁷

The Missouri Legion, minus its Indian auxiliaries, resumed the attack the next morning supported by artillery. The Arikaras, however, put up a surprisingly stiff defense against long odds, a defense that discouraged Leavenworth enough that he suspended the attack and offered to parley. Over the course of the next two days, Leavenworth negotiated a treaty with the Arikaras requiring only that they return Ashley's property taken in the fight on 2 June and recognize American sovereignty on the Missouri.

The campaign thus ended badly for all parties involved. Ashley and Pilcher and their men, believing the siege should have ended favorably—thereby resurrecting their fortunes—bitterly denounced Leavenworth as inept and a coward. The Arikaras interpreted Leavenworth's moderation as weakness and continued thereafter to interfere with Americans on the Missouri, a situation that persisted even though continued harassment by the Tetons eventually forced the Arikaras to abandon their upper Missouri villages and endure a twelve-year hiatus among their southern relatives, the Skidi Pawnees. And the Sioux, thoroughly disgusted with the army's dismal performance, afterward felt nothing but contempt for the United States government and its armed forces, an attitude that would persist for decades.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 64-72; Morgan, *The West of William H. Ashley*, 24-56; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 2: 585-588; Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 44-46; Ewers, *Zenas Leonard*, xi; Cox, "A World Together, A World Apart," ?; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 37-38.

²⁰⁸ Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 73-77; Morgan, *The West of William H. Ashley*, 24-56; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 2: 588-600; Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 47-49; Ewers, *Zenas Leonard*, xi.; Cox, "A World Together, A World Apart," ?; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 37-38.

VI

While American fur companies were largely absent from the upper Missouri country throughout the five-to-seven-year period immediately following the Treaty of Ghent, French entrepreneurs from St. Louis, operating according to well-established patterns dating back to the eighteenth century, moved swiftly to take advantage of that interruption in the American fur trade. Beginning with the post on Cedar Island founded by Registre Loisel in 1809 until the construction of Fort LaFramboise on the Fort Pierre Plain in 1817, the French dedicated their efforts to securing the Teton trade in furs—trading initially for the smaller and finer furs such as beaver, otter, mink, and muskrat and, later, for buffalo robes as the newly-mounted Western Sioux occupied the rich buffalo ranges west of the Missouri River. And, enterprising French fur traders continued to participate actively in the upper Missouri fur trade as the Americans struggled to reestablish themselves there.

Although Manuel Lisa's death in 1820 had briefly suspended the Missouri Fur Company's return to active operations along the upper Missouri, several favorable political and economic developments beginning in 1819 encouraged his able successor, Joshua Pilcher, to continue Lisa's initiatives, albeit with mixed success. Pilcher constructed two new fixed posts at the mouths of the Bighorn and White Rivers that reopened trade with the Crows and Tetons, respectively, and sent several hundred trappers into the beaver-rich Three Forks country. Unfortunately, however, a number of unanticipated setbacks—including the rise of stiff competition, the death of two of his most trusted lieutenants, and the loss of thousands of dollars worth of furs—finally forced Pilcher to dissolve the Missouri Fur Company. Following so closely upon Lisa's death,

Pilcher's decision marked the end of one era in the American fur trade and the beginning of another.

One of the more prosperous of the new firms on the upper Missouri proved to be the Columbia Fur Company. Created in 1822 by a group of experienced traders who suddenly found themselves unemployed following the forced merger of the Hudson's Bay and Northwest Companies, the Columbia Fur Company moved quickly to capture the upper Missouri buffalo robe trade with seven fixed posts anchored by Fort Tecumseh located at the mouth of Bad (Teton) River. The Western Sioux soon became the company's most important trading partners.

In contrast to the Rocky Mountain fur trade that, at least throughout the 1820s and 1830s, depended on harvesting beaver and on the mountain rendezvous, the principal items of exchange in the upper Missouri country during the same period were buffalo robes and hides—commodities produced almost exclusively by the Western Sioux and the other buffalo-hunting tribes of the north, central, and southern Great Plains. The buffalo robe trade was, therefore, an *Indian trade* that trade depended upon both the Indian hunters' ability to procure enough bison to exceed the number of animals required merely for subsistence and the women's skill at tanning the robes in a manner that both preserved and enhanced their value for trade.

The nineteenth-century buffalo robe trade, therefore, reinforced a gendered division of labor that had prevailed in Teton society from the time of their first buffalo hunts: men found and killed the animals; women skinned and dressed the hides and fashioned all of the many articles derived from the bison that both sustained their nomadic lifestyle on the

plains and effected a revolution in their political economy.²⁰⁹ By the nineteenth century, that economy reflected profound changes from the Tetons' eighteenth-century, pedestrian modes of procurement and production.

And to accommodate the nineteenth-century robe and hide trade, fur companies constructed larger, permanent forts such as Fort Tecumseh according to a set of semi-standardized features that included the following: rectangular ground plans, wood or adobe walls, pickets and blockhouses for defense, double doors to control entry, houses, barracks, shops, and storehouses, and gardens, corrals, lumber and boat yards. Most of the smaller posts, however, might consist of no more than a log building or two in which to conduct the trade.

But, then in the spring of 1823, ambitious newcomer to the upper Missouri fur trade, William H. Ashley, having led a relief expedition upriver from St. Louis and finding himself and his men attacked by the Arikaras opposite their villages, retired downstream with the loss of both men and materiel to await assistance. A contingent of United States infantry from Fort Atkinson—styled the Missouri Legion, commanded by Colonel Henry Leavenworth, and augmented by a sizeable party of trappers and hundreds of Teton and Yankton Sioux warriors under their sub-agent Joshua Pilcher—ultimately reinforced

²⁰⁹ John C. Ewers, *Teton Dakota Ethnology and History* (Berkeley, CA: National Park Service, 1938), 13-15; here too the author explains that “in no other section of the world has the culture of a people been so strongly moulded by the presence of a single species of animal as in the Plains of North America. The buffalo not only furnished the Indians with shelter, food, clothing, and many other articles in their material culture; it held a permanent place in the mythology, religion, and ceremonial organization of the plains tribes;” see also Walker, *Lakota Society*, 40; in this latter volume, Oglala winter-count keeper No Ears confirms the Tetons’ gendered division of labor and addresses ownership of the carcasses and the articles manufactured from them: “When the men had killed many buffalo they returned to camp singing the buffalo song. Then the women sang the song and hurried to the carcasses and skinned them. They skinned one half and cut the skin in two along the back. Then they turned the carcass over and skinned the other half. All the women went out to skin and cut up the carcasses, but the skin of a carcass belonged to the woman of the man who killed it. This could be known by the arrow. The meat was divided among all in the camp. The one who killed a carcass could claim the liver and the tongue and the brains. The women dried and tanned the skins and they belonged to them. They made tipis and robes of the skins and they made dresses and leggings and moccasins of the skins of the young animals.”

Ashley and carried the fight to the Arikaras. In that fight, the first for the army west of the Mississippi River, it failed to distinguish itself and set a precedent—with dire consequences—for its reputation among the Teton Sioux. As for Ashley and his party, disheartened by the difficulties inherent in proceeding by boat up the Missouri—particularly the lack of support from the army—they purchased horses from the Indians and, in a bold move that freed them from the necessity of river navigation and fixed posts, proceeded overland toward the central Rockies and fame.

The following year, Joshua Pilcher answered a series of questions before Congress regarding the state of the fur trade in the upper Missouri country. Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, Chairman of the Committee on Indian Affairs, had earlier forwarded three questions to Secretary of War, John C. Calhoun: (1) “What would be the probable expense of moving a military post, of competent strength, to some point between the mouth of the Yellow Stone River and the Falls of the Missouri?” (2) “What would be the probable amount of appropriation necessary to hold treaties, for the purpose of establishing relations of trade and friendship with the Indian tribes beyond the Mississippi?” (3) “Whether additional agencies are necessary among those tribes; and if so, how many?”²¹⁰ The details of both the Arikara campaign on the Missouri and Blackfoot depredations in the Three Forks region had evidently roused government officials to action; and, Pilcher’s testimony would, they hoped, provide the information necessary to choose the appropriate *courses* of action.

Pilcher first established his credibility with the committee: “Having been engaged in the Indian trade for the last four years, on the Missouri river, and its tributary waters, I

²¹⁰ Senator Thomas H. Benton, Chairman of the Committee on Indian Affairs, Senate Chamber, to Secretary of War, John C. Calhoun, 11 February 1824, 18th Cong., 1st sess., serial set vol. 91, sess. vol. no. 3-S. Doc. 56, 1.

have had an opportunity of becoming acquainted personally, and by information to be relied upon, with most of the Indian tribes in all that region beyond the state of Missouri as far as the Rocky Mountains.”²¹¹ He then proceeded to name the following tribes with which he had become “acquainted personally” or had “information to be relied upon”: Kansas, Otos, Missouris, Pawnees, Omahas, Poncas, Yanktons, Tetons, Saones, Oglalas, Hunkpapas, Yanktonais, Cheyennes, Arikaras, Mandans, Hidatsas, Arapahos, Kiowas, Crows, Assiniboins, and Blackfoot. Despite the fact that Pilcher estimated the population of all the Sioux in the upper Missouri country at somewhere between 10-12,000 individuals, he mentioned them only briefly; undoubtedly because, by 1824, they had become allied with the United States government and caused little or no trouble.²¹² Not surprisingly, however, considering the hostility of the Blackfoot and Arikaras toward American fur traders, much of his testimony focused on those two tribes.²¹³

Pilcher continued his testimony with a prescient statement that predicted the American fur trade’s future financial returns:

I would further beg to be indulged in making a few statements, to impress the committee with an idea of the value of the Indian trade in the United States. The returns of licenses show, that upwards of \$600,000 was embarked, last year, in the trade; and, if extended into the Rocky Mountains, I should suppose that it would employ a capital of three times the amount now employed in *that* trade, for an indefinite term of years to come.²¹⁴

Pilcher then concluded his testimony with statements that, indirectly, affirmed just how dependent the Indians of the upper Missouri country had become on an incredible

²¹¹ “Mr. Pilcher’s Answers to Questions, put to him by the Committee of the Senate on Indian Affairs,” 18th Cong., 1st sess., serial set 91, sess. vol. no. 3-S. Doc. 56, 9.

²¹² “Pilcher’s Answers to Questions,” 9-10.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 10-15

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

array of Euro-American trade goods and the blacksmiths' shops necessary to manufacture and repair metal trade goods:

Almost the whole of the articles necessary for this trade can be made in the United States. They consist of hardware, comprehending light guns, knives, hatchets, axes, hoes, lances, battle-axes, and beaver traps; cottons, comprehending checks, stripes, coarse calicoes, handkerchiefs, &c.; woolens, comprehending coarse cloths, blankets, flannels; to which may be added, tobacco, powder, lead, and many other articles of smaller value. The company of which I am a member, has always kept several blacksmiths' shops in operation on the Missouri, for the manufacture of some of the above-mentioned articles; and at the time of the commencement of hostilities, had one at the Mandans, one at the Big Bend of the Missouri, and two forges in the neighborhood of the Council Bluffs. The woolen and cotton goods particularly, can be made by American manufacturers, of a quality equally as well suited to the Indian trade as British goods, with which the Indians are at present supplied.²¹⁵

²¹⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

“COMPETITION, CONSOLIDATION, AND EXPANSION:

LURE OF THE CENTRAL ROCKIES AND THE RISE OF THE COMPANY, 1824-1832”

I

The field strategies implemented in the wake of the Arikara campaign of 1823 by the fur trade partnership of Andrew Henry and William H. Ashley directly led both to the founding of Fort Laramie in 1834 and to the permanent occupation of the Platte River valley by the westernmost Teton Sioux from 1834 to 1854. Yet, despite the significance of Andrew Henry’s historical legacy to the American fur trade and the exploration of the trans-Mississippi West, relatively little is known of his early life. The documentary record for his younger years does, however, suggest the later man of action who would make such a remarkable impact on the history of the American fur trade.

Henry was born in York County, Pennsylvania,²¹⁶ between 1773 and 1775 to George and Margaret Young Henry, devoted parents who, among other strictures, insisted that their son learned to read and write. Their solicitude eventually went too far, however, as young Andrew left home permanently at the age of eighteen in protest of his parents’

²¹⁶ Although both Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 249; and Louis Houck, *History of Missouri*, 3 vols. (Chicago: R.R. Donnelley & Sons, 1908), 3: 95 record Fayette County, Pennsylvania as Henry’s place of birth, Henry biographers Linda Harper White and Fred R. Gowans argue that York County is more likely as Henry’s 1805 marriage license “lists him as a native of York County;” see Andrew Henry Papers, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis (hereafter Henry Papers); White and Gowans, “Traders to Trappers,” 1: 60.

objections to his intended marriage.²¹⁷ Nothing whatever is known of his activities for the next five years. What is certain is that from 1798 to 1800 Henry lived in Nashville, Tennessee, the city where he may have met Ashley for the first time. Henry spent two of the next three years in Ste. Genevieve in upper Louisiana, returning for one of those years to Nashville.²¹⁸

Physically imposing, Henry was also a spiritual man of good character and wide interests. Chittenden describes him as “tall and slender, yet of commanding presence, with dark hair and light eyes inclined to blue. He was fond of reading and played the violin well. He was not a member of any church, but was a believer in the Christian religion. He was evidently a man of acts rather than words and no letter or recorded expression of his has come down to us.”²¹⁹ Henry was a Mason who belonged to Louisiana Lodge, No. 109. A principled man with strong convictions and high ideals, he once confided to a young miner who worked in “Henry’s Diggings” that “honor and self respect were more to be prized than anything else.”²²⁰ Henry’s integrity was above reproach, and he endeavored to comply with all of his many personal and commercial obligations.²²¹

Henry’s business associations prior to his final partnership with William H. Ashley, although they provided him with a wealth of practical experience, ultimately proved to be

²¹⁷ Interview with Mrs. George Henry, Andrew Henry’s daughter-in-law, 1 August 1906, Henry Papers; White and Gowans, “Traders to Trappers,” 1: 60.

²¹⁸ Notes by Adella Breckinridge Moore, Henry Papers; Dale L. Morgan, ed., “The Diary of William H. Ashley,” *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society* 11 (October 1954), 11; White and Gowans, “Traders to Trappers,” 1: 60; Richard M. Clokey, *William H. Ashley: Enterprise and Politics in the Trans-Mississippi West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 10.

²¹⁹ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, I: 250.

²²⁰ Interview with Mrs. George Henry, Henry Papers.

²²¹ Rufus Easton, St. Louis, to unknown party, 2 November 1815, J.B.C. Lucas Collection, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis (hereafter Lucas Collection; White and Gowans, “Traders to Trappers,” 1: 61.

financial disappointments. By 1806 at the latest, Henry entered into his first partnership with Ashley—a joint purchase of 640 acres of land containing a lead mine called “Henry’s Diggings” by the partners—in Washington County, Missouri. A year later, however, Ashley, intrigued more by manufacturing gunpowder than mining lead, sold his half of the property to Henry.²²² In 1807, he became a second lieutenant in the Cavalry Company of the District of Ste. Genevieve, eventually attaining the rank of colonel.²²³ Henry’s fur trade career began in earnest in 1809 with his acceptance as a full partner in the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company.²²⁴ His leadership qualities apparently surfaced early as the company entrusted him from the outset with command of trappers in the field.²²⁵ Henry’s experiences with the Missouri Fur Company from 1809 to 1812 convinced him that trapping in the mountains would yield greater profits than trading with Indians on the Missouri River.²²⁶ In July 1812, Henry and Ashley both enlisted in the volunteer army. Ashley subsequently formed a regiment—the Sixth—in which he served as its lieutenant colonel, while Henry became a major in the same regiment and commanded its first battalion. In January 1815, the House of Representatives of the Missouri Territory

²²² Clokey, *William H. Ashley*, 12-15; Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 26-27; White and Gowans, “Traders to Trappers,” 1: 60.

²²³ Morgan, *West of William H. Ashley*, xxxiv; White and Gowans, “Traders to Trappers,” 1: 60-61.

²²⁴ In a reference to Henry’s full partnership, Manuel Lisa’s biographer Richard E. Oglesby in *Manuel Lisa*, pp. 68-69, explains that “I have seen three copies of the Articles of Agreement, no two of which are alike in naming the members, although they do not differ in the body of the agreement. One is in the St. Louis Missouri Fur Company Ledger Book, 1809-1812, MHS [Missouri Historical Society] apparently kept in St. Louis by William Clark, and into which he had copied the communications received from the partners upstream. The second is in the Missouri Fur Company Ledger Book, 1812-1814, Vol. XXX, William Clark MSS, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. The third copy is in French: Articles of Agreement, Mar. 3, 1809, Chouteau Collection MHS. The second contains the interlineation of the name Dennis Fitzhugh, but has no signature for him. The first nowhere contains the name of Andrew Henry, but has the interlineation of Dennis Fitzhugh, and his copied signature as well. The French copy is unsigned, and contains neither the name of Dennis Fitzhugh nor that of Andrew Henry. This indicates that Henry was a late-comer to the deliberations, but was certainly one of the partners.” See also Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 138; Philips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 262; White and Gowans, “Traders to Trappers,” 1: 61.

²²⁵ Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 70; White and Gowans, “Traders to Trappers,” 1: 61.

²²⁶ Oglesby, *Manuel Lisa*, 188; White and Gowans, “Traders to Trappers,” 1: 64; Morgan, *West of William H. Ashley*, xxxvi.

nominated him to the territorial Legislative Council.²²⁷ Henry's financial situation worsened considerably beginning with the War of 1812. From 1816 to 1821, he found himself involved in thirty court cases stemming from his habit of personally guaranteeing the debts of others. It was a habit that eventually resulted in his accumulation of an enormous debt totaling over \$12,000—an obligation that finally forced him to abandon lead mining in favor of farming fertile soil along the Black River in Washington County, Missouri.²²⁸ By 1821, opportunities for American fur traders in the upper Missouri country had improved so much that the fur trade once again appealed to him as both the means to pay off his debts and the chance once again to participate in an endeavor at which he had previously excelled.²²⁹ As Ashley scholar Dale L. Morgan has observed, Henry was the one “partner in the old Missouri Fur Company [who] had penetrated to the remotest sources of the Missouri and even crossed the continental divide . . . to build a post. If anyone was capable of re-establishing the American fur trade on the fabulously rich waters of the high Missouri, Andrew Henry appeared to be that man.”²³⁰

In common with his more obscure partner, much of Ashley's early life remains a mystery; what little is known comes from a memorial address given in St. Louis by the Rev. W.G. Elliot, Jr., shortly after Ashley's death in 1838:

Gen. Wm. H. Ashley was born in Virginia, in Chesterfield county, and the town of Manchester, A.D. 1785. Of his parentage and early life we know almost nothing, except that when he was a child, his family moved to

²²⁷ Carter and Bloom, *Territorial Papers*, 14: 499-500; Houck, *History of Missouri*, 3: 106-107; Kate L. Gregg, “War of 1812 on the Missouri Frontier, Part II, *Missouri Historical Review* 33 (January 1939): 187, 190; White and Gowans, “Andrew Henry,” 64.

²²⁸ A.C. Dunn vs. Henry and Terry, Bogy Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis; Rufus Easton, St. Louis, to unknown party, 2 November 1815, Lucas Collection; Francois Vallé, Ste. Genevieve, to Andrew Henry, 8 April 1813, Ida M. Schaefer Collection, Ste. Genevieve Papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis; interview with Mrs. George Henry, Henry Papers; Clokey, *William H. Ashley*, 63; White and Gowans, “Andrew Henry,” 64-65.

²²⁹ White and Gowans, “Traders to Trappers,” 2: 56.

²³⁰ Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 27.

Powhattan county, where he resided until he came West. He seems to have had very few advantages of education growing up—as boys in the old dominion are often permitted to do,—without any particular trade or profession, and left to his own resources and ingenuity, wherewith to carve out his fortune in after life. Whatever he learnt, in boyhood and youth, was the result of his own seeking, and consisted rather in a practical knowledge of men and things, than in an acquaintance with books; and even his experimental knowledge must have been of a desultory nature, in consequence of his not having his attention directed to any one definite pursuit. It is indeed stated that he was for a short time engaged in one of the mechanic arts . . . But the connexion . . . must have been brief, for we find that, in about his 20th year, he emigrated from his native State to *the West, which was then, as it is now, the great field for enterprise, and offered almost irresistible allurements to young men of the Eastern States* [emphasis added].²³¹

By 1805, Ashley had settled near Andrew Henry in Ste. Genevieve, where the two men soon became friends.²³² In December of that year, Ashley served as witness to Henry's marriage to Marie Villars—a marriage that, for reasons unknown, lasted a mere three weeks.²³³ Morgan describes Ashley as being of “slight of frame and of medium height, with a thin face, prominent nose and jutting chin, not especially striking in his appearance yet a man of distinguished presence. Intelligent and forceful, he inspired confidence and respect, and was early made a captain in the Ste. Genevieve militia and a justice of the peace for his district.”²³⁴

²³¹ W.G. Eliot, [Jr.], *An Address on the Life and Character of the Late Hon. Wm. H. Ashley: Delivered in St. Louis, Mo., June 6th, 1838, at the Request of the Committee of Arrangements* (St. Louis: Bulletin Printing Office [1838]); quoted in Morgan, *West of William H. Ashley*, xv. For a concise overview of Ashley's life and career, also see Harvey L. Carter, “William H. Ashley,” in *Mountain Men and Fur Traders of the Far West: Eighteen Biographical Sketches*, ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, selected, with an introduction by Harvey L. Carter, 79-90 (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1982).

²³² Carter and Bloom, *Territorial Papers*, 13: 140; Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 26.

²³³ White and Gowans, “Traders to Trappers,” 1: 60; Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 26; Walter Bond Douglas, ed., *Three Years Among the Indians and Mexicans*, by Thomas James, with notes and biographical sketches by Walter Bond Douglas (Waterloo, IL: War eagle Press, 1846; reprint, St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society, 1916), 265, n. 7.

²³⁴ Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 26; see also John F. Darby, *Personal Recollections* (St. Louis, 1880), 220-221; J.T. Scharf, *History of Saint Louis City and County* (Philadelphia, 1883), 196-197.

From 1806 to 1822, Ashley engaged in several questionable business ventures, while simultaneously furthering careers in both the territorial militia and Missouri territorial and state politics. Commissioned lieutenant colonel of the Sixth Regiment of Washington County in 1814, by 1819, he was the regiment's colonel, and, by 1822, he had become its brigadier general. In the wake of his brief lead-mining partnership with Henry beginning in 1806, Ashley manufactured powder and shot, later engaging in both surveying and real estate promotion. Shortly after Ashley had presided over the first session of the Missouri Senate, he became the new state's first lieutenant governor in the same election in which his friend, Thomas Hart Benton, became Missouri's governor. Although Ashley's political fortunes steadily improved throughout this period, his business ventures prior to entering the fur trade were largely financial disasters that left him "nearly one hundred thousand dollars in debt" and nearly bankrupt.²³⁵

The last of the business partnerships formed by Henry and Ashley dates from the summer of 1821²³⁶—an entrepreneurial arrangement destined to exploit the previously

²³⁵ Harrison Clifford Dale, *The Explorations of William H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith, 1822-1829*, rev. ed., with the original journals ed. Harris Clifford Dale, introduction by James P. Ronda (1918; reprint, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1991), 61-62; as evidence of Ashley's financial woes, Dale, in n. 104, p. 62, cites the following sources: "Letter of Thomas Forsyth to Lewis Cass, October 24, 1831, in U.S. Senate, *Executive documents*, 22 cong., II, no. 90. Compare Letter of N.J. Wyeth to Messrs. Hall, Tucker, and Williams, Cambridge, Mass., November 8, 1833, in Young, *Sources of the History of Oregon*, I, 73. Wyeth says that Ashley was 'bankrupt but a person of credit.'" See also Morgan, *West of William H. Ashley*, xvi-xvii.

²³⁶ In Morgan, *West of William H. Ashley*, xxix, the author dates the Henry-Ashley fur trade partnership from September 1821, noting that "[t]he opening of the Ashley era is dated for us by a letter written on September 9, 1821 by Thomas Hempstead, the Missouri Fur Company's Acting Partner in St. Louis, to Joshua Pilcher, Acting Partner on the Missouri River: 'Mr Henry Gov Ashley and others have formed a party to go to the Mountains. they layed off their goods at Mr Bostwicks yesterday in part, they calculate to start next march or April they take from Bostwick about six thousand Dollars worth of Goods beads silver ware & [c] they have no connection with the other Company [Pratte, Chouteau, & Co.], and both Mr Henry and Gen Ashley informed me, that they would not have any thing to do with them, as they believed them not honest men for the mountains.' Within Hempstead's sight and hearing, more than five months before Ashley's famous want ad in the St. Louis newspapers summoned so many men to their destiny, Ashley and his partner, Andrew Henry had set in motion the machinery that would power their initial advance up the Missouri River." Chittenden, however, claims that "[t]he beginning of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company may be definitely traced to [an] announcement, which appeared in the *Missouri Republican* of St. Louis, March 20, 1822;" see Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 161.

untapped wealth in furs of the Central Rocky Mountains, to restructure many of the field strategies utilized by American fur traders from 1825 to 1840, and to lead indirectly to the permanent occupation of the Platte River Valley by the westernmost bands of Teton Sioux. In assessing their enterprise, fur trade scholar Richard M. Clokey concludes:

The partnership was an ideal blending of skills and experience, reinforced by twenty years of friendship. Although the precise terms of agreement were never made public, it was clear that Henry was to be the partner in the field. His historic trip across the Rocky Mountains to the Columbia River and back during the winter of 1810-11 endowed him with unexcelled knowledge of the region and revealed an inherent courage and ingenuity at the same time. By the summer of 1821, Henry was ready to gamble everything on a return up the Missouri and his ten-year-old dream of fortune in the fur trade. Ashley's role in the partnership was equally suited to his capabilities, for he was to manage the details of organization, financing, and marketing in St. Louis and the East. He had never before been involved in the fur trade, but his years of merchandising lead in southeast Missouri had not only acquainted him with the problems of supply, transportation, and marketing in the wilderness but also taught him to analyze the business of resource development. By June or July of 1821 the partners had apparently completed their plans and began the necessary preparations to put them into action. Trial and error over the succeeding years would force some revision, and serious setbacks would threaten failure several times, but within five years the two men would revolutionize the business of gathering furs as thoroughly as had any men since Europeans first introduced it in North America more than two centuries before.²³⁷

The innovations alluded to by Clokey include the exclusive reliance on trappers under contract to Henry and Ashley, the abandonment of fixed trading posts, and their substitution by the rendezvous system of procurement and supply.

The most famous want ad in the history of the American fur trade appeared in the 13 February 1822 edition of the St. Louis *Missouri Gazette & Public Advertiser*:

TO

²³⁷ Richard M. Clokey, *William H. Ashley: Enterprise and Politics in the Trans-Mississippi West* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 62-64.

Enterprising Young Men

The subscriber wishes to engage ONE HUNDRED MEN, to ascend the river Missouri 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 to the subscriber at St. Louis.

*Wm. H. Ashley*²³⁸

As there was no shortage of “enterprising young men” in the city of St. Louis in 1822, the response to the ad was prompt, many of the respondents eager to leave their relatively comfortable circumstances for the hazards of the wilderness.²³⁹ The partners had decided to make for the Three Forks of the Missouri—an area overflowing with a “wealth of furs not surpassed by the mines of Peru”—and dividing their party so that forty or fifty men might travel overland while the rest would proceed upriver by keelboat.²⁴⁰ Henry

²³⁸ In its entirety, the ad ran in the *Missouri Gazette* (St. Louis), 13 February- 6 March 1822; in the successor to the *Gazette*, the *Missouri Republican* (St. Louis), 20-27 March 1822; and in the *St. Louis Enquirer* (St. Louis), 26 February- 23 March 1822.

²³⁹ Henry and Ashley employed most of their “enterprising young men” as beaver hunters—the men who, as Morgan, in *Jedediah Smith*, p. 29, explains, “would revolutionize the Western fur trade. The companies would always require hired servants, *engagés*, but the free trapper became the rock on which the fur trade of the West was built.” Thomas Hempstead, acting partner in St. Louis of the Missouri Fur Company, expressed his shock at Henry and Ashley’s innovative new field strategy in a 3 April 1822 letter to Joshua Pilcher upriver on the lower Missouri: “Gen^l Ashley’s company starts this day with one boat and one hundred and fifty men by land and water they ascend the Missouri river to the Yellow Stone where they build a Fort the men are all generally speaking untried and of every description and nation, when you see them you will judge for yourself, the Company will be conducted by honourable men I think, but I expect they will wish nothing more of us than to unite in case of difficulty. my opinion as regards the manner that those men are employed might differ with yours, but I think it will not, they are engaged in three different ways I am told the hunters and trapers are to have one half of the furs &c they make the Company furnish them with Gun Powder Lead &c &c, they only are to help to build the fort & defend it in case of necessity, the boat hands are engaged as we engage ours, the Clerks are also the same but of those are the fewest number. I do think when men are engaged upon the principals of the above, that regularity, subordination, system, which is highly necessary to have on that river should be the first object of any company to establish but pray let me ask you in what way it can be done under those circumstances Should the hunters wish after they get above to leave them in a mass in what way will they prevent them, this kind of business of making hunters will take some time and much trouble;” reprinted in Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 29.

²⁴⁰ *St. Louis Enquirer* (St. Louis), 13 April 1822; Donald McKay Frost, *Notes on General Ashley, the Overland Trail, and South Pass* (Worcester, 1945); in Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 29. See also “Licenses to

commanded this three-year trapping expedition, working all “the streams on both sides of the mountains in that region and very likely penetrat[ing] to the mouth of the Columbia.”²⁴¹

Henry departed St. Louis for the mountains on 3 April 1822 with the first of two keelboats that the partners procured.²⁴² The upriver journey was relatively uneventful until after the expedition passed the Mandan villages. With Henry himself aboard the keelboat, it entered a stretch of the river where the channel carried it toward the far shore, effectively separating Henry and the boatmen from the land-borne members of the expedition. Seizing their opportunity, a number of Assiniboin Indians approached the shore party professing friendship but then unexpectedly made off with fifty of their horses. Although he had initially planned to press on to the Three Forks and raise a fort there before the onset of cold weather, the loss of the horses forced Henry to build it instead at the mouth of the Yellowstone. It was there that the expedition eventually spent the winter. Meanwhile, the hunters systematically trapped the numerous streams in the vicinity of the new post—named Fort Henry in honor of Ashley’s senior partner—while Henry acquired more horses.²⁴³

The second of Henry and Ashley’s two keelboats, the *Enterprize*, embarked on 8 May 1822 under the command of Daniel S.D. Moore. On a windy day later that month,

Trade with the Indians, 1822,” in U.S. Senate *Executive Documents*, 18th Cong., 1st sess., no. I; *American State Papers*, Indian Affairs, 2: 455; Dale, *Explorations of William H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith*, 64.

²⁴¹ *St. Louis Enquirer* (St. Louis); in Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 162.

²⁴² Morgan correctly fixes the date of Henry’s departure by citing both Hempstead’s 3 April letter to Pilcher (see n. 24 above) as well as the 3 April 1822 edition of the *St. Louis Enquirer* which reported the event; see Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 28-29. Dale incorrectly claims 8 April as the date of Henry’s departure, an error Chittenden repeats by placing the date at “about April 15;” both authors also mistakenly combine the 8 May 1822 departure of Henry and Ashley’s second keelboat, the *Enterprize*, under the command of one Daniel S.D. Moore, with that of the first; see Dale, *Explorations of William H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith*, 64; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 262.

²⁴³ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 262; Dale, *Explorations of William H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith*, 64-65.

approximately twenty miles below Fort Osage, the boat's mast unexpectedly snagged an overhanging tree and, turning broadside to the current, capsized with the loss of \$10,000 of freight; with great difficulty, the crew made it safely to shore. With no alternative but to advise Ashley of the calamity, Moore set off downriver while the men encamped and prepared to wait for relief.²⁴⁴

Ashley reacted to Moore's sudden appearance in St. Louis on 9 July with vigor and determination; in the brief span of only eighteen days, he secured another boat and forty-six additional men. Moore may have declined to accept the responsibility for this latest expedition, or else the General was simply unwilling to risk another such disaster; but whichever the case, Ashley decided to accompany the boat upriver. After reuniting with the men stranded by the loss of the *Enterprize*, the expedition proceeded upriver past the Platte and Council Bluffs to the Grand Detour of the Missouri, location of the Missouri Fur Company's newest post, Cedar Fort or Fort Recovery. A mere dozen miles above it, the French Fur Company of Berthold, Pratte, and Chouteau soon raised a fort known alternately as Fort Lookout, Fort Kiowa, or Fort Brazeau in honor of the man in charge of it, Joseph Brazeau, or "Young Cayewa as the French referred to him."²⁴⁵

The area surrounding the two forts was Sioux country. Since leaving St. Louis aboard the *Enterprize*, the Teton Sioux were the first Indians Jedediah Smith had seen who seemingly remained untouched by Euro-American civilization. Smith observed that, compared to other Indians, they were tall, had relatively light complexions, radiated

²⁴⁴ Maurice S. Sullivan, ed., *The Travels of Jedediah Smith* (Santa Ana, 1934), 1-2; Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 33, 375, n. 18.

²⁴⁵ T. M. Marshall, ed., *The Life and Papers of Frederick Bates*, 2 vols. (St. Louis, 1925; reprint, Arno Press, 1975), 2: 281; Carter, *Territorial Papers*, 15: 85; *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, 2: 201-203; Edgar Wesley, ed., "Diary of James Kennerly," *Missouri Historical Society Collections* (hereafter, *Mo. Hist. Soc. Coll.*), 6: 71-72; Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 34-36, 376, n. 22.

intelligence, and were generally handsome in appearance. He further noted—and Morgan believes “this might indicate that no brave had offered the strait-laced young man [i.e., Smith] his wife or sister for a bedfellow”—that, morally, the Sioux ranked higher than other Indians. Although the Tetons had allied themselves with the United States during the War of 1812 and, by 1822, rarely interfered anymore with American trapping parties moving up or down the Missouri, Ashley nevertheless prudently smoked the pipe with their headmen, afterward dispensing the requisite number of trade goods as presents.²⁴⁶

Ashley’s party arrived at the mouth of the Yellowstone on 1 October 1822, their eagerly-awaited appearance cheerfully hailed by Henry and his men with a discharge of the fort’s cannon.²⁴⁷ The two friends and partners agreed soon after this heartfelt reunion that Ashley should return to St. Louis during the winter to assemble an outfit for the following year while Henry would remain at the fort to coordinate the trappers’ fall hunt. Henry divided his men into two parties: the first, which he personally accompanied, proceeded up the Missouri as far as the Musselshell; and the second, under the command of an associate from the partners’ years in Ste. Genevieve, John H. Weber, ascended the Yellowstone to the mouth of Powder River. A brief visit to Fort Henry that fall by the Missouri Fur Company’s ill-fated “mountain expedition”—forty-three men under

²⁴⁶ Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 36-37.

²⁴⁷ Citing a description of this first Fort Henry contained in the “Journal of the Atkinson-O’Fallon Expedition,” p. 41, Morgan, in *Jedediah Smith*, p. 40-41, writes: “Fort Henry was a picketed enclosure on the right bank of the Missouri, a quarter of a mile above its confluence with the Yellowstone. A log structure had been built at each of the four corners, and these, joined together by pickets, enclosed a space which could serve as a corral if the fort were invested by Indians. The fort stood on a narrow tongue of land between the two rivers which was sufficiently elevated to be above high water. A heavily timbered bottom along the far shore of both rivers pleasingly hinted at the forested regions above. Here at the junction of the Missouri and the Yellowstone, by agreement, the Rocky Mountains began.” For a map of the fort’s location, see Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 49.

Michael Immel and Robert Jones—dramatically illustrated the developing competition for the fur riches of the upper Missouri country.²⁴⁸

In the early spring of 1823, Henry sent Jedediah Smith downriver by boat to St. Louis with an express urging Ashley to hurry upriver with supplies—particularly horses, a sufficient number of which Henry had been unable to procure. Ashley had already departed St. Louis on 10 March in two keelboats—the *Yellow Stone Packet* and *The Rocky Mountains*—when he met up with Smith somewhere below the Arikara villages. This site became the scene on 2 June 1823 of “the worst disaster in the history of the Western fur trade”²⁴⁹—a sudden attack by Arikara warriors on Ashley’s expedition that cost him thirteen men killed and eleven wounded, two mortally, in all, one-sixth of his force.²⁵⁰ In the wake of this catastrophe, Ashley, after first dispatching Smith upriver with an express for Henry on the Yellowstone, sent the terrified French-Canadian *engagés* to St. Louis in the larger of the boats, while he withdrew downriver to the mouth of the Cheyenne River with thirty or so volunteers to wait for reinforcements.²⁵¹

In the aftermath of the “Arikara Campaign of 1823” that had pitted Colonel Henry Leavenworth’s six companies of the United States Sixth Infantry—“The Missouri Legion” as he called it—Henry and Ashley’s survivors, a contingent of Missouri Fur Company men under the command of Joshua Pilcher, and hundreds of Teton and Yankton Sioux warriors all against the heavily-outnumbered Arikaras, the two partners

²⁴⁸ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 262; Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 42-45; Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*, 12; Joshua Pilcher, “Answers to Questions,” 18th Cong., 1st Sess., *Document 56* (Serial 91 Senate), 13; here Pilcher relates that, as part of his efforts to reestablish the Missouri Fur Company on the upper Missouri, he had, by September of 1822, visited both the Arikaras and the Mandans and had built Fort Vanderburgh at the latter’s villages—the very post from which Jones and Immell had departed for the mountains.

²⁴⁹ Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 50, 56.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 56-58; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 265-267; Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 51-52.

reevaluated their prospects for the coming year.²⁵² Their recent financial losses had been considerable. Beginning with the theft of seven horses valued at \$420, followed by \$1,540 lost to the Blackfoot in the spring of 1823, and the \$2,265 forfeited in the Arikara campaign, those losses had added up to the sobering total of \$4,225.²⁵³ Nevertheless, the two partners' prospects for an uncontested return to the mountains appeared excellent. First, not only had the Jones and Immel massacre driven the Missouri Fur Company from the Yellowstone, that company had largely forsaken its post among the Mandans as well. Second, by 1823, the French Fur Company traded no higher than Fort Lookout below the Sioux. And finally, although the Columbia Fur Company had firmly established itself at Fort Tecumseh on the Fort Pierre Plain, the company traded no farther upriver than the Mandan villages—and that trade was minimal.²⁵⁴

Given these generally favorable circumstances, therefore, Henry and Ashley resolved to abandon the Missouri and dispatch two major trapping parties overland. Henry personally led the first, which promptly set out for Fort Henry. Upon arrival, however, Henry determined that the site was too vulnerable and proceeded with more than a dozen trappers up the Yellowstone to the mouth of the Bighorn River where they constructed a second Fort Henry. From there, the trappers headed southwest to trap a mountainous region claimed by the Crows. The partners' second expedition headed west from Fort Lookout under the command of Jedediah Smith in September 1823. Smith's party later

²⁵² For comprehensive narratives of this pivotal event in the history of the American fur trade, see Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 263-268, 2: 584-601; Dale, *Explorations of William H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith*, 67-82; Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, chap. 3, "The Missouri Legion," 59-77.

²⁵³ National Archive, Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis Superintendency, list of claims certified by Gen. Clark Jan. 12, 1826, for the period 1808-1823. Claim 15 is that of "Henry & Ashley," quoted in Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 78, 384, n. 1; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 262-263.

²⁵⁴ Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 78; Wishart, *Fur Trade of the American West*, 49, 121.

joined Henry's men at the Crow villages where both groups passed the winter of 1823-24 in the Wind River Valley.²⁵⁵

That spring the combined expeditions penetrated the Green River country, where they discovered an undreamed-of wealth of beaver. It was on his way to Green River that Jedediah Smith and his men "discovered" South Pass. Morgan celebrates the discovery as "a high moment in American history. Others had traversed South Pass before him, but Jedediah Smith's was the effective discovery, the linking of the pass in the long lines of force along which the American people were sweeping to the Pacific."²⁵⁶ Following a successful spring hunt, James Clyman and Thomas Fitzpatrick took the furs to St. Louis, leaving the rest of the men free to trap. These somewhat unexpected developments convinced Ashley by the fall of 1824 to outfit a supply train for the Central Rockies, which would enable his trappers to remain in the mountains year-round. Ashley

²⁵⁵ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, I: 268-269, pt. IV, chap. VIII, "Miraculous Escape of Hugh Glass," pp. II: 689-697; Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*, 12; Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 79-91, chap. 5, "The Adventures of Hugh Glass," pp. 96-114; Morgan claims that "Jim Clyman . . . recalled that Henry's party amounted to about thirteen men, but it must have been larger than that, for the partners had mustered eighty men for the Missouri Legion, and even with the constant erosion still had at their disposal a considerable force of hunters and *voyageurs*. It was possibly about September 1 that Henry launched on his journey, one forever famous in the annals of the west because his party happened to include Hugh Glass;" see also Charles L. Camp, ed., *James Clyman, American Frontiersman, 1792-1881* (San Francisco, 1928), 22; Dale, *Explorations of William. H. Ashley and Jedediah Smith*, 82-85; here Dale, referring to both parties, writes: "The names of some of those who accompanied the expedition[s] are recoverable. Altogether they formed one of the most remarkable groups of mountain men ever brought together. Some were experienced traders of the older generation, including Andrew Henry and Edward Rose, the latter having been a companion of Ezekiel Williams during the first stretch of his remarkable wanderings in the interior, and subsequently one of the overland Astoria party as far as the continental divide. Rose had also dwelt for a long time among the Arikaras. Louis Vasquez of a family long associated with the trade, and probably a member of the expedition of the previous year [1822], was also with the party. Another man of 1822 was James Bridger, afterwards Vasquez's partner and one of the ablest mountain men of the period. William L. Sublette was a member and possibly one or more of his brothers. Fresh from the states and about to receive their first taste of mountain life were James Clyman, Hugh Glass, Thomas Fitzpatrick, David E. Jackson, and Seth Grant. The wanderings of this group during the next ten or fifteen years cover the entire west from the Missouri to the Pacific and from Canada to Chihuahua. It was the most significant group of continental explorers ever brought together;" see also Leavenworth, "Report," *Missouri Intelligencer* (St. Louis), 9 December 1823; *St. Louis Reveille* (St. Louis), 1 March 1847.

²⁵⁶ Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 92.

subsequently delivered the supplies to a pre-determined site in April of 1825 for distribution that summer at the first of the American fur trade mountain rendezvous.²⁵⁷

II

The general unrest that had prevailed among most of the tribes in the upper Missouri country even before the outbreak of hostilities in 1812, combined with the armed aggression of both the Blackfoot and the Arikaras in 1823, prompted Congress to pass legislation the following year that, among other provisions, sanctioned treaties “with the Indians beyond the Mississippi.”²⁵⁸ To negotiate those treaties, a primary purpose of which was to assert American dominance and power over the region at the expense of its Indian inhabitants, President James Monroe authorized General Henry Atkinson and Indian agent Benjamin O’Fallon to conduct an expedition across the central and northern Plains.²⁵⁹ Throughout its duration, the expedition produced a dozen minor treaties, all of which the signatories largely disregarded. Only three of those treaties involved the Teton Sioux, treaties that represented for most of them their first diplomatic experience with American officials.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 270-274; Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*, 12-23; Morgan, *Jedediah Smith*, 91-95, 154-174.

²⁵⁸ *Congressional Record*, 18th Cong., 1st sess., 1824, Ch. CXLVI, Statute L. May 25, 1824. OR Acts of 18 and 25 May 1824, *Annals of Congress*, 18th Cong., 1st sess., serials 3219-20, 3228.

²⁵⁹ Cox, “A World Together, A World Apart,” 150. A detailed account of the “Yellowstone Expedition of 1825” (Atkinson-O’Fallon expedition) appears in Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 2: 602-611; see also *American State Papers*, Indian Affairs, 2: 595-609; “Journal of the Atkinson-O’Fallon Expedition,” *North Dakota Quarterly* 4 (October 1929): 7.

²⁶⁰ The treaties appear in C. J. Kappler, comp. *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2, *Treaties*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1904), 2: 37-39. (*Senate Document* no. 319, 58th Cong., 2d sess., serial 4624). In Cox, “A World Together, A World Apart,” 149-151, the author refutes the argument in Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Treaties: The History of a Political Anomaly* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 5-9, by which Prucha contends that the wording of the provisions in the treaties concluded by the Atkinson-O’Fallon expedition are proof of the upper Missouri tribes’ subordinate political and economic status relative to the United States. As evidence for his argument, Prucha offers the following passage on p. 7: “The treaties signed by the tribes along the Missouri River in 1825 contained this clause: ‘The said bands also admit the right of the United States to regulate all trade and intercourse with them.’ And as the United States domain expanded west to the Pacific, the Indians newly encountered agreed by treaty to the extension of the trade and intercourse laws over their territories.

The United States government had thus responded swiftly to the disturbances in Indian country with its authorization of the Atkinson-O'Fallon expedition to negotiate treaties with a number of the region's tribes; and, although it failed to establish American hegemony in the upper Missouri country, the expedition did successfully conclude twelve treaties, including three with the Teton Sioux. The treaties did not, however, prevent the them from continuing their harassment of the Arikaras and forcing those unfortunate people to abandon their Grand River villages and head south to join their relatives, the Skidi Pawnees, on the lower Missouri—a development that removed the final obstacle to westward migration for those bands of Saones that still roamed east of the Missouri River.

The Arikara exodus south from their Grand River villages removed the only remaining obstacle to Teton migration west across the Missouri. The last Tetons to make the crossing were bands of Saones, mostly Hunkpapa and Blackfoot Sioux, they now occupied the hunting grounds flanked by the Cheyenne and Cannonball Rivers so recently claimed by the Arikaras. As the 1820s came to a close, therefore, all of the

The Indians' continuing, increasing, and in many cases nearly absolute dependence upon white citizens for necessary goods was an important factor in the growing conviction that Indians were wards of the government, not members of independent sovereignties with whom the United States should deal by means of formal treaties." In rebuttal, Cox argues that "the reverse is true, as the limits of American power and interest in the northern Plains meant that these treaties were forgotten almost as soon as they were concluded. The true significance of the Atkinson-O'Fallon treaties lies more in the manner of their conduct, the vision of American dominion evident in their content, and, finally, their subsequent neglect[;]" an argument presented first in Roger L. Nichols, "The Army and the Indians, 1800-1830—A Reappraisal: The Missouri Valley Example," *Pacific Historical Review* 41 (May 1972): 158, "which," according to Cox, "amply demonstrates the ephemeral achievement of the Atkinson-O'Fallon treaties, as well as the limits of American military power on the northern Plains." Cox's argument, supported by Nichols, appears to be the more compelling because it is simply misleading, as Prucha does, to group all of the Indian tribes in that region into a single monolithic entity. For instance, the geographic, demographic, military, economic, and political characteristics of the Teton Sioux at the time of the Atkinson-O'Fallon expedition were unique to those people—characteristics that, in the aggregate, made possible their initial conquest and later domination of the central and northern plains, as well as their successful resistance to the United States government for more than fifty years after 1825; see White, "The Winning of the West," 327-330, 333-335; Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue*, passim; Utley, *Frontier Regulars*, passim; Utley, *Last Days of the Sioux Nation*, passim.

Tetons were west of the Missouri River and strategically positioned for a conquest of the central and northern plains.²⁶¹

The Tetons saw their first steamboat as it carried the Atkinson-O’Fallon expedition upriver in the spring and summer of 1825. Eight keelboats accompanied it, all eight fitted with hand-powered wheels operated by Colonel Atkinson’s soldiers, laden with trade goods, and named after the most important fur-bearing animals of the upper Missouri fur trade—*Beaver, Buffalo, Elk, Mink, Muskrat, Otter, Raccoon, and White Bear*. Charged with negotiating treaties between the United States government and a number of Missouri River tribes, the expedition eventually signed three treaties with various bands of Sioux: the first on 22 June at Fort Lookout with the Brules, Yanktons, and Yanktonais; a second treaty on 5 July with the Oglalas, Minneconjous, Sans Arcs, Blackfoot Sioux, and Two Kettles; and a third on 16 July at the Arikara villages near the mouth of Grand River with the Hunkpapas.²⁶²

The expedition’s reports, though abbreviated, nevertheless provide some useful information about the approximate locations and population estimates of the Teton Sioux in 1825. The Brules, likely numbering three-thousand souls, traded freely at Fort Lookout on the Missouri and wandered the lower White River watershed all the way to the Black Hills country. The Oglalas, estimated at half that number, likewise roamed clear to the

²⁶¹ Hyde, *Red Cloud’s Folk*, 38. Although Richard White claims that the Yanktonais occupied these lands, James H. Howard describes the “heart of the 18th and 19th century Yanktonai domain [as] that part of northeastern South Dakota and southeastern North Dakota *east of the Missouri* [my italics].” Noting that “in their material culture and many of their customs, if not in language, the mid-19th century Yanktonai more closely resembled the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara tribes than either the Teton Dakota to the west or the Santee Dakota to the east. Clearly these Middle Dakota [i.e., the Yanktonais], as they encountered and displaced the Arikara and Mandan, borrowed many things from these tribes;” see White, “The Winning of the West, 333; Howard, *Yanktonai Ethnohistory*, 6-7.

²⁶² The Atkinson-O’Fallon expedition concluded treaties with the following tribes: the Otos and Missouris; Poncas; Cheyennes; Hidatsas; Mandans; Arikaras; Crows; Pawnees; Omahas; Tetons; Yanktons; and Yanktonais; see Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, 2: 37-39; Prucha, *American Indian Treaties*, 64-65; *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, 2: 595-609; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 2: 603; Chittenden, *Early Steamboat Navigation*, 383; Hyde, *Red Cloud’s Folk*, 39.

Black Hills, although their principal range encompassed the Bad (Teton) River drainage; they traded regularly at Fort Teton, located at the mouth of Bad (Teton) River and, about a mile to the north of it, at Fort Tecumseh. The reports listed the Saones, as with the Brules, at three-thousand people roving in two groups on either side of the Missouri from the mouth of Bad (Teton) River to approximately fifty miles north of Cheyenne River: Minneconjous and Sans Arcs lived west of the Missouri and traded at the mouth of the Cheyenne; while bands of Hunkpapas, Blackfoot Sioux, and Two Kettles ranged as far east as the Minnesota River, although they usually traded on James River.²⁶³

If the expedition's references to the Tetons as a whole are disappointing, the names of the four chiefs and four headmen that appear on the Oglala treaty—names that suggest four distinct bands—provide invaluable information regarding the disposition of that tribe. First, there were the True Oglalas, whose chief, Standing Bull (*Tatanyinka Najin*), and their head-warrior, Black Elk, had by this time reestablished that band as preeminent among the Oglalas. The names of Shoulder and Lone Bull, chief and head-warrior, respectively, of the Shiyo or Sharp-tail Grouse band also appear, although by sometime around 1845, it disappeared as a separate entity after joining with the True Oglalas. The Kiyuksas, led by Crazy Bear (*Mato Witko*), emerge as the third band present. The head-warrior of the Kiyuksas, Bull Bear (*Mato Tatanyka*), would later become head-chief of all the Oglalas. The identity of the fourth band present at the treaty-signing remains a mystery. The names of this band's chief and head-warrior translate as Ghost Heart (*Wanonrechege*) and Mad Shade, respectively. Around the time of the founding of Fort Laramie in 1834, these four bands—by that time all followers of Bull Bear—became

²⁶³ *American State Papers*, Indian Affairs, 2: 606; "Journal of the Atkinson-O'Fallon Expedition, 22-31; Hyde, *Spotted Tail's Folk*, 18-24; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 39-40.

known as the Bear People. And, just as that chief first led his followers to the Platte River valley in that year, several bands of Brules and Saones, including the bands of Chief Smoke, Red Water, and Red Cloud's father—thereafter known as the Smoke People—broke away and also headed for the Platte, calling themselves Oglalas in the process, and eventually forming the other half of that tribe.²⁶⁴

III

In 1827, John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company (AFC)—known simply as "The Company" in recognition of its dominance of the American fur trade—purchased the Columbia Fur Company, renamed it the Upper Missouri Outfit (UMO) with McKenzie retained as its chief agent, and made it accountable to the AFC's Western Department headquartered in St. Louis. Also in that same year, the American Fur Company engaged Bernard Pratte & Company to manage its Western Department, along with Pierre Chouteau, Jr., one of the company's partners, as chief agent.

An unusually high Missouri River threatened Fort Tecumseh in the spring of 1831 and forced Chouteau to order the construction of a new fort on higher ground on the Fort Pierre Plain. Christened Fort Pierre in his honor, its builders located it two miles north of old Fort Tecumseh with ready access to wood, water, pasture, and most importantly, the Missouri River waterway. And, just as they had earlier, first at Fort LaFramboise and later at Fort Tecumseh, the Teton Sioux became the foremost trading partners at Fort Pierre. It was there that a talented young artist by the name of George Catlin became familiar with the Teton Sioux and their increasing dependence on the American fur trade.

Born on July 26, 1796, in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Catlin was the fifth of Putnam and Polly Catlin's fourteen children. Putnam had seen service in the Revolutionary War

²⁶⁴ Kappler, *Indian Affairs, Laws and Treaties*, 2: 37-39; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 40.

as a fifer. He was a loving father, strict disciplinarian, part-time farmer, and perennial office seeker. Putnam's character, training in the law, and largely unsuccessful attempts to secure patronage influenced his son's life and career.

George Catlin left home in July 1817 to study law in Litchfield, Connecticut. He joined the bar a year later but abandoned his practice after only three years; Donald Jackson claims that Catlin "called himself a 'Nimrodical lawyer' who would rather fish than prepare briefs."²⁶⁵ In 1821, he moved to Philadelphia to pursue a career in art. The promising young artist specialized in miniatures and proved talented enough to win election to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1824.

That same year, as Catlin saw a delegation of western Indians pass by on a Philadelphia street, he experienced a passionate conversion of the spirit. The Indians had affected him deeply and the idealistic young artist resolved to devote the rest of his life to preserving them forever on canvas. He later wrote:

In silent and stoic dignity these lords of the forest strutted about the city for a few days, wrapped in their pictured robes, with their brows plumed with the quills of the war-eagle, attracting the gaze and admiration of all who beheld them. The history and customs of such a people, preserved by pictorial illustrations, are themes worthy the lifetime of one man, and nothing short of the loss of my life shall prevent me from visiting their country and becoming their historian.²⁶⁶

Some years later, Catlin proposed that the government set aside a large enough tract of land to preserve the Indian cultures, flora, and fauna of the West; i.e., a "nation's park, containing man and beast, in all the wildness and freshness of their nature's beauty. I

²⁶⁵ Donald Jackson, *Voyages of the Steamboat Yellow Stone* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 35.

²⁶⁶ George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*, 2 vols. (London, 1841; reprint, Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, 1965), 1: 2 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

would ask no other monument to my memory . . . than the reputation of having been the founder of such an institution.”²⁶⁷

At first glance, Catlin’s words appear to have been written by a man well ahead of his time, i.e., a man possessed of an expanded—if somewhat romantic—cross-cultural awareness coupled with an appreciation for resource conservation. But this impression is only partially correct; for if Catlin was ahead of his time—and he was—he nevertheless remained a product of the first half of the nineteenth century.

Having made its way across the Atlantic in the early part of that century, the Romantic Revolution had transformed American art and literature by the 1830s. The works of Byron, Shelley, Keats, and Wordsworth inspired the nature poems of William Cullen Bryant, the “noble savage” novels of James Fenimore Cooper, and a new and exciting approach to painting styled the Hudson River School. Named for the locale where it originated, Hudson River painters pioneered a fresh vision of the American wilderness as something of value that Americans should admire and appreciate rather

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 1: 261-262. Catlin penned those words in 1841, fully two years after he had departed the United States for Europe, yet no less an authority than General Hiram Martin Chittenden credited the artist with “the conception of the national park idea.” see Hiram Martin Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, 1895, reprint, ed. And with an introduction by Richard A. Bartlett (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), 77. General Chittenden served two tours of duty in the Park from 1891-1893 and from 1899-1900, respectively, with the Army Corps of Engineers and supervised the construction of four hundred miles of roads as well as Roosevelt Memorial Arch at Gardiner, Montana and the bridge over the Yellowstone River above the Upper Falls. Although rebuilt, that bridge is appropriately known as the Chittenden Memorial Bridge as his devotion to the Park exceeded both his scholarly and engineering achievements. Chittenden’s impressive professional credentials coupled with his long association with America’s first national park lend credence to his assertions that “in everything else except the particular locality, and the plan providing a reservation for the Indians, Catlin’s idea was the same as that finally adopted by Congress” and that the artist’s prodigious output of paintings “anticipated the magic of photography”—thirty years after Catlin proposed a “nation’s park” in *Letters and Notes*, the photographs of William Henry Jackson and others had gone a long way toward convincing a skeptical Congress that the wonders of the geyser regions deserved protection; see Chittenden, *Yellowstone National Park*, xvi, 79. And if Catlin’s dream of a “nation’s park” included wild Indians hunting for the vicarious edification of white men, that dream also contained the artist’s vision for the preservation of the fish, birds, and four-legged creatures that sustained the tribes. And while his journals celebrate in prose the fantastic diversity and abundance of wildlife that seemed to overflow grassy plains of his travels, several of the artist’s wildlife paintings illustrate Peter Mathiessen’s monumental study, *Wildlife in America*.

than despise and subjugate. Romantic age literature affected a similar *cultural* appreciation for the Indian inhabitants of that wilderness.²⁶⁸

Yet, for white Americans, the 1830s represented far more than simply a romantic interlude in nineteenth-century America. Although the century had begun with the United States government negotiating with Indian tribes as sovereign nations, the open hostility of President Andrew Jackson to the 1832 decision of Chief Justice John Marshall regarding Cherokee territorial claims foreshadowed decades of broken treaties and the end of trans-Mississippi Indians as politically-independent peoples. A single word expresses American Indian policy throughout that decade: removal. Scholar Brian W. Dippie summarizes its intent: "Removal was the ultimate means to an established end. Along with other measures passed in the 1830s, it constituted a functioning isolationist policy." The other "measures" included a ban on introducing liquor into Indian country, a bill supported by Lewis Cass, Secretary of War, which created the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and a revision of the Indian Trade and Intercourse Act of 1802. The rejection by Congress of a final "measure" sabotaged the entire concept of Indian isolation. That bill would have created the Western Territory as well as a government for the resettled natives. Had the bill passed, it would have also provided legal safeguards prohibiting white encroachment on Indian lands.²⁶⁹ Implicit in this doomed legislation, of course, was the assumption that America's national expansion would halt well before reaching the Rocky Mountains. But, unfortunately for the Indians, an essay expressing the

²⁶⁸ Frank Getlein, ed., *The Lure of the Great West* (Waukesha: Country Beautiful Corp., 1973), 31-32.

²⁶⁹ Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 69, 70.

prevailing Anglo-American view that there could be no permanent barrier to westward expansion appeared in a November 1818 edition of *Niles' Weekly Register*.²⁷⁰

George Catlin seems to have grasped the implications of that view long before most of his contemporaries. In fact, Dippie's attempt to ridicule Catlin's challenge to the United States government to create a "nation's park" serves instead as a tribute to the artist's prescience: "In the 1830s George Catlin could still wander around the far western 'fairy land' and dream of a permanent wilderness reserve where the Indians and the buffalo might live wild and free, but his fantasy, like the whole mirage of isolation as a long-term solution, evaporated before the expansionist energies of the next decade."²⁷¹ Contemporary Southern Cheyenne W. Richard West offers a more generous appraisal of Catlin's vision:

Seen in the larger context of his time and place . . . he becomes far more appealing as being in many ways exceptional for his time. Whatever racist notions of the day may have been embedded in his imagination, Catlin placed great value on Indians and their cultures, revealing genuine concern at how they were being systematically stressed or destroyed by non-Indians. No artist could so passionately pour himself into his work the way Catlin did without having sincere respect and affection for the subjects of his work.²⁷²

Ironically, the years between 1831 and 1837 during which Catlin traveled among, lived with, and sympathetically painted hundreds of western Indians were also years during which the United States government forcibly removed tens of thousands of eastern Indians from their ancestral homes and resettled them on less-desirable lands west of the Mississippi River—episodes brutally punctuated by the Trail of Tears and the Black

²⁷⁰ "The American Aborigines," *Niles' Weekly Register* (Baltimore), 14 November 1818, quoted in Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 72.

²⁷¹ Dippie, *The Vanishing American*, 72.

²⁷² Quoted in Dippie et al., *Catlin and His Indian Gallery*, 21.

Hawk War. If the decade of the 1830s overflowed with contradictions, George Catlin certainly belonged to his age.²⁷³

IV

In recognition of his growing talent, Catlin had, by 1826, won election to the newly-founded and prestigious National Academy of Design. The following year, he moved to New York City and became an accomplished portrait painter. Perhaps because his dual status as a member of both the Pennsylvania and National Academies contributed to his financial security and to the recognition of his peers, Catlin next took the first tentative step toward the fulfillment of his dream to journey throughout the trans-Mississippi west and paint its Indian inhabitants—a visit to the newly-created Indian reservations in western New York state, exploring and sketching as a prelude to his western travels.²⁷⁴

By 1830, Catlin apparently felt himself prepared for his new career. Leaving behind his wife, his home, and a successful career as a portrait artist, he set out for St. Louis,

²⁷³ Over time, the literature on Catlin has reflected these contradictions. Prior to the 1970s, historians generally cast the artist in a positive light. For instance, Bernard DeVoto wrote in 1947 that Catlin “was an extraordinary man, a man with a certain greatness in him; his work is notable and his life was picturesque;” see Bernard DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1947), 393. In 1948, Loyd Haberly claimed that Catlin was one of America’s great native painters and a great man who “as sincerely and unreserved as a mortal can, devoted himself to the Indian cause;” see Loyd Haberly, *Pursuit of the Horizon: A Life of George Catlin Painter and Recorder of the American Indian* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 235. And Harold McCracken, writing in 1959, gushed that the artist’s long career “entitles George Catlin to a place of distinction among the most extraordinary men of the nineteenth century;” see Harold McCracken, *George Catlin and the Old Frontier* (New York: The Dial Press, 1959), 13. But beginning in the 1960s, scholars began to reexamine the concept of race and its significance to American history. This reevaluation of the historical experiences of Asians, Africans, and American Indians resulted in a wide range of fresh interpretations. A new wave of western historians represented by Patricia Nelson Limerick, William Cronon, Richard White, and Donald Worster sought nothing less than a redefinition of western history freed from the “intellectual straitjacket” of the long-standing thesis first advanced by Frederick Jackson Turner; see Ronda, *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*, xi-xii. Catlin’s legacy suffered in the backlash of this more critical, less-accepting interpretive approach. The unqualified praise of earlier commentators yielded to the more balanced treatments of historians writing a “New Western History.” For example, Brian W. Dippie describes Catlin as a “traveler, author, showman, entrepreneur, crackpot theorist, inventor, treasure hunter, rhinologic pioneer, extrovert, recluse, mendicant, expatriate, proud American original, and an artist of unconventional but commanding gifts;” see Brian W. Dippie, Therese Thau Heyman, Christopher Mulvery, Joan Carpenter Troccoli, ed., *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery*, with a preface by Elizabeth Broun and introduction by W. Richard West (Smithsonian American Art Museum: W.W. Norton, 2002), 27.

²⁷⁴ Dippie, et al., *Catlin and His Indian Gallery*, 29-30.

“Gateway to the West.” Upon his arrival, Catlin announced himself to General William Clark, co-leader of the famed Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1803-1806 and then governor of Missouri Territory. As governor, Clark used his unique position to assist the artist in embarking upon his new vocation. For instance, individual members of the Indian delegations that frequently came to St. Louis to parley with Clark often stood for their portraits, thus allowing the determined artist gradually to perfect his techniques. Following the summer of 1831, after Catlin had accompanied Clark on a diplomatic mission to the Sioux, Iowa, Missouri, and Sauk and Fox Indians and a jaunt up the Missouri River, the artist could feel with some justification that his western travels had at last begun.²⁷⁵

According to Catlin’s own family, 1832 was his “big year.” Although he would make several more journeys at various times from 1833 to 1837, he never surpassed, in quantity and quality, the artwork he produced in 1832.²⁷⁶ The buffalo-hunting tribes of the upper Missouri provided Catlin with the most dramatic and outstanding examples of the free, wild, and unconquered nomadic hunters and warriors of the northern plains. From Fort Pierre at the mouth of Bad (Teton) River to Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone, the artist executed the portraits, ceremonies, hunts, village scenes, and landscapes of that vast area’s Teton Sioux, Blackfoot, Assiniboin, Ojibwa, Crow, and Plains Cree tribes.²⁷⁷ Counting his paintings of these and other tribes along the upper Missouri, most notably the Mandans, Catlin’s artistic output over an 86 day period resulted in 135 drawings that included 36 views of Indian life, 25 landscapes, and 8 hunting scenes. The remainder

²⁷⁵ Getlein, *Lure of the West*, xii.

²⁷⁶ Marjorie Catlin Roehm, *The Letters of George Catlin and His Family: A Chronicle of the American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 65.

²⁷⁷ George Catlin, *North American Indians*, ed. and with an introduction by Peter Matthiessen (New York: Viking, 1989), xii.

comprise a remarkable series of portraits of both men and women that faithfully capture the grace, dignity, and character of the artist's proud models.²⁷⁸

Catlin practiced the techniques of outdoor painting a full generation ahead of the artists normally associated with it—the French Impressionists. Thirty years before the Barbizon painters, he experimented with methods that allowed him to capture on canvas the wilderness landscapes of his travels illuminated in their natural light. He painted in his camps on the plains and along the rivers. He often painted while gently drifting in a canoe and even—according to the artist—from the back of a horse. Catlin restricted himself to very few colors. He pre-painted his canvases with a neutral blue for the sky, a somewhat hazy horizon line, and a neutral green for the grassy plains. With his backgrounds largely filled in, he would then add the natural features, Indians, and wildlife as they appeared. Two of his paintings, *Buffalo Hunt Under the Wolf-Skin Mask* and *A Bird's-Eye View of the Mandan Village* are classic examples of these skillfully-employed techniques.²⁷⁹ Catlin used elevated viewpoints, which allowed him to suggest the vastness of the grassy plains. A fine example of this approach painted by the artist in 1832, *River Bluffs, 1320 miles Above St. Louis*, dramatically renders a line of sunlit bluffs along the upper Missouri by capturing the “beautiful clear-cut outlines of [those] billowy slopes”—the result of fires deliberately set by the Indians to control tree growth. But Catlin's art anticipated more than just the techniques of the French Impressionists—the sheer number of his paintings seems to have foreshadowed the magic of photography.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ Dippie, et al., *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery*, 33.

²⁷⁹ Getlein, *Lure of the West*, 40-45.

²⁸⁰ Dippie, et al., *Catlin and His Indian Gallery*, 21, 114-117. And far beyond the mere application of these techniques, Catlin's work vividly showcased his extraordinary artistic skills. In defense of Catlin's innate abilities, Paris art critic Charles Baudelaire responded in 1846 with a letter to several of the artist's harsher critics: “When M. Catlin came to Paris with his museum and his Ioways, the word went round that he was a good fellow who could neither paint nor draw, and that if he had produced some tolerable studies, it was

Catlin's 1832 steamboat voyage up the Missouri inaugurated his career as a chronicler of the trans-Mississippi West.²⁸¹ In addition to his artistic achievements detailed above, Catlin generated a voluminous output of notes and open "letters" on this voyage in his capacity as a correspondent for the *Spectator*, *Daily Commercial Advertiser*, and other New York City publications. Eight "letters" from the "Mouth of the Yellowstone" combined with another thirteen written from "a Mandan village" comprise nearly half of his entire journal. His inspired artistic and literary output from this journey through the upper Missouri country represents the very core of his work.²⁸²

Catlin's sojourn began with an invitation from Pierre Chouteau, Jr. to travel to Fort Union on the American Fur Company's new steamboat *Yellow Stone*.²⁸³ Although the

thanks only to his courage and his patience. Was this an innocent trick of M. Catlin's, or a blunder on the part of the journalists? For today it is established that M. Catlin can paint and draw very well indeed . . . I had been particularly struck by the transparency and lightness of his skies. M. Catlin has captured the proud free character and the noble expression of these splendid fellows in a masterful way; the structure of their heads is wonderfully well understood. With their fine attitudes and their ease of movement, these savages make antique sculpture comprehensible. Turning to his color, I find in it an element of mystery which delights me more than I can say," quoted in Getlein, *Lure of the West*, 51. Baudelaire's intellectual credentials included his earlier discovery and promotion of a heretofore despised and ignored poet by the name of Edgar Allan Poe. Even Catlin's detractors could be generous. For instance, one critic noted that "[s]ome of [Catlin's] portraits are perfunctory, slipshod. He was capable of compressing the torso and limbs absurdly . . . whatever the cost to anatomy. Sometimes he mounted small heads on elongated trunks. Legs seemed to sprout from stomachs; tiny arms folded across giant chests." Nevertheless, this same critic also conceded that "[t]here is a tendency to forgive Catlin such lapses. He was working under impossible conditions, at a killing pace, rushing to record what he saw," quoted in Brian W. Dippie, *Catlin and His Contemporaries: The Politics of Patronage* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 437. Ethnohistorian John C. Ewers likewise excused Catlin's perceived deficiencies as a technical artist: "To accomplish so much in a single summer Catlin had to work very quickly. Many of his paintings of Indians were impressionistic—omitting or merely approximating the details of his sitters' costumes or of Indian actions in their villages, in their camp movements, or on their hunts or war expeditions;" quoted in Jackson, *Voyages of the Steamboat Yellow Stone*, 38.

²⁸¹ For an excellent account of Catlin's role in this record-breaking steamboat voyage up the Missouri see chap. 2, "Platform for an Artist's Easel" in Jackson, *Voyages of the Steamboat Yellow Stone*, 28-50. For a comprehensive history of steamboats on the upper Missouri, see Hiram Martin Chittenden, *History of Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River: Life and Adventures of Joseph La Barge, Pioneer Navigator and Indian Trader Identified with the Commerce of the Missouri Valley*, 2 vols. (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1903; reprint, Ross & Haines, 1962). For a brief but informative study of the men who piloted and manned the Missouri River steamboats, see Michael Allen, "The Riverman as Jacksonian Man," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 21 (August 1990): 305-320.

²⁸² Catlin, *North American Indians*, xiii.

²⁸³ The name, "*Yellow Stone*," as spelled in this dissertation, appears in Jackson, *Voyages of the Steamboat Yellow Stone*; and Wood, et al., *Karl Bodmer's Studio Art*; and elsewhere; the name spelled alternately as,

year before it had proceeded upriver only as far as Fort Tecumseh [Fort Pierre], in 1832 the crew succeeded in making the entire two-thousand mile trip to the mouth of the Yellowstone River.²⁸⁴ Hiram Martin Chittenden, prominent historian of early steamboat navigation on the upper Missouri, captured the significance to the American fur trade of that historic voyage:

In several respects the voyage of the *Yellowstone* in 1832 has been a landmark in the history of the West. It demonstrated the practicability of navigating the Missouri by steam as far as to the mouth of the Yellowstone with a strong probability that boats could go on to the Blackfoot country. *Among the passengers was the artist Catlin, whose works have given added celebrity to the voyage* [emphasis added]. This noted voyage gave great satisfaction to the company [i.e., American Fur Company]. It completed the second step in reaching the head of navigation on the Missouri by steam, the first having been accomplished from St. Louis to Council Bluffs in 1819, and the third from Fort Union to Fort Benton in 1859. From 1832 on, the Missouri River steamboat was a constant and indispensable feature of frontier life in every department until the railroad destroyed its usefulness. It is needless to say that the appearance of this wonderful craft made a profound impression upon the Indians. Its power against the current, as if moved by some supernatural agency, excited the keenest astonishment, and even aroused a feeling of terror. One good effect was to increase their respect for Americans. The *Missouri Republican*, commenting upon the voyage said: "Many of the Indians who had been in the habit of trading with the Hudson [']s Bay Company, declared that the company could no longer compete with the Americans, and concluded thereafter to bring their skins to the latter; and said that the British might turn out their dogs and burn their sledges, as they would no longer be useful while the *Fire Boat* walked on the waters."²⁸⁵

"*Yellowstone*;" appears in Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*; Chittenden, *Early Steamboat Navigation*; and elsewhere; fur trade scholars have generally accepted either spelling.

²⁸⁴ Catlin Roehm, *Letters of George Catlin*, 57; Jackson, *Voyages of the Steamboat Yellow Stone*, 47; Chittenden, *Early Steamboat Navigation*, 22-23; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 338.

²⁸⁵ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, I: 338-340. A 24 March 1832 roster of the fur traders and clerks who traveled upriver aboard the *Yellowstone* contains many of the most illustrious names in the history of the American fur trade: Kenneth McKenzie, Lucien Fontenelle, William Laidlaw, Daniel Lamont, L. Bissonet (Louis Bissonette), Joseph Brazeau, Duchoquette Brazeau, Pascal Cerré, F. A. Chardon, John Dougherty, Jr., Jacob Halsey, James Kipp, Frederick Laboue, M.P. Laferriere, D.D. Mitchell, P.D. Papin, Henry Picotte, E. Primeau, and Thomas L. Sarpy; quoted in Jackson, *Voyages of the Steamboat Yellow Stone*, 167-168.

Ironically, the same steamboat voyage that provided Catlin with the opportunity to preserve Native American cultures on canvas also represented the advent of Euro-American technologies that would ultimately destroy those cultures within a few short decades.

V

On the *Yellow Stone's* return voyage, Catlin descended the Missouri to Fort Pierre in advance of the steamboat in a "little bark" with Batiste and Bogard, his two "*compagnons du voyage*," and accepted the hospitality of the fort's *bourgeois*, William Laidlaw. Finding himself, again, "in the heart of the country belonging to the numerous tribe of Sioux or Dahcotas," Catlin noted the thousands of Teton Sioux encamped on the Fort Pierre plain waiting their turn to trade. And just as he had on his previous journey upriver, the artist set out to paint as many of them as his brief stay permitted.²⁸⁶

Catlin first painted the portrait of *Ha-wan-je-tah*, or, *Ha-wan-ghee-ta* (One Horn), of the *Mee-ne cow-e-gee* band.²⁸⁷ The artist referred to *Ha-wan-je-tah* as "a *superior chief*

²⁸⁶ Catlin, *North American Indians*, 203-266. Catlin often combined his notes from the upriver and return voyages on board the *Yellow Stone*; therefore, the chapters titled "Mouth of Teton River, Upper Missouri," compiled from "Letters—No. 26-31," narrate somewhat indiscriminately with regard to date and time the artist's experiences on the Fort Pierre Plain.

²⁸⁷ In Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 41, the author frankly expresses his antipathy toward Catlin's writings, specifically, his rendering of Indian names: "In 1832 that foolish fellow George Catlin visited the Indians at the mouth of Bad River, but there is nothing to be gained from his romantic and rather addle-headed pages further than the names of two or three individuals, these names being so badly mutilated that they are almost unrecognizable. His one statement of any interest is that Whirlwind, the well known chief of later times, was an Oglala of the Kiyuksa band." In the artist's defense, his desire to spell Indian names correctly may have faded in his eagerness to accommodate all of the Indians waiting to have their portraits drawn. As Catlin later remembered: "I was busily engaged painting my portraits, for here were assembled the principal chiefs and *medicine-men* [italics in the original] of the nation. To these people, the operations of my brush were entirely new and unaccountable, and excited amongst them the greatest curiosity imaginable. Every thing else (even the steamboat) was abandoned for the pleasure of crowding into my painting-room, and witnessing the result of each fellow's success, as he came out from under the operation of the brush. They had been at first much afraid of the consequences that might flow from so strange and unaccountable an operation; but having been made to understand my views, they began to look upon it as a great *honour* [italics in the original], and afforded me the opportunities that I desired; exhibiting the utmost degree of vanity for their appearance, both as to features and dress. The consequence was, that my room was filled with the chiefs who sat around, arranged according to the rank or grade which they held in the

[italics in the original] and leader, a middle-aged man, of middling stature, with a noble countenance, and a figure almost equaling the Apollo.”²⁸⁸ The chief had been the first of about “one in five or eight . . . willing to be painted, [as] the rest thought they would be much more sure of ‘sleeping quiet in their graves’ after they were dead, if their pictures were not made.”²⁸⁹

The artist found painting Lakota women to be even more difficult than painting the men. He initially found himself “being heartily laughed at by the whole tribe, both by men and by women” because they “had never taken scalps, nor [done] anything better than make fires and dress skins” and would therefore be a poor choice to represent “the most distinguished and worthy of the Sioux” to the “white chiefs” that Catlin planned to show his drawings. But after explaining that he “merely [wished] to shew [*sic*] how their women *looked*, and how they *dressed* [italics in the original], without saying any more of them, [he] succeeded in getting a number of women’s portraits.”²⁹⁰

The last portrait that Catlin painted among the Sioux was of a distinguished warrior whose name the artist rendered as *Mah-to-chee-ga* (Little Bear). Catlin was in the process of painting that venerable chief of the *Onc-pa-pa* band (Hunkpapas) when a surly and unpopular chief of the *Caz-a-zshee-ta* band named *Shon-ka* (The Dog) entered the lodge in which the artist was working and, seating himself before Little Bear, began to insult him by sneering that, because Catlin was, as the artist later remembered, “painting almost a profile view of [Little Bear’s] face, throwing half of it in shadow,” the missing half of

estimation of their tribe; and in this order it became necessary for me to paint them, to the exclusion of those who never signalized themselves, and were without any distinguishing character in society;” see Catlin, *North American Indians*, 241.

²⁸⁸ Catlin, *North American Indians*, 206.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 219.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

his face must be “good for nothing.” Little Bear responded evenly to this slander by saying that The Dog was nothing but “an old woman and a coward.” Upon hearing this, the other chiefs present burst into laughter, after which The Dog stood up and rushed immediately to his lodge to arm himself. Little Bear calmly remained seated until Catlin had completed the portrait. The grateful chief then presented the artist with “a very beautiful shirt of buckskin, richly garnished with quills of porcupine, fringed with scalp-locks (honourable memorials) from his enemies’ heads, and painted with all his battles emblazoned on it.” Little Bear thereupon retrieved his own weapon which, unfortunately for him, his wife, unaware of the nature of her husband’s dispute with The Dog but still fearing the possible consequences of it, had unloaded without Little Bear’s knowledge. In the ensuing duel, he suffered a mortal wound, while The Dog was unhurt and subsequently fled from the village with his followers.²⁹¹ Catlin later recalled the “frightful agitation amidst several thousand Indians, who were divided into jealous bands or clans, under ambitious and rival chiefs. The blood of the *Onc-pa-pas* was roused, and the indignant braves of that gallant band rushed forth from all quarters, and, swift upon their heels, were hot for revenge.” As for Catlin, he was simply grateful to have escaped the whole affair with his life.²⁹²

²⁹¹ Catlin wrote that “Little Bear lay weltering in his own blood (strange to say!) with all that side of his face entirely shot away, which had been left out of the picture; and, according to the prediction of the Dog, “good for nothing;” carrying away one half of the jaws, and the flesh from the nostrils and corner of the mouth, to the ear, including one eye, and leaving the jugular vein entirely exposed;” see Catlin, *North American Indians*, 244.

²⁹² Catlin, *North American Indians*, 240-245. See also DeLand, ed., “Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Journal and Letter Books,” 165, n. 171.

CHAPTER FOUR

“TRANSITIONS:

THE RISE OF FORT LARAMIE AND THE TETON OCCUPATION OF THE PLATTE RIVER VALLEY, 1832-1837”

I

In the years from 1832 to 1837, the American Fur Company firmly established its business operations along the Missouri River from St. Louis all the way to the Blackfoot country, successfully extended those operations into the Platte River Valley, and recaptured the trade of the westernmost Sioux with an efficient supply and procurement network anchored at Fort Pierre and terminating at Fort Laramie. As one result of this trade, the Tetons came to dominate the rich buffalo ranges of the northern and central plains. But while that domination ensured their continuing participation in the buffalo robe and hide trade, their almost unlimited access to the goods it provided masked their illusions of independence from Anglo-American culture and civilization.

Preceding these significant developments, John Jacob Astor’s American Fur Company had already absorbed its chief rival on the Missouri, the Columbia Fur Company—the profitable and efficiently-managed firm under the able direction of experienced trader, Kenneth McKenzie—and had renamed the new combination the Upper Missouri Outfit (U.M.O.). The origins of this durable enterprise—it would exist under the aegis of the American Fur Company until 1865—provide yet another example of Astor’s principal business strategy for dealing with his competition: amalgamation.

The Columbia Fur Company had become so successful by 1825 that the following year John Jacob Astor's exceptionally-talented agent, Ramsay Crooks, opened negotiations with McKenzie to explore the possibility of dividing the trade on the upper Mississippi River above the St. Croix. McKenzie answered Crooks with a demand that he grant the Columbia Fur Company all trade on the Minnesota River, a condition that Crooks could not abide. Subsequent negotiations in the spring of 1827 stalled after McKenzie again refused to compromise. As an explanation for failing to reach agreement, Crooks tersely reported to Astor that "McKenzie's demands are too great."²⁹³

The impasse then prompted Astor to consider absorbing McKenzie and his company into the American Fur Company's Western Department. With that in mind, Astor wrote Crooks: "I still hope you will succeed in arranging with Mr. McKenney [*sic*]—as it will be better than to carry on one opposition after another."²⁹⁴ Although Crooks persisted with the negotiations through June, McKenzie's insistence on including his partners in any combined business arrangement, his repeated demand for a \$1,500 annual salary, an understanding that the Western Department would employ former Columbia Fur Company men on the upper Missouri in preference to American Fur Company people, and the condition that Astor advance money for the purchase in England and the United States of trade goods by McKenzie's associates, Collier and Powell, all combined to make an agreement unlikely. In desperation, Crooks wrote to American Fur Company agent Robert Stuart at Mackinac: "I have done all I could (in the greatest sincerity) to become friends with our opponents and since they have refused peace on fair terms, they

²⁹³ Crooks to Astor, 30 August 1827; quoted in Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 418.

²⁹⁴ Astor to Crooks, 7 May 1827; quoted in *ibid.*

must take the consequences.”²⁹⁵ And to American Fur Company trader Joseph Rolette, also at Mackinac, Crooks lamented that “all my sincere efforts to arrange with the Columbia Fur Company on equitable terms have proved abortive. We must now fight harder than ever, and I rely with the utmost confidence on your opposing them successfully.”²⁹⁶

Only days later, however, as scholar Annie Heloise Abel so colorfully observed: “It was a case, seemingly, of the hour being darkest just before the dawn; for early in July, [Crooks] had his deserts.”²⁹⁷ In his report to Astor, Crooks seemed very satisfied with his achievement: “It affords me pleasure to inform you that after an almost useless negotiation, I have, at last succeeded in agreeing on preliminaries with the Columbia Fur Company to give up their trade entirely and take a share with us in that of the Upper Missouri.”²⁹⁸

Somewhat surprisingly, especially considering Crooks’s apparent elation at the successful outcome of the negotiations, the actual terms of the merger did not favor his firm; in fact, McKenzie’s adroit maneuvering retained for his company substantial autonomy within the new organization.²⁹⁹ Indeed, as Hiram Martin Chittenden explains:

²⁹⁵ Crooks to Robert Stuart at Mackinac, 22 June 1827; quoted in Annie Heloise Abel, *Chardon’s Journal at Fort Clark, 1834-1839: Descriptive of Life on the Upper Missouri; of a Fur Trader’s Experiences Among the Mandans, Gros Ventres, and Their Neighbors; of the Ravages of the Smallpox Epidemic of 1837*, with historical introduction and notes by Annie Heloise Abel, introduction to the Bison Books edition by William R. Swagerty (Pierre: South Dakota Dept. of History, 1932; reprint, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1997), 199.

²⁹⁶ Crooks to Joseph Rolette at Mackinac, 27 June 1827; quoted in *ibid.*

²⁹⁷ Abel, *Chardon’s Journal*, 199.

²⁹⁸ Crooks to Astor, 6 July 1827; quoted in Abel, *Chardon’s Journal*, 199.

²⁹⁹ The main reason for McKenzie’s unwillingness to come to terms prematurely—i.e., without first securing his own and his partners’ best interests—was undoubtedly his firm’s consistent financial success. For as Paul Phillips reports: “Gross income of the Columbia Fur Company for the seasons ending in 1825, 1826, and 1827 was from \$150,000 to \$200,000 annually. *Approximately one-half of this was from buffalo robes* [emphasis added]. The cost of merchandise and supplies for those years did not run over \$20,000 or \$25,000 annually. The balance went to pay off old debts and for salaries and profits;” see Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 417. Conversely, Annie Heloise Abel grants Crooks the advantage throughout the negotiations:

“The partners of the retiring company became partners or proprietors of the [Upper Missouri Outfit], and McKenzie, [William] Laidlaw, and [Daniel] Lamont conducted the affairs of the upper Missouri quite as independently as if they had remained a separate company.”³⁰⁰ In his brief discussion of the merger, Paul Phillips grants the partners somewhat less freedom of action than does Chittenden:

The organization known as the Columbia Fur Company was renamed the Upper Missouri Outfit and was *to operate under the general supervision of the Western Department* [emphasis added]. It gave up trade on the Mississippi and Red River [and the St. Peter’s] and confined its activities to the upper Missouri and to the territories westward. Here it had no competition from

“Amalgamation was resolved upon after repeated attempts to create distinct spheres of influence had proved unsuccessful. That all went well, finally, was doubtless due to the fact that Crooks and McKenzie, being compatriots, were unhampered by personal prejudices and were disposed to be as conciliatory towards each other as was consonant with duty. *More than all else, however, it was due to the fact that the Columbia Fur Company was financially embarrassed, being hard-pressed by the supply merchants* [emphasis added]. Of this situation Ramsay Crooks was nothing loath to take advantage;” see Chardon, *Chardon’s Journal*, 197. Interestingly, Abel seems to contradict herself as she relates how successfully McKenzie clearly negotiated the final terms of the agreement: “That union . . . was in the nature of an absorption, whereby McKenzie and his friends, Daniel Lamont and William Laidlaw, passed over to the Astor concern but upon the understanding that they, collectively, should constitute a separate and distinct branch of its Western Department, at the head of which stood Pierre Chouteau, Jr., Bernard Pratte, and other merchants of St. Louis. Thus had come into being the famous Upper Missouri Outfit, which, in all its essentials, was but the old Columbia Fur Company in another guise, Tilton gone, Renville gone, *but the rank and file of its personnel retained. Retained, likewise, were its ambitions, though operating, henceforth, in one respect, in a restricted area; for Astor’s new recruit, retiring altogether from the St. Peter’s, once its richest field, was to confine its energies to the development of the fur trade of the upper Missouri and across the mountains to the Far West* [emphasis added];” see Abel, *Chardon’s Journal*, xxxvii. The Upper Missouri Outfit’s rapid expansion into the upper Missouri so soon after its formation—McKenzie would found Fort Union in 1829 at the confluence of the Yellowstone River with the Missouri, Fort Clark in 1831 at the Mandans, Fort Cass in Crow country in 1833, and Fort McKenzie in Blackfoot country at the mouth of the Marias in 1834—suggests that his foremost ambition had always been to dominate the upper Missouri fur trade. Indeed, Annie Heloise Abel even suggests that McKenzie’s interests had always included Oregon: “To control the trade of the Far West, thus out-witting the Hudson’s Bay Company [murderous former rival of McKenzie’s old North West Company], had long been Kenneth McKenzie’s dearest wish and the very name of the Columbia Fur Company, of which he was reputed to be the real head, had been as significant in its day as was that now bestowed upon the establishment near the mouth of the Yellowstone [Fort Union]. In joining forces with Ramsay Crooks, an ex-Astorian and therefore presumably committed to an interest in Oregon, McKenzie had done the wisest thing possible in the furtherance, at long range, of his own pet ideas;” see Abel, *Chardon’s Journal*, xxxix. Hiram Martin Chittenden, however, does not ascribe nearly the same degree of significance to the name “Columbia Fur Company” as does Abel, saying mildly only that the “legal title of the firm was Tilton and Company, but the name by which it was always known was the Columbia Fur Company. Whether this name was given in token of the ambitious schemes of the new company and their purpose to carry their trade to the Pacific does not appear;” see Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 326.

³⁰⁰ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 328. For a useful study of the Upper Missouri Outfit, see Ray H. Mattison, “The Upper Missouri Fur Trade: Its Methods of Operation,” *Nebraska History* 42 (1961): 1-28.

other of Astor's traders. Astor supplied it with goods and was to receive all the pelts it collected either by purchase or to sell on commission. The agreement gave the American Fur Company a monopoly of all the fur trade of the upper Missouri. The free traders in the country beyond the mouth of the Yellowstone remained dependent upon McKenzie to supply them with goods and to buy their pelts. McKenzie remained head of the organization, and James Kipp became his most active assistant. Laidlaw and Lamont generally made their headquarters at Fort Tecumseh, which in 1832 was replaced by the better-built Fort Pierre. From there they supervised trade on White River, the Cheyenne, the Moreau, and more distant trading centers.³⁰¹

For the Teton Sioux, it was to be the construction of Fort Pierre at the expense of old Fort Tecumseh, followed by the Upper Missouri Outfit's control of trade on the White, Cheyenne, and Moreau Rivers, as well as the eventual expansion of that control to "more distant trading centers (e.g., Fort Laramie)" that would, by 1851, allow them to reach the furthest extent of their military, political, and economic domination of the north-central plains.

II

Born in St. Louis on 19 January 1789 to Pierre Chouteau—second son of the founder of St. Louis, Pierre Laclède Ligest—and to Pelagie Kiersereau, Pierre Chouteau, Jr. inherited not only his father's name but, as was appropriate for a second son, the elder Pierre's nickname, "Cadet," as well. As the younger Pierre's biographer, Janet Lecompte, explains:

He also inherited his father's shrewdness and diligence, and his lust for wealth and power. But the son's ambition came not altogether from the father, nor in any part from the placid, frivolous creole society of his heredity. It came from the new materialism of the nineteenth century, and from its first behemoth exponent, John Jacob Astor. The interest in Chouteau's character lies in the

³⁰¹ 24 October 1831 report of John Forsythe in 22nd Cong., 1st Sess., *Senate Document 90* (Serial 213), 75; Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 419. See also Abel, *Chardon's Journal*, xxxvii-xl, 197-199;

conflict between the gentle, home-loving creole he was, and the grasping American tycoon he became.³⁰²

The fortunate circumstances of Pierre Chouteau, Jr.'s birth could hardly have been more propitious; as Lecompte explains: "For at least a century the Chouteaus were the leading family of St. Louis—a clan whose many intermarriages produced a tight core of social and business eminence. If one wished to make a name or a fortune in St. Louis, it was best to be born a Chouteau."³⁰³

Pierre Chouteau Jr.'s long and eventful career in business began when he entered the fur trade at the age of fifteen as a clerk in the office of his uncle, Auguste Chouteau. Soon afterward Pierre became a trader to the Osage Indians. For while Cadet's pursuits varied as he mined lead on the upper Mississippi River for several years, then opened a store in St. Louis with Bartholomew Berthold, and six weeks later married twenty-year-old Emilie Anne Gratiot, daughter of Charles Gratiot and Victoire Chouteau.³⁰⁴

Although initially the partnership of Berthold and Chouteau focused solely on their St. Louis store, by 1814 the two partners' business interests had gravitated toward the fur trade. That year, the firm dispatched traders to the Otos, the Loup River Pawnees, and the Pawnees along the Platte and Missouri rivers. In 1815, Berthold and Chouteau outfitted a financially-disastrous trading expedition to the Rocky Mountains—an experience that permanently biased Chouteau against the mountain trade. Thereafter, until 1819, the firm of Berthold and Chouteau confined its fur-trading operations to the lower Missouri, the only notable exception being the post maintained on Cedar Island for trade with the

³⁰² Janet Lecompte, "Pierre Chouteau Junior," in *Mountain Men and Fur Traders of the Far West: Eighteen Biographical Sketches*, 10 vols., ed. LeRoy R. Hafen, selected and with an introduction by Harvey L. Cater (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark, 1965-1972; reprint, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1982), 24-25 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 24. For a well-researched study of the entire St. Louis Chouteau clan, see Hoig, *The Chouteaus*.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 25-28.

Sioux. Also in that year, the company, in conjunction with Jean P. Cabanné and Company and other firms, underwrote an unsuccessful Missouri Fur Company expedition to the upper Missouri led by Manuel Lisa. For the next several years, Berthold and Chouteau found themselves outmatched in the competition for the fur trade of the upper Missouri—particularly that offered by Missouri Fur Company men such as Lisa, Joshua Pilcher, Lucien Fontenelle, Andrew Drips, William Vanderburgh, and Charles Bent. Beginning in 1822, that competition intensified with the advent of Andrew Henry and William H. Ashley and their “enterprising young men” on the upper Missouri and in the Rocky Mountains.³⁰⁵

It was in that year also that John Jacob Astor’s American Fur Company established its Western Department in St. Louis, a shrewd move by Astor that linked his interests with that of long-established St. Louis merchants and one that also had far-reaching implications for Chouteau’s future in the fur trade. Berthold and Chouteau had recently restructured their firm under the name Berthold, Chouteau, and Pratte with the addition of Bernard Pratte, Sr. as a full partner. It was Pratte who had arranged with Ramsay Crooks in February 1822 for Berthold, Chouteau, and Pratte to sell furs to and buy supplies from the American Fur Company—an arrangement that proved to be enormously profitable for Chouteau and his partners. Nevertheless, over the next four years, not only were Chouteau and his partners unable to convince Astor to deal exclusively with them in St. Louis, their firm also engaged in some highly questionable business schemes that cost it dearly in both lives and treasure. With the further addition of J. P. Cabanné to Berthold, Chouteau, and Pratte in May 1823, the partners replaced that name with Bernard Pratte and Company. Competition from the Columbia Fur Company in the fall of 1826 finally

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 30-31.

forced Ramsay Crooks to approach Chouteau and his partners with a proposal to combine the personnel and financial resources of the American Fur Company with those of Bernard Pratte and Company. The resulting agreement, signed by Astor and Chouteau in December 1826, established the latter firm as exclusive western agent for the former company with each receiving equal distributions of profit and each absorbing half of all losses. Chouteau's effective control of the upper Missouri fur trade thus dates to 1827, the first year during which his company began to manage the affairs of the AFC's Western Department in St. Louis.³⁰⁶

III

Fort Tecumseh had served as Kenneth McKenzie's headquarters from 1822 to 1829, a period during which he had first directed the operations of the Columbia Fur Company and, subsequently, after its merger with the American Fur Company's Western Department, the business affairs of its sub-department, the Upper Missouri Outfit.

³⁰⁶ Articles of agreement, with letter of P. Chouteau, Jr., New York, December 21, 1826, to B. Pratte & Co., Chouteau Family Papers; Lecompte, "Pierre Chouteau, Junior," 31-35; Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 29. The 20 December 1826 agreement between Astor and Chouteau—not the establishment of the AFC's Western Department in St. Louis or its later incorporation of the Columbia Fur Company—was actually the most important component of Astor and Crooks's strategy to monopolize the upper Missouri fur trade. The terms of the agreement also reveal how much Chouteau personally benefited from it after he and Astor "agreed to make a joint concern of their two St. Louis fur companies, sharing equally in profit and loss. The American Fur Company would furnish all supplies, collecting 7% interest on all disbursements and 5% commission on all goods imported from England, and on all charges, including transportation and insurance and the 60% duty charged on woolen goods. No commission was to be charged on American goods. B. Pratte & Co. would offer its whole collection of furs to the American Fur Company. If Astor did not choose to buy them, they would be sold by Astor at a commission of 2½%. If not sold by September 25 of each year, they would be offered at public sales held in October or at reduced prices in April. Pierre Chouteau, Junior was to be agent of the American Fur Company, general superintendent of the business and director of affairs in the Indian country at an annual salary of \$2000 and traveling expenses. Bernard Pratte was to act in his stead in case of illness (Cadet was frequently and severely ill during this period) or absence from St. Louis. Berthold and Cabanné were to remain in charge of the Sioux country and Council Bluffs respectively at a salary of \$1200 apiece. The new company would begin on July 1, 1827, or with the outfit for that year, and continue for four years, or until the returns of 1831. Now the little company of Berthold and Chouteau, a French creole organization of limited imagination and effectiveness, was backed by the country's biggest monopoly. *The power and wealth of Pierre Chouteau Junior may be said to have begun in 1827, even though he had already been in the fur business for twenty years [my italics];*" this summary of the agreement in Lecompte, "Pierre Chouteau, Junior," 35-36.

Ironically, it was McKenzie who first suggested the means by which Pierre Chouteau, Jr. ascended the Missouri in the spring of 1831 and decreed the end of Fort Tecumseh. The example of a profitable steamboat route between St. Louis and Fort Leavenworth had inspired McKenzie in the summer of 1830 to recommend the use of a steamboat on the upper Missouri. The idea intrigued Chouteau who, despite the initial opposition of both Pratte and Cabanné to the scheme, nevertheless contracted that fall with a firm in Louisville for the delivery of a new boat to St. Louis no later than April 1831. Chouteau had argued that steamboats were safer than keelboats and the Anglo-American mechanics who operated the former would undoubtedly be a more disciplined lot than the volatile French-Canadian *engagés* who manned the latter. Moreover, the company would then be able to pay its employees largely in trade goods rather than cash, as it could maintain all of its employees in Indian country. Chouteau allocated \$7,000 for construction, another \$1,000 for spare parts, and he installed a blacksmith on board in case of mechanical failure. Christened the *Yellow Stone*, its on-time arrival at St. Louis and its proposed destination generated considerable enthusiasm. One St. Louis newspaper declared it a “new and handsome steam boat . . . [bound] for the mouth of the Yellowstone. . . . Should the [American Fur Company] succeed in reaching this point with their boat . . . we shall have the pleasure of beholding what, it was thought the other day, was reserved for the next generation.”³⁰⁷

The *Yellow Stone* departed St. Louis for the upper Missouri on 16 April 1831; its most illustrious passenger was Pierre Chouteau, Jr. The steamboat made good progress until it passed the mouth of the Niobrara River at which low water prevented it from

³⁰⁷ *St. Louis Beacon* (St. Louis), 16 April 1831; Lecompte, “Pierre Chouteau, Junior,” 39; Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 11-12, 29; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 336-338; Chittenden, *Early Steamboat Navigation*, 22-23.

proceeding beyond the Company's Ponca post. Impatient with the delay, Chouteau went ashore every day, climbed a high river bluff—known ever since as Chouteau's Bluffs—and scanned the horizon for a change in the weather to bring more water. Unwilling to stand passively by, however, he presently ordered keelboats brought down from Fort Tecumseh to lighten the steamboat's load. Thus unencumbered, it continued upriver and docked at the fort on 19 June 1831; it would go no further that year.³⁰⁸

An unusually high Missouri River had earlier that spring threatened to inundate the nine-year-old fort. American Fur Company employees at first responded to the crisis merely by relocating the fort's storehouse to higher ground; but after Chouteau's arrival in June, he authorized the construction of a new fort. In addition to locating it on higher ground than that upon which the Columbia Fur Company had raised Fort Tecumseh, the site of the new fort also required a dependable water supply; ample timber for building; heating, and cooking; ready water access to the Missouri River to minimize cargo transport; good pasture; and, of paramount importance, a location in the center of the Teton Sioux buffalo range. The traders eventually settled on a site that satisfied all of these requirements, a broad level plain roughly two miles north of Fort Tecumseh that, at 1442 feet elevation, all but eliminated the danger from flooding, greatly facilitated the hauling of supplies, and provided the Sioux—the new fort's principal trading partners—with an ideal setting for their camps. With construction of the new fort well under way, the *Yellow Stone*, with Chouteau on board, headed for St. Louis fully loaded with packs of buffalo robes and furs and ten thousand buffalo tongues and arrived there without

³⁰⁸ P. Chouteau, Jr. to Gen. B. Pratte, Poncas River, May 31, 1831, Chouteau Family Papers, MHMA; Lecompte, "Pierre Chouteau, Junior," 39; Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 30; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 338.

incident on 15 July 1831. Chouteau declared the steamboat's maiden voyage a qualified success and resolved to repeat the waterborne expedition the following year.³⁰⁹

The 1832 voyage of the *Yellow Stone* began with its departure from St. Louis on 26 March. Hiram Martin Chittenden terms it "a landmark in the history of the West [as it] demonstrated the practicability of navigating the Missouri by steam as far as to the mouth of the Yellowstone with a strong probability that boats could go on to the Blackfoot country. Among the passengers was the artist Catlin, whose works have given added celebrity to the voyage."³¹⁰ Writing from the mouth of Teton (Bad) River, upper Missouri, Catlin portrayed his first visit to Fort Pierre in glowing terms:

I am here living with, and enjoying the hospitality of a gentleman by the name of *Laidlaw*, a Scotchman, who is attached to the American Fur Company This gentleman has a finely-built Fort here, of two or three hundred feet square, enclosing eight or ten of their factories, houses and stores, in the midst of which he occupies spacious and comfortable apartments, which are well supplied with the comforts and luxuries of life and neatly and respectably conducted by a fine looking, modest, and dignified Sioux woman, the kind and affectionate mother of his little flock of pretty and interesting children.

This Fort is undoubtedly one of the most important and productive of the American Fur Company's posts, being in the centre of the great Sioux

³⁰⁹ Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 29, 32; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 338; Jackson, *Voyages of the Steamboat Yellow Stone*, 17-23; here Jackson explains why Chouteau considered the 1831 voyage merely a qualified success: "A harder decision [than the one Chouteau made to replace Fort Tecumseh], made sometime during the eleven days of his visit, was whether or not to try for Fort Union on this trip. McKenzie, who had recently seen the condition of the river upstream, must have joined reluctantly in the conclusion that the *Yellow Stone* must turn around and head downstream. She could try for Fort Union next spring. It is easy to say that Chouteau ought to have decided on the spot to build another steamboat with a much shallower draft. Instead, he clung to the hope that 'improvements' to the *Yellow Stone* would make her more fit for these waters. Actually, the improvements he was to make when he got his craft back to St. Louis were directed toward greater convenience, not more effective navigation. In 1831 there may have been no boatbuilder or marine architect in the country who could have designed a vessel with both a draft shallow enough for the Upper Missouri and ample cargo space too. That development was years away. So Chouteau had to justify his *Yellow Stone* on other grounds. Was it cheaper to operate than the equivalent tonnage in keelboats? Yes, so long as fuel was free for the taking and if he could keep the vessel working every month of the year. Was it even *possible* to use it in the upper waters? Chouteau and McKenzie must have thought so, for plans already were made for next spring's trip. An earlier start, the experience gained on the present voyage, and a little luck would carry them to Fort Union."

³¹⁰ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 338.

country, drawing from all quarters an immense and almost incredible number of buffalo robes, which are carried to the New York and other Eastern markets and sold at a great profit. This post is thirteen miles above St. Louis, on the west bank of the Missouri, on a beautiful plain near the mouth of the Teton river [now called Bad River] which empties into the Missouri from the West, and the Fort has received the name of Fort Pierre in compliment to Monsr. Pierre Chouteau, who is one of the partners in the Fur Company residing in St. Louis.

The Fort is in the centre of one of the Missouri's most beautiful plains, and hemmed in by a series of gracefully undulating, grass-covered hills, on all sides; rising like a series of terraces, to the summit level of the prairies, some three or four hundred feet in elevation, which then stretches off in an apparently boundless ocean of gracefully swelling waves and fields of green. On my way up the river I made a painting of this lovely spot, taken from the summit of the bluffs, a mile or two distant, shewing an encampment of Sioux, of six hundred tents or skin lodges, around the Fort, where they had concentrated to make their spring trade.³¹¹

Even making certain allowances for the artist's somewhat romanticized vision of the fort and its location, Catlin nevertheless had artfully described the American Fur Company's most profitable business enterprise on the Missouri River.³¹² Naturally, the

³¹¹ Catlin, *North American Indians*, 202-203.

³¹² Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied also visited Fort Pierre for six days in the spring of 1833—from 30 May to 5 June. The prince saw the fort shortly after its completion; indeed, passing the site of old Fort Tecumseh, he noted that nothing remained but “an isolated, decayed old house, the only remains of Fort Tecumseh;” see Maximilian, Prince of Wied, *Travels in the Interior of North America*, in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, 32 vols. (Cleveland: Arthur P. Clark, 1904-1907), 22: 316. Maximilian's observations are not only less romanticized than Catlin's, but also more detailed and undoubtedly more accurate: “Fort Pierre is one of the most considerable settlements of the Fur Company's on the Missouri, and forms a large quadrangle surrounded by high pickets. At the northeast and southwest corners there are blockhouses, with embrasures, the fire of which commands the curtain. The upper story is adapted for small arms and the lower for some cannon. Each side of the quadrangle is 108 paces [324 feet] in length, the front and the back each 114 paces [342 feet] and the inner space is 87 paces [261 feet] in diameter. From the roof of the blockhouses, which is surrounded with a gallery, there is a fine prospect over the prairie and there is a flag-staff on the roof on which the colors are hoisted. Mr. Laidlaw's dwelling house [on the west side] consisted of one story only, but was very conveniently arranged with large rooms, fire places and glass windows. Next to this house was a smaller building for the office and residence of a clerk. The other clerks, the interpreters for the different Indian nations, the engages and their families, altogether about 100 persons lived in the other buildings [on the south and east sides]. Opposite [on the north side] were the stores . . . value of \$80,000 dollars, and in other rooms the furs obtained from the Indians by barter. The fort has two large doors, opposite each other [one on the east side and one on the

administrative talents of the fort's *bourgeois*, William Laidlaw, its superb location, and its facilities for warehousing trade goods and supplies and for processing furs were key elements of its success, but the most important reason for that success may have been Fort Pierre's association with the Teton Sioux—a people whose political economy focused almost exclusively on the buffalo robe trade.

The buffalo robe and hide was an Indian trade. Its relations of production depended in equal measure upon the skill and efficiency of the Indian men who hunted buffalo from the backs of swift ponies as well as upon the knowledge and endurance of the Indian women who tanned the robes and hides. In the case of the Teton Sioux, their nineteenth-century acquisition of the horse occurred simultaneously with the expansion of the upper Missouri American fur trade as these two parallel developments collided on the Tetons' new home range west of the Missouri. New economic incentives then emerged in the form of previously-undreamed-of wealth in Euro-American trade goods, the pursuit of which radically transformed Teton relations of production and distribution—particularly those based on gender—from eighteenth-century collectivism to nineteenth-century individualism, a transformation that hastened the onset of the Tetons' dependency on a global market economy controlled from New York and London. But unfortunately for those Indians and their traders alike, the buffalo robe and hide trade involved the widespread use of spirituous liquors as one of the most ubiquitous—and lethal—of Anglo-American trade goods—a very unromantic reality that George Catlin discovered to his sorrow at Fort Pierre and elsewhere.

west] which are shut in the evening. There was an enclosed garden on the south side;” see Thwaites, *Early Western Travels*, 22: 316; and for the information in brackets see Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 35.

IV

In a passage from James Fenimore Cooper's 1826 novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper's Indian villain, Magua, justifies his treacherous behavior to white captive Cora Munro: "Listen, Magua was born a chief and a warrior among the red Hurons of the lakes. Then his Canada fathers came into the woods, and taught him how to drink the fire-water, and he became a rascal. Who gave him the fire-water? Who made him a villain? T'was the pale-faces, the people of your own color."³¹³ Although Cooper's novel takes place almost three-quarters of a century before Catlin made his way up the Missouri River in 1832, courtesy of Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and the American Fur Company, the passage underscores the long and tragic history of alcohol in Indian country.

Hiram Martin Chittenden opens a chapter from the *American Fur Trade of the Far West* entitled "The Liquor Traffic" with his observation that the "degrading and demoralizing influence of intoxicating spirits upon the Indian was well understood from the experience of two centuries of frontier life."³¹⁴ Chittenden adds that, unfortunately, liquor was the most powerful weapon the traders possessed in their relentless competition with rival companies, primarily because its attraction to the Indians proved irresistible. Without regard to national boundaries, liquor remained the one indispensable article that the fur traders—American or British—had to have to stay in business.³¹⁵

George Catlin encountered that grim reality at both Fort Pierre and Fort Union during his 1832 steamboat voyage. With his moral sensibilities outraged, Catlin proceeded to write letters to New York City newspapers denouncing the American Fur Company's

³¹³ James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans* [1826]; reprint, with an introduction by A.B. Guthrie, Jr. (New York: Bantam Doubleday Bell Publishing Group, 1989), 101-102.

³¹⁴ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 23.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1: 23-24.

unscrupulous trade practices.³¹⁶ Western historian Patricia Nelson Limerick claims in *The Legacy of Conquest* that Catlin's affected moral indignation concealed his true feelings, and that instead of confronting his hosts with the evil embodied in their indiscriminate trading practices, the artist chose instead to express gratitude to Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Kenneth McKenzie for their hospitality. Limerick maintains that the American Fur Company acted toward Catlin in the capacity of a modern-day "corporate sponsor" and that the artist eagerly accepted their largesse and conducted himself accordingly.³¹⁷

Limerick's assessment of Catlin's actions overlooks the complex political and economic realities that confronted the fur companies, circumstances that Catlin, a highly-intelligent man, undoubtedly grasped. For example, although in July 1832 Congress enacted a bill prohibiting liquor as an article of trade with the Indians, fur traders in the field soon recognized the impracticability of its enforcement. In a letter to Catlin's host on the upper Missouri, Pierre Chouteau, Jr., American Fur Company executive Ramsay Crooks lamented: "I regret truly the blindness of the government in refusing liquor for the trade of the country in the vicinity of Hudson's Bay Posts, because the prohibition will not prevent the Indians getting it from our rivals, to our most serious injury."³¹⁸

The American Fur Company penalized Catlin for his denunciation of their participation in the liquor trade. Thereafter, the Company forced the artist to cover his own travel expenses and offered neither hospitality nor assistance. On a subsequent trip to visit and paint the Comanches in 1834, he steadfastly refused financial assistance from the government, despite making the journey in the company of United States army

³¹⁶ Dippie, et al., *Catlin and His Indian Gallery*, 41.

³¹⁷ Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 182-183.

³¹⁸ Ramsay Crooks, New York, to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., 16 November 1832; quoted in Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 30.

dragoons. Two years later, the American Fur Company spared no efforts to hinder his trip to the *Coteau des Prairies* in present-day Minnesota. And, after having witnessed and faithfully recorded the Mandan self-torture ceremony known as the O-KEE-PA (Okipa), the Company refused to corroborate Catlin's account despite the general public's ridicule of his literary and artistic depictions of the ritual as products of his vivid imagination. Unfortunately for his reputation, that tribe's near-extinction from smallpox during the upper Missouri epidemic of 1837 precluded further opportunities for verifying the ceremony's existence.³¹⁹

Catlin went well beyond merely expressing sympathy for the Indians' plight; he depicted the tragic consequences of the liquor trade both in print and on canvas and worked diligently to stop it. For instance, in "Letter—No. 58.," the final "letter" in *Letters and Notes*, he reflected on the effects of alcohol among the tribes. After first identifying the fur traders as the source of the liquor, he wrote:

In the Indian communities, where there is no law of the land or custom denominating it a vice to drink whiskey, and to get drunk; and where the poor Indian meets whiskey tendered to him by white men, whom he considers wiser than himself, and to whom he naturally looks for example; he thinks it no harm to drink to excess, and will lie drunk as long as he can raise the means to pay for it. And after his first means, in his wild state, are exhausted, he becomes a beggar for whiskey, and begs until he disgusts, when the honest pioneer becomes his neighbor; and then, and not before, gets the name of "poor, degraded, naked, and drunken Indian," to whom the epithets are well and truly applied.³²⁰

In "Appendix—C." to *Letters and Notes*, Catlin constructed a chart with the Indians' original character traits on one side contrasted with the traits they acquired soon after

³¹⁹ Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 1: 251.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1: 266.

contact with white civilization and alcohol—eg., handsome vs. ugly; temperate vs. dissipated; cleanly vs. filthy; etc.³²¹

Two paintings from the artist’s “Indian Gallery” poignantly capture the moral degradation experienced by the wild tribes following sustained contact with whites. The first is a painting of Shin-gos-se-moon, or Big Sail, an Ottawa chief. Blind in one eye and an alcoholic, Big Sail epitomized one of “the miserable living victims and dupes of white man’s cupidity, degraded, discouraged, and lost in the bewildering maze that is produced by the use of whiskey and concomitant vices.”³²² The second, a side-by-side painting of Wi-jun-jon, or Pigeon’s Egg Head (The Light), a young Assiniboin warrior, pictures the Indian on the left side in his splendid buckskin finery—a compelling study in noble dignity. On the right half of the painting, Catlin drew Wi-jun-jon after the Indian had spent eighteen months in Washington, DC. The warrior returned home dressed in a general’s uniform complete with a top hat, umbrella, fan, high-heeled boots, and the ubiquitous bottle of whiskey. Revolted by his transformation, Wi-jun-jon’s own tribesmen eventually murdered him. Perhaps more than any other of his paintings, Catlin’s poignant illustration of Wi-jun-jon’s fallen state expressed the artist’s conviction that white civilization destroyed Indian culture.³²³ Indeed, for Catlin, the altered moral

³²¹ Ibid., 2: 266.

³²² Dippie, et al., *George Catlin and His Indian Gallery*, 198.

³²³ Ibid., 202. If Catlin, using both his art and his pen, had challenged white Americans to confront the unfortunate costs of relentless and irresponsible western expansion, most of his contemporaries not only ignored him, but exacted retribution as well. In early 1838, a resolution before the House of Representatives urging the Library Committee to purchase “Catlin’s Indian Gallery” stalled due to a combination of apathy and hostility. Nevertheless, the 10 November 1838 issue of *Nile’s National Register* expressed its outrage: “We felt ashamed and mortified at the indifference shown Catlin’s most interesting exhibition whilst it was in this city, but especially at the little interest which was felt in the attempt to secure it to the nation; and almost hope that the permission granted . . . [by the Lords of the Treasury] to land the collection in England free of duty, may be the first step to place it beyond our reach, as a punishment to the illiberal feeling manifested here.” The newspaper’s reference to England pointed to Catlin’s thinly-veiled attempt to pressure the United States government into buying his paintings. In response, a second resolution introduced in the House on 11 February 1839 directed the Commissioner of

qualities attributed to Indians who had associated with whites for too long revealed as much about the decline of nineteenth-century America as it did that of the Indians he so genuinely admired. In his own words: “Black and blue cloth and civilization are destined, not only to veil, but to obliterate the grace and beauty of Nature.”³²⁴

V

A number of Sioux winter counts reflect the increasing presence of the American fur trade along the upper Missouri in the years from 1830 to 1833. For example, according to the American Horse winter count for 1830-31, the Sioux “saw wagons for the first time. Red Lake, a white trader, brought his goods in them.”³²⁵ Although Short Man inexplicably placed the destruction of Red Lake’s post by fire in the winter of 1830-31; the winter counts of No Ears, Iron Crow, and American Horse correctly record that event for 1831-32; the translation of the latter’s pictograph for that year reads: “Red Lake’s house, which he had recently built, was destroyed by fire, and he was killed by the accidental explosion of some powder”; “Red Lake” was the name the Lakotas gave to American Fur Company clerk Thomas L. Sarpy.³²⁶ Also for the year 1831-32, the winter counts of Lone Dog, The Swan, and Cloud Shield all depicted a white trader named Le

Indian Affairs to investigate the artist’s terms of purchase. Although Catlin offered his paintings and artifacts for a very reasonable price, Congress again refused to act. Later that same year, Catlin sailed for Europe. Thirteen years later, a congressional bill authorizing the purchase of “Catlin’s Indian Gallery” failed to pass by a single vote. Despite eloquent pleas for the bill’s passage by Senators Daniel Webster and Henry Clay, Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi cast the fatal ballot. Ironically, it was Davis who, as a young lieutenant of dragoons in 1834, had befriended Catlin on their odyssey to Comanche country. Fortunately, although Catlin never lived to see it, the Smithsonian Institution acquired and displayed “Catlin’s Indian Gallery” in 1965; see Dippie, et al., *Catlin and His Indian Gallery*, 61; Catlin, *North American Indians*, xiii-xvi.

³²⁴ Catlin, *Letters and Notes*, 1: 2.

³²⁵ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 138. Interestingly, the wagons referred to in American Horse’s 1830-31 winter count may have been the four-wheeled variety rather than the two-wheeled carts so often used by the traders to transport their goods to the Indians’ remote camps; for a carefully-researched study of these “Red River” carts complete with photographs, drawings, and schematic diagrams, see Charles Hanson, Jr., “Red River and Other Carts,” *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 19 (Fall 1983): 1-12.

³²⁶ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 138; Walker, *Lakota Society*, 137.

Beau (Gray Eyes) killing one of his employees, a white man named Kermel (Kennel); while that of The Flame records the killing of two white men by a third, undoubtedly Le Beau.³²⁷

George Catlin found more than twenty Teton Sioux bands encamped on the Fort Pierre Plain in the summer of 1832; their presence there provided the artist with the opportunity to observe them closely. Writing from the mouth of the Teton (Bad) River, after having “descended the Missouri, a distance of six or seven hundred miles, in my little bark, with Bâtiste and Bogard, my old ‘*compagnons du voyage*,’” the artist expresses unqualified admiration for the Sioux as well as an appreciation for their unrestricted access both to abundant natural resources and to Euro-American trade goods:

I am now in the heart of the country belonging to the numerous tribe of Sioux or Dahcotas, and have Indian faces and Indian customs in abundance around me. This tribe is one of the most numerous in North America, and also one of the most vigorous and warlike tribes to be found, numbering some forty or fifty thousand, and able undoubtedly to muster, if the tribe could be moved simultaneously, at least eight or ten thousand warriors, well mounted and well armed. This tribe take vast numbers of the wild horses on the plains towards the Rocky Mountains, and many of them have been supplied with guns; but the greater part of them hunt with their bows and arrows and long lances, killing their game from their horses’ backs while at full speed.³²⁸

³²⁷ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 115, 138; Walker, *Lakota Society*, 137. The “Le Beau” referred to in these English translations of the various winter counts is undoubtedly that Frederick [or Frederic] LaBoue—alternately spelled “Laboue” and “Labone,” and known to the Sioux as “Grey Eyes”—who first went upriver to Fort Pierre on the *Yellow Stone* in 1832 and who later became one of the American Fur Company’s most innovative and successful traders; see Hanson, “A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail,” 5; Bray, “The Oglala Lakota and the Establishment of Fort Laramie,” 4, 12; Jackson, *Voyages of the Steamboat Yellow Stone*, 168.

³²⁸ Catlin, *North American Indians*, 202. Catlin’s observation that the Tetons preferred bows, arrows, and lances for buffalo-hunting in the early 1830s, even though Northwest trade guns were available at Fort Pierre and elsewhere in considerable numbers—and many of the Indians already owned them—supports Charles E. Hanson, Jr.’s conclusion that the Sioux hunted buffalo at the turn of the nineteenth century in the same manner that Catlin witnessed. Interestingly, Hanson claims that hunting buffalo without firearms in the early 1800s was the main reason that the Tetons traded only for a few essential items such as metal knives and pots and wool blankets; conversely, although they still preferred to hunt buffalo with bows and arrows and lances in the early 1830s, the Sioux were by then trading for an astonishing variety and quantity of Euro-American trade goods—including luxury items.

There is no tribe on the Continent, perhaps, of finer looking men than the Sioux; and few tribes who are better and more comfortably clad, and supplied with the necessaries of life. There are no parts of the great plains of America which are more abundantly stocked with buffaloes and wild horses, nor any people more bold in destroying the one for food, and appropriating the other for their use.³²⁹

Catlin also noted that the Fort Pierre Plain was “the nucleus or place of concentration of the numerous tribe of the Sioux, who often congregate here in great masses to make their trades with the American Fur Company”;³³⁰ trade that would make it possible, over the next twenty years, for the Teton Sioux first to conquer the north-central plains and then to dominate the region so completely that the United States government would tacitly recognize that geo-political reality in the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. Ironically, however, having reached the pinnacle of their military and political power relative to neighboring plains tribes and the United States government by 1851, the Western Sioux would be a mere three years away from discovering to their horror that their wealth in Euro-American trade goods had fostered only the illusion of independence.

On 10 April 1833, Alexander Philip Maximilian, Prinz zu Wied-Neuwied [Prince of Wied-Neuwied] boarded the steamboat *Yellow Stone* at St. Louis bound for the upper Missouri. Accompanying the prince were hunter and taxidermist David Dreidoppel, and the artist Johann Karl Bodmer. The boat arrived at Fort Pierre on 30 May, the first of six days that afforded Maximilian and his party the opportunity to observe, and for Bodmer to paint, the Teton Sioux encamped there.³³¹ And in at least one of his portraits—that of a

³²⁹ Ibid., 203-205.

³³⁰ Ibid., 206.

³³¹ Wood et al., *Karl Bodmer's Studio Art*, 2, 12; here in the introduction to this study, anthropologist W. Raymond Wood compares Bodmer's portraiture with that of Catlin: “Only George Catlin can compete with Bodmer in the number of works portraying the Indians of the upper Missouri valley—but while few would doubt the purity of Catlin's motives, the accuracy of some of his written work leaves much to be desired; some of it is flatly wrong or contradictory. His art, too, has been criticized [although] he was capable of

Lakota woman named Chan-Chä-Uiá-Teüin—Bodmer captured on canvas some of the luxury goods that many wealthier Sioux had accumulated through trade by the early 1830s. After first noting that the “precision of Bodmer’s renderings [of objects] is inescapable and almost beyond superlatives,” Anthropologist W. Raymond Wood offers the following description:

As did most of Bodmer’s male subjects, Chan-Chä-Uiá-Teüin carefully prepared herself for her portrait, and her clothing and jewelry demonstrate that she was from a well-to-do family. Like [Bodmer’s] portrait of [two Yankton warriors], *her portrait reveals how the fur trade had insinuated itself among the Lakotas by the 1830s* [emphasis added]. Her necklace is of blue and white glass trade beads, and she pulled tendrils of her hair through a series of beads to frame her face. She wore an extraordinary set of loop earrings made of trade beads. Small metal cones, or “tinklers,” decorate the fringes of her dress, and she wears a buffalo robe with the geometric “box and border” design, a highly regarded style among the Lakotas, especially for women. Her portrait reveals her status in a wealthy Lakota family because of the abundance of beads that embellish her hair and jewelry and because of the wonderful robe that she wears.³³²

And, in addition to the wide variety of luxury items such as beads, buttons, combs, mirrors, and vermilion acquired by the Tetons at Fort Pierre, even a partial list of other valued trade goods must include: Northwest guns, gun powder, powder horns, flints, knives, battle axes, tomahawks, lances, colored blankets, tobacco, coffee, sugar, salt, pepper, metal awls and scrapers, metal arrow points, cloth and ready-made clothing, and

delicate nuances of facial expression. Bodmer was trained in the finest of European traditions, whereas Catlin was essentially self-trained. Bodmer often would spend several days on a single painting, while Catlin would paint several canvasses in the course of one day. While it is a disservice to call them caricatures, Catlin’s portraits and landscapes clearly lack the precision that Bodmer brought to his art.”

³³² *Ibid.*, 13, 55-56; Wood’s detailed description of the luxury trade goods that appear in Bodmer’s painting of this Sioux woman strongly suggest that since the early 1800s Teton trading behavior had evolved well beyond exchanging buffalo robes for only a few practical items such as metal knives and cooking pots. For a classic treatment of both Catlin and Bodmer on the upper Missouri, other artists who painted the nineteenth-century American West, and a representative sampling of their work, see William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1966), 181-228.

needles. Indeed, as early as 1829, United States government officials had observed that “since the introduction of these articles [of trade] among the Indians, a corresponding change has taken place in their modes of life, and many of the tribes could not subsist, were they deprived of their accustomed supplies.”³³³

The records of William Clark, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis, contain a remarkable document from the fall of 1831 that records in some detail the geographical descriptions by agency of the posts for trade with the Indian tribes within Clark’s jurisdiction. Under the heading “Upper Missouri Agency” is a catalogue of posts for the westernmost Sioux that includes this entry describing the Fort Pierre Plain and the location of Fort Tecumseh: “A tract of country not exceeding three miles square at a place called Hollow Wood on the Teton (Bad) River. A tract of country some space at the mouth of Teton (Bad) River.”³³⁴ But, with buffalo herds along the Missouri noticeably thinning, several bands of Oglalas and Brules had already begun to winter well to the west of that river near the Black Hills of present-day South Dakota and Wyoming. And in September of that year the Oglalas complained to William Laidlaw, *bourgeois* at Fort Tecumseh, about having to come all the way to Hollow Wood to trade, preferring instead to have a post near their winter encampments at the confluence of Rapid Creek and the south fork of the Cheyenne River. American fur traders were quick to grasp the implications of the Lakotas’ increasing dependence on Euro-American trade goods. As early as the late 1820s, they had begun to shift their business west to accommodate those

³³³ James Austin Hanson, *Metal Weapons, Tools, and Ornaments of the Teton Dakota Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 8-9; Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 115-120; Senate Journal, 20th Cong., 2nd sess., 9 February 1829, 5; quoted in Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 112.

³³⁴ National Archives, Office of Indian Affairs, St. Louis Superintendency, 28 November 1831; reproduced in Charles E. Hanson, Jr., ed., “Trading on the Missouri and Upper Mississippi, 1831, *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 2 (Summer 1966): 7.

bands which had migrated and had begun, more or less permanently, to inhabit the plains just east of the Black Hills in present-day South Dakota and Wyoming.

In February 1833, William H. Ashley responded to a request from Major Henry Dodge, commander of the United States Battalion of Mounted Rangers, for information regarding conditions beyond the settlements. Dodge was at that time preparing to lead an expedition among the western Indians to impress them with the power of the United States government. Although Ashley had by then retired from the fur trade and was instead serving in Washington, D.C. as a congressional representative from Missouri, his extensive experiences in that industry had secured his reputation as an authority on the West. In this case, Dodge sought Ashley's opinion concerning routes through the region and conditions once there. Ashley's written response, accompanied by a map copied from Jedediah Smith's original manuscript map, fully justified Dodge's confidence in Ashley's knowledge. In his detailed letter, the former fur trader outlined a possible route for the expedition as well as the locations of certain tribes, their dispositions toward the United States, and their military potential.

One particularly-illuminating passage in Ashley's report places the Tetons on the North Fork of the Platte *seasonally* and cautions Dodge to approach them only with a sizeable contingent of men:

On reaching the south fork of the River Platt, marked on the map, Ashley's route in 1824, I would send a detachment of not less than two hundred men to strike the north fork of said river near the point marked on the map, The Chimneys [Chimney Rock, near present Bayard, Nebraska]—thence to ascend that fork & join the Battn. at the foot of the mountains. The Shyannes, Arapahoes & a large band of the Sioux are in the habit, *frequently in the*

summer season of the year [emphasis added], of locating themselves on [the North Platte] river between the mountains and the Chimney.³³⁵

The significance of Ashley's observation as it pertains to the Sioux—and here he is almost certainly referring to the Oglalas—is that their presence on the North Platte at the time of his report was *seasonal* rather than *year-round*.³³⁶

The Platte River valley, however, was only *one of many* summer hunting grounds that comprised an enormous region utilized by the Tetons—especially the Oglalas.

Anthropologist James R. Walker deduced the vast extent of territory—including both summer hunting grounds and winter camps—covered by a single band of Oglalas over a twenty-one-year period by combining the birth years of certain prominent men from that band with information extrapolated from its winter counts: (White Hawk, b. 1819) that winter Bull Bear's followers—the Kuinyan (Kiyuksa) band camped near the big bend of the Minnesota River in present-day Minnesota; (Red Cloud, b. 1821) that summer they hunted buffalo on the Smoky Hill River in present-day Kansas; (Little Wound, Bull Bear's son, b. 1828) that summer the band chased buffalo on the headwaters of the south fork of the Cheyenne River in present-day Wyoming; (Wolf Ears, b. 1833) that summer Bull Bear's people chased buffalo just east of the mountains on the south fork of the

³³⁵ National Archives Microfilm Publication 1637, roll 3, frames 1-10; reprinted in James S. Hutchins, ed., "A Letter From William H. Ashley," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 36 (Fall 2000): 2-5; Bray, "The Oglala Lakota and the Establishment of Fort Laramie," 6.

³³⁶ Bray, "The Oglala Lakota and the Establishment of Fort Laramie," 7. Here, the author expands upon Ashley's brief notation concerning the Sioux in the Platte River valley: "Although other Lakotas, chiefly Brules and Miniconjous, were forging trade contacts as far south as Bent's Fort, Ashley undoubtedly referred to the Oglalas. Moreover, it was the Kuinyan band, an important Oglala subdivision united under the leadership of the Bull Bear family that aggressively carved out the district [the Platte river valley] for Lakota use. Visitors were pressured to accept secondary status as guests of the Kuinyan. As early as 1822 the band made a spring visit to Ash Hollow on the North Platte. In 1828 Bull Bear led the band far up the south fork of the Cheyenne River into the plains southwest of the Black Hills. In 1832 the Kuinyan ventured as far as the South Platte near the Colorado Rockies. Besides these band-level hunting operations, Ashley's report implies that by 1832 the Kuinyan were hosting the Oglala tribal Sun Dance on the North Platte. Certainly in 1830 and 1831 Lakotas participated with the Cheyennes and Arapahos in joint offensives against the Pawnees, descending the North Platte in large villages." See also Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 40-42.

Platte River in present-day Colorado; (American Horse, b. 1840) they camped that winter near the mouth of Grand River in present-day North Dakota. Thus, according to Walker, “it appears that the Tetons usually made their winter camps near or east of the Missouri River, and in the summertime roamed as far north as well as up in North Dakota, as far west as the Rocky Mountains, as far south as well as down into Kansas.”³³⁷ Walker demonstrates that even Bull Bear’s followers—the first Teton band to trade at Fort Laramie in 1834—did not remain in the Platte River valley year-round. Nevertheless, the founding of that fort in the spring of that year proved to be a pivotal event for the Kuinyans, the other Oglala bands, and, in fact, for all of the Western Sioux.

VI

Eighteen thirty-four marked a turning point in the history of both the Teton Sioux and the American fur trade for a number of reasons. First, the United States Congress thoroughly restructured federal Indian policy by reorganizing the Indian Office, by clarifying the duties of Indian agents, and by passing legislation to regulate the Indian trade in the lands west of the Mississippi River.³³⁸ Second, John Jacob Astor retired from the fur trade. As the result of negotiations concluded on 1 June 1834, he sold his interest in the American Fur Company to a firm whose most illustrious partner was Ramsay Crooks, former chief executive of Astor’s Northern Department.³³⁹ Third, this new

³³⁷ Walker, *Lakota Society*, 88-89; No Ears Winter Count, 1819, 1821, 1828, 1833, 1840, in Walker, *Lakota Society*, 134-139.

³³⁸ Robert A. Trennert, *Alternative to Extinction: Federal Indian Policy and the Beginnings of the Reservation System, 1846-1851* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1975), 3-5.

³³⁹ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 365; here Chittenden claims that “Astor was no doubt partly influenced to take this step in view of impending changes which he foresaw must soon overtake the fur trade. While in London the summer before [1832] he had noted the beginning of the downfall of the beaver trade. He said in a letter written at the time: ‘I very much fear beaver will not sell very soon unless very fine. It appears that they make hats of silk in place of beaver.’” See also Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 466; here the author observes: “The French, who had lost all their fur dominions, had introduced the silk hat, which soon [by the 1840s] became more popular than either nutria or beaver.” In T. Lindsay Baker,

American Fur Company, now under the direction of Crooks, sold its Western Department to Pratte, Chouteau and Company with the stipulation that the AFC would furnish the trade goods and market the furs of the Western Department's new owners.³⁴⁰ Fourth, the Rocky Mountain fur trade began to decline due to lack of demand for beaver pelts.³⁴¹

"Beaver to Buffalo Robes: Transition in the Fur Trade," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 23 (Spring 1987), 5, the author explains the attraction of the fur-bearing nutria to fur traders: "The nutria is best described as a large water rat. The animal, living in the hundreds of thousands in southern South America, had a habitat near rivers and marshes, building in its dens on the banks or in nests in the water itself. The fur companies in the United States and Europe discovered that they could buy nutria skins in Buenos Aires and elsewhere in South America far cheaper than they could secure beaver pelts from the Rocky Mountains, and within a few years the nutria successfully displaced the beaver for almost all hat manufacture." And in common with many fur trade scholars, Lindsay claims: "*The final death blow for beaver came a few years later [early 1840s] with the introduction of silk as a substitute for animal hair in the manufacture of high-quality hats [emphasis added];*" Scholars whom Lindsay cites for his conclusions include: David A. Dary, *The Buffalo Book: The Full Saga of the American Animal* (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1974), 74-75; Charles E. Hanson, Jr., "The Nutria and the Beaver Pelt," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 12 (Fall 1976): 6-10; Horace T. Martin, *Castorologica or the History and Traditions of the Canadian Beaver* (Montreal: Wm. Drydale & Co.; London, England: Edward Stanford, 1892), 114; Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, II: 470-471; see also Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*, 144. Fur trade scholars are far from unanimous, however, in conceding that the introduction of silk hats was the most important reason for the decline of the beaver trade in the late 1830s. For instance, James Hanson writes "about the myth of the silk hat and the end of the rendezvous" and provides statistical evidence to support his conclusion that beaver pelt imports actually peaked in England in 1860 and rebounded in the United States during the late 1850s; see James A. Hanson, "The Myth of the Silk Hat and the End of the Rendezvous," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 36 (Spring 2000): 2-11. Hanson also offers for consideration a newspaper article from 1840 submitted by James S. Hutchins that claims federal import duties placed American traders at a serious disadvantage in their competition with Canadian traders; see *Kentucky Gazette* (Lexington), 24 December 1840 1:4; quoted in James A. Hanson, ed., "Source Material: Why the Rendezvous Ended," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 36 (Fall 2000): 6. Similarly, Paul C. Phillips argues that "the panic of 1837 put an end to high prices for [beaver] furs [while t]he costs of producing them could not be reduced." Furthermore, "beaver imported into England from foreign parts was taxed four times the amount levied on imperial beaver," again, making it nearly impossible for American firms to compete overseas; see Phillips, *The Fur Trade*, 2: 466, 559. Fred R. Gowans points to the changing character of the mountain men themselves—for the worse it turns out—as many of them found stealing horses in California to be a much more lucrative enterprise than trapping for furs; see Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*, 197.

³⁴⁰ Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 15.

³⁴¹ From the sixteenth century until the late 1840s the most profitable return on beaver pelts came from their use in the making of felt hats. In Russell, *Firearms, Traps, & Tools of the Mountain Men*, 5-6, the author first explains this fascinating process in detail and then concludes his discussion by agreeing with those scholars who lay the blame for the end of the beaver trade on silk hats: "For three hundred years before Lewis and Clark, the hatters of the world had raised a cry for beaver. In the day of the mountain man, 100,000 beaver skins were consumed each year in the production of hats for men. Dandies of the boulevards were not the only buyers of the 'beavers;' the armies of many nations wanted their own particular styles of beaver hats, and stalwarts in rural communities everywhere needed them for Sunday-go-to-meeting dress. The beaver pelt as it came from the trader was a rough, greasy skin covered with coarse brown hair under which was the fine fur or wool. The first step in hatmaking was to shave both hair and wool from the skin. The bare skin was then sold to a maker of glue, and the wool and hair were separated by a blowing process. Only the wool found use in hatmaking. The soft, loose fur was applied in small

This last, highly significant development occurred simultaneously with the decision by William Sublette and Robert Campbell—partners in the St. Louis Fur Company, which they had formed during the winter of 1832-33—to construct a trading fort at the junction of Laramie’s Fork and the North Platte River. Their decision had everything to do with the Rocky Mountain beaver trade and virtually nothing to do with Teton Sioux migrations to the plains surrounding the Platte River valley.

Throughout the spring, summer, and fall of 1833, the St. Louis Fur Company, still under the direction of Sublette and Campbell, challenged the American Fur Company for control of the upper Missouri fur trade by constructing nearly a dozen trading posts in the immediate vicinity of AFC establishments along that river; the most important of the St. Louis Fur Company posts was Fort William, located three miles below Fort Union. By virtue of its considerable financial reserves, however, American Fur Company negotiator Kenneth McKenzie forced Sublette and Campbell to offer their Missouri River posts for sale to the AFC. Nevertheless, Sublette was able to extract the concession from McKenzie that the American Fur Company would abandon the Rocky Mountain trade and restrict its future operations to the Missouri River. Sublette and Campbell were thus left free to concentrate all of their energies on the fur trade in the mountains; only New

quantities to a perforated copper revolving cone within which was a suction device that pulled the fur against the cone. A spray of hot water turned upon the fur-covered cone, together with manipulation of the fur with the hands, started the felting process. Repeatedly fur was added, and the manipulation continued until the felt became tough in texture. Then it was removed as a hood from the cone and placed in a mold where it was worked into the desired shape. While it was still soft and warm, shellac was forced into it from the inside. Fine fur was then applied to the outside of the shaped hat. With the aid of hot water and careful handwork the outer surface was made to appear covered with a growth of fur. The final step in making the dress hat was to give it a high gloss and embellish it with a band and lining. By means of a revolving block and the application of brushes, irons, sandpaper, and velvet, a finish as bright as that of silk was obtained. Because of its long velvety ‘pile’ or fur, the ‘beaver’ was characterized by an exquisite beauty that never distinguished the silk hat. Beaver-hat making is now a lost art. *The introduction of silk in the 1830s gradually displaced beaver fur in the hatter’s industry* [emphasis added]; today [1960s] ‘beavers’ are seldom found except in museum collections.”

Englander Nathaniel Wyatt remained a threat to their plans to supply the mountain outfits with trade goods exchanged for furs that they would then transport to St. Louis.³⁴²

William Marshall Anderson accompanied Sublette's caravan to the mountains in the spring of 1834 and became an eyewitness to Sublette's decision to build Fort Laramie. In his journal entry for 30 May, Anderson recorded that "this evening we arrived at the mouth of Laramie's Fork where Capt. Sublette intends to erect a trader's fort."³⁴³ And, for 31 May:

This day we laid the foundation *log* [emphasis in the original] of a fort, on Laramie's fork. A friendly dispute arose between our leader and myself, as to the name. He proposed to call it Fort Anderson, I insisted upon baptizing it Fort Sublette, and holding the trump card in my hand (a bottle of champagne) was about to claim the trick. Sublette stood by, cup reversed, still objecting, when Patton offered a compromise which was accepted, and the foam flew, in honor of Fort William, which contained the triad prenames of clerk, leader, and friend.³⁴⁴

The establishment of Fort Laramie in 1834 proved to be a highly favorable development for the Teton Sioux—particularly for certain bands of Oglalas and Brules—as the sizeable concentrations of Indians trading at the succession of posts located on the Fort Pierre Plain had significantly reduced the buffalo herds in that region. As a consequence of that reduction in their resource base, those Indians continued their westward migration in pursuit of more substantial herds and, as a result, forced many of the traders at Fort Pierre to follow them. In response to these traders' complaints, the

³⁴² Fred R. Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous: A History of the Fur Trade Rendezvous, 1825-1840* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1976; reprint, Layton, UT: Gibbs M. Smith, 1985), 80, 98-99 (page citations are to the reprint edition); Hanson, "Fur Trade Activities in the Fort Laramie Region, 1834-1849," 8; Hanson, "A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail," 4.

³⁴³ Dale L. Morgan and Eleanor Towles Harris, eds., *The Rocky Mountain Journals of William Marshall Anderson* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1967; reprint, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1987), 108 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

American Fur Company eventually divided the trade between the two forts at a point along White River, a move that both increased Fort Laramie's relative importance and further encouraged the westernmost Sioux to trade there.³⁴⁵

Subsequent developments induced Sublette and Campbell to sell Fort William to Fontenelle, Fitzpatrick and Company in 1835. Ownership of the fort changed hands again a year later when Pratte, Chouteau and Company purchased it. Although that firm eventually rebuilt the fort of adobe brick in 1841 and rechristened the new structure Fort John, it had, almost from the beginning, been called Fort Laramie. With the acquisition of the fort in 1836 by Pratte, Chouteau and Company—generally known as the American Fur Company—the AFC had, by 1837, positioned itself to extend the Teton Sioux trade into the Platte River valley by utilizing a portion of “the old Spanish trail”; i.e., the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail.³⁴⁶

As an integral feature of the American Fur Company's trade with the Teton Sioux, the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail remained in year-round use from 1837 to 1849. The AFC trader generally recognized as the originator of the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail was a hard-driving, often violent man by the name of Frederick LaBoue—“Grey Eyes” to the Sioux.³⁴⁷ Although Sublette and Campbell had supplied Fort Laramie by way of the five-hundred-mile-long Platte River road, using it exclusively had proven to be too costly and was, therefore, a primary reason for their decision to sell out to Fontenelle, Fitzpatrick and Company, a firm that experienced similar financial difficulties utilizing

³⁴⁵ Colin Campbell, White River, to P. D. Papin, 29 December 1837, Chouteau Family, MHMA; quoted in Hanson, “A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail,” 9; Hanson, “A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail,” 4-5.

³⁴⁶ Hanson, “Fur Trade Activities in the Fort Laramie Region,” 9; Hanson, “A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail,” 3.

³⁴⁷ Earlier English translations of the Sioux winter counts in Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts* spell “LaBoue” as “Le Beaux;” the spelling used here follows that found in the “Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Journal and Letter Books,” ed. Charles Edmund De Land, notes by Doane Robinson, *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. 9 (1918), passim; Hanson, “A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail,” passim.

the same road. LaBoue, however, conceived the complementary ideas of using Fort Pierre as both the main supply depot and fur storehouse for Fort Laramie—an option not available to the previous owners of the fort—and of transporting those supplies and furs over the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail. Not only was the overland route between the two posts two hundred miles shorter than the Platte River road, but Fort Pierre also possessed critical supplies, skilled labor, food stocks, and warehousing facilities needed by the traders. The American Fur Company already absorbed water transportation costs to and from Fort Pierre as part of the Company's larger operations supplying the Upper Missouri Outfit's numerous posts along the Missouri River; by 1837, the trail was a major component of Fort Pierre's transportation network.³⁴⁸

Within a year of the American Fur Company's acquisition of Fort Laramie in 1836, LaBoue resolved to exploit the lucrative Indian trade in buffalo robes by establishing a number of smaller trading posts in the sheltered river valleys and creek beds between Forts Laramie and Pierre where the tribes generally wintered. LaBoue located one of them on Chadron Creek, near the modern town of Chadron, in the Pine Ridge country of present-day, northwestern Nebraska, and chose Missouri Frenchman, James Bordeaux to oversee it. Bordeaux's trading post consisted of a one-room trading store, living quarters for Bordeaux and his family, a storeroom, fur press, and garden.³⁴⁹

In common with many of the French traders, Bordeaux enhanced his trade with the Indians through marriage. By 1838, he had married an Arikara woman, who later left him to return to her people. Unwilling to sever his relationship with the Sioux, however, Bordeaux remained in their country and married a Brule woman named *Huntkalutawin*

³⁴⁸ Hanson, "A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail," 5.

³⁴⁹ "The Bordeaux Trading Post," Museum of the Fur Trade, accessed 6 October 2011, <http://www.furtrade.org/2brdx.html>.

(Marie Bordeaux) the daughter of Lone Dog and sister of Swift Bear of the Corn Band.³⁵⁰

Thus, the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail, anchored by those two major trading establishments, combined with the satellite posts strung along the entire length of the trail and the familial relationships fostered by many of the traders with their Indian trading partners, all served to connect the Teton Sioux to a global market economy that reached from the Platte River valley to the East Coast of the United States, and Europe. And although that intricate commercial network provided the Sioux with what had become, even long before 1837, vital Euro-American trade goods, their very indispensability fostered a dependency on that trade, a dependency with consequences that few Lakotas anticipated.

³⁵⁰ Charles E. Hanson, Jr., "James Bordeaux," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 2 (Spring 1966): 2.

CHAPTER FIVE

“THE GOLDEN YEARS:

THE FORT PIERRE-FORT LARAMIE TRAIL AND THE TETON ASCENDANCY, 1837-1846”

I

On or about 17 April 1837, an American Fur Company steamboat, the *St. Peter's*, commissioned to carry annuity and trade goods to the Indian agencies and the Company's fur trade posts of the upper Missouri, respectively, left St. Louis and began its journey upriver. In its wake, the ill-fated craft spread illness and death in the form of smallpox on an almost unimaginable scale among the upper Missouri tribes all the way from the Great Bend of the Missouri to Fort Union and beyond. The epidemic permanently overturned the region's geo-politics, temporarily disrupted the upper Missouri fur trade, and, created circumstances that inexorably forced several bands of Western Sioux—particularly those of the Brules and Oglalas—into Fort Laramie's trade orbit. And from 1837 to 1849, the American Fur Company supplied that fort by the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail, a transportation innovation capable of sustaining Fort Laramie's large business volume and that, in turn, encouraged those bands of Tetons that regularly traded there to occupy the Platte River valley *year-round*.

The route traced by the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail neatly bisected the vast region—anchored by Fort Pierre on the Missouri and Fort Laramie on the Platte—that the Teton Sioux freely ranged and permanently occupied beginning in the late 1830s and lasting until their dispersal in 1854.³⁵¹ Fur traders who actually used the trail made few written references to it, undoubtedly thinking of it as just one more “humdrum” aspect of what were, to them, routine operations, although in later years they might occasionally rough-out a map of the trail for interested cartographers.³⁵² Of them all, apparently only Rufus Sage left a written record of his passage of the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail.³⁵³

Francis Parkman made one of the few contemporary references to it in his account of an altercation at Fort Laramie between a French-Canadian *engage* named Perrault and the fort’s *bourgeois*, James Bordeaux. The context of the reference is illuminating for its glimpse of the volatile relations that often prevailed among the isolated employees of the American Fur Company. Parkman writes:

When we reached [Fort Laramie], a man came out of the gate with a pack at his back and a rifle on his shoulder; others were gathering about him, shaking him by the hand, as if taking leave. I thought it a strange thing that a man should set out alone and on foot for the prairie. I soon got an explanation.

³⁵¹ Fur trade scholars Charles E. Hanson, Jr. and his son, James A. Hanson, relied heavily on the information contained in the “Report of Lieutenant G. K. Warren, Topographical Engineer of the ‘Sioux Expedition,’ Of Explorations in the Dacota Country, 1855,” particularly the “Plot of the Route from Fort Laramie to Fort Pierre, August 1849,” P & R File, Map 31, Records Group 92, National Archives and Records Administration, “Journal 1855,” Box 5, Warren Papers for their respective descriptions of the trail in Hanson, “The Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail” and Hanson, “A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail.” While the elder Hanson notes that the trail “has received little historic notice, probably because it both began and ended in the far wilderness,” he also points out that, in the original 1902 edition of Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, the author indicated the trail on a map that accompanied the work and referred to it several times in the text. Yet another detailed depiction of the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail appears in Charles Edmund De Land, “Basil Clement,” *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. 11 (1922): 243-389; here De Land identifies the trail by name and includes its path on a fine map of western trails. The description of the trail that appears in this essay relies almost exclusively on the two Hanson articles.

³⁵² Hanson, “A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail,” 5.

³⁵³ *Rufus B. Sage: His Letters and Papers, 1836-1847; With an Annotated Reprint of His “Scenes in the Rocky Mountains, and in Oregon, California, New Mexico, Texas, and the Grand Prairies,”* with an introduction, biographical sketch, and notes by LeRoy R. Hafen and Ann W. Hafen (Glendale, CA: Arthur Clark, 1956), 232-240; Hanson, “A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail,” 5.

Perrault—this, if I recollect right, was the Canadian’s name—had quarreled with the *bourgeois*, and the fort was too hot to hold him. Bordeaux, inflated with his transient authority, had abused him, and received a blow in return. The men then sprang at each other, and grappled in the middle of the fort. Bordeaux was down in an instant, at the mercy of the incensed Canadian; had not an old Indian, the brother of his squaw, seized hold of his antagonist, it would have fared ill with him. Perrault broke loose from the old Indian, and both the white men ran to their rooms for their guns; but when Bordeaux, looking from his door, saw the Canadian, gun in hand, standing in the area and calling on him to come out and fight, his heart failed him; he chose to remain where he was. In vain the old Indian, scandalized by his brother-in-law’s cowardice, called upon him to go to the prairie and fight it out in the white man’s manner; and Bordeaux’s own squaw, equally incensed, screamed to her lord and master that he was a dog and an old woman. It all availed nothing. Bordeaux’s prudence got the better of his valor, and he would not stir. Perrault stood showering opprobrious epithets at the recreant *bourgeois*, till, growing tired of this, he made up a pack of dried meat, and, slinging it at his back, set out alone for Fort Pierre, on the Missouri, a distance of three hundred miles, over a desert country, full of hostile Indians.³⁵⁴

The Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail paralleled two major drainage systems for much of its distance: the Bad (Teton) and White Rivers; the trail also cut perpendicularly to the Niobrara River and Rawhide Creek before terminating at Fort Laramie. After departing Fort Pierre, the trail headed west, southwest up the Bad [Teton] River to its source, a distance of approximately 110 miles. The river rushed by in a deep and narrow channel shouldered by gently-sloping terrain generously supplied with grass and firewood. The trail then turned abruptly south at the river’s source and cut through the Badlands headed for White River. Three springs afforded drinking water for this portion of the trail.³⁵⁵ The Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail struck the White River valley 160 miles from Fort Pierre at the approximate half-way point and continued up the north bank of the White into the

³⁵⁴ Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 121-122.

³⁵⁵ The southernmost of the three springs, known now as Harney Spring, then as Ash Spring, surfaced just outside the Badlands at a point that, today, denotes the rough northern limit of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation; see Hanson, “A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail,” 6.

Pine Ridge country until near the present site of Whitney, Nebraska, where it crossed over to the south bank of the river to avoid the suddenly-difficult terrain lining the north bank.³⁵⁶

Eighty miles northeast of Fort Laramie the trail split, with one fork, the western, more suited for pack animals and accepted by traders indifferent to uneven ground and scarce fuel and water. As this branch of the trail neared the source of White River, sheer cliffs compelled the traders to cross it perhaps a dozen times in one ten-mile stretch. The road then veered to the southwest after leaving the Pine Ridge country, finally striking the Niobrara. As its banks were devoid of firewood, winter travel forced the crews to pack their own when snow buried the buffalo chips that generally served as fuel along that stretch of the road.³⁵⁷

The western branch then threaded its way into present-day Wyoming and on toward upper Rawhide Creek. Once across that stream, the trail finally met the North Platte at its confluence with the Laramie River and terminated at the fort itself. The total distance of this route from Fort Pierre averaged anywhere from 319 to 326. The westernmost fork of the trail served as an “express” route when making good time to and from Fort Laramie was important; it also offered the traders readier access to the Indian camps on the upper White River and in the western and southern Black Hills than its more easterly counterpart.³⁵⁸

The eastern fork of the trail, although twenty miles longer than the western, was considerably less demanding on both the traders and their stock. The eastern branch left the White River before striking the precipitous canyon walls near its source. As the trail

³⁵⁶ Hanson, “A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail,” 6.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

next wound its way up the valley of Deadman Creek, the traders first encountered a single “very steep” hill followed by six miles of jagged terrain across a pine-covered ridge, twelve miles of gently-rolling plains, before cutting the Niobrara twelve miles below where the western fork had crossed it. At Horn Spoon Butte near the present-day Nebraska-Wyoming border, springs provided fresh drinking water as the trail turned to the west and continued on to Rawhide Creek before finally reaching the North Platte eight miles below Fort Laramie. The eastern branch thus offered numerous opportunities to rest after a demanding journey of hundreds of miles.³⁵⁹

Sturdy wagons pulled by oxen and strings of pack mules and horses afforded most of the heavy transport on the trail; nevertheless, carts—particularly, the Red River type of two-wheeled cart—also carried much of the traffic; and, significantly, the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail almost certainly represented the southernmost use of the Red River cart.³⁶⁰ There are numerous references to the use of these carts in contemporary accounts. For example, in 1833 at Fort William on the Missouri—the opposition post built by Robert Campbell and William Sublette to challenge Fort Union’s hold on the region’s trade—Charles Larpenteur used “an old cart purchased from some half-breeds.”³⁶¹ The traders undoubtedly manufactured their own carts; Robert Campbell noted in his journal for December 1833 that, because “they are very useful,” he had already finished 5 carts

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ The finest description of these carts, complete with a photograph and four scale drawings of the Smithsonian Red River cart collected in 1882 is in Charles E. Hanson, Jr., “Red River and Other Carts,” *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 19 (Fall 1993): 1-12.

³⁶¹ Larpenteur, *Forty Years A Fur Trader*, 54; here, too, Larpenteur’s editor, Elliott Coues, writes of the carts: “This was a one-horse, two wheeled cart built of wood without any iron whatsoever, the ramshackle affair being held together with rawhide. But the ‘Red River cart,’ as it was called because it was made in this fashion by the Canadian French and their half-breeds of the Red River of the North, answered all ordinary purposes, and many thousands of these primitive vehicles were in use during the years of which Larpenteur writes [1833-1872], especially on the annual buffalo hunts which were conducted on the plains in large companies.”

with harnesses “and material was on hand for 6 more.”³⁶² While the traders used but a single horse to pull most of the carts, some required two or more draft animals to carry the heaviest loads along the trail. Following especially good trading seasons, two or three round trips by as many as 100 carts might be necessary to haul the more than 25,000 buffalo robes exchanged at Fort Laramie and carried to Fort Pierre.³⁶³ And this transportation network created by Frederick LaBoue and the Chouteau Company between Fort Laramie and Fort Pierre also readily accommodated the establishment of smaller, intermediate posts to facilitate trade with those wide-ranging people.

II

The 1837 outbreak of smallpox on the upper Missouri, a demographic catastrophe of unprecedented proportions that would have far-reaching consequences for all of the Indian tribes of that region, began with the debarkation from St. Louis of the American Fur Company steamboat, *St. Peter's*. Laden with annuity goods for the tribes and trade goods and supplies for the Company's upriver posts, the steamboat also carried Joshua Pilcher, Indian agent for the Sioux, and Indian subagent for the Mandans, William N. Fulkerson. In a tragic irony, by the time the epidemic had abated, smallpox had reduced the tribal population of the Mandans to a level “below the genetic survival threshold” and virtually ended that tribe's military, political, and economic influence on the upper Missouri. The Teton Sioux and other mounted hunters, however, “more nomadic and less damaged by the disease, moved farther westward into areas where game still could be

³⁶² George Brooks, ed., *Robert Campbell's Journal* (St. Louis, 1964), 29, 34.

³⁶³ Hanson, “Red River and Other Carts,” 3; Hanson, “The Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail,” 5; Hanson, “A Forgotten Fur Trade Trail,” 6-7.

procured.” In the case of the Sioux, “farther westward” meant the buffalo-rich plains surrounding Fort Laramie and the Platte River valley.³⁶⁴

In addition to Pilcher and Fulkerson, the *St. Peter's* carried its crew and other AFC employees, as well as a number of Indians headed for the upper Missouri and home; Bernard Pratte, Jr. piloted the vessel.³⁶⁵ Pratte was the son of that same Bernard Pratte,

³⁶⁴ Clyde D. Dollar, “The High Plains Smallpox Epidemic of 1837-38,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 8 (January 1977): 15.

³⁶⁵ James A. Hanson, “An Interesting Reference to the Upper Missouri Smallpox Epidemic of 1837,” *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 47 (Spring 2011): 2. Here Hanson briefly describes the voyage of the *St. Peter's* and the effects of the epidemic on the Indians of the upper Missouri to provide the context for introducing a letter written by Pratte that confirms the steamboat's complement was very aware that smallpox was aboard long before they reached the Sioux agency below Fort Pierre. The most recent account of the entire episode is found in Dollar, “High Plains Smallpox Epidemic,” 15-38; other extended treatments of the epidemic appear in Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, II: 613-620 [somewhat surprisingly, Chittenden does not even mention the 1837 voyage of the *St. Peter's* in his *History of Early Steamboat Navigation*]; and DeVoto, *Wide Missouri*, 279-301. Regarding the cause[s] of the epidemic, here Dollar holds both Chittenden and DeVoto accountable for a “recriminatory [historiographical] approach [that] has grown in sinister connotations until, in recent times, the white man in general stands indicted of premeditated Indian genocide through the introduction of smallpox.” According to Dollar, the list of scholars who later adopted and expanded upon this “recriminatory approach,” includes William T. Hagan, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Angie Debo, and others. For instance, Dollar writes that “Chittenden castigated the American Fur Company for its role in the epidemic and pointed to a purloined blanket as the principal means of introducing the scourge to the Mandan.” And Dollar claims that DeVoto “also pinned the blame on the American Fur Company and a stolen blanket [despite] being more moderate in his condemnations;” see Dollar, “High Plains Smallpox Epidemic,” 16. But a more careful reading of both Chittenden and DeVoto reveals that neither author subscribed to what Dollar terms “a rather pointed racial indictment.” For instance, according to Chittenden: “The plague was introduced through the annual steamboat *St. Peters* [*sic*], of the American Fur Company, which according to Larpenteur, arrived at Fort Union on the 24th of June 1837; see Charles Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri: The Personal Narrative of Charles Larpenteur, 1833-1872*, 2, ed. by Elliott Coues (Reprint, Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1962), I: 131-132. Some accounts say there was but a single case on board, but it appears certain that there were several. The course of the American Fur Company on this occasion was in many respects culpable, for, knowing the terrible effects of the disease, it should not have permitted the infected boat to visit the tribes. The situation, however, was a very difficult one to deal with. The Indians expected the boat and knew that it had many goods for them, and if it failed to arrive they could never have been made to understand that it was not because of an attempt to rob them. Moreover, to have returned and sent up another steamboat would have been impossible, for the river would have been too low by that time. *As the company would be the greatest sufferer from any epidemic among the Indians, they [ie., the AFC] cannot be accused of any selfish motives in the course they pursued* [my italics]; see Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, II: 613. And DeVoto adds: “This narrative will not be suspected of admiring the business ethics of the Company. But it must protest the tendency of twentieth-century historians to hold the eighteen-thirties in American history to ideas which the eighteen-thirties had never heard of, which they would not have understood, and which produce confusion or nonsense when imposed on them today. In the fifth decade of the twentieth century [DeVoto first published *Across the Wide Missouri* in 1947] it is easy to say that the *St. Peter's* should have tied up somewhere till the smallpox aboard had burned out, or should have returned to St. Louis, and that meanwhile the Indians should have been kept away from her. Try to do it. In 1837 the germ theory and the concept of immunization did not exist: Pasteur was ten years short of investigating even his silkworms. No one knew how smallpox was communicated. *If the best physicians of America had*

Sr. who, along with Pierre Chouteau, Jr., had purchased John Jacob Astor's Western Department in 1834 and subsequently formed Pratte, Chouteau and Company. Although the younger Pratte, too, nurtured interests in the fur trade and eventually became a principal partner in Pratte and Cabanne Fur Company, he first became fascinated with steamboat navigation. Having distinguished himself earlier with service aboard the *Yellow Stone*, and later supervising the construction of and commanding its successor on the upper Missouri, the *Assiniboine*, Pratte, in the spring and summer of 1837, found himself piloting the deadliest vessel yet to ply the unpredictable waters of the Missouri River, the *St. Peter's*.³⁶⁶

On 29 April, a mere thirteen days out of St. Louis, as the *St. Peter's* docked at Fort Leavenworth, a deckhand described by Pilcher as a "mulatto" already lay ill with fever. Pratte, understandably reluctant to pronounce the man sick with smallpox, declined to abandon him onshore despite the fact that Fulkerson had apparently recommended doing so. But even before the *St. Peter's* reached the Oto, Omaha, and Pawnee agency at

*been aboard the St. Peter's they would have done exactly what the Company agents did [emphasis added]: they would have instructed the uninfected to avoid miasmas, to eat no foods that were held to alter the proportions of mythical bodily attributes, and on the first symptoms of any illness whatever to take strong physics and various magical substances. The best physicians knew empirically that it was best to isolate smallpox victims as soon as you knew what they were suffering from (long after they had become infectious); the Company agents had the same knowledge and acted on it. But no one had any understanding of the rationale of quarantine [emphasis added];" see DeVoto, *Wide Missouri*, 296-297. Clearly, neither Chittenden nor DeVoto accuse the American Fur Company of "premeditated Indian genocide;" indeed, DeVoto, in particular, forcefully argues against such a historiographical "recriminatory approach." Dollar also claims the credit for uncovering "evidence overlooked by Chittenden and DeVoto and the recriminating historians who have followed them" and exposing the legend of the "purloined blanket" which supposedly first introduced smallpox into the Arikara village. But Dollar's claim is without merit, for here too, upon closer examination, DeVoto also attributes the story of the stolen blanket to "rumor and folklore created by the epidemic." And while Chittenden does include the theft of the blanket in his narrative, he is too cautious to attribute the spread of the disease to so simple a causal relationship; indeed, even Dollar concedes that "there may have been a stolen blanket purloined from a deckhand when the steamboat docked at Fort Clark," but, more emphatically than Chittenden, insists that "this blanket could hardly have been the primary means whereby the disease came among the Mandan;" see Dollar, "High Plains Smallpox Epidemic," 32-34; Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, II: 614; DeVoto, *Wide Missouri*, 295.*

³⁶⁶ Hanson, "An Interesting Reference," 2.

Council Bluffs, the “mulatto” deckhand manifested the unmistakable advanced symptoms of smallpox, and several other unfortunate victims also displayed at least the initial symptoms of the disease. It was here that three Arikara women boarded the *St. Peter’s* for passage upriver to join their tribe, which had only recently settled with the Mandans and Hidatsas living in the vicinity of Fort Clark.³⁶⁷

Two weeks after leaving Fort Leavenworth the crew and passengers of the *St. Peter’s* found themselves waiting impatiently at the mouth of the Niobrara River for the waters of the Missouri to raise enough to permit further progress upriver.³⁶⁸ There, Pratte wrote a letter to his cousin, Pierre Chouteau, Jr., disclosing that even by 29 May smallpox was raging among those aboard the vessel; an independent trader named Narcisse Leclerc passed by the *St. Peter’s* and bore the letter to St. Louis. The letter provides a revealing glimpse of both the unpredictable nature of Missouri River navigation and the enormous variety of supplies and trade goods required to sustain the upper Missouri fur trade during that period; in fact, Pratte devotes most of the letter to these subjects.³⁶⁹ Ominously,

³⁶⁷ Dollar, “High Plains Smallpox Epidemic,” 20. This article is an exacting and thoroughly-researched account that, unlike other narratives of the epidemic, incorporates “assistance [in] the form of comments and suggestions” from a medical professional, in this case, Karl H. Wegner, M.D., at the time of writing, chairman of the department of pathology, University of Medical School at Vermillion, and director of the Laboratory of Clinical Medicine in Sioux Falls, South Dakota and, subsequently, dean of the School of Medicine, University of South Dakota. Dollar also consulted no fewer than eight professional medical references for “the clinical manifestations of smallpox.” The author’s primary research focused on what, at the time of writing, were “newly available source documents”: Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-80, Microcopy No. 234, National Archives Microfilm Publications, (Washington: The National Archives, 1966); more specifically, those records of the Upper Missouri Agency, 1824-74, roll 884, 1836-51.

³⁶⁸ In period fur trade accounts, the Niobrara River appears as *Eau qui Court*, its mouth as “Running Water.”

³⁶⁹ For example, Pratte writes: “To start with, the water left us at Beausoleil Island and since then I have done nothing but portage. Then I was obliged to wait for water at the Omahas, two other times between there and the Vermillion [River] and one other time at 10 or 12 miles above that river; having grounded the Barge with 160 bars of lead, and 8 or 10 axes, our wheel arms and Bucket planks [parts for steamboat paddle wheels]. The water came up a little, but has fallen since dinner. I do not believe I will be able to make it to the Little Missouri with this set-up.” And even prevented from continuing upriver, Pratte pursued the business of the fur trade: “I wanted to follow my cousin’s instructions to buy the [fur] packs of Mr. Leclerc but that’s not something he wanted to do. Following the same instructions I did not deliver Mr.

however, he also adds three sentences that, while illuminating, barely hint at the widespread devastation that the epidemic would soon wreak among the unsuspecting Indians: “As an added blessing I have smallpox on board. We buried this morning Vital Papin, and have 8 new cases, two since yesterday. *I do not know where this will end* [emphasis added].” It would, in fact, end with the near-total annihilation of the Mandans. That tribe suffered a loss rate of over ninety percent, leaving fewer than one hundred survivors out of a tribe that had previously numbered roughly sixteen hundred individuals. The total number of dead among the other Missouri River tribes, including the Blackfoot, Crows, Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras, exceeded 15,000 souls.³⁷⁰

By the time the boat reached the Sioux agency on 5 June, all three women exhibited the advanced symptoms of smallpox, and it was here, too, that Pilcher disembarked to begin distributing annuity goods to the various bands of Yankton and Santee Sioux gathered there. In only twenty-five days, smallpox had spread rapidly among those Sioux encamped at the agency and forced entire bands to scatter. Pilcher thereafter warned all

Dixon his goods and I plan to leave the balance of the outfit at the Little Missouri; articles to be left include 1 pr. Cart wheels, 1 Medicine chest, 1 demijohn of vinegar, 1 cast iron kettle, 4 pigs or 285 lbs. of lead, 1 box tea 13#, 2 Boxes tobacco, 700 lbs. powder, 2 Bbls. Flour, 1 Bbl. Pork, 2 scythes & snaths, Box No. 8, Bale No. 380, 1 Box Sugar. He should be going down to St. Louis but he intended to leave the packs at the Vermillion in charge of Mr. Labruyere, and that I will pick them up when I go down.” Bernard Pratte, Jr. to Pierre Chouteau, Jr., Running Water, 29 May 1837, Museum of the Fur Trade Collections, Chadron, Nebraska; quoted in Hanson, “An Interesting Reference,” 4.

³⁷⁰ The estimate of a greater-than- ninety-percent casualty rate among the Mandans is from DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri*, 287; and on p. 295 in the same volume, DeVoto, citing an unspecified report by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, gives a figure of 17,200 dead for the Mandans, Arikaras, Hidatsas, Sioux, Assiniboins, and Blackfoot; the estimate of 15,000 dead between the Missouri River tribes listed above is from Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, II: 619, who credits David D. Mitchell, first a clerk and later a partner in the Upper Missouri Outfit, with the figure; In Hanson, “An Interesting Reference,” 3, the author writes: “Before the disease ran its course, ten out of twelve Indians living around Fort Union were dead. It killed at least 700 Blackfeet, 800 Assiniboines, 2,500 Pawnees, and an unknown number of Lakota, Dakota, Nakota, and Canadian Indians;” unfortunately, he fails to specify his source. Each of these estimates clearly indicates a depopulation of the Missouri River Indians of staggering proportions; and one that would have far-reaching geopolitical consequences for the survivors.

Sioux bands, including the Tetons, not to trade at any posts on the Missouri that summer.³⁷¹

The *St. Peter's* stopped at Fort Pierre on the sixth or seventh of June and took aboard one Jacob Halsey, formerly in command there, but now recently ordered to take charge at Fort Union. In what was but the beginning of a series of tragic events for all the Indians of the Missouri River valley from the Council Bluffs to the Blackfoot country, Halsey arrived at Fort Union already in the incubation stage of the disease, having contracted it from someone heading upriver on board the *St. Peter's*. Fortunately for Fort Union's new *bourgeois*, he became only mildly sick due to the smallpox vaccination he had received somewhat earlier in life. Unfortunately, however, for thousands of Indians even the mild variety *transmits* the disease in its most virulent form.³⁷²

Following the arrival of the *St. Peter's* and its deadly cargo at Fort Union, but tragically unaware of this immutable medical fact, American Fur Company clerk, Charles Larpenteur and several others eventually took what they believed to be positive steps to avert a catastrophe. Larpenteur himself depicts their efforts in his *Personal Narrative*:

After my return from the Canoe camp nothing worthy of remark took place until the arrival of the steamer, late in June. The mirth usual on such occasions was not of long duration, for immediately on the landing of the boat we learned that smallpox was on board. Mr. J. Halsey, the gentleman who was to take charge this summer, had the disease, of which several of the hands had died; but it had subsided, and this was the only case on board. Our only apprehensions were that the disease might spread among the Indians, for Mr. Halsey had been vaccinated and soon recovered. Prompt measures were adopted to prevent an epidemic. As we had no vaccine matter we decided to inoculate with the smallpox itself; and after the systems of those who were to

³⁷¹ Ibid., 20-21; Sunder, *Joshua Pilcher*, 123-124. For an overview of the various Indian agencies in the upper Missouri country during this time period, see Chester L. Guthrie and Leo L. Gerald, "Upper Missouri Agency: An Account of Indian Administration on the Frontier," *Pacific Historical Review* 10 (March 1941): 47-56.

³⁷² Ibid., 21-22.

be inoculated had been prepared according to Dr. Thomas' medical book, the operation was performed upon about 30 Indian squaws and a few white men. This was done with the view to have it all over and everything cleaned up before any Indians should come in, on their fall trade, which commenced early in September.³⁷³

Tragically, the results of their efforts were ineffective; Larpenteur continues:

The smallpox matter should have been taken from a healthy person; but, unfortunately, Mr. Halsey was not sound, and the operation proved fatal to most of our patients. About 15 days afterward there was such a stench in the fort that it could be smelt at the distance of 300 yards. It was awful—the scene in the fort, where some went crazy, and others were half eaten up by maggots before they died; yet singular to say, not a single bad expression was ever uttered by a sick Indian. Many died, and those who recovered were so much disfigured that one could scarcely recognize them.³⁷⁴

III

Despite the severity of the smallpox epidemic of 1837 on the sedentary Indians of the upper Missouri, most of the nomads—with the unfortunate exception of the Blackfoot and Assiniboins, in particular—escaped the worst ravages of the disease. The Western Sioux, in particular the Brules, Oglalas, and Minneconjous, appear to have done so by scattering to the south and west of their previous ranges and reestablishing *a year-round presence* on the plains surrounding the Platte River valley. Sioux winter counts for the years beginning with and immediately following the epidemic confirm this migration and, by omission, reflect the relatively minor effects of the smallpox outbreak on the Western Sioux. For example, for the critical

³⁷³ Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader*, 131-132. For an outstanding analysis of the American Fur Company's efforts to stop the spread of the epidemic, see David L. Ferch, "Fighting the Smallpox Epidemic of 1837-38: The Response of the American Fur Company Traders," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 19 (Winter 1983):2-7; David L. Ferch, "Fighting the Smallpox Epidemic of 1837-38: The Response of the American Fur Company Traders (Conclusion)," *Museum of the Fur Trade Quarterly* 20 (Spring 1984): 4-9.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

year 1837-38, the winter counts of American Horse, Cloud Shield, No Ears, Short Man, and Iron Crow all record the killing of Paints-His Cheeks-Red (alternately translated as “Paints the Lower Half of His Face Red”) and his family by the Pawnees on the North Platte, an event that foreshadowed the bitter warfare between that tribe and the Western Sioux—principally the Brules and Oglalas—that developed as a result of the latter’s permanent occupation of the Platte River valley.³⁷⁵ And the impact of the epidemic on the Tetons seems to have been so slight that the 1837-38 winter counts of the Flame, Lone Dog, and the Swan all tell only of a relatively colorless event—a successful hunt during which the Sioux killed over one hundred elk.³⁷⁶

But if the winter counts are silent regarding the smallpox outbreak of 1837 on the upper Missouri, for the next ten years they do tell part of the story of the Tetons’ conquest of the north-central plains by recording the ever-accelerating pace of intertribal warfare between the Teton Sioux and the Pawnees, Snakes [Shoshones], Crows, Arapahos, and Flatheads.³⁷⁷ For instance, the winter counts of American Horse and Cloud Shield for 1839-39 document the efforts of Spotted Horse and Crazy Dog, respectively,

³⁷⁵ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 139; Walker, *Lakota Society*, 138-139; Hyde, *Red Cloud’s Folk*, 47-50; here Hyde relates how the Medicine Arrow fight between the Cheyennes and the Pawnees—a fight in which the latter tribe captured the Cheyenne’s four sacred medicine arrows—attracted the notice of the Tetons who, from that time on, became increasingly involved in war with the Pawnees, a war that would, by the 1870s, drive them from their hunting grounds on the Platte and Loup Rivers in Nebraska to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma. Also according to Hyde, the “Brulés appear to have played the leading part in attacks on the Pawnee earth-lodge villages, while the Oglalas, after they moved to the Platte, devoted much of their attention to harrying the Pawnees when they came westward into the plains on their semi-annual buffalo hunts.” An account of the Medicine Arrow fight is in George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), 72-73. For an award-winning account of the Pawnee exodus and that tribe’s struggle with the Sioux, see Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*; see also, George E. Hyde, *The Pawnee Indians* [1954], reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁷⁷ For two outstanding treatments of intertribal warfare on the Great Plains, see John C. Ewers, “Intertribal Warfare As the Precursor of Indian-White Warfare on the Northern Great Plains,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 6 (October 1975): 397-410; Colin G. Calloway, “The Inter-Tribal Balance of Power on the Great Plains, 1760-1850,” *Journal of American Studies* 16 (April 1982): 25-47.

to raise war parties against the Pawnees to avenge the death of Paints-His Cheeks-Red.³⁷⁸

Also for that year, No Ears recorded that a Sioux war party, undoubtedly organized by one of the two men above, “went out to fight,” presumably the Pawnees. While both Short Man and Iron Crow credit the war party with retrieving stolen Oglala horses, and although Battiste Good indicated that the Oglalas “killed one hundred Pawnees,” imminent starvation apparently forced the Sioux to eat many of the captured horses.³⁷⁹

For the eventful year 1839-40, The Flame recounted the killing of twenty lodges of Arapahos; Lone Dog, the killing by the Sioux of an entire village of Snake [Shoshone] Indians; The Swan, that a band under Minneconjou chief, The Hard, killed seven lodges of Arapahos; American Horse, that the Shoshones killed Left Hand Big Nose, an Oglala

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 139-140; here, based upon information obtained from his Indian informants, Mallery describes the elaborate Teton rituals associated with organizing a war party: “When a warrior desires to make up a war party he visits his friends and offers them a filled pipe as an invitation to follow him, and those who are willing to go accept the invitation by lighting and smoking it. Any man whose courage has been proved may become the leader of a war party. He fixes the day for his departure and states where he will camp the first night, naming some place not far off. The morning on which he starts, and before leaving the village, he invokes the aid of the sun, his guardian by day, and often, to propitiate him, secretly vows to undergo penance, or offer a sacrifice on his return. He rides off alone, carrying his pipe in his bare hand, with the bowl carefully tied to the stem to prevent it slipping off. If the bowl should at any time accidentally fall to the ground, he considers it an evil omen, and immediately returns to the village, and nothing could induce him to proceed, as he thinks only misfortune would attend him if he did. Sometimes he ties eagle or hawk plumes to the stem of his pipe, and, after quitting the village, repairs to the top of some hill and makes an offering of them to the sun, taking them from his pipe and tying them to a pole, which he erects in a pile of stones. Those who intend to follow him usually join him at the first camp, equipped for the expedition; but often there are some who do not join him until he has gone further on. He eats nothing before leaving the village, nor as long as the sun is up; but breaks his fast at his first camp, after the sun sets. The next morning he begins another fast, to be continued until sunset. He counts his party, saddles his horse, names some place six or seven miles ahead, where he says he will halt for awhile, and again rides off alone with his pipe in his hand. After awhile the party follow [*sic*] him in single file. When they have reached his halting place he tells them to dismount and let their horses graze. They all then seat themselves on the ground on the left of the leader, forming a semicircle facing the sun. The leader fills his pipe, all bow their heads, and, pointing the stem of the pipe upward, he prays to the sun, asking that they may find an abundance of game, that dead shots may be made, so that their ammunition will not be wasted, but reserved for their enemies; that they may easily find their enemies and kill them; that they may be preserved from wounds and death. He makes his petition four times, then lights his pipe, after sending a few whiffs of smoke skyward as incense to the sun, hands the pipe to his neighbor, who smokes and passes it on to the next. It is passed from one to another, toward the left, until all have smoked, the leader refilling it as often as necessary. They then proceed to their next camp, where probably others join them. The same programme is carried out for three or four days before the party is prepared for action.”

³⁷⁹ Walker, *Lakota Society*, 139; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 49-50.

warrior; and Cloud Shield, that the Sioux killed a Crow man and woman found on the trail.³⁸⁰ In pictographs that suggest the Tetons' growing presence in the Rocky Mountains, both American Horse and Cloud Shield depict the stealing of horses from neighboring mountain tribes in 1840-41: two hundred horses from the Flat Heads in the case of the former, and one hundred from the Snakes [Shoshones] in the case of the latter.³⁸¹ For that same year, the winter counts of The Flame, Lone Dog, and The Swan all tell of the Sioux making peace with the Cheyennes, a political development fraught with enormous import for the history of the north-central plains throughout the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s. The Flame even identifies the principal negotiators of this foreign-policy coup: Lone Horn, a Sioux, and Red Arm, a Cheyenne.³⁸² The Flame, Lone Dog, and The Swan all preserve the theft by a Minneconjou warrior of many Crow horses in 1841-42; the latter two even provide the number of horses stolen: nineteen.³⁸³ According to the winter counts, 1842-43 was a particularly bloody year: No Ears portrays Feather Earring killing an enemy horse herder; Iron Crow records that "four lodges came home victorious;" The Flame reports that a Minneconjou chief tried to make war; Lone Dog claims that One Feather organized a large war party to go against the Crows; The Swan illustrates Feather-in-the-Ear making a feast to convince young men to join his war party; American Horse recounts the death of Feather Ear Rings in a fight with the Shoshones in which they suffered four lodges killed by the Sioux; and Cloud Shield illustrates Lone Feather reciting his prayers and taking to the war path to avenge the death of some of his

³⁸⁰ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 117, 140; here White Cow Killer, in an apparent contradiction, calls this year "Large-war-party-hungry-eat-Pawnee-horses winter;" i.e., referring to the event attributed to 1838-39 in most winter counts.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 140.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 118; Hyde does not specifically mention this event, although he writes of the "Sioux and their allies," presumably the Cheyennes, in the years after 1840; see Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 50.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

relatives.³⁸⁴ The year 1843-44 may have been instrumental in reinforcing the Sioux-Cheyenne alliance forged three years earlier as both American Horse and Cloud Shield depict the Oglalas and Brulés recapturing one of the medicine arrows taken by the Pawnees and returning it to the Cheyennes.³⁸⁵ For the year 1844-45, American Horse records the killing of Male Crow by a Shoshone, while Cloud Shield represents Crazy Horse [father of the famous warrior who would defeat Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer and units of the Seventh Cavalry at the Little Big Horn in June 1876] saying his prayers and going on the war path; No Ears reports the killing of He Crow by the enemy; Iron Crow tells of the enemy killing thirty Oglalas. In their winter counts, both American Horse and Cloud Shield ascribe this event to 1845-46 and name White Buffalo Bull [White Bull] as one of those killed.³⁸⁶ Several winter counts record still more deaths for 1846-47: No Ears relates how “One with white testicles was killed;” Short Man tells of the stabbing of Crow Eagle; and Iron Crow depicts the murder of Tall Pine.³⁸⁷ In the aggregate, these Sioux winter counts portray a dynamic and aggressive people acquiring by force some of the richest buffalo ranges on the Great Plains, the prime habitat of a seemingly inexhaustible and renewable resource base—herds of

³⁸⁴ Walker, *Lakota Society*, 140; Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 118, 141; here White Cow Killer terms it “Crane’s-son-killed winter.”

³⁸⁵ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 141; White Cow Killer labels it “The Great-medicine-arrow-comes-in-winter;” Battiste Good calls it “Brought-home-the-magic-arrow-winter.” Hyde disputes the veracity of the winter counts in the following passage: “The statement in the Brulé winter counts that their tribe recaptured the medicine arrows from the Pawnees is incorrect. Captain L. H. North of the Pawnee Scouts tells me that the old Skidis [Pawnees] always said that their chiefs gave two of the medicine arrows to the Yanktons at a peace council and the Yanktons traded or gave these arrows to the Brulés;” Hyde, *Red Cloud’s Folk*, 47. Nevertheless, the winter counts are probably accurate as Sioux-Pawnee relations had become so poisoned by the 1870s that, conceivably, the older Pawnee chiefs would have resisted conceding any battlefield victories to their hated Brulé and Oglala enemies; see also Hyde, *The Pawnee Indians*; Wishart, *An Unspeakable Sadness*.

³⁸⁶ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 141; here White Cow Killer calls it “White-Buffalo-Bull-killed-by-the-Crows-winter,” apparently agreeing with Iron Crow as to the correct year; Walker, *Lakota Society*, 140.

³⁸⁷ Walker, *Lakota Society*, 140; it is worth noting that the incidents associated with this year may have been the result of the intratribal strife caused by the promiscuous distribution of alcohol among the Western Sioux throughout the 1840s, not intertribal warfare.

buffalo estimated in the millions—that would allow the Teton Sioux to dominate trade on the north-central plains and thereby assure themselves of an uninterrupted supply of Euro-American trade goods.³⁸⁸

IV

The implementation of the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail in 1837 combined with the year-round occupation of the Platte River valley by several of the westernmost Sioux bands to position the Tetons for their eventual conquest of the north-central plains. Although Fort Pierre remained their principal trade outlet, Fort Laramie gained steadily in importance throughout the 1840s. Additionally, many bands of the northernmost Lakotas had ready access to Fort Union, yet another major trade depot founded by Kenneth McKenzie in 1829 at the mouth of the Yellowstone River. At all three forts, at a number of smaller posts, and at numerous wintering places, American fur traders conducted a profitable trade with the Tetons, who thereby received an astonishing variety of both practical and luxury trade items in exchange for their average annual output of tens of thousands of buffalo robes.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁸ For estimates of the total number of buffalo that the Great Plains could support, see McHugh, *Time of the Buffalo*, 16-17(30 million); Flores, “Bison Ecology,” 471 (28-30 million); Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 25 (27 million).

³⁸⁹ Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 115-120; Hanson, *Metal Weapons, Tools, and Ornaments of the Teton Dakota Indians*, 8; here Hanson unravels the intricate geographical relationship between the various forts and posts—not all of them under the control of the American Fur Company—that serviced the Teton trade: “Two major fur trade centers and a minor one grew up in Teton country. In present-day central South Dakota, a series of posts—Forts Lookout, George, defiance, Tecumseh, and Pierre—were built, abandoned, and rebuilt. *The most important of these was Fort Pierre* [my italics]. It was the eastern terminus of the traders’ road to the second major center in present eastern Wyoming. There the traders established Forts William, John (commonly called Fort Laramie), Bernard, Platte, and several smaller houses. Fort Laramie emerged as the principal trading post, but the Chouteau firm abandoned it in 1849 and reestablished the western depot near modern Scottsbluff, Nebraska, naming it Fort John. The minor trade center (minor not because of its volume but because of its only occasional use by the northern Tetons) was on the Missouri’s Big bend. These were Forts Lisa, William, Clark, Berthold, and Union. Fort Union evolved as the main trading post and depot in this area.”

By 1840, throughout their vast domain, the Teton Sioux were never more than a short distance from a trader and his supply of goods. Even a partial list of the Tetons' preferred trade goods includes the following: Northwest trade guns, gunpowder, powder horns, flints, knives, battle axes, tomahawks, lances, colored blankets, tobacco, coffee, sugar, salt, pepper, metal awls and scrapers, metal arrow points, cloth and ready-made clothing, needles, beads, buttons, combs, mirrors, and vermilion. Indeed, even this abbreviated list of both practical and luxury Euro-American trade goods that the Sioux had been adapting to their culture dating back to their first contacts with white traders along the upper Mississippi River in the late seventeenth century suggests a degree of increasing dependence upon those items. But the consistent acquisition and utilization of those goods by the Lakotas depended upon a time-consuming and labor-intensive system designed to procure, process, and transport thousands of buffalo robes, first to the forts, posts, and winter camps of the traders and then on to domestic and overseas markets anchored by New York City and London, respectively. It was a system that had changed dramatically in the opening decades of the nineteenth century with the adaptation of the horse to Lakota political economy.

Throughout most of the eighteenth century the Teton Sioux, though already skilled buffalo hunters, were afoot, and the forms of their political economy arose from that condition. Indeed, they were some of the last Indians of the high plains to acquire horses—Hyde places the approximate time of that acquisition within the last decades of that century.³⁹⁰ Anthropologist Allen M. Klein captures the essence of this pedestrian, yet nomadic, lifestyle:

³⁹⁰ Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 21.

Before the horse and hide trade, Plains life was closer to the margins. Life on foot mitigated [*sic*] against overland travel, hence extensive contact of any means. Subsistence, while sufficient, was precarious. Buffalo hunting was fraught with difficulties, failing as much as it succeeded. *The economy was geared for use (i.e. consumption)* [emphasis added].³⁹¹

Still other characteristics of the Tetons' eighteenth-century relations of production included the following: cooperative hunting on a large scale, collective ownership of the harvested bison, an elaborate and relatively non-gendered division of labor, minimal material dependency between family groups, and equal distribution of wealth.³⁹²

All of these features except the first, i.e., cooperative hunting, derived from it, particularly the technique known as the "pound method."³⁹³ Impounding involved driving the animals into an enclosure where the hunters could kill them at will. The labor required for this type of hunt required the services of every able-bodied man and woman in camps that tended to concentrate relatively large numbers of Indians. That concentration intensified band associations as well as fostered tribal practices such as the

³⁹¹ Alan M. Klein, "The Political Economy of Gender: A 19th Century Plains Indian Case Study," in *The Hidden Half*, eds. Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1983), 147.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 150-152.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 150. See also Frank G. Roe, *The North American Buffalo* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), 637. In Ewers, *Teton Dakota Ethnology and History*, the author describes several other buffalo-hunting methods practiced by Plains Indians before their acquisition of horses including the following: simply stalking the animals on foot; hunting them on snowshoes in the winter—especially when buffalo floundered in deep snowdrifts; burning the grass surrounding a buffalo herd, which thus prevented its escape and often caused the death of every animal in it; and, finally, driving buffalo over steep cliffs, once again usually killing every animal in the herd. Klein may have neglected to mention these other pedestrian hunting techniques as they tend not to support his Marxist interpretation of "Production-Distribution-Exchange-Consumption;" see Klein, "The Political Economy of Gender," 159; Alan M. Klein, "Political Economy of the Buffalo Hide Trade: Race and Class on the Plains," in *The Political Economy of North American Indians*, ed. John H. Moore (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 133-160; and Alan M. Klein, "Plains Economic Analysis: The Marxist Complement," in *Anthropology on the Great Plains*, ed. W. R. Wood and M. Liberty (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980). For a study that rejects "the applicability of conceptual categories [e.g., Marxist political economy] relevant for one social context—19th century industrial capitalism—to the analysis of others [e.g., nineteenth-century Plains Indian political economy]," see David Nugent, "Property Relations, Production Relations, and Inequality: Anthropology, Political Economy, and the Blackfeet," *Ethnologist* 20 (May 1993): 336-362.

Sun Dance. As the collective nature of these hunts thus encouraged communal, rather than individual, relations of labor, production, and distribution, Klein concludes:

The essentially equal distribution of the product of the hunt among families made dependency between them less likely. Each was assured an equal share of meat and hides from which most other manufactures resulted. Further exchange of raw materials reflected individuals' or families' desires over and above what was needed for basic provisioning. Inequalities of wealth between households and individuals tended to be minimal; first because of the limited sources of wealth, and secondly, because [eighteenth-century] Plains society was governed by production-for-use. The latter placed political and economic emphasis on group consumption rather than the creation of surplus for increased individual wealth. Wealth differences tended to be leveled out, via "big man" giveaways which was the only route to prestige, and which further underscored the egalitarian structure of early Plains society.³⁹⁴

The acquisition of horses by the Western Sioux in the final decades of the eighteenth century, coupled with the almost simultaneous penetration of the American fur trade—specifically, the bison robe trade—into the upper Missouri country, effected a revolution in both the Tetons' political economy and in the structure of their society.³⁹⁵ Horses greatly expanded the physical, material, and cultural parameters within which the Indians had previously lived. For instance, horses made possible swifter travel with much heavier loads than previously thought possible, and over vastly longer distances. As a commodity, horses offered a new form of wealth on a par with "bridewealth, fines, and trade goods," and as a new "technological factor" in the Indians' world, horses greatly increased the efficiency with which the Indians could harvest buffalo. And locked in a symbiotic relationship with mounted Indian hunters that persisted for decades, "[t]he

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 151-152.

³⁹⁵ For a study of the effects of the fur trade on another powerful Plains Indian confederacy, see Oscar Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact Upon Blackfoot Culture, With Special Reference To The Role Of The Fur Trade*, ed. A. Irving Hallowell, Centennial Anniversary Publication VI, The American Ethnological Society (New York: J. J. Augustin Publisher, 1942).

buffalo hide trade seemed to grow in direct proportion to the changes wrought by the horse in the hunt. That these two were well suited to one another is evident in the changes they jointly were able to effect.”³⁹⁶

Mounted Teton Sioux hunters pursued the bison in high-speed chases armed with either bows and arrows, ten-to-fourteen foot lances, or flintlock muzzle-loading guns, typically Northwest fusils. The Indians generally preferred to use a three-foot bow with either flint- or metal-tipped arrows because they were lighter, easier to handle, and more reliable than guns. A skilled hunter could fire anywhere from five to seven arrows in the same amount of time it took to reload a muzzle-loading trade gun.³⁹⁷ But whichever weapon they used, the hunters, stripped to breech cloth and moccasins, rode out on lesser horses, switching to specially-trained ponies covered with a light robe or blanket only after sighting buffalo. Mounted on these swift buffalo runners, the hunters closed in

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 152; see also H. Clyde Wilson, “An Inquiry into the Nature of Plains Indian Cultural Development,” *American Anthropologist* 65 (April 1963): 355-369. For examples of the “classic” interpretation of the changes wrought by the horse on Plains Indian societies—i.e., that the horse merely “intensified” pre-existing, pre-horse Plains Indian cultural and societal traits rather than substantially “modified” them—see Clark Wissler, “The Influence of the Horse in the Development of Plains Indian Culture,” *American Anthropologist* 16 (1914): 1-25; Daryll C. Forde, *Habitat, Economy and Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1934); George P. Murdock, *Our Primitive Contemporaries* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1934).

³⁹⁷ Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 23; Hanson, “The Early Fur Trade in Northwestern Nebraska,” 296. Interestingly, in Ewers, *Dakota Ethnology and History*, 44, the author makes no mention of an Indian preference for bows and arrows over guns; while in Hanson, *The Northwest Gun*, 1, the author almost seems to contradict his later statements on p. 296 in the article cited above regarding the Indians’ choice of weapons used in buffalo hunting: “Actually the trade gun as we usually think of it was a sound, dependable arm of standardized size and dimensions. The Indian lived by hunting and he demanded a gun just large enough to kill big game at close range and still light enough to carry all day with comfort. Since he was no ballistics expert he no doubt on many occasions overloaded his piece and sometimes burst a barrel in that way. Another prime reason for barrel failure was the practice of loose-loading the gun on horseback when running buffalo. In the heat of the chase the powder was poured by hand down the barrel, a bullet spit down on top of it from the mouth, and the pan filled by striking the butt. The trick was to fire the gun as soon as it pointed downward, but if the ball rolled ahead before the explosion, a ringed or burst barrel was the result. Barrel length varied with the taste of the user, and the trading companies generally handled guns in barrel lengths from thirty to forty-eight inches. This range of length is about the same as that of the muzzle-loading rifles and shotguns used by everyone on the frontier. The shorter model guns were popular with the Indians who used horses.”

approaching from the right side and aimed arrow, lance, or bullet for the heart, just below the right shoulder.

Plains Indian women performed the work of tanning the hides—an arduous task at once both labor- and time-intensive. After they had skinned the buffalo where they lay (see n. 34 above) and packed both the meat and hides back to camp, the real work of tanning could begin. First, the women stretched the skin on the ground, hair side down, and staked the corners; each woman tanner dressed several skins at once. Next, in a process depicted by European traveler Maximilian, Prince of Wied for the Teton Sioux of 1834, the tanners scraped the hides clean of all fat, flesh, and muscular tissue using a bone or metal tool fitted with iron teeth and a wrist strap attached to the handle which facilitated scraping. After leaving the fleshed hides to cure in the sun for a number of days, the women scraped them again to a uniform thickness, this time using a tool resembling an adze with a bone or metal blade attached with rawhide to a wooden or antler handle. For those hides intended for tipi covers and liners, parfleches, and other articles, the women turned them over, removed the hair, and scraped both sides. The tanners then rubbed a noxious blend of cooked deer or buffalo brains, liver, fats, and even red grass into the skin, using their hands and smooth stones. Next, they stretched the hides out on either wooden frames or again on the ground and stripped all of the excess brains and moisture from them with an edged tool shaped like a hoe. Once the hides had dried, the women smoothed them out with a graining tool made of either buffalo bone or iron. Finally, they rendered the hides soft and pliable by drawing them over a smooth log or rawhide cord. To further enhance the value of their robes, the women sometimes painted them in colorful geometric patterns. As the whole process consumed anywhere

from three to ten days, most of the women could reasonable expect only to tan anywhere from eighteen to twenty hides in a single season; their finished products, however, particularly those of the Sioux, were of extraordinarily high quality. So skillfully tanned were Teton robes and hides that they could withstand months of storage without rotting—one of the many factors that contributed to the Tetons' emergence as Fort Tecumseh's major trading partner.³⁹⁸

In the brief introduction to his discussion of nineteenth-century Plains Indian relations of production, Klein states that “[t]he buffalo hide trade seemed to grow in direct proportion to the changes wrought by the horse in the [buffalo] hunt. That these two were very well suited to one another is evident in the changes they jointly were able to effect.”³⁹⁹ The changes to which Klein refers appear to have been, in his view, largely negative. And while conceding that Euro-American trade goods contributed to an “overall prosperity,” he insists that it “concealed an erosion of women’s position through her being increasingly circumscribed to a few tasks related to processing [e.g., buffalo robes and hides] and domestic production. On the other hand, men were increasingly free to pursue wealth.”⁴⁰⁰

In a process that accelerated in the 1820s, the buffalo robe and hide trade radically transformed Teton relations of production—particularly those between the sexes—as the Western Sioux reconfigured their political economy away from one structured merely for subsistence to one committed to mounted buffalo hunting and surplus production for

³⁹⁸ Maximilian, Prince of Wied, *Travels in the Interior of North America, 1832-1834*, vols. 22-25, *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: Arthur P. Clark, 1906), Vol. XXII: 309-322; Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri*, 541; Schuler, *Fort Pierre Chouteau*, 26; Ewers, *Teton Dakota History and Ethnology*, 50-51; Hassrick, *The Sioux*, 182-183. For photographs of Sioux tanning tools with descriptions of their manufacture, see Hanson, *Metal Weapons, Tools, and Ornaments of the Teton Dakota Indians*, 62-64.

³⁹⁹ Klein, “The Political Economy of Gender,” 152.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

trade. As with the century before it, nineteenth-century relations of production derived from Teton buffalo hunts, although now they had become highly individualized rather than collective. Mounted hunters could now run down the animals they desired and kill them with individually-patterned arrows that marked the carcasses as the hunters' own. So efficient was the mounted chase that it became necessary to prevent individual hunters acting alone from prematurely dispersing the herds and thereby ruining the hunt for all. Individual property rights supplanted collective ownership—and thus overturned eighteenth-century relations of distribution—as hunters now claimed the tongue, the choicest cuts of meat, and the hides of carcasses identified by their distinctive arrows. And although nineteenth-century mounted buffalo hunts still generally involved a considerable number of hunters, this was so primarily because the mobility provided by horses made possible large concentrations of tribesmen and not out of any need for increased efficiency.⁴⁰¹

Individualized mounted buffalo hunting considerably altered Teton gendered relations of production and distribution. As women no longer participated in the hunt—although the remainder of their responsibilities still mirrored those of the eighteenth century—they now began to join horses and buffalo hides as sources of wealth. Men assumed the role of “procurers,” while women became “processors.” And while the time required to tan buffalo hides for exchange added greatly to a woman’s burdens, hunting buffalo from horses made it possible for a single hunter to keep at least two women busy tanning

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 152-153; see also Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri*, 504, 531; Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Culture*. Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 159 (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1955), 305; Frank G. Roe, *The Indian and the Horse* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955), 258; Abel, *Tabeau's Narrative*, 199; Regina Flannery, *The Gros Ventre of Montana*, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1953), 56, 64; Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail: Sketches of Prairie and Rocky Mountain Life* (New York: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1911), 264.

hides, a relation of production that encouraged polygyny. Thus, although the Teton Sioux of this period highly valued a woman's labor, her relative position within their political economy declined as men with ability accumulated wealth in the form of "horse to buffalo to wives to trade goods," a relation of distribution that clearly favored younger and more highly skilled hunters in the competition for wives to process hides for trade.⁴⁰²

The nineteenth-century robe and hide trade also resulted in the decline, relative to that of men, of a woman's ability to control valued commodities. Although men and women continued individually to own tools, household goods, and personal items, men owned all of the prized war horses and buffalo runners, while women possessed only the least-valued pack horses. Women might own hides for domestic use once the men had relinquished them, but robes and hides intended for trade remained an unchallenged male prerogative. And even though a woman both made and theoretically owned her own tipi, a man's penalty for unsanctioned buffalo hunting often included the forfeiture of his horses, weapons, *and lodge* [emphasis added]. Clearly, men's private property rights displaced those of women."⁴⁰³

Finally, Klein explains how the increase in material prosperity made possible by the buffalo robe and hide trade both concealed the gender reconfiguration of nineteenth-

⁴⁰² Ibid., 154-156; see also Thaddeus Culbertson, *Journal of an Expedition to the Mauvais Terres and the Upper Missouri in 1850*, ed. John McDermott, Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 147 (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1952), 91; Roe, *The North American Buffalo*, 629-642; Hassrick, *The Sioux*, 183; Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri*, 505, 541; Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Culture*, 150; Ewers, *Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains*, 110, 123; Flannery, *The Gros Ventre of Montana*, 61, 73; Maximilian, *Travels in the Interior of North America*, vol. 23: 110; Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 248.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., 156-157; see also Flannery, *The Gros Ventre of Montana*, 44, 66; Denig, *Five Indian Tribes of the Upper Missouri*, 155; Rudolph Kurz, *Journal of Rudolph Friedrich Kurz*, ed. J.N.B. Hewitt (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 216; Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Culture*, 28, 159; Culbertson, *Journal of an Expedition to the Mauvais Terres and the Upper Missouri in 1850*, 83; Father DeSmet, *Life, Letters, and Travels*, 4: 1028. For a study of gender relations in two sedentary Plains Indian tribes, see David Wishart, "The Roles and Status of Men and Women in Nineteenth Century Omaha and Pawnee Societies: Postmodern Uncertainties and Uncertain Evidence," *American Indian Quarterly* 19 (Autumn 1995): 509-518.

century Plains Indian societies and, for the Teton Sioux, became the single most important factor in creating their illusions of independence:

The loss of much of women's position (in the hunt, property relations, and control over goods) is masked by the general rise in [productivity] in the hunting-raiding sector of society. The horse clearly brought about a revolution in transportation, hunting, and raiding. The entire society prospered from the increased trade that came about as new forms of production (internal) and trade (external) merged. If women occupied a more circumspect role in production it was while enjoying the new prosperity. Hunting was now more assured. Metal pots, knives and axes had obvious advantages over stone and pottery. Iron arrowheads were infinitely better than stone counterparts. Guns were superior weapons of war. And the host of cosmetic products provided welcome relief in the world of self-preservation and fashion. *However, the continued enjoyment of these goods demanded the shift to an economy geared for exchange, which in turn assumed dependency on foreign trade* [my italics].⁴⁰⁴

V

American Horse, Cloud Shield, and Iron Crow all record in their respective winter counts for the year 1841-42 a drunken brawl during which an Oglala chief named Smoke killed Bull Bear—that venerable chief who had led the Kiyuksas to the Platte River valley from the Black Hills country in 1834—in the former's camp on Chugwater Creek, a tributary of Laramie Fork located southeast of and a few miles below Fort Laramie.⁴⁰⁵ Bull Bear's leadership style had always been overtly tyrannical: he brooked no opposition to his wishes, often enforcing this rule at the point of his knife; he took any girl who pleased him for his wife, without making the traditional payment to their parents; and he tolerated no rivals to his chieftainship. Apparently, some traders persuaded “that plump and jovial chieftain,” Smoke, to challenge Bull Bear for supremacy among the Oglalas.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 158.

⁴⁰⁵ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 140-141; Walker, *Lakota Society*, 140.

Outraged at the former's audacity, Bull Bear killed Smoke's favorite horse and thereby considered the matter closed. Although Smoke declined to make much of the incident at the time, he and his supporters, a group that included the young Red Cloud, merely bided their time. Their opportunity for revenge came after some American Fur Company men traded liquor in the camp, and Smoke's warriors set Bull Bear's followers to drinking. A vicious argument between the two groups soon broke out during which Bull Bear, charging from his lodge to put a stop to the quarrel, died instantly from a bullet fired by Red Cloud. Before it was all over, Red Cloud's brother, Yellow Lodge, and six warriors were dead, and many others lay wounded.⁴⁰⁶

In the wake of Bull Bear's murder on the Chugwater, the Kiyuksas broke away from the rest of the tribe, accompanied only by Red Water's band of True Oglalas. With the tribe now split irrevocably into two factions, Bull Bear's followers—known from that time on as the Bear People—gradually drifted southeast to occupy the country in present-day Kansas and Nebraska between the Platte and Smoky Hill Rivers. While the bands under Smoke—the Smoke People—headed northward, away from Fort Laramie, to reside thereafter near the headwaters of Powder River in present-day Wyoming. Although earlier the Oglalas had put forward a warrior named Whirlwind to succeed Bull Bear as chief, once the tribe split, Whirlwind led only his own band, the Kiyuksas. The other

⁴⁰⁶ Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 53-54; Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 139-141. And while under ordinary circumstances, the murder of a fellow tribesman by a Sioux was an unthinkable crime, George Catlin had also noted back in 1832 yet another of the devastating consequences of liquor trafficking among the Tetons: "I arrived, (when an immense herd of buffaloes had showed themselves on the opposite side of the river, almost blackening the plains for a great distance,) a party of five or six hundred Sioux Indians on horseback, forded the river about mid-day, and spending a few hours amongst them, recrossed the river at sun-down and came into the Fort [Fort Pierre] with *fourteen hundred fresh buffalo tongues* [italics in the original], which were thrown down in a mass, and for which they required but a few gallons of whiskey, which was soon demolished, indulging them in a little, and harmless carouse. This profligate waste of the lives of these noble and useful animals, when, from all that I could learn, not a skin or a pound of the meat (except the tongues), which was brought in, fully supports me in the seemingly extravagant predictions that I have made as to their extinction, which I am certain is near at hand;" see Catlin, *North American Indians*, 259-260.

bands each were led by their own chiefs and acted independently of the others. This deep rift among the Oglalas persisted for decades, surviving long after the entire tribe had settled on the reservation.⁴⁰⁷

The 1841 murder of Bull Bear by his fellow tribesmen, despite its profound impact on the future of the Oglalas, represented but a single episode in a much greater problem for the Teton Sioux and the American fur trade of the 1840s: the liquor trade. George Catlin had identified the problem in the 1830s and had received only the ridicule and censure of his hosts, the American Fur Company, for his efforts. The abuse of liquor as an item of exchange in the Fort Laramie region resulted largely from but a single imperative: the traders' need to crush their opposition.

Until 1840, the traders at Fort Laramie enjoyed a monopoly on trade in the North Platte region; but then in the fall of 1840 or spring of 1841, a trader by the name of Lancaster P. Lupton built Fort Platte roughly three-fourths of a mile above the mouth of the Laramie River to compete directly with the American Fur Company.⁴⁰⁸ Lupton built

⁴⁰⁷ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 140-141; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 55; in a note on p. 54, Hyde explains: "There is a watercolor portrait of Bull Bear reproduced in *The West of Alfred Jacob Miller* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1951). The chief is shown as a handsome, strong-featured man of commanding appearance. Little Wound is said to have been a son of Bull Bear and to have hated Red Cloud all his life for killing his father. Little Wound became head chief of the Bear People, and even in 1890 he was bitterly opposing Red Cloud." And, of course, the Oglalas had experienced the divisive effects of Bull Bear's murder almost immediately afterward; Francis Parkman, who camped with them in the summer of 1846 wrote: "The Eagle Feather, who was a son of Mene-Seela [Red Water], and brother of my host the Big Crow, [lamented that] since old Mahto-Tatonka [Bull Bear] had died, the people had been like children that did not know their own minds. They were no better than a body without a head;" see Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 189.

⁴⁰⁸ At the time of Fort Laramie's founding in 1834, its closest rivals had been Fort Bent on the Arkansas River, Fort Hall on the Snake River, and the several Missouri River posts. But then between 1834 and 1840, traders established four posts on the South Platte: Fort Lupton, founded by Lancaster P. Lupton; Fort Jackson, raised by Henry Fraeb and Peter A. Sarpy; Fort Vasquez, built by Louis Vasquez and Andrew W. Sublette; and Fort St. Vrain [also known variously as Fort Lookout and Fort George], owned by the firm of Bent and St. Vrain. Lupton had first seen the Platte River country as a young lieutenant of Dragoons in 1835. Imagining the potential for wealth in the fur trade of that region, he promptly resigned his commission and built the first post on the South Platte, Fort Lupton, in 1836. In 1837, the American Fur Company met this challenge to its hold on the Indian trade of the Platte River valley by subsidizing Fraeb and Sarpy in the building and stocking of Fort Jackson barely six miles from Fort Lupton. Also that year,

Fort Platte of adobe on the right bank of the North Platte directly in the path of the Oregon Trail by way of South Pass. Employed by Lupton at Independence, Missouri to carry supplies to Fort Platte, upon his arrival there, Rufus Sage observed both its strategic location and the traders' bitter rivalry:

[Fort Platte] is situated in the immediate vicinity of the Oglallia and Brulé divisions of the Sioux nation, and but little remote from the Cheyennes and Arapaho tribes. One mile south of it, upon the Laramie, is Fort John [Fort Laramie], a station of the American fur company. Between these two posts a strong opposition is maintained in regard to the business of the country, little to the credit of either⁴⁰⁹

And among the men employed at the fort, Sage soon observed some of the collateral damage that resulted from the unrestricted importation of liquor into Indian country:

The night of our arrival at Fort Platte was the signal for a grand jollification to all hands, (with two or three exceptions,) who soon got most gloriously drunk, and such an illustration of the beauties of harmony as was then perpetrated, would have rivaled bedlam itself, or even the famous council chamber beyond the Styx. Yelling, screeching, firing, shouting, fighting, swearing, drinking, and such like performances, were kept up without intermission—and woe to the poor fellow who looked for repose that night—he might as well have thought of sleeping with a thousand cannon bellowing at his ears. The scene was prolonged till near sundown the next day, and several made their egress from this beastly carousal, minus shirts and coats—with swollen eyes, bloody noses, and empty pockets—the latter circumstance will be easily understood upon the mere mention of the fact that liquor, in this country, is sold for four dollars per pint.⁴¹⁰

Vasquez and A. Sublette erected Fort Vasquez. Fort St. Vrain later completed the string of four opposition posts on the South Platte, all within fifteen miles of each other. It soon became clear, however, that the volume of trade on the South Platte could not sustain that many forts and, by the mid-1840s, their owners had abandoned them all; see Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 67-68.

⁴⁰⁹ Rufus B. Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains, and in Oregon, California, New Mexico, Texas, and the Grand Prairies, or Notes by the Way, During an Excursion of Three Years With a Description of the Countries Passed Through, Including Their Geography, Geology, Resources, Present Condition, and the Different Nations Inhabiting Them* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1846); reprinted in Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 72-73.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 96, 98; quoted in *ibid.*, 73-74.

With the fur traders having thus provided a free lesson in debauchery and over-indulgence, two nearby camps of Indians presently found themselves in drunken imitation, if not exceeding the example, of their white benefactors. According to Sage, the American Fur Company men even drugged the alcohol they dispensed with the object of securing the Indian trade solely to themselves. An unfortunate incident, however, soon transformed the Indians' revelry into contrition and their goodwill into bitter recriminations directed at the traders who had distributed the liquor. A Brulé chief named Susu-ceicha, drunk and riding from Fort Laramie to Fort Platte at break-neck speed, did exactly that when he fell from his horse and died. Then, soon after a rather elaborate burial ceremony that included securing the chief's body to a scaffold followed by the ritual slaying of his horse, the Sioux struck their lodges and moved off, depriving each rival company of its trading partners.⁴¹¹

In responding to this apparent commercial setback, the traders at both Forts Laramie and Platte prepared for the winter season by outfitting pack trains loaded with relatively small quantities of trade goods—including, of course, alcohol—for transport to the scattered winter camps of the Indians. The traders at Fort Platte also dispatched somewhat larger shipments to Fort Lupton on the South Platte and to the White River country in present-day South Dakota. A trader at Fort Laramie by the name of Francois Xavier Matthieu noted the inclusion of liquor in his outfit: "They furnished me with goods, man, and horses, and all that was necessary. *They generally gave us some alcohol*

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 101-102; quoted in Ibid., 74-75.

in ten gallon casks, one on each side of a pack animal [emphasis added]; blankets, tobacco, vermilion and beads; very little powder and lead.⁴¹²

But then in the late summer of 1842, the United States government took steps to stop the liquor trade in Indian country, the first of which was the appointment by T. Hartley Crawford, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, of Andrew Drips, experienced American Fur Company trader, as Indian agent for the Indian tribes on the upper Missouri.⁴¹³ In his correspondence with Drips, Crawford had explicitly stated:

The principal object in making this appointment is to insure the most effectual means of preventing the introduction of ardent spirits into the Indian country [.] You are fully authorized by the law regulating trade and intercourse to eject all who go into the Indian country . . . to sell whiskey I can not too strongly impress upon you the importance of the duty imposed on you. The prevention of the use of strong drink has almost been considered the one thing needful to insure the prosperity of the Indian race and its advancement in civilization. The use of it has tended more to the demoralization of the Indians than all other causes combined, and if by your exertions the abominable traffic can be prevented, even in a partial degree, you will deserve, as you will receive, the thanks of the Government and the blessings of the Indians.⁴¹⁴

There is little reason to doubt either Crawford's sincerity with regard to his position on the liquor traffic or that Drips would receive "the blessings of the Indians." The Sioux, in

⁴¹² Francois Xavier Matthieu, MSS in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California; reprinted in Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 75.

⁴¹³ In "The War on Whiskey in the Fur Trade," in DeLand, ed., "Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Journal and Letter Books," 169, Doane Robinson notes that "Major Andrew Drips was born in Westmoreland county [*sic*], Pennsylvania, in 1789 and died in Kansas City, Missouri, September 1, 1860. He had prior to his appointment as Indian agent been long employed by the American Fur Company and he was among their most valuable traders and was entirely familiar with the entire northwest and all of the conditions of the region and trade. He was charged by opposition companies with gross favoritism to the American in his administration of the Indian agency, but whether or not the charge was just it is difficult at this distance to determine. He left a reputation for integrity and high character." Robert Cutting of the Union Fur Company did, in fact, charge Drips with favoritism toward the American Fur Company in the application of his duties as Indian agent accusing him of "malice and revenge" with regard to Cutting's firm, thereby forcing it, along with the firm of Pratte and Cabanné, to withdraw from the upper Missouri fur trade by 1845; see Sunder, *Fur Trade of the Upper Missouri*, 80-81.

⁴¹⁴ T. Hartley Crawford, War Department, Office of Indian Affairs, to Andrew Drips, Esq., 8 September 1842, DeLand, ed. "Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Journal and Letter Books," 170-171.

particular, supported an end to the illicit trade in alcohol and questioned the government's unwillingness to send troops to enforce its prohibition.⁴¹⁵

Superintendent of Indian Affairs, David Dawson Mitchell, informed Drips that his first responsibility was to clear the Sioux country of alcohol by inspecting all of the trading posts along the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail:

You will therefore proceed as rapidly and as quietly as possible to Fort Pierre, near the mouth of Teton River; this is the principal depot for all goods intended for trade in the Sioux country. Here it will be necessary to make an immediate and thorough search for whiskey, taking care to avail yourself of all the information that can be obtained, both from free whites and well-disposed Indians. When nothing more remains to be done at this point, it will be well to push across the country to Laramie's fork of the River Platte, taking the small trading houses that are generally established along the Black Hills in your way. On the Platte you will, in all probability, find quantities of liquor brought in from Santa Fe; with these violators of all law, who have neither the privileges of a license nor citizenship, I would deal in a very severe manner, and if physical force be necessary, I doubt not but that it will be cheerfully furnished by the American traders. When the whole of the Sioux country has been well scoured, your next move should be to Fort Clark at the Mandan villages.⁴¹⁶

Following his inspections of the traders at the Mandan, "Arrickera" [Arikara], and Gros Ventre [Hidatsa], villages, Mitchell directed Drips to Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone and then on to the Blackfoot post [Fort McKenzie] at the mouth of the

⁴¹⁵ Sunder, *Fur Trade of the Upper Missouri*, 69. Nevertheless, there is evidence that the Lakotas' objections to the liquor trade were somewhat more complex than Crawford may have believed. For instance, Rufus Sage wrote of the Indians: "It was right [they said] the Long-knife [Americans] should bring the fire-water to GIVE to the red man, but wrong to SELL it." But Crawford must have been aware of the motives behind the American Fur Company's sudden interest in ending the illegal traffic in liquor. When Congress had contemplated banning liquor in Indian country back in 1832, the Company had forcefully opposed any such prohibition and had artfully avoided its strictures after it passed. But by 1842, with increasing competition from opposition traders on the North Platte and elsewhere, especially from Lupton's traders at Fort Platte, the AFC had cynically advocated rigidly enforcing the law and had also manipulated the government into commissioning one of its own men as Indian agent on the upper Missouri; see Sage, *Scenes in the Rocky Mountains*, 83-84; Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 86-87.

⁴¹⁶ D. D. Mitchell, Office Superintendent Indian Affairs, St. Louis, to Major A. Drips, U. S. Indian Agent, October 6, 1842, DeLand, ed., "Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Journal and Letter Books," 173-174.

“Marie” [Marias] River, after which Mitchell expected “reports, accounts, &c.” forwarded to his office.⁴¹⁷

The government’s bid to eliminate the liquor traffic in Indian country fared poorly. The next summer Mitchell expressed his disappointment that Drips had not done more to suppress the whiskey trade: “I am free to confess that in **my opinion** [emphasis in the original] still more could have been accomplished. You state positively that there was whiskey trade in the country, at several points. Now it occurs to me that you might, and ought to have obtained **positive** [emphasis in the original] proof of the fact; such as would have justified a revocation of the offender’s **license** [emphasis in the original].”⁴¹⁸ It was around this time, too, that an unscrupulous trader by the name of John Richard first surfaced on the Platte selling whiskey obtained from Santa Fe to the Indians encamped near Fort Laramie.⁴¹⁹ And in the summer of 1842, one of the worst perpetrators of the illegal trade in whiskey, the “Union Fur Company,” built Fort George twenty miles below Fort Pierre on the Missouri and began to expand its operations into the Yellowstone and Bighorn valleys.⁴²⁰ By the spring of 1843, Drips was complaining to Superintendent of Indian Affairs, D. D. Mitchell, about that firm’s blatant disregard for the agent’s authority:

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ D. D. Mitchell, Office Superintendent Indian Affairs U. S., to Maj. A. Drips, U. S. Ind. Agt., July 25, 1843, DeLand, ed., *Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Journal and Letter Books*, 179; also in this letter, Mitchell advised Drips that he should have taken even more drastic action by confiscating all of the offending traders’ goods and expelling them from the Indian country.

⁴¹⁹ American Fur Company trader Honoré Picotte informed Drips in a letter dated 30 April 1843 that Richard had indeed sold “a quantity of spirituous liquor” to the Tetons at the forks of the Cheyenne River, that there had been much loss of life as a result, and that Richard denied trading in alcohol; unfortunately for the Western Sioux, Richard would continue to wreak havoc in their camps with his liquor trafficking for many years; see H. Picotte, Fort Pierre, to Maj. Andrew Drips, U. S. Indian Agt., 30th April, 1843, DeLand, ed., “Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Journal and Letter Books,” 181; see also Hyde, *Red Cloud’s Folk*, 52; Sunder, 49. Mari Sandoz includes a poignant description of Richard’s trading practices and of the devastation they caused among the Oglalas in the mid 1850s in Sandoz, *Crazy Horse*, 48-54.

⁴²⁰ Sunder, *Fur Trade of the Upper Missouri*, 40.

“Mr. Ebbit [John A. N. Ebbetts, Union Fur Company partner] has on several instances interposed with me, by counseling the Indians contrary to the views and wishes of the Government, by stating to them that I was not an agent of Government and that he (Ebbit) had a right to give or sell to them as much liquor as he pleased, and on a recent visit of his to his trading posts in the interior the whites and Indians have been drinking and quarreling.”⁴²¹

The Union Fur Company later abandoned the upper Missouri fur trade, a circumstance due primarily to intense business pressure applied by the American Fur Company, not because of the government’s prohibition of and its agent’s campaign against illicit liquor trafficking.

Mitchell’s ill-concealed disappointment at his agent’s inability to curtail the liquor trade in Indian country led Drips to request assistance. In the same letter to his superior in which he had vented his frustration over Ebbetts’s trade practices, Drips wrote: “I would recommend the appointment of a sub-agent for the upper part of the Missouri River to range from the Arikaras up as far as the Blackfoots [*sic*] trading posts, that would enable me to spend my time entirely with the Sioux and keep a strict eye on these traders.”⁴²²

Although the Superintendent of Indian Affairs initially assigned Joseph Varnum Hamilton, an experienced trader who had first-hand knowledge of the whiskey trade, as special sub-agent, within three months of his appointment, Mitchell had relieved Hamilton of his duties. Drips continued to pursue the illegal liquor traffickers throughout 1844 and beyond, but with little success.⁴²³ But by the mid-1840s, a very different type of threat to the independence of the Western Sioux was emerging in the Platte River valley, a threat infinitely more ominous in its implications for the Teton Sioux and the American

⁴²¹ Andrew Drips, Ind. Agt., Fort Pierre, to Maj. D. D. Mitchell, Supt. Indian Affairs, St. Louis, April 4, 1843, DeLand, ed., “Fort Tecumseh and Fort Pierre Journal and Letter Books,” 191-192.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Sunder, *Fur Trade of the Upper Missouri*, 69-72.

fur trade than the mere consumption of illicit spirits: the increasing number of emigrant trains threading their way along the Oregon Trail.

CHAPTER SIX

“A COLLISION OF CULTURES: EMIGRANTS IN THE PLATTE RIVER VALLEY, THE SALE OF FORT LARAMIE, “THE GREAT TREATY COUNCIL OF 1851,” AND THE GRATTAN AFFAIR, 1846-1854”

I

The buffalo robe and hide trade between the Teton Sioux and American fur traders peaked in the mid-1840s, as it continued to provide the Sioux with enormous quantities of Euro-American trade goods that both eased their daily lives and made possible the maximum extension of their range and military power by the 1850s. At the height of their power, they dominated the north-central plains from the Rocky Mountain Front east to the Missouri, and from the Platte River valley north to the Yellowstone. The Tetons' strategically-located domain also provided access to the Southwest, Great Lakes, and Canadian plains trading networks—commercial opportunities that, considered together, lay beyond the reach of most other plains tribes.

By the mid-1840s, however, Teton bands that to a greater or lesser degree permanently occupied the Platte River country had begun to appreciate the danger inherent in Fort

Laramie—one of the most important components of their commercial network—laying astride the Oregon Trail, the route used by ever-increasing numbers of white emigrants making their way to the Pacific Northwest. That route, as it threaded its way up the Platte River valley, and with ready access to Fort Laramie itself, perhaps inevitably brought two cultures with irreconcilable world-views into first incredulous, then aggrieved, and, finally, violent contact. But, as with so many other developments throughout the trans-Mississippi West during the opening decades of the nineteenth century, it was the trappers and traders of the American fur trade who first drove wheeled vehicles across the plains.

By the time of the Fort Laramie Treaty Conference of 1851, the Teton Sioux had reached the peak of their political power. Three years earlier, the United States government, in tacit recognition of that power and seeking to safeguard white emigrants traveling through Sioux lands, had first built Fort Kearny on the south bank of the Platte River in what is now the state of Nebraska. The government had then purchased Fort Laramie the year after from Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Company, the name to which Chouteau had changed Pratte, Chouteau and Company after the elder Pratte died in 1839.

For five years following the sale of Fort Laramie to the United States Army, veteran fur trader James Bordeaux occupied an unstockaded trading post located roughly eight miles downriver from the fort along the Oregon Trail, a site that a succession of traders had used since 1837. Bordeaux had first entered the fur trade in 1830 as a hunter for the Upper Missouri Outfit. But from that humble beginning, his career progressed over the years until, by 1842 at the latest, Bordeaux was acting *bourgeois* at Fort Laramie, a position that he filled admirably until the sale of the fort to the army in 1849. Then thrust

unexpectedly into the role of independent entrepreneur, Bordeaux continued to conduct a lively and profitable business with the same bands of Brules and Oglalas that had frequented the Platte River valley since the mid-1830s, a connection which served to stabilize Teton Sioux trade relations in the region that might otherwise have swiftly deteriorated.

But then in the summer of 1854, a tragic confrontation involving a group of Mormon emigrants and the bands of Sioux camped along the Oregon Trail adjacent to Fort Laramie ushered in more than two decades of intermittent warfare between the Americans and Tetons. As a wagon train of Mormons passed the Lakotas camped near the fort, a cow fled from its owner, who, afraid to enter the Indian camps, left it behind. A Minneconjou visitor to the Oglalas saw the cow abandoned by its owner and, seizing the opportunity for some meat, shot the animal on the spot. The aggrieved settler soon complained of the incident to the commander of Fort Laramie's small garrison, a Lieutenant Fleming, who, somewhat reluctantly, detailed twenty-nine men under Second Lieutenant J. L. Grattan to the Sioux camps. Once there, Grattan unwisely attempted to arrest the Minneconjou warrior accused of killing the cow. In the fight that followed, Chief Brave Bear of the Brules and all of the troopers died. As the Indians subsequently fled the Platte River valley for the surrounding plains to escape the retribution of the whites, the Indians' collective awakening to their reliance on *readily-accessible* Euro-American trade goods exposed their illusions of independence.

II

The first wagons to make the trek along a route that wound its way westward from St Louis, up the North Platte, and on to the mountains—ten wagons pulled by five mules

each and two Dearborn carriages, each pulled by a single mule—started for the 1830 rendezvous on 10 April of that year under the able leadership of William Sublette. While William Ashley had hauled a wagon across part of what is now the state of Nebraska in 1824, and a company of forty-six trappers hired by Ashley and under the direction of James Bruffee and Hiram Scott had taken a four-pounder cannon mounted on wheels—the first wheeled vehicle to traverse South Pass—to the 1827 rendezvous just south of Bear Lake in the Wasatch Range, Sublette’s caravan was the first to include wagons traveling on at least a portion of the future Oregon Trail.⁴²⁴

But the honor of taking the first wagons through South Pass fell to Captain Louis Eulalie de Bonneville, an 1815 graduate of the United States military academy at West Point who, some fifteen years later, was contemplating his own entry into the American fur trade—along with his share of its supposed profits. After securing a two-year leave of absence from the army and the financial backing of investors, Bonneville equipped an expedition—complete with loaded wagons—and departed Fort Osage on 1 May 1832. He headed, by way of South Pass and the Green River country for the mountain rendezvous held that year at Pierre’s Hole, a magnificent setting near Jackson Lake in what is now northwestern Wyoming. His party arrived there intact on the 27th of July, in company with Lucien Fontenelle and the American Fur Company caravan, already two weeks late for the rendezvous.⁴²⁵

⁴²⁴ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 294; *Gowans, Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*, 56; David Dary, *The Oregon Trail: An American Saga* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 55.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1: 398; *Ibid.*, 66; *Ibid.* Of course, no account of the American fur trade is complete without a contemporary description of the mountain rendezvous held each summer from 1825-1840. And trapper Joe Meek’s sketch of the 1832 *Bacchanal* at Pierre’s Hole—arguably the largest, most picturesque, and most eventful rendezvous of them all—is certainly one of the most colorful: “All the parties were now safely in. The lonely mountain valley was populous with the different camps. The Rocky Mountain and American companies had their separate camps; Wyeth had his; a company of free trappers, fifteen in number, led by a man named Sinclair, from Arkansas, had the fourth; the Nez Perces and Flatheads, the allies of the Rocky

Both parties soon left Pierre's Hole for the Green River country, struck the river at the mouth of Piney Creek, and began to work their way upriver to camp. Later that fall, Bonneville, fearing Indians, erected a temporary structure—immodestly christening it “Fort Bonneville”—a short distance from Green River near its confluence with Horse Creek. Built at an elevation of 7,000 feet, amused trappers could not resist calling it “Bonneville's Folly” and “Fort Nonsense,” both because of its poor construction and the severe winters that prevailed in its area.⁴²⁶ Bonneville eventually spent three years in the mountains pursuing his phantom riches, but, unable to compete with the more seasoned fur companies and free trappers, he abandoned the trade in 1835 only to discover that the army had dropped him from its rolls for exceeding his authorized leave of absence. And although his encounter with the American fur trade had been largely unsuccessful, Bonneville could at least claim he had shown that loaded wagons could successfully

Mountain company, and the friends of the whites, had their lodges along all the streams; so that altogether there could not have been less than one thousand souls, and two or three thousand horses and mules gathered in this place. ‘When the pie was opened then the birds began to sing.’ When Captain Sublette's goods were opened and distributed among the trappers and Indians, then began the usual gay carousal; and the ‘fast young men’ of the mountains outvied each other in all manner of mad pranks. In the beginning of their spree many feats of horsemanship and personal strength were exhibited, which were regarded with admiring wonder by the sober and inexperienced New Englanders under Mr. Wyeth's command. And as nothing stimulated the vanity of the mountainmen like an audience of this sort, the feats they performed were apt to astonish themselves. In exhibitions of the kind, the free trappers took the lead, and usually carried off the palm, like the privileged class that they were. But the horse-racing, fine-riding, wrestling, and all the manlier sports, soon degenerated into the baser exhibitions of a ‘crazy drunk’ condition. The vessel in which the trapper received and carried about his supply of alcohol was one of the small camp kettles. ‘Passing around’ this clumsy goblet very freely, it was not long before a goodly number were in the condition just named, and ready for any mad freak whatever. It is reported by several of the mountainmen that on the occasion of one of these ‘frolics,’ one of their number seized a kettle of alcohol, and poured it over the head of a tall, lank, redheaded fellow, repeating as he did so the baptismal ceremony. No sooner had he concluded than another man with a lighted stick, touched him with the blaze, when in an instant he was enveloped in flames. Luckily some of the company had sense enough to perceive his danger, and began beating him with pack-saddles to put out the blaze. But between the burning and the beating, the unhappy wretch nearly lost his life, and never recovered from his baptism by fire;” quoted in Frances Fuller Victor, *The River of the West: The Adventures of Joe Meek*, 2 vols., Classics of the Fur Trade Series, ed. Winfred Blevins (1870; reprint, Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing, 1983), I: 110-111.

⁴²⁶ Gowans, however, comments that Bonneville had, in fact, sited his fort in a strategic location as the trappers held six of the next eight rendezvous near the fort's location.

navigate South Pass. And shortly after he sold his story to celebrated author Washington Irving for \$1000, the army restored his commission in the spring of 1836.⁴²⁷

Missionaries on their way to Oregon country were soon accompanying the trappers as they followed the North Platte to the Sweetwater River and then through South Pass to the annual summer rendezvous. The first to do so was a thirty-two-year-old Methodist missionary named Jason Lee, who, attended by his nephew, Daniel Lee, Cyrus Shepard, and two assistants, attached himself to Nathaniel Wyeth's second expedition to the mountains. Wyeth's personnel consisted of himself; William Sublette's younger brother, Milton; Jason Lee and his party; two naturalists, Thomas Nuttall and Kirk Townshend; 75 other men; and 250 horses, all bound for the 1834 rendezvous on Ham's Fork of Green River.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁷ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 398-399; Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*, 66; Dary, *Oregon Trail*, 55; of course, the classic account of Bonneville's three years in the mountains is Edgeley W. Todd, ed. *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville U.S.A. in the Rocky Mountains and the Far West*, by Washington Irving, with an introduction by Edgeley W. Todd (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961).

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, I: 446-448; *Ibid.*, 104; Dary *Oregon Trail*, 56-59; here Dary includes Daniel Lee's fascinating account of a mountain-bound trapper's caravan on the move: "The whole party numbered between fifty and sixty men, all mounted on horses or mules, and armed with rifles. Most of them each had a powder-horn or a flask, a large leathern pouch for bullets hung at his side, and buckled close to his body with a leathern belt in which hung a scabbard of the same material bearing a "scalping knife," that savage weapon whose very name is a terror. The mules and horses altogether were over one hundred and fifty. Nearly one-third were for the men, and about two-thirds carried packs, each man leading two of them . . . Our encampments were generally near some stream of water, where there was good grass for our animals; and our tents, eight in number, were pitched in a circular form, enclosing a space large enough to contain all our horses and mules, fastened to pickets. These are sticks more than a foot long and two inches wide, one for every horse or mule, They were driven into the ground, and are designed to prevent the escape of the animals in case of any sudden attempt of the Indians to frighten them away. A regular guard was kept up, and relieved every four hours during the night; and when the horses were without the camp feeding, morning and evening, a watch was set near them . . . We generally traveled about twenty miles a day, halting near noon to bait and take dinner, and encamping early to give our animals time to fill themselves without the camp before dusk, when they were all brought within, where they remained till morning; then the cry, 'Turn out!' was heard from Captain Wyeth. Soon the horses were seen without, and the breakfast fires before the tents. Each of the eight messes into which the company was divided, embraced from five to eight persons. Fried bacon and dough fried in the fat, with tea or coffee made our meal; around which we sat on the ground in good Indian style, and braced up our craving stomachs for the toils of the day. Each mess now prepared to move: tents were struck, packs and saddles put in order. 'Catch up!' cried Captain Wyeth, and the whole camp was instantly in motion to gather the animals, pack up, and away."

Wyeth and his party left Independence, Missouri on 28 April 1834, passed through South Pass on 14 June, and arrived at the rendezvous five days later. A Canadian trapper died there in a fall from his horse, after which Jason Lee held the first Protestant funeral service west of the Rocky Mountains. Wyeth meanwhile discovered that the trappers who had contracted to buy his considerable supply of trade goods abruptly, and without explanation, refused to honor the agreement.⁴²⁹ Discouraged but not defeated, on 3 July, Wyeth departed Ham's Fork with 41 men, including the missionaries, 126 horses, and most of his trade goods and headed for the Snake River country. The expedition reached the Snake on 14 July, and it was there, two days later, that Wyeth commenced building Fort Hall at the junction of the Snake and Portneuf Rivers. Conceived as a post where he could exchange his large supply of trade goods to both Indians and white trappers, Fort Hall was the first permanent American establishment west of the Continental Divide, despite the fact that Wyeth sold it to the Hudson's Bay Company in 1836. And it was from there that Jason Lee and the other missionaries set out with some Hudson's Bay Company traders for Fort Vancouver in the Oregon country and arrived there on 15 September 1834.⁴³⁰

Jason Lee had already established his mission along the east bank of the Willamette River near the site of present-day Salem, Oregon, by the time Dr. Marcus Whitman, a practicing physician and elder of the Presbyterian Church, and the Reverend Samuel Parker, pastor of various Presbyterian and Congregational churches and a teacher at New

⁴²⁹ Chittenden claims that Milton Sublette's older brother William, having arrived at the rendezvous with his own large quantity of trade goods in advance of Wyeth, had induced the members of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, and those of its successor, Fitzpatrick, Sublette, and Bridger, not to honor their contract with Wyeth who apparently said he would "roll a stone into their garden which they would never be able to get out;" see Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 448-449.

⁴³⁰ Chittenden, *American Fur Trade*, 1: 448-450; Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*, 104-109; Dary, *Oregon Trail*, 58-61; see also Osborne Russell, *Journal of a Trapper* [1914 and 1921], ed. Aubrey L. Haines (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1955; reprint, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1986), 1-5.

York's prestigious Ithaca Academy, journeyed to the Oregon country in search of a location for their own mission.⁴³¹ Leaving St. Louis in the spring of 1835, the two missionaries accompanied the American Fur Company supply train led by Lucien Fontenelle all the way to that year's rendezvous on Green River. Once there, Dr. Whitman removed two arrowheads lodged in the bodies of two of the participants: one of the points had lodged in the back of mountain man Jim Bridger during a fight with the Blackfoot Indians, and the legendary trapper had stoically endured it for three years; another hunter had carried the second point in his shoulder for two-and-a-half years.⁴³² Whitman and Parker also used the opportunity provided by the rendezvous to speak with some Nez Perce and Flathead Indians camped there. Believing that among those tribes the two missionaries had uncovered a "promising field for missionary labor," Whitman resolved to go back east to "obtain associates to come out with him next year . . . and establish a mission among these people, and by so doing, save at least a year, in bringing the gospel among them."⁴³³

The following year, Dr. Whitman, his new bride, the former Narcissa Prentiss; a second missionary couple, Henry and Eliza Spalding; and William H. Gray accompanied an American Fur Company caravan led by Thomas Fitzpatrick and destined for the 1836

⁴³¹ Dary, *Oregon Trail*, 61. The American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions sent Whitman and Parker to the Northwest in 1835 to investigate the possibility of establishing a mission among the Nez Perce and Flathead Indians; see Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*, 121.

⁴³² Of course, the details of Jim Bridger's life, career, and historical legacy appear in so many primary documents and scholarly accounts of the history of the American West that even a partial list of those sources would overwhelm the reader. But for the classic biography of the legendary westerner whose experiences spanned the years from Henry and Ashley's first forays into the mountains in the early 1820s to the final subjugation of the plains Indians in the late 1870s see Stanley Vestal [Walter Stanley Campbell], *Jim Bridger: Mountain Man* (William Morrow, 1955; Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1970).

⁴³³ Gowans, *Rocky Mountain Rendezvous*, 121-123; Samuel Parker, *Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains* (Ithaca, NY: Mack, Andrus, & Woodruff, Printers, 1840).

Green River rendezvous.⁴³⁴ There, the missionaries arranged to make the trip to Walla Walla in Oregon country in the company of two Hudson's Bay Company trappers—a fortuitous development that saved the missionary party from first having to return back east before proceeding on to Oregon. Although the American Fur Company men had transferred their trade goods from wagons to pack animals at Fort Laramie, the missionaries retained both their freight wagon and light wagon, which they subsequently converted into a two-wheeled cart at Fort Hall, for the entire trek to Fort Boise.⁴³⁵ Although the Whitmans and their associates were not the first to establish religious missions in the Pacific Northwest, they had nevertheless conclusively demonstrated the feasibility of driving loaded wagons the length of the Oregon Trail.

III

As scholars LeRoy R. Hafen and Francis Marion Young have concisely observed: “The trapper had opened the trails to the Rocky Mountains. The Missionary had followed his paths to carry the white man’s religion to the Indian. The homesteader was next in line.”⁴³⁶ Indeed, as early as 1829, an energetic New England school teacher named Hall J. Kelley had established the American Society for Encouraging the Settlement of Oregon Territory at Boston. Nine years later, a second group of eager promoters published *The*

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 130. Because the American Board of Foreign Missionaries preferred *married* missionaries—undoubtedly perceiving marriage as a bulwark against the temptations of native women—upon his return east, Whitman called on Narcissa Prentiss, an unmarried woman whose application the board had denied, and wed her following a brief courtship. Their marriage being more in the nature of an arrangement or partnership rather than a romantic coupling, it nevertheless offered them the opportunity to pursue missionary work together; see Robert V. Hine & John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A New Interpretive History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 184-185.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 142-144. The Oregon settlement founded in 1836 by the Whitmans also became the scene of their deaths eleven years later. In a process repeated for hundreds of years throughout the Americas from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, Euro-American emigration into the Oregon country had brought with it a deadly epidemic, in this case, measles; and by the mid-1840s, it had devastated the Cayuse tribe, particularly the children. In an act of vengeance for the loss of so many of their tribe to that dreadful disease, a group of Cayuse men burst into the Whitman mission on a cold morning in November 1847 and slaughtered twelve whites, including the Whitmans.; see Hine & Faragher, *American West*, 185.

⁴³⁶ Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 95.

Oregonian and Indians' Advocate in Massachusetts to encourage settlement there.

Emigration societies emerged soon thereafter in Missouri, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, and Indiana.⁴³⁷

The first emigrant train to Oregon left the Missouri settlements in the spring of 1841 with approximately eighty homesteaders and missionaries under the direction of seasoned trapper and trader, Thomas Fitzpatrick. Although the missionaries carried their belongings in mule-drawn Red River carts, the settlers used covered wagons pulled by teams of horses or oxen. And while the missionaries headed west primarily to spread the word of God, other conditions motivated the emigrants to head west: the desire to escape the worst effects of the financial panic of 1837, the opportunity to acquire cheap land, and the wish by the poorest of their number to achieve social equality in a new setting. Perhaps unaware to all but the most self-analytical among them was simply the need to be a part of “the very momentum of the westward movement.”⁴³⁸

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 96; while this quote belongs to Hafen and Young, what they are implicitly referring to is the larger idea expressed by the phrase first coined by nineteenth-century journalist, John L. O’Sullivan—“manifest destiny.” Scholar Robert W. Johannsen elegantly captures the relationship between that overarching concept and the thousands of white homesteaders who traveled the Oregon Trail throughout the 1840s: “Although destiny and mission have a pedigree that predates the nation itself, it was not until the early nineteenth century that profound changes in American life were combined with the idealism of the nation’s revolutionary beginnings and with currents of European Romanticism to produce a popular romantic nationalism that gave new meaning to the idea of progress. Fundamental to the feelings of national superiority generated by romantic nationalism was the conviction that American territorial expansion was inevitable, that the nation’s providential destiny—its Manifest Destiny—decreed an extension of the ideals of its founding charter throughout the entire continent. The notion was all the more credible because American settlers, traders, and missionaries were already on the move to far distant areas of North America. John L. O’Sullivan’s first uses of the phrase *Manifest Destiny* were in response to population movements that were already underway in Texas and the Oregon Country. Thus, Manifest Destiny became and has remained virtually synonymous with territorial expansion;” see Sam W. Haynes and Christopher Morris, eds. *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism*, Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures, no. 31 (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1997), *pg. #s?* The 1845 article in which O’Sullivan first used the words, “manifest destiny,” clearly expressed his indignation over the resistance of Great Britain and France to the annexation of Texas by the United States. According to O’Sullivan, those nations were attempting to constrict American policy “in a spirit of hostile interference against us, for the avowed object of thwarting our policy and hampering our power, limiting our greatness and checking the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for

Even before leaving Missouri, the first emigrant party had set a precedent for those that followed by hiring a veteran mountain man to guide them; along the way, it established a second with its halt at the forts on the Platte. After long weeks on the trail, Forts Laramie and Platte provided the weary home seekers the opportunity to repair equipment, restock supplies, and rest weary animals; the layover also afforded most of them their first sight of the forts' inhabitants.

Cleric Joseph Williams set an unfortunate third precedent with his self-righteous disdain of the trappers and their secular lifestyle:

Here is a mixture of people, some white, some half breeds, some French. Here is plenty of talk about their damnation, but none about their salvation; and I thought about the words of David, 'Woe is me that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwelt in the tents of Kedar' . . . I tried to preach twice to these people, but with little effect. Some of them said they had not heard preaching for twelve years.⁴³⁹

But not all emigrants shared Williams's prejudices. The following year, former Oregon missionary, Dr. Elijah White, organized a second wagon train of roughly 112 homesteaders in eighteen wagons which left Independence, Missouri, on 16 May 1842 accompanied by Lansford W. Hastings, a self-aggrandizing lawyer and promoter of westward expansion, who noted that it departed "all as one man, united in interest, united in feeling, we were, *en route*, for the long desired *El Dorado* of the West."⁴⁴⁰ Hastings

the free development of our yearly multiplying millions;" see John L. O'Sullivan, "Annexation," *Democratic Review* 17 (July and August 1845): 5-10, quotation, 5; quoted in Haynes and Morris, eds., *Manifest Destiny and Empire*, 9.

⁴³⁹ Joseph Williams, *Narrative of a Tour from the State of Indiana to the Oregon Territory, in the Years 1841-2* (Cincinnati, OH: J. B. Wilson, 1843), 38-39; quoted in Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 98.

⁴⁴⁰ Lansford W. Hastings, *The Emigrant's Guide to Oregon and California: Containing Scenes and Incidents of a Party of Oregon Emigrants; A Description of Oregon; Scenes and Incidents of a Party of California Emigrants; A Description of California; With a Description of the Different Routes to Those Countries; and All Necessary Information Relative to the Equipment, Supplies, and the Method of Traveling* (1932; reprint, Santa Barbara, CA: The Narrative Press, 2001), 5; Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 98-99.

later expressed a more charitable view of the fur traders than had Joseph Williams the year before:

In a very few days, we met a company of traders from Fort Larimie [*sic*], on their way to the States, with their returns of furs and buffalo robes, which they had accumulated during the previous year. These furs and robes were transported in wagons, drawn by oxen. This meeting afforded a very favorable opportunity for forwarding letters to the States, of which many of the party were happy to avail themselves.⁴⁴¹

And about the men working at the two forts on the Platte, Hastings remembered: “Upon arriving at Forts Larimie [Laramie] and John [Platte], we were received in a very kind and friendly manner by the gentlemen of those forts, who extended every attention to us, while we remained in their vicinity.”⁴⁴² Hastings also clearly appreciated at least one mountain man’s extensive knowledge of the West:

Leaving these forts, we had traveled but a few miles, when we met a company of trappers and traders from Fort Hall, on their way to the States, among whom was a Mr. Fitzpateric [Thomas Fitzpatrick], who joined our party, as a guide, and traveled with us, as such, to Green river. From this gentleman’s long residence in the great western prairies, and the Rocky mountains, he is eminently qualified as a guide, of which fact, we were fully convinced, from the many advantages of which we derived from his valuable services.⁴⁴³

The migration of 1843 dwarfed those of the previous two years. According to the results of a census taken on the Big Blue and reported in the 29 July 1843 issue of *Niles Register*, that year’s wagon train contained 121 wagons, 698 oxen, 296 horses, 973 cattle, and a party of 1,000 emigrants comprising 260 men, 130 women, and 610 children—a ratio of roughly five children for every woman.⁴⁴⁴ Upon their arrival at the forts on the Platte, two of the men in the party took particular notice of the traders’ conflicted

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁴⁴ *Niles’ Register* (Baltimore), 29 July 1843, quoted in Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 100.

relations with their Indian trading partners: “Fort Lauramie [Laramie] belongs to the American Fur company, and is built for a protection against the Indians. The occupants of the fort, who have long been there, being mostly French and having wives of the Sioux, do not now apprehend any danger.”⁴⁴⁵

The pace of migration over the Oregon Trail continued to accelerate over the next two years. A contingent of health seekers combined with four emigrant trains in the summer of 1844 to swell to over 1,000 the number of persons passing through the Platte River valley on their way to Oregon and California. And following the example of the 1842 train, all four of the emigrant companies hired veteran mountain men to guide them: Moses “Black” Harris; Elisha Stephens; Andrew W. Sublette; and Joe Walker.

Travelers passing Forts Laramie and Platte generally observed Teton bands camped there. Theodore Talbot, a journalist traveling with the Fremont expedition of 1843, remembered seeing Indians there that summer: “In the evening [of 4 August] we forded the ‘La Rainee’ [Laramie] and camped near Fort John [Fort Laramie]. There were several lodges of ‘Brulés’ and some ‘Mine-Konjas’ [Minneconjous] also camped around the fort.”⁴⁴⁶ That same summer, William Clark Kennerly, member of a distinguished hunting party led by Scottish nobleman, Sir William Drummond Stewart, noted about thirty

⁴⁴⁵ Johnson and Winter, *Route Across the Rocky Mountains* (reprint of 1932), 14; quoted in Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 101. Here also, Johnson and Winter briefly describe the two forts on the Platte as they appeared at the time: “The fort [Fort Laramie] is built of dobies, (unburnt bricks). A wall of six feet in thickness and fifteen in height, encloses an area of one hundred and fifty feet square. Within and around the wall, are the buildings, constructed of the same material. These are a trading house, ware houses for storing goods and skins, shops and dwellings for the traders and men. In the centre, is a large open area. A portion of the enclosed space is cut off by a partition wall, forming a carell (enclosure), for the animals belonging to the fort. About one mile below Fort Lauramie [Fort Laramie], is Fort Platte; which is built of the same materials and in the same manner, and belongs to a private trading company.”

⁴⁴⁶ Theodore Talbot, *The Journals of Theodore Talbot, 1843 and 1849-52, with the Fremont Expedition of 1843 and with the First Military Company in Oregon Territory, 1849-1852*, ed. Charles Henry Carey (Portland, OR: Metropolitan Press, 1931), 34; quoted in Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 102.

lodges of Sioux who had come to Fort Laramie to trade.⁴⁴⁷ And James Clyman, a twenty-year veteran of the American fur trade on his way to Oregon with one of the four emigrant companies headed there in the summer of 1844, commented on the Indian presence at the forts on the Platte in his diary entry for 1 August 1844: “. . . about 4 o’clock in the afternoon we hove in sight of the white battlements of Fort Larrimie [Laramie] and Fort Platte whose white walls, surrounded by a few Sioux Indian lodges, shewed us that human life was not extinct.”⁴⁴⁸

The mass migration to Oregon was not without its detractors. A letter submitted to the *Missouri Republican* in June of 1844 expressed doubts about the entire enterprise:

By next spring the true character of the Oregon territory will begin to be known., but not sufficiently, I think, to deter a considerable number from going. But next year a year, I think, the mania will run out. [Oregon] is mountainous and rugged; its plains are dry and barren; nothing but rain in winter, nothing but sun in summer In truth, no man of information, in his right mind, would think of leaving such a country as this, to wander over a thousand miles of desert and five hundred of mountain to reach such as that. It is wrong in the people of St. Louis to encourage this spirit of emigration.⁴⁴⁹

Opposition to American settlement of the Pacific Northwest represented only one aspect of the larger controversy surrounding national expansion that dominated the presidential election of 1844. While the Whigs under their nominee Henry Clay urged federal support for the internal improvements that would lead to widespread economic development, the Democrats meanwhile had nominated Tennessean James K. Polk, an

⁴⁴⁷ Kennerly Family Papers, MHMA, St. Louis. In addition to William Clark Kennerly, nephew of William Clark of the Lewis and Clark expedition, the group did indeed include several well-connected individuals: Jefferson Kennerly Clark, son of the famous explorer, William Sublette, one of Henry and Ashley’s “enterprising young men” and founder of Fort Laramie, Baptiste Charbonneau, son of Sacajawea, and renowned painter, Alfred Jacob Miller; see Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 102-103.

⁴⁴⁸ James Clyman, *Journal of a Mountain Man*, ed. and with an introduction by Linda M. Hasselstrom, Classics of the Fur Trade Series (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1928; reprint, Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing, 1984), 99; quoted in Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 105.

⁴⁴⁹ Quoted in Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 106.

ardent proponent of both the annexation of Texas and the occupation of Oregon. Polk's narrow margin of victory in that election—he garnered only 49.6 percent of the national vote and thus become only the second president to secure election without a clear popular majority—underscored how the issue of territorial expansion had divided the nation.⁴⁵⁰ Nevertheless, after a joint resolution of congress admitted Texas to statehood even before Polk assumed the presidency in March of 1845, he set out to acquire all of Oregon for the United States, aided immeasurably in this endeavor by the thousands of emigrants passing over the Oregon Trail every year since 1841.⁴⁵¹

The migration of 1845 surpassed in magnitude all those that had gone before it. Estimates of its wagon trains range from 3,000 to 7,000 individuals—including at least 1,000 children—traveling in anywhere from 460 to 500 wagons. One emigrant wrote at the time: “Our team, cattle, and wagons stretched out in procession some three miles in length on the broad prairies present a grand spectacle.”⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ Hine & Faragher, *American West*, 202.

⁴⁵¹ The Anglo-American Convention of 1818 had set the boundary between the Louisiana Purchase and Canada at the 49th parallel and allowed for joint occupation of the Oregon country by Great Britain and the United States. Although the activities of the Hudson's Bay Company gave Great Britain the better claim to that part of Oregon that would eventually become part of the modern Canadian province of British Columbia, American settlement of what would become parts of the present-day states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho afforded the United States the better claim to those lands south of the 49th parallel. A period tune printed in the *St. Louis [Weekly] Reveille* of 4 September 1845 titled the “Oregon Song” reflected the feelings of those Americans willing to acquire Oregon by force if necessary:

To the far—far off Pacific sea,
Will you go—will you go—dear girl, with me ?
By a gentle brook, in a lovely spot,
We'll jump from our wagon and build our cot !

Then hip—hurrah for the prairie life !
Hip—hurrah for the mountain strife !
And if rifles must crack, if we swords must draw,
Our country forever, hurrah ! hurrah !

⁴⁵² F. G. Young, “The Oregon Trail,” *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*, 1 (? ?), 370; *St. Louis [Weekly] Reveille* (St. Louis) 16 May 1845; *St. Louis [Weekly] Reveille* (St. Louis) 4 September 1845; W.

The company commanded by Joel Palmer arrived outside Fort Laramie on 24 June 1845. Over the course of the next two days, the emigrants rested their stock, repaired their equipment, and resupplied themselves for the arduous trip to the Snake River country and Fort Hall. And on the afternoon of the 25th each emigrant family provided meat, bread, coffee, and sugar as the company hosted a lavish dinner for the encamped Sioux. Before the meal, one of the traders interpreted as both hosts and guests delivered speeches urging friendship between Indians and whites after which the participants observed the ritual smoking of the pipe.⁴⁵³

But despite the relatively peaceful relations between Indians and whites that then prevailed along the Oregon Trail, the traders at Forts Laramie and Platte welcomed their first contingent of American dragoons in June of 1845. The previous month, Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny had led five divisions of the First Regiment of United States Dragoons out of Fort Leavenworth with instructions “to ascertain the military resources of the country;—its definite geography—the strength, manners and customs, and mode of warfare, of the different tribes of Indians that lay in their way;—together with their disposition towards the whites—their method of subsistence, &c. &c.”⁴⁵⁴ Although his orders specified a return to Fort Leavenworth by way of the Santa Fe Trail—and by doing so to secure safe passage for the numerous American traders’ caravans making the

B. Ide, “Oregon Correspondence, Bank of the Nebraska, in *Jefferson Inquirer* (?) 26 June 1845; quoted in Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 107.

⁴⁵³ Joel Palmer, *Journal of Travels Over the Rocky Mountains, to the Mouth of the Columbia River . . . 1845 and 1846: Containing Descriptions of the Valleys of the Willamette, Umpqua, and Clamet, a General Description of Oregon Territory . . . a List of Necessary Outfits for Emigrants, and a Table of Distances from Camp to Camp Along the Route: Also . . . the Organic Laws of Oregon Territory, Tables of About 300 Words of the Chinook Jargon . . . &c.*, in Reuben Gold Thwaites, *Early Western Travels*, XXX: 60-61; Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 108.

⁴⁵⁴ J. Henry Carleton, *The Prairie Logbooks: Dragoon Campaigns to the Pawnee Villages in 1844, and to the Rocky Mountains in 1845*, ed. and with an introduction by Louis Pelzer (Chicago: Caxton Club, 1943; reprint, Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1983), 157.

round trip from Independence, Missouri, to Santa Fe and Chihuahua—Kearny’s primary mission was twofold: to protect the emigrants working their way west that summer along the Oregon Trail, and to overawe the Indians in their path with the military power of the United States. For these purposes, Kearny’s column included 250 well-armed dragoons, two mountain howitzers, seventeen wagons loaded with supplies, twenty-five steers, and fifty head of sheep.⁴⁵⁵

With the arrival of the dragoons in the Platte River valley, the traders at the two rival posts competed with each for the privilege of hosting the troopers. Although they camped nearer Fort Laramie because of the rich grass in its vicinity, Kearny even-handedly chose to council with the 1200 Sioux camped near Fort Platte. Accompanied by two-thirds of his officers, a guard detachment, the two howitzers, and their crews, Kearny met with the Indians, seven-eighths of whom were Brulés, at a site between the two forts on the morning of 16 June. Snowflakes fell from the sky as the council leaders seated themselves on chairs and benches contributed by the men from Fort Platte and arranged on a carpet of buffalo robes; the rest of the Indians watched seated in a great semi-circle on the ground. Nearby, the Indians had raised three flags, two with the stars and stripes of the Republic and a third flag of Indian design that contained two crossed bands denoting the winds placed between a cluster of stars above and clasped hands below.⁴⁵⁶

Kearny opened the proceedings by shaking hands with the most important headmen. He then addressed the chiefs by choosing words that seemed almost to foreshadow further trouble for the Sioux from home seekers using the Oregon Trail. Lieutenant J.

⁴⁵⁵ S. W. Kearny, “Report of a Summer Campaign to the Rocky Mountains,” etc., in *Sen. Ex. Docs.*, cong. 29, sess. I, no. I, 210-213; Carleton, *Prairie Logbooks*, 157; Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 109-110.

⁴⁵⁶ Carleton, *Prairie Logbooks*, 247-248; Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 110.

Henry Carleton later recorded the “substance” of that part of Kearny’s message demanding safe passage for the emigrants:

Sioux: I am glad to meet you. Through your Chiefs I have shaken hands with all of you. Your great father has learned much of his red children, and has sent me with a handful of braves to visit you. I am opening a road for your white brethren. They are now following after me, and are journeying to the other side of the great mountains. They take with them their women, their children, and their cattle. They all go to bury their bones there, and never to return. You must not disturb them in their persons, or molest their property; neither must you on any account obstruct the road which I have now opened for them. Should you do so, your great father would be angry with you, and cause you to be punished.⁴⁵⁷

Carleton also recorded the “substance” of Kearny’s admonition to the chiefs to refrain from trading for alcoholic spirits and to destroy them wherever and whenever found:

You have many enemies about you;—but fire-water is the greatest of them all. I learn that some bad white men bring it here from New Mexico, and sell it to you. Open your ears now, and listen to me. It is contrary to the wishes of your great father that it should be brought here; and I advise you, whenever you find it in your country—no matter in whose possession—to spill it all upon the ground. The earth may drink it without injury, but you cannot.⁴⁵⁸

Kearny, understandably, if a bit disingenuously, had been careful to attribute the source of the liquor trade among the Sioux to unscrupulous traders plying the Santa Fe Trail rather than to the buffalo robe and hide trade conducted at either Fort Laramie or Fort Platte.

Then, according to Carleton, Kearny added: “Your great father is the friend of his red children, and will continue to be so as long as you behave yourselves properly. He did not direct me to bring you presents, but he has sent you a few things that you may remember what I have said.” Of course, the “presents” Kearny distributed were precisely the kinds

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 248.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 249.

of Euro-American trade goods that the Tetons had gradually become dependent upon for their very survival as buffalo-hunting nomads: red and green blankets, scarlet and blue cloth, looking glasses, knives, beads, and tobacco. If the American government had served notice, through Kearny, that in the future it intended to manipulate Sioux behavior through the distribution of gifts, Bull Tail, principal chief at the council, seemed to accept and even welcome the new status quo in his brief reply, as Carleton later remembered it, to Kearney:

My father: what you have told my people is right, and it pleases me. *I know now if they are good to their white brethren, they will be well treated in return; and will find that such presents as those they are about to receive, will often come* [emphasis added]. Now I have found a father: my people will no longer think of dying—but will live. They will long remember the words you have spoken to them; and as you have said, so, always shall they do.⁴⁵⁹

IV

Despite the feelings of goodwill Kearny and Bull Tail expressed at the council, relations between the Sioux and the emigrants soon began noticeably to deteriorate. The Tetons had gradually awakened to the uncomfortable reality that there were, in fact, many more whites than the Indians had believed possible. For decades they had accepted the fur traders in their midst because they were few in number and, in the Indians' estimation, but little inferior to themselves. Then the spectacle of hundreds of emigrants passing by their encampments every summer for the last five years had strained the Lakotas' ability to comprehend such multitudes. Finally, the appearance of the dragoons had utterly terrified the Sioux, as they realized that the mounted troopers could easily

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid. For another first-hand account of this council, see Philip St. George Cooke, *Scenes and Adventures in the Army, or, Romance of Military Life*, The Far Western Frontier (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1857; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1973).

reach the most distant corners of the Tetons' domain.⁴⁶⁰ As tensions between Indians and whites in the Platte River valley continued to escalate throughout the summer of 1846, Fort Laramie entered upon its final three years as a privately-owned trading post.

Francis Parkman visited Fort Laramie during the summer of 1846 and, in addition to providing a detailed description of the fort, recorded his observations of the interaction between the traders, emigrants, and Sioux. As the owners of Fort Platte had recently abandoned it, Parkman accurately observed that “Fort Laramie . . . well-nigh monopolizes the Indian trade of this region. Here its officials rule with an absolute sway; the arm of the United States has little force; for when we were there, the extreme outposts of her troops were about seven hundred miles to the eastward.” And until 1846 there seemed to be scant reason to station a garrison any closer for, as Parkman observed at Fort Laramie: “Though men are frequently killed in the neighborhood, no apprehensions are felt of any general designs of hostility from the Indians.”⁴⁶¹

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 250.

⁴⁶¹ Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 95-96. George Hyde argues that the emigrants did indeed have legitimate grievances against the fur-company men: “The emigrants on the Platte were annoying enough to the Sioux and their neighbors, but the natural feeling of the Indians against them seems to have been greatly increased by the talk of many of the traders, who blamed the emigrants for all the ills from which they and the Indians suffered. As the emigrant road touched the buffalo range along the Platte for only one hundred miles, the traders’ talk of the slaughtering of game by the emigrants was absurd. These men either had not the brains or the honesty to observe that the dwindling away of the great herds had begun long before the first emigrant trains appeared on the Platte. The traders themselves were largely to blame for the reckless killing-off of the buffalo.” As evidence for his assertion, Hyde recounts a buffalo hunt described by the artist George Catlin who “in 1832 saw a herd of 1,500 of these animals slaughtered by Indians near Fort Pierre on the Upper Missouri because a trader wanted a boat-load of salted tongues to ship to the St. Louis market. Catlin states that only the tongues were taken, the rest of the meat and the skins being left for the wolves. These foolish Indians received only liquor in exchange for the tongues;” see Hyde, *Red Cloud’s Folk*, 61. And having witnessed the hunt for himself, Catlin later wrote with great clarity and prescience about two of the most deleterious effects of the American fur trade on the Plains Indians—alcohol abuse and environmental degradation: “This profligate waste of the lives of these noble and useful animals, when from all that I could learn, not a skin or a pound of the meat (except the tongues), was brought in, fully supports me in the seemingly extravagant predictions that I have made as to their extinction, which I am certain is near at hand. In the above extravagant instance, at a season when their skins were without fur and not worth taking off, and their camp was so well-stocked with fresh and dried meat, that they had no occasion for using the flesh, there is a fair exhibition of the improvident character of the savage, and also of

But Parkman also noted that the emigrants did not share in this freedom from “apprehensions,” as they regarded the American Fur Company men themselves with suspicion and the Indians with a mixture of fear and confusion—attitudes that both groups reciprocated and that, someday, would likely result in tragedy. As he later remembered: “The emigrants felt a violent prejudice against the French Indians, as they called the trappers and traders. They thought, and with some reason, that these men bore them no goodwill. Many of them were firmly persuaded that the French were instigating the Indians to attack and cut them off.”⁴⁶²

In *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman had advised his readers to present, “in the presence of the Indians, a bold bearing, self-confident yet vigilant, and you will find them tolerably safe neighbors;” predictably, however, the “timorous mood of the emigrants [as he saw it] . . . exposed them to real danger.” As Parkman went on to explain:

The Dahcotah [Sioux] saw clearly enough the perturbation of the emigrants, and instantly availed themselves of it. [The Indians] became extremely insolent and exacting in their demands. It has become an established custom with them to go to the camp of every party, as it arrives in succession at the fort, and demand a feast. Smoke’s village had come with this express design, having made several days’ journey with no other object than that of enjoying a cup of coffee and two or three biscuits. *So the “feast” was demanded, and the emigrants dared not refuse it [emphasis added].*⁴⁶³

Throughout the remainder of his visit to the fort, Parkman bore witness to, in his estimation, a recurring cycle of extortion:

With each emigrant party that arrived at Fort Laramie this scene was renewed; and every day the Indians grew more rapacious and presumptuous. One evening they broke in pieces, out of mere wantonness, the cups from which

his recklessness in catering for his appetite, so long as the present inducements are held out to him in his country for its gratification;” see Catlin, *North American Indians*, 259-260.

⁴⁶² Ibid., 102.

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 103.

they had been feasted; and this so exasperated the emigrants that many of them seized their rifles and could scarcely be restrained from firing on the insolent mob of Indians. Before we left the country this dangerous spirit on the part of the Dahcotah had mounted to a yet higher pitch. They began openly to threaten the emigrants with destruction, and actually fired upon one or two parties of them.⁴⁶⁴

Parkman then went on to recommend his solution to the escalating level of violence:

“A military force and military law are urgently called for in that perilous region; and unless troops are speedily stationed at Fort Laramie, or elsewhere in the neighborhood, both emigrants and other travelers will be exposed to most imminent risks.”⁴⁶⁵ The

United States government would soon heed Parkman’s advice.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 103-104. Parkman, of course, inevitably viewed the interaction between emigrants and Indians from the vantage point of a privileged, well-educated, Anglo-American male “on a tour of curiosity and amusement.” For their part, the Teton Sioux initially responded to the ever-intensifying invasion of their homeland throughout the 1840s and 1850s by white emigrants with a mixture of bewilderment and hostility and subsequently expressed their feelings toward them in a manner consistent with their culture—their feelings of utter helplessness would come later. In her biography of Crazy Horse, author Mari Sandoz faithfully captured the Indians’ dilemma regarding the emigrants in her unique idiom: “From the first there had been a white man’s road past the fort, and once in a while even soldiers came riding on it, their swords bright in the sun. But they had always gone on, and there was plenty of water and grass and buffalo for all. So the trail had started, with just a little stream of white men coming through, and the Indian lifted his hand in welcome and went out to smoke and watch this lengthening village of the whites that moved past him day after day all summer, always headed in the same direction. He wondered that he never saw them come back, yet they must be the same ones each year, for there could not be that many people on all the earth. At first he wondered at the women and children too, for he had long thought of the whites as only men, although he had heard stories of the families that had been seen, the women with the pale, sick skins and the break-in-two bodies, the young ones pale too, with hair light and soft as the flying seed of the cottonwood that tickles the nose in summer. Even when there were quite a few on the trail the Indian had let the whites use his trader town while he sat with his pipe and blanket looking on as they bought perhaps a handful of gunpowder or the last cup of flour for a sick woman, or had their footsore oxen shod at three dollars a shoe. Often they left more wagons behind with the many already standing dead as old bones around the fort because the animals that were to pull them over the far mountains had been worn out. Puffing at his long-stemmed pipe of stone the Indian had watched all these things and found them very new and strange. But soon the little stream of whites grew into a great river, wider than a gun could shoot across, and the grass and the buffalo got so used up that the Indian ponies were poor far into sundance time and the hunters had to travel many days, sometimes clear to the Crow country, for a kettle of fresh meat. There was uneasiness about this, and much talk at the councils. The younger chiefs and warriors from up on the Cheyenne River or down in the Smoky Hill country and other places back from the white man’s road were angry at the things they saw happening. And when the trader chiefs like Conquering Bear and Bull Tail and old Smoke made strong talk for continued peace with the people on the trail, the others called them Loaf About the Forts and said they had sold their tongues to the white man for his sugar and coffee and whiskey; see Sandoz, *Crazy Horse*, 3-4.

⁴⁶⁵ Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 104.

Emigrant activity along the Oregon Trail in the summer of 1846 did not, however, interfere with Oglala plans to move against the Crows and Shoshones. The season before, the Shoshones had killed Male Crow, son of an Oglala chief, The Whirlwind, who, after dismissing the Shoshone peace offering of his son's scalp, then sent a war pipe as far away as the Missouri River to induce other Teton bands to join his campaign against their hated enemies. Although two villages of Minneconjous from the Cheyenne River country did, in fact, respond to The Whirlwind's summons, James Bordeaux meanwhile had convinced the chief to abandon his war. Old Smoke's Oglalas and some Cheyennes eventually gathered at Fort Laramie—3,000 people camped in 600 lodges—to prepare for the Snake country expedition. This large village soon dwindled to roughly 1250 souls in 250 lodges who scoured the country looking for any Snakes or whites to kill. Before their war was over, the Oglalas had lost a chief, White Buffalo Bull, and thirty other warriors to the Crows and Snakes.⁴⁶⁶

A new factor motivated one group of emigrants to navigate the Platte River valley on their way west past Fort Laramie in the spring of 1847—religion.⁴⁶⁷ The hostility of their “gentile” neighbors had forced the Mormons from their Mississippi River home at Nauvoo, Illinois, across Iowa, and then into winter quarters on the banks of the Missouri River in 1846. Safe temporarily from the relentless persecution of mainstream Protestants, Mormon leader, Brigham Young, had prepared a “blueprint for action” that outlined the personnel, route, and preparations necessary for an advance pioneer

⁴⁶⁶ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 141; Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, 122-123; A. J. Allen, *Ten Years in Oregon; The Travels of Dr. E. White & Lady* (Ithaca, NY, 1850), pg. #s; Edwin Bryant, *What I Saw in California* (New York, 1849), 111-112; Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 121; Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 59.

⁴⁶⁷ For an excellent study of this factor as it applied to one group of emigrants on the Oregon Trail—the Mormons—see Richard E. Bennett, *We'll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846-1848*, with a foreword by Leonard J. Arrington (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1997; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).

company to depart no later than 15 March 1847. The company was to follow the route popularized by explorer John C. Fremont that led up the North Platte to Fort Laramie, crossed over to the Sweetwater River, and continued on through South Pass and beyond. Anxious to reestablish the First Presidency in their new home beyond the Rocky Mountains, Young's Pioneer Band, comprised of 143 men, three women, and two children in 72 wagons at last set out from their Winter Quarters on 14 April 1847.⁴⁶⁸

After nearly six weeks on the trail, the Mormons had journeyed as far west as Chimney Rock, and it was in its vicinity that they encountered the first Teton Sioux any of the emigrants had seen. Their journalist, William Clayton, counted a group of "thirty-five in number, about half squaws and children."⁴⁶⁹ In his journal, Clayton described a people who had achieved an unprecedented level of prosperity through their uninterrupted access to Euro-American trade goods:

They are all well dressed and very noble looking, some having good clean blankets, others nice robes artfully ornamented with beads and paintings. All had many ornaments on their clothing and ears, some had nice painted shells suspended from the ear. All appeared to be well armed with muskets. Their moccasins were indeed clean and beautiful. One had a pair of moccasins of a clear white ornamented with beads, etc. They fit very tight to the foot. *For cleanness and neatness, they will vie with the most tasteful whites* [emphasis added].⁴⁷⁰

Several members of the Pioneer Band echoed Clayton's description of the rich appearance of the Tetons, perhaps comparing them to the impoverished band of Pawnees

⁴⁶⁸ William Clayton, *William Clayton's Journal: A Daily Record of the Journey of the Original Company of "Mormon" Pioneers from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake* (Salt Lake City, UT: *The Deseret News*, 1921; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1973), 75-76; Richard E. Bennett, *We'll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus, 1846-1848*, with a foreword by Leonard J. Arrington (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1997; reprint, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 69-88; Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 123-124. For a comprehensive history of the Mormons, see Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Britton, *Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-Day Saints* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979.

⁴⁶⁹ Clayton, *Journal*, 181.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

that the Mormons had encountered several weeks earlier. Erastus Snow, for instance, wrote that some of the Sioux “had fur caps and cloth coats, others had cloth pants and shirts, and the rest were neatly dressed in skins ornamented with beads, feathers, paints, etc. and they were by all odds the most cleanly, orderly, and best appearing of any Indians we have seen west of the Missouri River.”⁴⁷¹ Impressed by the beauty of their women, Norton Jacob, using a pejorative term for indigenous females, observed that “some of their squaws are pretty brunettes.”⁴⁷² And judging by an entry in his journal, Horace K. Whitney also viewed the Indians favorably: “There were some very fine looking men and women among them.”⁴⁷³

Undoubtedly influenced by the emigrants’ favorable first impressions of the Sioux, the Mormons’ two-day encounter with their visitors proceeded smoothly. Their chief, a man named *Owashtecha* [Brave Bear], had first approached the Pioneer Band carrying an American flag and wearing around his neck a medal with “Pierre Chouteau Jr. and Co. Upper Missouri Outfit” inscribed on one side and “Brave Bear” etched on the reverse. The Mormons then returned their guests’ expressions of goodwill with a tour of the Mormon camp, gifts of tobacco, food, and other presents, a feast later that evening that included the ritual smoking of the pipe; and, for Brave Bear, an entertaining look at the moon through a telescope and a special tent for him and his wife to spend the night. The next morning, perhaps emboldened by the Mormons’ unexpected generosity, a Sioux chief named *Washteha* requested and received from clerk Thomas Bullock a “written paper” to show other whites using the Oregon Trail. Bullock’s subsequent “character

⁴⁷¹ Journal of Erastus Snow, 24 May 1847, Latter Day Saints Church Archives, Latter Day Saints Church Historical Department, Salt Lake City, UT (hereafter, LDS Church Archives) quoted in Bennett, *We’ll Find the Place*, 152.

⁴⁷² Journal of Norton Jacob, 25 May 1847, LDS Church Archives; quoted in *ibid.*

⁴⁷³ Journal of Horace K. Whitney, 25 May 1847, LDS Church Archives; quoted in *ibid.*

reference” of *Washteha* included all thirty-five Sioux in the clerk’s favorable assessment of their behavior: “This is to certify that Washteha of the Dacohtah tribe of Indians, with O Wash te cha the principal chief, and thirty-three other men, women, and children, visited our camp on the 24th and 25th May 1847, behaved themselves civilly and peaceably; we gave them bread. They were very friendly to us, and the best behaved Indians we have yet seen. W Richards—Thomas Bullock, scribe.”⁴⁷⁴ But relations between the Sioux in the Platte River valley and Mormons on the Oregon Trail would not for long remain as cordial as those described by Bullock.

The scale of westward emigration in 1847 surpassed all previous years. One estimate of the traffic on the Oregon Trail that summer calculates the number of emigrants at approximately 6,500 souls traveling in 1,300 wagons.⁴⁷⁵ And for all of them, Fort Laramie provided the opportunity to rest, repair equipment, and resupply themselves for the long journey ahead.

The Mormon emigration of 1848 dominated traffic on the Oregon Trail that year. While approximately 4,000 Latter-day Saints trekked to the Salt Lake valley, 1,700 went on to Oregon, and 150 made it to California. So accustomed had the Mormons become to stopping at Fort Laramie that their leader, Brigham Young, declared it the point of transfer for freight carried in wagons from Missouri onto wagons dispatched from the Salt Lake valley. As each caravan then returned from the fort to its starting point, draft animals that had become acclimated either to the lowlands of Missouri or to the high

⁴⁷⁴ Journal of Thomas Bullock, 25 May 1847, LDS Church Archives, quoted in *Ibid.*, 152-153.

⁴⁷⁵ The estimate for the number of wagons is from the 14 August 1847 issue of *Niles’ Register*; Hafen and Young assign five persons per wagon to arrive at the total number of emigrants; see Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 126.

mountain air of the Great Basin thus avoided exposure to an unfamiliar climate.⁴⁷⁶ But notwithstanding its unrivalled utility for emigrants navigating the Oregon Trail, the end of Fort Laramie's career as a private trading post was near.

The firm of Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Company restructured itself in the summer of 1848 by assigning nearly half of its stock in equal distributions of one share each to five partners in the field: Alexander Culbertson, James Kipp, William Laidlaw, Frederick LaBoue, and Andrew Drips. As part of the reorganization, the company named Culbertson as head of the Western Department and Upper Missouri Outfit, while Drips received instructions to assume control of operations at Fort Laramie.⁴⁷⁷ Throughout the winter of 1848-49, Drips performed his duties efficiently and collected enough robes and furs to warrant a request for sufficient horses and mules from Fort Pierre to transport the season's returns over the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail to the Missouri River and from there to St. Louis.⁴⁷⁸

In the spring of 1849, Drips left Fort Laramie for St. Louis and placed Bruce Husband in charge of reconditioning the fort in anticipation of its projected sale to the government. Husband later informed Drips of his progress in a letter written toward the end of May: "After you left we were dull enough for a few days, until Robinson arrived from Mo. When I set him and Burke at whitewashing the rooms, repairing the chimneys etc. We had just got through this most necessary job when the first emigration parties arrived, keeping Burke and in fact all of us employed crossing their wagons, etc. etc."⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁶ Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 131.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ James Kipp, St. Louis, to Major Drips, 14 April 1849, Andrew Drips Papers, MHMA, St. Louis; Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 132.

⁴⁷⁹ Bruce Husband, Fort John [Fort Laramie], to Andrew Drips, Esq., Kansas, 24 May 1849, Andrew Drips Papers, MHMA, St. Louis.

Husband's letter also reflects his company's neglect of Fort Laramie's heretofore lucrative trade with emigrants on the Oregon Trail: "It is a great pity you left no robes here as I could sell inferior robes very freely to emigrants at 3 and 4 dollars each; as it is, no robes, no blacksmith to work, and no oxen or horses (all of which would be more than ordinarily profitable) to make anything out of the emigration except ferryage, which last will cease when Laramie falls."⁴⁸⁰ Husband then closes his letter with a proposal to enter into a partnership with Drips after the sale of the fort: "I would write you more fully, but there is nothing of very great interest only this (a fortune in two or three years can be made by taking seven or eight thousand dollars worth of good serviceable merchandise into Salt Lake valley next autumn or even next spring). If you think of anything like this or would feel inclined to assist me therein, I am on hand certainly."⁴⁸¹

The purchase of Fort Laramie by the United States government in June of 1849 furthered the implementation of its policy to safeguard emigrants using the Oregon Trail, a policy first articulated more than three years earlier. As early as 2 December 1845, President James K. Polk had formulated a plan for their protection: "I recommend that a suitable number of stockades and block house forts be erected along the usual route between our frontier settlement on the Missouri and the Rocky mountains, and that an adequate force of mounted riflemen be raised to guard and protect [the emigrants] on their journey."⁴⁸² Then, on 30 December 1845, Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton introduced a bill based on the president's suggestions; Representative Jacob Brinkerhoff introduced a comparable bill in the House of Representatives the following day. And on

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, 20 vols. (New York: Bureau of National Literature, 1917), IV: 396; quoted in Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 137.

19 May 1846, Congress passed “An Act to provide for raising a regiment of Mounted Riflemen, and for establishing military stations on the route to Oregon.”⁴⁸³

The army moved swiftly to implement the provisions of the act. Although the Mexican War had temporarily interrupted the government’s plan to construct a series of “stockades and block house forts” along the Oregon Trail, in 1848 a battalion of nearly five hundred men called the Missouri Mounted Volunteers built Fort Kearny on the Platte River three miles from the head of Grand Island.⁴⁸⁴ Army officers had also questioned veteran trapper and trader, Thomas Fitzpatrick, for information regarding suitable locations to build additional forts, Fitzpatrick consequently recommended placing forts near Forts Laramie and Hall, in the valleys of the Platte and Snake Rivers, respectively, by the Big Bend of the Arkansas, and close to Fort Bent along the Santa Fe Trail. In referring specifically to Fort Laramie, Fitzpatrick wrote in a letter to the army: “My opinion is that a post at or in the vicinity of Laramie is much wanted. It would be nearly in the vicinity of the buffalo range, where all the most formidable Indian tribes are fast approaching, and near where there will eventually (as the game decreases) be a great struggle for the ascendancy.”⁴⁸⁵ The army accepted his recommendation.

On 9 April 1849, General David E. Twiggs issued the following orders:

“There will be a post established at or near Fort Laramie. Its garrison will consist of companies A and E, Mounted Riflemen, and company G, 6th infantry, under the command of Maj. W. F. Sanderson, Mounted Riflemen Major Sanderson will leave Fort Leavenworth by the 10th of may, with company E, Mounted Riflemen (rationed for two months), and such quarter master’s stores (tools, etc.) as may be necessary until the arrival of the

⁴⁸³ United States, *United States Statutes at Large* (Washington: U.S. G.P.O., 1937), IX: 13; quoted in Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 138.

⁴⁸⁴ Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 139.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*; Hafen and Carter, *Mountain Men and Fur Traders*, 249-250; Fitzpatrick’s letter of 11 January 1847, quoted in Hafen and Ghent, *Broken Hand*, 193.

remainder of his command, and will proceed to locate a post in the vicinity of Fort Laramie, agreeably to the special instructions that will be given him.”⁴⁸⁶

Major Sanderson first arrived at Fort Laramie on 16 June 1849. In a report to his superior written nine days later, he explained:

I have, accompanied by Lieutenant Woodbury of the engineer department, made a thorough reconnaissance of the country in the neighborhood of [Fort Laramie] [It] was found to be the most eligible for a military post, and was purchased at my request, on the 26th instant by Lieutenant Woodbury, at a cost of four thousand dollars from Mr. Bruce Husband, agent of the American Fur company, who was duly authorized to dispose of the same for that amount.⁴⁸⁷

Although the army had acquired Fort Laramie upon the recommendation of Thomas Fitzpatrick, his years in the West, combined with his recent appointment as Indian agent for the upper Platte and the Arkansas had convinced him that merely establishing a series of military posts along the Oregon Trail would not, in itself, ensure peace in the region. Toward that end, he conceived the idea of a great council at which the government could negotiate peace-keeping treaties with the more important plains tribes. Fitzpatrick believed that without large enough garrisons the military posts—especially Fort Laramie—would not be able to withstand an Indian attack. And the Indians would have a legitimate grievance for doing so as the money allocated for the purchase of the fort had not bought the land upon which it stood. That site still belonged primarily to the Sioux, but also to the Cheyennes, and Arapahos.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ *Publications of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, XX: 189; Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 139; the Mounted Riflemen had relieved the Missouri Mounted Volunteers in November of 1848.

⁴⁸⁷ Manuscript copy in Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, CA; quoted in Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 141-142.

⁴⁸⁸ “Thomas Fitzpatrick’ Report to the Senate,” 24 November 1851, 32nd Cong., I sess., *Senate Executive Document # ?*; Burton S. Hill, “The Great Indian Treaty Council of 1851, *Nebraska History* (1966), 88.

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The years immediately following the sale of Fort Laramie to the army were eventful ones for the Teton Sioux of the Platte River valley. Thousands of gold-seekers headed west for the new gold fields in California in the summer of 1848 and joined the ever-increasing throng of Oregon- and California-bound emigrants and Mormons traveling the Oregon Trail. Additionally, an outbreak of Asiatic cholera in the East sent even more whites eager to escape the ravages of the disease to the westward migration.

Unfortunately for the Indians in its path, however, the steamboats that transported so many of the emigrants to the upper Missouri also brought the plague. Several winter counts for 1849-50 record its effects: that of American Horse claims that “many died of the cramps,” that of White Cow Killer terms 1849-50 as “The people had the cramps winter,” while those of No Ears and Iron Crow label that year simply as “Cramps” and “Convulsions,” respectively.⁴⁸⁹

A deadly epidemic of smallpox erupted in the Indian camps in 1850. For that year, Cloud Shield’s winter count explains that “Many died of the smallpox;” White Cow Killer calls it “All-the-time-sick-with-the-big-smallpox-winter;” No Ears, Short Man, and Iron Crow all describe the year simply as “Smallpox.” To minimize its impact, the Sioux temporarily moved north of the Platte while the Cheyennes and Arapahos fled south.⁴⁹⁰

In September of 1851, nearly 10,000 Indians gathered at Horse Creek to visit with old friends—and enemies—and for feasting, gift-giving, and treaty-making. Sioux winter counts record this highly significant event. But whereas The Flame, Lone Dog, and The

⁴⁸⁹ Mallery, *Dakota Winter Counts*, 142; Walker, *Lakota Society*, 141; here Ella C. Deloria remarked regarding these winter counts: “Epidemic of cramps, or spasms, some sort of contracting of the ligaments or muscles, causing great discomfort.”

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*; *Ibid.*; Hyde, *Red Cloud’s Folk*, 63-64; Hafen and Young, *Fort Laramie*, 157.

Swan all refer to the winter of 1851-52 as the year the Sioux made peace with the Crows—an allusion to the Laramie Peace Conference of 1851, the winter counts of American Horse, Cloud Shield, No Ears, Short Man, and Iron Crow all reflect the substantial distribution of annuity goods dispensed at Fort Laramie that year as a condition of the treaty-making at Horse Creek. White Cow Killer explicitly calls 1851-52 as “Large-issue-of-goods-on-the-Platte-River-winter.”⁴⁹¹

The goods to which White Cow Killer refers were hardly an altruistic gift from a generous United States. In fact, their annual distribution to the Sioux and other tribes served American interests in three very important ways: (1) because annuities would—*theoretically*—compensate the Indians for disrupting the buffalo herds along the Oregon Trail, the government could thus eliminate the rationale—i.e., control of the shrinking buffalo ranges—for the intertribal warfare that both threatened the safety of white emigrants and disrupted trade; (2) as the payments had essentially bribed the tribes to agree to live within discrete boundaries, they could be held accountable for any infractions of the peace within their territory; and (3) by dispensing—or withholding—annuities, the Americans could, at last, directly influence tribal politics.⁴⁹²

Consumerism had at last trapped the Teton Sioux in an accelerating cycle of dependency. Euro-American *trade* goods had first irrevocably transformed their economy from one of communal subsistence to one of individual surplus production for exchange. And once *trade* goods had become such an integral part of Teton life and culture that they could not survive without them, it required little effort on the part of

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.; Ibid.; Ibid.

⁴⁹² Mitchell to Brown, 13 October 1849, and Mitchell to Brown, 9 March 1851, St. Louis Superintendency, Letters Received, Records of the Office of Indian Affairs; Senate Exec. Docs., 31 Cong., 1 Sess. (2 vols., Washington, 1850), I, No. 70; White, “The Winning of the West, 339-340.

United States government officials to manipulate Sioux intertribal politics through the “free” distribution of *annuity* goods. Thus, although Richard White claims that “the whole conference can be interpreted as a major triumph for the Tetons” and that “[i]n a sense, the Fort Laramie Treaty marked the height of Sioux political power,” it would require the passing of but three years to expose both the transitory nature of that political power and their illusions of economic independence.⁴⁹³

The unexpected confrontation that shattered the peace between the Teton Sioux and the United States government occurred along the Oregon Trail near Fort Laramie in the summer of 1854. As wagonloads of Mormons slowly wound their way past the bands of Teton Sioux camped in the vicinity of the fort to receive their annuities, a lame cow suddenly bolted from the Mormon caravan and into the Indian camp, after which a Minneconjou visitor to the Oglalas named Straight Foretop shot the distressed animal for meat. The cow’s owner, loath to enter the ring of tipis, had abandoned it only to report the incident later to a Lieutenant Fleming, commander of Fort Laramie’s small garrison. Despite an offer from Chief Brave Bear of the Brules to make restitution to the aggrieved owner of the cow, the inexperienced Fleming ordered his subordinate, Second Lieutenant J. L. Grattan, and twenty-nine men and one howitzer to the Sioux camps to take the Minneconjou offender into custody.⁴⁹⁴

Grattan, even more ignorant of Indians than his superior and feeling little but contempt for their fighting ability, arrived at the Sioux camps, unwisely attempted to take Straight Foretop into custody, and set off decades of warfare between the Teton Sioux and the United States army. For as Straight Foretop resisted arrest, a fight ensued in

⁴⁹³ White, “The Winning of the West,” 340.

⁴⁹⁴ Sandoz, *Crazy Horse*, 9-28.

which Brave Bear and all of the troopers perished—the chief only after enduring hours of agony. As the Indians subsequently fled the Platte River valley for the relative safety of the nearby plains to escape the inevitable retribution of the soldiers, the Tetons, became painfully aware of their reliance on *readily-accessible* Euro-American trade goods, an awareness that finally exposed their illusions of independence.⁴⁹⁵

Perhaps Mari Sandoz best captured the shock experienced by the Sioux as they dealt with this new reality:

These were times of changing things, unsettled and hard, some of the older people were saying when they saw a winter away from the whites of the Shell [Platte] River ahead of them. It would be the first one since the Oglalas followed Bull Bear southward from the Black Hills country to his traders twenty years before, the first winter without white men and their goods somewhere in the Lakota country in the memory of the oldest among them. But now it seemed certain that the soldier chiefs were very angry and would not let the Indians come back to the Holy Road [Oregon Trail] or let the traders bring their packs and wagons to the camps. When they thought of this it seemed very hard, for they had forgotten how to live without trader goods, not only for eating and wear, but even the arrows and spears would fail them without iron for the points.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 28-44.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 45.

CONCLUSION

The nineteenth-century history of the Teton Sioux is indeed a study of contradictions. While their attitude toward the members of the Corps of Discovery had prompted William Clark to call them “the vilest miscreants of the savage race,” Manuel Lisa had found them to be firm allies of the United States during the War of 1812, and, in 1823, they had even fought alongside Colonel Henry Leavenworth’s Missouri Legion against the Arikaras. But it had been the establishment of Fort Laramie in 1834 that subsequently tied the Western Sioux to the Americans in a symbiotic trade relationship that secured the peace between them for the next twenty years.

It was the permanent occupation of the Platte River valley by the Sioux in the years after the founding of Fort Laramie that both enabled them to dominate the north-central plains. In the end, the scholarly debate outlined in the introduction to this study over who followed whom to the Platte settled nothing. And the discovery that the Tetons had been there *seasonally*—even before Sublette and Campbell built their trading post at the mouth of the Laramie River—while interesting, misses the essential point that it was the Tetons’ wholesale submersion in the buffalo robe trade in the two decades after 1834 that tied them irrevocably to Euro-American consumerism and eventually compromised their ability to maintain their political and economic independence.

Business between the Tetons and American fur traders peaked throughout the 1840s and provided the Sioux with enormous quantities of trade goods that both eased their daily lives and made possible the maximum extension of their range and military power throughout the 1850s. At the height of that power, they controlled the north-central plains from the Rocky Mountain Front to the Missouri and from the Platte River valley to the Yellowstone. Their domain thus afforded them access to the Southwest, Great Lakes, and Canadian plains trading networks. But beginning in the 1840s, the most important road used by non-trading white emigrants—the Oregon Trail—neatly bisected Sioux hunting grounds along the Platte River valley.⁴⁹⁷

By the time of the Fort Laramie Peace Conference of 1851, the Tetons' military, political, and economic power reached its zenith. The United States government had acknowledged that power by building Fort Kearney in 1848 and purchasing Fort Laramie from Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Company the following year. With these initiatives, therefore, the army had accepted a permanent and active role on the plains west of the Missouri. Stationed to protect white emigrants traveling the Oregon Trail, the garrisons attached to the forts along the trail soon proved inadequate

For five years following the sale of Fort Laramie to the United States Army, veteran fur trader James Bordeaux occupied an unstockaded trading post at a site roughly eight miles downriver from the fort along the Oregon Trail that a succession of traders had used since 1837. As an independent entrepreneur, Bordeaux pursued a lucrative trade with the same bands of Brules and Oglalas that had frequented the Platte River valley

⁴⁹⁷ Hanson, *Weapons, Tools, and Ornaments*, 9.

since the mid-1830s, thus normalizing Teton Sioux trade relations there that might otherwise have rapidly deteriorated.⁴⁹⁸

Then an incident in the summer of 1854 between the United States army and bands of Sioux camped along the Oregon Trail adjacent to Fort Laramie brought the Tetons into direct conflict with the Americans. That summer, as a train of Mormon emigrants passed several bands of Sioux awaiting the distribution of annuities promised them at the treaty council of 1851, an old cow fled from its owner. Afraid to enter the Indian camps, he left the animal behind; shortly thereafter, a Minneconjou warrior visiting the Oglalas killed it for its meat and hide. The owner later complained of the incident to Fort Laramie's commander, who somewhat reluctantly ordered Second-Lieutenant J. L. Grattan to investigate the disturbance. As he approached the Indian camps, accompanied by twenty-nine men and a howitzer, Grattan arrogantly demanded that the Sioux surrender the Minneconjou. They refused. In the fight that followed, Chief Brave Bear of the Brules and all of the troopers died.⁴⁹⁹

The aftermath of the "Grattan affair" exposed the degree to which the Western Sioux had become dependent on Euro-American trade goods. After venting their anger at the white survivors of the uneven fight, the Tetons scattered to escape the army's certain wrath. Some bands headed for the buffalo ranges north of the Platte, while still others turned south.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁸ White, "The Winning of the West," 340; Schuler, *Fort Pierre*, 132; Hanson, "James Bordeaux," 6.

⁴⁹⁹ George Hyde points out that Grattan, young and impulsive, educated at West Point, believed that the government had stationed the troops at Fort Laramie to suppress the Sioux rather than merely observe them and keep the peace; Grattan's youthful enthusiasm coupled with his contempt for the Indians cost him his life; see Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 72-75.

⁵⁰⁰ Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folk*, 76; Sandoz, *Crazy Horse*, 35-39.

The army did, in fact, dispatch a punitive expedition under General William S. Harney to punish the Sioux. Before Harney concluded his campaign, his soldiers destroyed Little Thunder's camp of Brules on Blue Water Creek. It had made no difference to Harney that Little Thunder always counseled peace with the whites. Following his victory on the Blue Water, Harney marched his troops to Fort Pierre without incident, where, in the spring of 1856, he forced the Sioux to accept a treaty that appointed new chiefs and restricted trade. But while the Indians generally ignored the treaty—even the Senate refused to ratify it—its repercussions effectively destroyed the intricate trade network anchored by Forts Laramie and Pierre and the trail that linked them.⁵⁰¹

The general disruption of the Sioux trade caused by Harney's campaign to force the southwestern most Tetons away from the Oregon Trail persuaded Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Company to sell Fort Pierre to the army that same year. Although its freighters continued to use the Fort Pierre-Fort Laramie Trail, by 1855, the Tetons had lost the services of their two most important trading establishments. Suddenly, the Euro-American trade goods they had come to depend on for so many years were no longer readily accessible.

In the years after the sale of Fort Pierre, the buffalo robe and hide trade continued, albeit in an altered form and often with dire consequences for the Indians. In *Crazy Horse*, Mari Sandoz relates an encounter between an unscrupulous trader named John Richard and a band of Oglalas in the wake of the Grattan fight. Richard and his men had come to the Indians' camp with "the usual Richard goods: blue cloth and Mexican

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 78-82; Ibid., 73-89. An excellent account of both the Grattan fight and Harney's campaign is found in Paul N. Beck, *The First Sioux War: The Grattan Fight and Blue Water Creek 1854-1856* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004).

blankets on top, whiskey kegs underneath. [The whiskey] was forbidden by the soldiers, but none would try to catch them just now, and the traders had to make a living some way, they said. *There would be no bringing robes to the Platte for a long, long time* [emphasis added].”⁵⁰² At first, the Sioux had hoped that Bordeaux had brought their annuity goods, but it was, instead, only Richard, with his easy credit and deadly cargo. The next day, following a night of drunken excesses that included the murder of one Oglala warrior by another, Sandoz writes that “there was one orderly place in the morning village, the Richard wagons and the lodges beside them filled now with the goods the Indians had taken from the stone houses after [Brave] Bear was shot. And out on the hillside was a big herd of horses and mules no longer watched by the Indian herders but by Richard’s men.”⁵⁰³ The Indians’ dependence on Euro-American trade goods was complete.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰² Sandoz, *Crazy Horse*, 48.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁰⁴ The experiences of the Teton Sioux with Western-style capitalism most closely resemble those of the tribes documented by Richard White in his classic study, *The Roots of Dependency*. Here White contends: “Although they had once been able to feed, clothe, and house themselves with security and comfort, Indians gradually resorted to whites for clothing and food. Initially they obtained clothing and other manufactured items as the result of various exchanges (first of goods and military services, later of labor and the land itself) whose terms and methods were not beyond their control. Increasingly, however, the terms of these exchanges were literally dictated by the whites. In the end, whites specified what was to be exchanged, how it was to be exchanged, what the Indians were to receive, and how they were to use it. At its most extreme, the process rendered the Indians utterly superfluous—a population without control over resources, sustained in poverty by payments controlled by the larger society, and subject to increasing pressure to lose their group identity and disappear;” see Richard White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawnees, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), xix. Scholar Pekka Hamalainen, however, in his recent study of the Comanches, challenges White’s “linear reading of Indian-white relations” by “questioning some of the most basic assumptions about indigenous peoples, colonialism, and historical change.” Significantly, Hamalainen’s work focuses on the Comanches in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a time when the “Comanches adjusted their traditions, behaviors, and even beliefs to accommodate the arrival of Europeans and their technologies, but [later] turned the tables on Europe’s colonial expansion by refusing to change.” Yet even Hamalainen concedes that the Comanches suffered the same fate as North America’s other indigenous peoples by the late nineteenth century; see Pekka Hamalainen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1-17. For a purely theoretical treatment of dependency, see Jay Gurian, “The Importance of Dependency in Native American-White Contact,” *American Indian Quarterly* 3 (Spring 1977): 16-36.

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VITA

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Graduate Teaching Associate at Oklahoma State University, 2006-present.

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Pages in Study: 272

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Scope and Method of Study:

This study examines the relationship between the Teton Sioux and the American fur trade during the years from 1804-1854; specifically, its contribution to their conquest of the north-central plains and to what degree that trade involved the Sioux in a global, consumer economy. This study draws freely from the following primary sources: transcribed Indian winter counts and oral histories; journals and diaries of the trappers and traders; government documents; and, period newspapers. Secondary sources include an abundance of material from the following disciplines: history; ethnohistory; historical geography; anthropology; archaeology; political economy; economic history; gender studies; foreign relations; public history; and material culture.

Findings and Conclusions:

The nineteenth-century history of the Teton Sioux is indeed a study of contradictions. While their attitude toward the members of the Corps of Discovery prompted William Clark to call them "the vilest miscreants of the savage race," Manuel Lisa found them to be firm allies of the United States during the War of 1812, and, in 1823, they fought alongside Colonel Henry Leavenworth's Missouri Legion against the Arikaras. But it was the establishment of Fort Laramie in 1834 that subsequently tied the Western Sioux to the Americans in a symbiotic trade relationship that secured the peace between them for the next twenty years. It was, however, the Tetons' wholesale submersion in the buffalo robe and hide trade in the two decades after 1834 that also tied them irrevocably to Euro-American consumerism and eventually compromised their ability to maintain their political and economic independence. By the time of the Fort Laramie Peace Conference of 1851, the Tetons' military, political, and economic power had reached its zenith. Then, an incident in the summer of 1854 between the United States army and bands of Sioux camped along the Oregon Trail adjacent to Fort Laramie brought the Tetons into direct conflict with the Americans. The aftermath of that incident exposed the degree to which the Western Sioux had become dependent upon Euro-American trade goods. By 1854, the Tetons' dependence on those goods was complete.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. L. G. Moses
