

FORGING A FUR EMPIRE: *Expeditions in the Snake River Country, 1809-1824*, by John Phillip Reid. Norman: Arthur C. Clark Company, 2012. 229p. Map, Notes, Bibliography, Index. Cloth, \$29.95.

The fur trade of the Pacific Northwest is an excellent case study in the complex social dynamics that developed among converging populations in 19th century North America. John Phillip Reid identifies multiple levels of cultural differences that occurred between Anglos and Native Americans, the British and Anglo-Americans, as well as rivalries between Native American tribes such as the Shoshone and Blackfeet. Equally important, Reid looks at the tumultuous institutional rivalry between the British owned Hudson's Bay Company and the US-owned North West Company before their merger at the behest of the British government in 1821.

Hunting beaver for their pelts was big business in the Snake River region during the 19th century. As the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company worked to establish dominance in the region, they were faced with emerging legal matters relating to property rights, labor issues, and international law. Reid suggests, "In the History of the North American West, there is perhaps no other topic that can reveal more about institutional or legal behavior in the wilderness" (p. 10). As such, there are multiple examples of legal history throughout the book.

Hired by the Hudson's Bay Company to lead fur hunting expeditions, Alexander Ross became the first chronicler of Snake River expeditions. Reid relies heavily on the official journals Ross kept for the Hudson's Bay Company, as well as his personal memoirs, *Fur Hunters of the Far West*. Commanding a Snake River expedition was an extraordinarily difficult task. Ross wrote frequently of his struggle to maintain control over his racially

diverse expeditionary parties. Discipline was a recurring problem for Ross as he found his men deserting on a regular basis. Reid clearly explains the challenges Ross faced in controlling his men, navigating the wilderness and harsh weather, as well as avoiding conflict with Native American tribes that populated the Snake River Region.

Reid argues that Ross's journals were more valuable than his memoirs because they were "written on the spot under the pressure of daily events" (p. 57). This meant that facts were fresh in Ross's mind when he wrote them down, as opposed to his memoirs which were written years later when he was seventy years old. As Reid points out, the Hudson's Bay Company required expedition leaders to keep journals. Ross was different from most expedition leaders in that he was literate and he took the time to thoroughly document his missions while others were unable or unmotivated to write anything at all.

A few criticisms are worth mentioning. The monograph lacks an introduction which, at the outset, leaves the reader wondering about the objectives, arguments, and structure of the book. In Chapter 9 Reid argues the corporate culture of the Hudson's Bay Company was an impediment to Ross's success in the wilderness. This important point gets lost in the chapter's excessive amount of information about the social hierarchy and corporate culture of the Hudson's Bay Company. Surprisingly, Reid gives very little attention to the devastation of the beaver population as a result of 19th century fur hunting.

Overall, this book is an excellent resource for studying early 19th century fur trapping in the Snake River region. Reid provides a well rounded historical survey of the legal, cultural, economic, and territorial issues that developed from the fur trapping industry.

— Jonathan Saxon