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## The West as seen through frontier biography

John Henry Haefner  
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### Recommended Citation

Haefner, John Henry. "The West as seen through frontier biography." PhD (Doctor of Philosophy) thesis, State University of Iowa, 1942.

<https://doi.org/10.17077/etd.ygzhl7g9>

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THE WEST AS SEEN THROUGH  
FRONTIER BIOGRAPHY

by  
John Henry Haefner

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
in the Department of History, in the Graduate  
College of the State University of Iowa

December, 1942

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To

Dorothy Haefner and Louis Pelzer  
who contributed, in very unlike ways,  
to the completion of this thesis.

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## FOREWORD

Acknowledgments have something in common with motives -- the real ones can seldom be brought into the open. It is a pleasure, however, to make the obvious ones.

Professor Pelzer compelled me to "court" this thesis (as he put it), before I took the important step of becoming "married" to it. Having done that, he pursued a policy of laissez-faire -- a discipline which proved disconcerting but salutary. The final form clearly bears the imprint of his careful editing.

Much of the research was done at the Newberry Library in Chicago. I should like to record here the discovery of a library staff which went out of its way to make a graduate student's work easier and more pleasant. George B. Utley, Stanley Gwynn, Richard Hale, Dr. Ruth Lapham Butler, and Barbara Boston were particularly responsible for making my visits enjoyable and worthwhile.

Finally, to quote an old bibliographer,  
"Errors are confessed and regretted."

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCING THE BOUNDARIES AND LIMITATIONS

On a mid-summer's day in 1893, before the American Historical Association's annual convention, a young historian in his early thirties read a paper before his assembled elders which was destined to exert a profound influence on the study of American history and seems even to have left an indelible imprint upon it. The young man was Frederick Jackson Turner and his paper was entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History."

Prefacing his paper by quoting from a bulletin prepared by the Superintendent of the Census in 1890 which stated that the American frontier had officially come to a close, Professor Turner stated his conviction that American development to 1890 could be explained by "the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward."<sup>1</sup> In elaborating this basic thesis, he made it clear that it was his judgment that the frontier was responsible for the basic ideals, institutions, and characteristics which made American life truly American.<sup>2</sup>

The effects of "Turner's thesis" were somewhat curiously like those of a delayed-action bomb. Established historians received it almost casually, terming it merely "curious" and "interesting." In a short time, however, a

group of students, attracted by the implications of Turner's hypothesis and by the personality of the man himself, undertook a series of studies and publications extending and implementing the various aspects of their teacher's contentions. As a result, a full-fledged "school" of historians has developed whose interpretation of the role of the frontier in the development of American life went almost unchallenged and uncriticised for nearly two decades. In the recent past, however, reexamination has set in and various historians have pointed out that certain discrepancies exist between the facts and the contentions of the "Turner school."

One result of this academic controversy is the reevaluation and reexamination of the frontier itself. Professor P. H. Boynton insists that the frontier be "re-discovered,"<sup>3</sup> and graduate students are studying limited aspects of the West "in partial fulfillment" of the requirements for their degrees. Articles appearing in professional journals from time to time are further evidence that the issue is not yet dead.

This study is one in a series designed to examine the frontier from some particular angles and to tap little-used sources of information to discover what light they will shed upon the current conception of the West. These studies are not intended to prove or disprove the Turner thesis but rather to aid in the collection of data which

can eventually be used to confirm or modify it. Dr. Wilfred Black's dissertation entitled "Historians and the Tradition of Pioneer Hardships" and Miss Lenora Purdy's study of "Buffalo Bill in Truth and in Fiction" are completed portions of the series of which this is also a part.<sup>4</sup>

As yet the West has not been viewed through the eyes of frontier biographers. None of the standard histories of the West include extensive reference to pioneer biography, and the works on frontier literature largely ignore it. Even Rusk's well-known treatment devotes only five pages to both autobiography and biography.<sup>5</sup> Judged by present-day standards, frontier biography was poor literature, poor biography, and, occasionally, poor history. But perhaps its usefulness in providing a picture of the frontier as frontiersmen themselves saw it -- and as many Easterners must have viewed it -- has been underestimated. In any event, this study may be justified by the conviction that the frontier biographers' views of the West will be of some use in composing a more complete picture of the West, as it was and as it was said to be.

Such a task must be approached with considerable misgivings. How much credence can be given the accounts of frontier life as portrayed by the frontiersmen themselves? Professor Boynton has expressed his personal opinion: "The frontier has been content to be itself, sing its songs, spin its yarns. It has never cared to put itself

on paper."<sup>6</sup>

Yet he himself is the first to admit that actually the frontier did produce its own distinctive printed material:

There is a great deal of printed material -- not to call it all literature -- about the frontier and the pioneer.... Of the matter that was contemporary with the event, some that was unconscious and genuinely self-revealing appeared in unliterary publications and has only recently come in for critical attention. In its day the polite ignored it or apologized for it. The conscious literature of frontier days was of two main kinds: what was written from frontier communities -- almost invariably affected, unrevealing of anything except the desire of the writers to compose the kind of thing approved by tradition; and what was written about the frontier by more or less careless and more or less unscrupulous observers and sojourners who put in writing a sentimentalized and rapidly conventionalized account to be marketed in the older country.<sup>7</sup>

This is indeed a penetrating analysis and is true of much of the frontier biography examined. Indeed, there is some reason to believe that many of the biographies, consciously or unconsciously, were written to provide a "sublimated escape" for those in the East who could not themselves participate in the dramatic and exciting events of the frontier, or were loth to do so. These Easterners were able to experience vicariously and in arm-chair comfort the hairbreadth escapes of Buffalo Bill and Kit Carson -- and they were willing to pay for the privilege of doing so. It became a paying venture for men on the

frontier to produce biographies which were "dressed for the market." The unfortunate result of this in some cases was that as readers in the East developed stereotypes about the West and its characters, those who aspired to producing a best-seller were almost forced into fitting their subjects into these previously prepared molds. Like Procrustes, they both added and subtracted as the occasion demanded.

Granting these frailties in frontier biography, there is still a neglected aspect of their value. Johnson suggests it succinctly: "Formal histories and biographies may themselves be original sources, either by reason of material which has been incorporated in them and which can be found nowhere else, or by reason of a point of view which is itself historically valuable.....the author is often sublimely unconscious of the tendency or bias which may vitiate his historical work. On the other hand, this bias may itself be an historical fact of some importance."<sup>8</sup> There you have it, exactly. Is there a point of view to be gleaned from frontier biographies that is "itself historically valuable"? Do frontier biographies exhibit tendencies and forms of bias which may make their products poor history and poor biography but still be historically important? Finding answers to these questions constitutes the purpose of this study in a nutshell. It is not concerned with the biographical excellence of the biography nor yet with the historicity of the facts nor even in an external

and internal criticism of the sources. Instead, the end product is designed to be a portrait, executed with broad brush-marks, of the frontier as it was reproduced for popular consumption, by men and women who had themselves experienced some aspects of the West. Viewed in this light, it becomes clear that these frontier biographies become source materials in a very real sense, and that they must constitute the foundation and superstructure of this study.

The task, then, is to discover and to read critically the biographies of men who had played a role on one or another of the frontiers -- biographies, however, which had been written by men or women who were contemporaries of their subjects and who had themselves had some first-hand experience on the "cutting edge of civilization." But when is a biographer a contemporary of his subject? This practical problem had to be met immediately, and a rough rule-of-thumb was arbitrarily adopted. No biography was included in the study which was not published during the subject's lifetime or within ten years of his death. This criterion doubtlessly eliminated some splendid biographies, some of which might properly have been included. But nearness to the scene was the factor of prime importance, and several limitations had to be devised to make the study manageable.

There were other troublesome problems. A great many prominent political figures in American life lived on

the frontier during the early portion of their lives, before migrating to the East. Should the biographies of such individuals be included? In the interests of completeness perhaps they should, but in the interests of manageability another limitation was imposed. This was to be a study of the little folk and plain people of the frontier, "whose essential acts were most commonly anonymous!"<sup>9</sup> How did the contemporaries of the explorers, the trappers, the hunters and scouts, and the ministers, and the doctors who lived their lives on the frontier report the West to those who did not know it? Always the focus of attention must be on the elements of frontier life, not on the characters on the stage. Sufficient exceptions to prove the rule, however, were made in the case of William Henry Harrison, Lewis Cass, and Zachary Taylor, who so dominated the biographical field for a time that they merit inclusion.

A third practical problem arose from the fact that biography is not always what it seems. Sometimes it is the biographer's path of least resistance simply to let his subject tell his own story, by reprinting the subject's diary, log, or other autobiographical material, without change and without exercising discrimination. This was especially true, for example, in the case of Fremont, who left a log-book which proved to be the temptation of every biographer. As a result, contemporary biographies of his life are far more autobiographical than anything else.

Well, what of them in terms of this study? Do they properly "belong"? It was impossible to adopt and follow through a completely consistent policy but in general only those portions of the book which could properly be called biographical were critically examined. After all, the problem was to capture the interpretation of the contemporaries -- not the frontier character's account as he saw it.

The same question arose in reverse. What of an account ostensibly autobiographical but actually biographical? Really only one instance of this occurred, but it is of considerable interest. Filson and Imlay's A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America contains as one part "The Adventures of col. Daniel Boon."<sup>10</sup> This account is signed by Boone, but there is considerable evidence that Filson actually wrote it. Consequently, it warrants inclusion in this study.

A final limitation was imposed by including only biographies which achieved book or pamphlet form. According to Rusk much of the biographical writing before 1840 appeared in periodicals.<sup>11</sup> No attempt was made to use these materials, nor were biographical dictionaries turned to as sources. In a few instances collective biographies were examined, though there are few of these in which the author was a contemporary of all his subjects.

Having made these decisions, it remained to erect some kind of framework to be used when examining the frontier

biographies. "The Elements of Frontier Life," "Frontier Institutions," and "Economic Aspects of the Frontier" were selected as major headings. The complete outline is as follows:

I. The Elements of Frontier Life

- A. Food, clothing, and shelter on the frontier
- B. Indian relations on the frontier
- C. The hardships of pioneer life
- D. Land and settlement on the frontier
- E. Transportation, travel, and communication on the frontier

II. Frontier Institutions

- A. Social life on the frontier
- B. Education and cultural development
- C. Frontier morals, religion, and religious institutions
- D. Law, order, and justice on the frontier

III. The Economic Framework of the Frontier

- A. Pioneer occupations, professions, and industries
- B. Prices, barter, and credit

It is obvious, then, that this study aims to explore the field rather than to exploit it. If, hedged about as it is by limitations, it savors of incompleteness, it would be charitable to apply the paraphrase that:

He who writes and runs away  
Lives to write another day.

## Chapter II

## THE PECULIARITIES OF BIOGRAPHY

In the preface to his Eminent Victorians, Lytton Strachey observes that "...it is perhaps as difficult to write a good life as to live one." This exacting standard for the would-be biographer is distinctly modern, for the art of life-writing has had a checkered career, having been put to many diverse ends and having been entrusted into the hands of all modes and manner of men. A distinguishing characteristic of man (and perhaps one of his besetting sins) is his inordinate desire to leave a record of himself -- on the stone walls of caves, on obelisks and in pyramids, in ruins, on canvas, and in the written or the printed word. And since mankind is really only the aggregate of individual men, a large portion of the record consists of the lives, the times, the deeds, the vices, and the virtues of greater and lesser characters who have crossed the stage.

Biography in History

What is the position of biography in the household of the mistress, History? Carlyle and Emerson, we are told, believed that history was biography, and Dryden saw no difference between them.<sup>12</sup> To William Roscoe Thayer "they are not rivals but allies,"<sup>13</sup> while to Edward O'Neill "Biography is a part of history, and history is frequently

used as background for biography...."<sup>14</sup> Certainly the relationship is intimate, and there is much history that can be learned from biography. "The lives of some men are so intimately connected with public affairs, that a faithful narrative of their actions will furnish the greater part of what is valuable in the history of their own country during a particular period," wrote an anonymous author in The Southern Literary Messenger in 1856,<sup>15</sup> neglecting to add that even the lives of men who played no great roles in public life may still be highly revealing of the manners and modes of the time.

Before viewing the West through the medium of frontier biography and especially through the life-stories of the little folk and the near-great, it is not amiss to inquire briefly into the varying conceptions that men have held concerning the nature and purpose of biographical writing.

Plutarch is generally credited with being the first true biographer, though there is much fine portraiture contained in the Old Testament. Plutarch had a definite philosophy of biographical writing which is so germane to the later development of biography that it merits reproduction:

It must be borne in mind that my design is not to write histories, but lives. And the most glorious exploits do not always furnish us with the clearest discoveries of virtue or vice in men; sometimes a matter of less moment, and expression or

a jest, informs us better of their characters and inclinations, than the most famous sieges, the greatest armaments, or the bloodiest battles whatsoever. Therefore as portrait-painters are more exact in the lines and features of the face, in which the character is seen, than in the other parts of the body, so I must be allowed to give my more particular attention to the marks and indications of the souls of men, and while I endeavor by these to portray their lives, may be free to leave more weighty matters and great battles to be treated of by others.<sup>16</sup>

That is as modern as the "new biography" of Strachey, Maurois, Ludwig, and Bradford! Plutarch went beyond mere narrative biography and tried to portray character and depict personality. That he wrote also from a moral point of view does not invalidate his contribution to the art of life-writing.

But the excellence of his example was not maintained by those who followed him. His contemporary, Suetonius, wrote scandal-biographies of the Caesars -- a type of biographical writing which much later became popular and which has not yet entirely disappeared. Such biographies as were written during the Middle Ages were didactic and eulogistic in their nature, and since they were designed to teach lessons, they did not hesitate to omit facts and falsify the records if it seemed necessary or desirable. "From the second to the eighteenth century," says O'Neill, "There is little in the literature of biography that indicates any progress in the art."<sup>17</sup>

There is general agreement that modern biography

should be dated from the latter part of the eighteenth century, and particularly from the publication of Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson in 1791. His effort to portray his hero as he actually was, went beyond the mere recital of the major events in his life and has left for us a clear portrait of a character and a personality. In a sense, Boswell returned to Plutarch's conception of what biography ought to be, but as it developed, Boswell, like Plutarch, was far ahead of his time. William Roscoe Thayer characterizes the life-writing in the century following the appearance of The Life of Samuel Johnson in this fashion:

It took a long time for Boswell's example to influence other biographers. The traditional idea continued that biographies must be constructed according to well-recognized patterns. Just as the "dignity of history" had to be respected, so respect for the "proprieties" had to be observed. The intimate life of a man, his everyday doings, his weaknesses and follies and mistakes, must not be mentioned. But he must be described as being perpetually on parade, the counterpart of the portraits of men in their best apparel. This fashion has by no means passed away.<sup>18</sup>

O'Neill's characterization of the period just preceding the present century is less kind. "The last half of the nineteenth century was ....a period of hero worship, smug propriety, and biographical whitewashing."<sup>19</sup>

American Biography, 1800-1900

The biographical writing during the first half of the nineteenth century has been classified as falling into three main categories: clerical, political, and literary.<sup>20</sup> Much of the early biography was written by clergymen about clergymen, a representative example being John G. Palfrey's A Discourse on the Life and Character of the Reverend Henry Ware, D.D., A.A.S. As the political development of the two party system led to widespread presidential campaigns, the field was dominated by "sketches," "memoirs," "outlines," and "essays" of the lives, times and services of presidential candidates. Most of the subjects of these biographies were also military men, and the military aspects of their careers were treated gloriously in great detail. The war with Mexico at mid-century provided much biography, as well as presidential timber. Representative titles include: Richard Hildreth's The People's Presidential Candidate (William Henry Harrison); J. Reese Fry's A Life of Gen. Zachary Taylor; and John Henry Eaton's The Life of Andrew Jackson.

Literary biography of this period concerned itself largely with men who had played important roles in the Revolution, and with a few frontier characters who captured public imagination such as Daniel Boone. Typical of the biographies and their authors are the following:

Mason Locke ("Parson") Weems' lives of Washington and Francis Marion; Washington Irving's Life of George Washington; William Gilmore Simms' lives of Francis Marion, John Smith, and Nathaniel Greene; Timothy Flint's Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone; and John Filson's Adventures of col. Daniel Boone. Less famous but equally representative titles include Edward R. Cotten's Life of the Hon. Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina; Anthony Haswell's Memoirs and Adventures of Captain Mathew Phelps; and William Emmons' Authentic Biography of Colonel Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky. Occasionally an outstanding Indian chief was selected for treatment. The Life and Times of Red-Jacket, or Sa-Go-Ye-Wat-Ha by William Stone is a good example.

From the standpoint of biography as a form of literature and its development in America, the Reverend Jared Sparks was probably the outstanding figure during the first half of the century. In his prolific works he formulated a commendable philosophy for the art of life-writing, but he failed to meet and maintain his own standards, and was even guilty of some biographical counterfeiting.<sup>21</sup> In spite of this, the individual "Lives" he wrote, and particularly the "Library of American Biography" which he projected and edited, were important contributions to the development of American biography.

During the period from 1800 to 1850 there were

relatively few biographies written which fall within the limits of this study. A few clergymen, Indians, explorers, hunters, and military men, in addition to presidential candidates who played a role on the frontier were of sufficient contemporary importance and interest to be made the subjects of biographies. But they are not numerous and some of these few were not available to the writer. Many colorful figures that the modern historian of the West considers outstanding did not attract the biographers and their lives were not recorded by their contemporaries. Of such figures "Nolichucky Jack" Sevier, Meriwether Lewis, and George Rogers Clark come instantly to mind. Biographical studies of these men by their contemporaries are apparently lacking (at least in extended book form), and history will always be the poorer for it. Biographies of Andrew Jackson, on the other hand, came at a dime-a-dozen, and practically everyone with any literary ambitions whatsoever seems to have considered "Old Hickory" fair game. These books must have been both a cause and a result of the popular conception of Jackson as a "man of the people"; most of them painted him as only a little lower than the angels. The resurgence of democracy during this period, and the forceful personality of the man himself are important factors in explaining this flood of biographies. The opposition which Jackson's candidacy met with from the Eastern seaboard was also influential.<sup>22</sup>

The second half of the nineteenth century saw a

considerable increase in the quantity of biographical writing, though a corresponding improvement in quality is scarcely noticeable. In part, at least, this may be accounted for by the fact that the reading public was taking an increasing interest in biography so noticeably that Annie Russel Marble wrote at the turn of the new century that "At the public libraries, the demand for biography is fast rivalling that for fiction; ...."<sup>23</sup>

The types of biographies did not change radically from 1850 to 1900. The lives of American literary men were written in great numbers, of which the series entitled "American Men of Letters," edited by Charles Dudley Warner, is a typical example. The close of the Civil War, and the subsequent presidential campaigns let loose a flood of military and campaign biographies whose merits, as biography, were little superior to similar books produced during the first half of the century. Lincoln and Grant became the most written-about men of the period, both of whom, friends eulogized and enemies reviled. Representative titles of this type include Joseph Holland's Life of Abraham Lincoln, Frank A. Burr's Original and Authentic Record of the Life and Deeds of General Ulysses S. Grant, John E. Cooke's A Life of Gen. Robert E. Lee, and Edward S. Pollard's Life of Jefferson Davis, with a Secret History of the Southern Confederacy.

This period saw, also, the rewriting of the lives

of men prominent in earlier periods of American history. A greatly increased interest was taken in the outstanding characters of the colonial and Revolutionary eras. The "lives and times" of Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, Samuel Adams, Patrick Henry, Tom Paine, and Paul Revere were examined and reexamined. Outstanding characters from the "middle period" of our history, some of them living and others only recently dead, were also the subjects of biographers. George Ticknor Curtis' Life of Daniel Webster and Life of James Buchanan, F. B. Sanborn's Captain John Brown, Life and Letters, and Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison's William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, are examples. Among the most prolific writers of the time was James Parton, termed America's "first professional biographer,"<sup>24</sup> whose Life and Times of Aaron Burr, Life of Andrew Jackson, Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin, and Famous Americans of Recent Times, to cite only a partial list, were genuine contributions of considerable merit. The "American Statesmen" series of political biographies, consisting of thirty-one volumes plus nine volumes of an incomplete second series, was the most ambitious undertaking during these years.

The rapid extension of the frontier and the settlement of the West seems to be largely responsible for the appearance of a somewhat different kind of biography during the period of 1850-1900 -- different at least in

emphasis if not in kind. The colorful characters of the West became subjects of increasingly intense interest after 1850, and a mass of biographical writing about them made its appearance. The subjects were not really public figures in the sense of men like Lincoln, Grant, or William Henry Harrison, nor were they politically powerful. They were not military heroes. Instead they were explorers, trappers, hunters, missionaries, "bad men," and, in a few cases, simply "pioneers." But their dangerous way of life, their unusual customs and mode of dress, and their dramatic adventures made them objects of extreme curiosity in the East, and thus provided market for their contemporaries who felt inclined to write their lives. From the standpoint of the art of biography, some of the "lives" which were published were as unique as their subjects, but the numerous editions in which they appeared testify to their popularity. It is these biographies which form the basis of this study. The bibliography suggests representative titles; suffice it to say here that they range from John Abbott's Christopher Carson to Helen Cody Wetmore's Last of the Great Scouts.

#### The Characteristics of Frontier Biography

What shall be said of the nature of the frontier biography which constitutes the basis of this study? What are some of its limitations as historical source material?

Actually, frontier biography was highly representative of nineteenth century biographical writing. None of the life-writing done by frontiersmen about the frontier and its characters measured up to the best biography produced during the century. In fact, it is probably fair to say that most of it had all the faults which characterized nineteenth century biographical writing as a whole. But to measure the biographies of the eighteenth hundreds by twentieth century standards -- an error which results in gross injustice.

Judged by present day definitions of biography, nineteenth century life-writing was not really biography at all. William Roscoe Thayer, for example, insists that the first obligation of the biographer is to "reveal to us the individual, man or woman, that indivisible unit which has no exact counterpart in the world" and to show "how his environment in time and place affects him."<sup>25</sup> Professor James Johnston is of the opinion that "whenever the intent is faithfully to depict a life, with personality and temperament as outstanding characteristics of the picture, we have biography ...."<sup>26</sup> The "new biographers," particularly Lytton Strachey, Emil Ludwig, and Gamaliel Bradford go even beyond this, and departing from chronology (in some cases) and making no attempt to give a complete event story of the lives they are depicting, aim instead, to portray their subject's personality, character and soul.

They seek not only to explain men's deeds, but to probe back of the deeds and discover their motives and why they were motivated as they were. So different is this approach from the former conception of biography, and so heavily does it draw on psychology and psychoanalysis, that Gamaliel Bradford no longer thinks of himself as<sup>27</sup> biographer but rather as a "psychographer" and defines psychography as "the condensed, essential, artistic presentation of character."<sup>27</sup>

But this conception of biography is still so new that a more moderate definition will probably be more representative of twentieth century life-writing. "My definition of biography," says Edward O'Neill, "is that it is the re-creation of a man as he really was, as he lived and moved and had his being."<sup>28</sup> Good biography, he continues, is characterized by the following: "It must be true; it must be well planned and the plan completely developed; it must be a complete account of a life from birth to death; the subject must be of sufficient importance to justify the writing of a biography; and the biographer must be, as far as such a thing is possible, impartial."<sup>29</sup>

But these, it must be reiterated, are twentieth century standards. "The constant direction in the evolution of Biography," says Thayer, "has been from the outward to the inward. At first the chief effort was to describe the

external man, the rank or position he filled and his visible acts."<sup>30</sup> It should be said in fairness to nineteenth century biography that it was still in the stage of narration and recital and made few attempts to interpret.

In telling a life story, frontier biographers were ordinarily not lacking in their willingness to give detail. The campaign biographies, including those designed to prepare the voters for future presidential possibilities, fought the wars, operation by operation, in which their heroes participated. Sometimes the authors were good enough to forewarn the readers who glanced at the title page:

Taylor and His Generals. A biography of Major-General Zachary Taylor; and sketches of the lives of Generals Worth, Wool, and Twiggs; with a full account of the various actions of their divisions in Mexico up to the present time; together with a sketch of the life of Major-General Winfield Scott, and an account of the operations of his divisions in Mexico. Embellished with portraits and engravings.<sup>31</sup>

A "full account" meant just that, including the number of troops engaged, their location, their movements, and the names and number of men slain. It must be confessed that books of this nature make dull reading for the average lay man, especially today, though they may have been gripping to the reader in the middle nineteenth century interested in military tactics. They are certainly not revealing of character, but they do reproduce

reports of considerable importance to the military historian.

The other extreme in frontier biography is represented by the "blood and thunder" life-sketches which had the bad men and explorers, the hunters and scouts of the West as their subjects. These chroniclers chose the colorful and dramatic events for their record -- consciously and purposefully. Their motives in doing so were no doubt mixed. But they had a "public" as surely as do the actors and actresses of today -- and they were writing for a market. Often these biographers saw no point in beating about the bush; the reader was entitled to a curiosity-arousing preview of what the book held in store for him, as the following title pages testify:

Life of Kit Carson: the Greatest Western Hunter and Guide. Comprising wild and romantic exploits as a hunter and trapper in the Rocky Mountains; thrilling adventures and hairbreadth escapes among the Indians and Mexicans; his daring and invaluable services as guide to scouting and other parties, etc., etc. With an account of various government expeditions to the far west.<sup>32</sup>

This one was designed to catch the attention of those who leaned a little toward the naughty in their tastes:

The Life of Joseph Bishop, the celebrated old pioneer in the first settlement of middle Tennessee, embracing his wonderful adventures and narrow escapes with the Indians, his animating and remarkable hunting excursions. Interspersed with racy anecdotes of those early times.<sup>33</sup>

And this booklet was written to appeal to those who enjoyed rugged adventure and death -- at a distance:

Life and Adventures of Sam Bass the Notorious Union Pacific and Texas Train Robber together with a graphic account of his capture and death -- sketch of the members of his band, with thrilling pen pictures of their many bold and desperate deeds, and the capture and death of Collins, Berry, Barnes, and Arkansas Johnson. <sup>34</sup>

Books of this type are a far cry from the "psychographs" of Gamaliel Bradford, but they are representative of their times, and they are not without historic value.

A serious shortcoming of almost all nineteenth century biography -- and frontier life-writing certainly partook of it -- was its lack of critical scholarship. In some cases the authors showed an unwillingness to take the trouble of examining original sources and documents. Such writers resorted to simple literary piracy, lifting whole chapters of their books almost verbatim from other authors. Campaign biographies, published in the heat of battle and usually under duress of time, are particularly open to this charge. In some instances the author admitted, in very general terms, his indebtedness; in most cases this was conveniently forgotten. In his Memoir of the Public Services of William Henry Harrison of Ohio, James Hall admits that he drew heavily on an earlier life of Harrison by Moses Dawson and on M'Affee's history of the war of 1812. Confessions of this type were, however, the exception rather than the rule. More typical is Upham's life of John Charles Fremont, in which the author quotes whole paragraphs almost verbatim from other accounts without

listing a single reference or giving acknowledgment of any kind.

As a matter of fact, the greater number of frontier biographers were keenly aware of their obligation to tell the truth and to make use of all possible source materials. They occasionally went out of their way to make this clear to their readers. Edward D. Mansfield, for example, in his preface to the Memoirs of the Life and Services of Daniel Drake M.D., carefully enumerated his sources:

In the preparation of the work, there were several sources of information which I should acknowledge. First. A large mass of private letters, part furnished by me by the family of Dr. Drake, and a part in my own possession. Second. The testimony and conversations of several cotemporaries. Third. My own knowledge and observation, furnished by nearly thirty years of intimate friendship. Fourth. The works and writings of Dr. Drake. Fifth. The able and faithful discourse of Dr. Gross, from which I have drawn largely for professional testimony. Sixth. The cotemporary documents and history of the times.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps Mansfield had an unusually acute literary conscience for his day, but there are many similar instances. J. W. Buel wrote, modestly, disarmingly, and with unusual frankness:

I was well acquainted with Wild Bill [Hickok] for several years before his death, and in 1879 wrote a pamphlet sketch of his life, but discovered afterward that while it contained comparatively few of his adventures, there were several mortifying errors, a correction of which influenced me to write another sketch of the famous scout, and this

labor developed into "Heroes of the Plains." I was fortunate in securing Wild Bill's diary from his widow, Mrs. Agnes Lake Hickok, of Cincinnati, from which I have drawn my facts concerning him, that there might be no mistakes or omissions in recounting the marvelous exploits of his life in this publication.<sup>36</sup>

Since these are rather typical examples, it is obvious that ignorance of the value of source materials and lack of access to them, were not primarily to blame for the unscholarly aspects of frontier biographies. Instead, three related factors seem to be responsible: first, the unskilled use of source materials; second, the nature of the individual writing the story and his relationship to the subject; and third, the motives responsible for the biography.

It is unnecessary to read a great number of frontier biographies to discover that their authors failed to use their materials with discrimination. In their eagerness to make their story complete -- and to give the reading public its money's worth, they included vast quantities of useless detail -- useless because it contributed little to an understanding of the character and very often little to the role he played. Much of the detail, paradoxically, was phrased so generally and without supporting evidence, as to be of little genuine value. The lives of scouts, explorers, and frontier clergymen, as well as the military and campaign biographies, teem with this fault. Living conditions are described as difficult,

transportation facilities as bad, and campaigns as being waged under the handicap of almost insuperable obstacles, but the details explaining these conditions are often lacking. The work of selecting and digesting the voluminous details was apparently to be the task of the reader, not the author.

Most serious of all, perhaps, was the failure on the part of the writers to evaluate their sources and to apply the standards of internal and external criticism. They were content to use original sources without qualification and without attempting to inquire as to their validity, their authenticity, or the motives producing them. The result was inaccuracy, ranging from minor discrepancies of chronology to wholesale fabrication and falsification.<sup>37</sup> The kindest thing that can be said of many authors is that they failed to control their historical imaginations. In a few cases it was unintentional and due to ignorance. In the majority of cases it was deliberate and done with malice aforethought. In either case, it constitutes an outstanding characteristic in judging the merits of frontier biography.

The nature of the biographer and his relationship to his subject go far toward explaining the peculiarities of nineteenth century life writing. "It is, indeed, a curious fact," wrote an anonymous author in 1901, "that one of the most difficult branches of the literary art

[biography] should ordinarily be turned over to the unskilled. That the portraying of great men should so commonly fall to intimate friends, pious relatives, indiscreet admirers, or, worse yet, to industrious hacks, brings a deeper penalty than is usually the result of dabbling in letters."<sup>38</sup>

Fortunately, only a small portion of the frontier biography included in this study was produced by "industrious hacks," but unfortunately, much of it was the work of "intimate friends, pious relatives, and indiscreet admirers." Most of these were unskilled, all were partisan, and the books carry clearly the imprint of their biases. This factor is enhanced in a study such as this which limits itself to works whose authors were contemporaries of their subjects. How much perspective is essential in the writing of a life? Literary critics are still not agreed, for Pearson, quoting or paraphrasing the Persian Bahram, insists that "Personal contact blurs the vision. There is nothing so dangerous to truth as intimate knowledge .... intimacy is fatal to biography."<sup>39</sup> Bradford, too, believes that when an author knows his hero personally "he is most of all apt to go astray."<sup>40</sup> Professor O'Neill, on the other hand, is not so certain that contemporaneousness breeds bad biography, though he believes that few contemporary biographies are satisfactory because they lack perspective.<sup>41</sup> H. H. Asquith, however, writing in

The Living Age, sees personal acquaintanceship between author and subject as an advantage.<sup>42</sup>

These questions, it should be borne in mind, are setting standards for biography. This study is more concerned with a description of frontier life as frontier biographers saw it. Perspective in this instance would seem to be far less essential than in the case of biographical or historical writing which purports to be interpretative. Even where the object is description, however, too intimate a relationship with the subject may lead to mistaken emphasis, omission, distortion, or outright falsification. The books dealing with the life of Buffalo Bill Cody are partial evidence of this fact.<sup>43</sup> In many instances it is more a matter of motive than perspective.

In the case of frontier biography contemporaneity is sometimes deceptive. Particularly after the middle of the nineteenth century the West expanded so rapidly that authors who were the contemporaries of their subjects were actually possessed of a post-frontier outlook by the time they started writing. The writers may themselves have experienced intimately frontier life, and may even have known well the genuine frontiersmen they were depicting. But the very fact that they put these lives on record, and that they wrote for an Eastern market, is some evidence that the authors themselves already

represented a post-frontier point of view. "The frontier," Percy Boynton insists, "as long as it genuinely survived, was more interested in living than in contemplating life. The frontier, when it became the subject for literary treatment, was treated by visitors and sojourners and dressed for the market at that."<sup>44</sup>

Regardless of the perspective from which the lives were written, frontier biographies were almost always lacking in literary style. Organization was often conspicuous by its absence; the only obligation to unity which the author seemed to feel was the stringing together of disconnected episodes and events. Chronology was usually, but not always, followed. In the military and campaign biographies the style was often stilted; in the clerical biographies it was sometimes over-pious; and in the lives of the more rugged individuals of the frontier an occasional attempt to capture the picturesqueness of speech was usually ludicrous. Many frontier life sketches were dictated by the subject to others because he was unable to write. Occasionally this resulted in the illiterate leading the illiterate. Filson's life of Boone<sup>45</sup> and McCorkle's life by O. S. Barton<sup>46</sup> may be cited as examples. Usually the writers were not apologetic for their lack of polished style, but an exception to this is so unique -- being frank without fawning -- that it bears quoting:

The writer of this little book is well aware that it will not stand the test of criticism as a literary production. A frontiersman himself, his opportunities for acquiring information, and for supplying the deficiencies of a rather limited education, have of course been "few and far between;" and therefore it cannot reasonably be expected that he could make a book under such circumstances which would not be sadly defective as to style and composition. However, it can justly lay claim to at least one merit, not often found in similar publications -- it is not a compilation of imaginary scenes and incidents, concocted in the brain of one who never was beyond the sound of a dinner-bell in his life, but a plain, unvarnished story of the "scapes and scrapes" of Big-Foot Wallace, the Texas Ranger and Hunter, written out from notes furnished by himself, and told, as well as my memory serves me, in his own language.<sup>47</sup>

Frontier biography was highly motivated. In all likelihood there is no other single factor which accounts in such large measure for the frailties which it exhibits. The motives that impelled men to write the lives of their fellowmen were as varied as the writers themselves. Whether noble or ignoble, however, the effect was usually detrimental.

There are countless examples of books written solely to eulogize or commemorate the subject, occasionally by a member of the family, but more often by some trusted friend, perhaps a clergyman. Such biographies (though strictly speaking they were not biographies at all) were usually brief and overdone in style. Only the barest outline of the subject's life was included, the remainder consisting mostly of flowery and laudatory phrases. William

Venable's sketch of William Davis Gallagher<sup>48</sup> and George W. Samson's Henry R. Schoolcraft<sup>49</sup> are two examples. Actually Helen Cody Wetmore's Last of the Great Scouts belongs in this category, though it purports to be a fullfledged biography.

The didactic motive has always been strong in biographical writing, and frontier biographies were no exception. Some of them must have had a public similar to that exerted by the Horatio Alger books of a later generation. Ordinarily it was not necessary for an author to point out that his purpose was primarily moral, but a Mr. Cotten took advantage of an extended title to give a preview of his intention. His approach to the art of biography differed more in degree than in kind from that of his fellow biographers:

Life of the Hon. Nathaniel Macon, of North Carolina; in which there is displayed striking instances of virtue, enterprise, courage, generosity and patriotism. His public life: Illustrating the blessing of political union -- the miseries of fiction -- and the mischiefs of despotic power in any government. His private life: Furnishing lessons upon the science of social happiness and religious freedom, of greater value perhaps, than are to be found in the biography of any other character, either ancient or modern, -- "having lived and died without an enemy."<sup>50</sup>

Partisanship was still another motive responsible for great numbers of "sketches," "outlines," "memoirs," and "lives." Such biographies, in fact, outnumbered all other kinds. Usually they were written to

acquaint the voters with the party's candidate, to display him to the electorate on the basis of his military career, or, on occasion, as "a Vindication of his Character and Conduct as a Statesman, a Citizen, and a Soldier."<sup>51</sup> Hildreth's The People's Presidential Candidate, and Hickman's The Life of General Lewis Cass are but two examples of many. Less frequently there appeared derogatory accounts by the opposition party. Fremont's candidacy bred a huge litter of campaign biographies, of which two anonymous pamphlets, Fremont, His Supporters and Their Record and Black Republican Imposture Exposed might be classified as "mud slinging." "Debunking" biography did not become a vogue during the nineteenth century, though John Fellow's The Veil Removed, dealing with the life of David Humphreys and his earlier biographers, was a close approximation.

A mercenary motive sometimes played a dominant part in encouraging an author to write. Such biographers usually chose the lives of frontier desperadoes and "bad men," to pander to the public's love of the bizarre and the morbid. These books were distinguished by their unusually poor style, the cheapness of their typography and binding, and the luridness of detail. Kit Dalton's Under the Black Flag, chiefly a biography of the guerilla leader Quantrell, is an outstanding example of this type.

"A person who writes biography with any object

whatever except that of portraying character and telling the story of a life is a bad biographer," writes Hesketh Pearson,<sup>52</sup> and in so doing condemns the biographical writing of the frontier. Perhaps that is as it should be, and no defense of the frontier biographies, as biographies, will be attempted. But the motives which actuate an author and result in a "bad" biography do not necessarily invalidate his description of his environment as he knew it. Undoubtedly his portrait of the subject was thrown out of focus by the reasons which impelled him to write, but it does not follow that his view of the manners and modes of life surrounding him were by the same measure untrustworthy. "Love is blind" -- but it is a partial, not a total blindness. It is easy to over-estimate, in terms of the purposes of this study, the degree to which the motives of the authors invalidate their description of the West as they saw and knew it.

What shall be said, by way of summary, of the nature of frontier biography and the accuracy of the picture it can give of the West? In the first place, frontier biography gives a fragmentary view of the West and its many aspects. As Turner, Paxson, and Boynton all point out, there was not one frontier, but many: there was the frontier of the explorer, of the trapper, of the Indian; there were missionary frontiers, military frontiers, mining frontiers, and agricultural frontiers. Furthermore, these different

"West" were steadily on the move, slowly at first, but with everincreasing tempo, until in a burst of speed, the wilderness from the Mississippi to the Pacific was settled in only half a century. But western biography deals with the shifting frontiers unequally and apparently without regard to their inherent importance. It gives considerable attention to the frontiers of the explorers, scouts and trappers; it touches lightly the frontiers of the soldier, the missionary, and the Indian; it leaves almost untouched the frontier of the miner and the farmer. Some of the reasons for these omissions have been suggested, but these do not alter the fact that there are large pieces of the historical picture missing.

It follows that the subjects chosen for portrayal are also not a representative cross section of all frontiersmen. It is not only that presidential candidates who experienced some aspects of frontier life receive the lion's share of attention. Nor, that the lives of scouts and bad men are far more abundant than those of miners, cattlemen, and dirt farmers. More significant is the fact that frontier biography never dealt with men who had failed. "We know too little of the people of the West who cracked under the strain, and died; too little of those whose courage waned, and who deserted the attempt at independence. The trails leading West were travelled by the failures going home; but how numerous these were

the historian can only guess."<sup>53</sup> In these sentences Paxson was not thinking of frontier biography, but it, too, is of little help to the historian. Perhaps Sidney Lee is right; if biography deals with a nonentity or a mediocrity -- or a failure -- it ceases to be biography.<sup>54</sup>

Just as the various frontiers and the different types of frontiersmen are treated fragmentarily by frontier life-writers, so also the many aspects of frontier life are given peculiar emphasis. Did the settlers' relationships with the Indians really play as allabsorbing a role as the biographies would indicate? Was social life and recreation as minor a part of the lives of frontiersmen as the descriptions in the books would have us believe? Even allowing for the fact that political life was not highly developed on the frontier, must there not have been "power politics" of one kind or another, even then? Were the pioneers as unconcerned with prices, credit, and banks as the amount of space devoted to these subjects by frontier biographers would indicate? These questions are raised to illustrate the point that there are great areas which the frontier biographer leaves untouched -- much to the dismay of the student of history.

Even at the risk of belaboring the point, a second observation about frontier biography needs to be made. Boynton aptly stresses this:

....with the rarest of exceptions, literature about the frontier is likely to be more genuinely authentic than the literature of the frontier .... When the frontier begins to put itself on paper, it ceases to be the habitat of the pioneer. It is becoming back country. It is self-consciously taking its pen in hand to address the gentle reader. The district may be satisfied with being rough and ready, but the element in it that wants to read and write wants also to be polite and sophisticated.<sup>55</sup>

The curious thing is that frontier biography is a unique mixture of literature about the frontier and literature of the frontier. It is neither exclusively one nor the other. No generalization concerning the authenticity of early western biography can be made, simply because the individual pieces vary so widely in their quality and viewpoint.

A final observation already suggested should be restated. Some of the very characteristics of frontier biography which violate accepted standards for biographical writing provide a valid basis for this study. Gamaliel Bradford suggests that four pitfalls and dangers of which the biographer must be wary are the dangers of including gossip, of giving excessive background, of including irrelevant materials which do not contribute to the portrait-ure of character, and of writing at excessive length.<sup>56</sup>

Yet, with qualifications, these factors are the very stuff of which this study is made. Interesting anecdotes -- call them gossip if you will -- which are insignificant in terms of painting a portrait of character, may tell a great deal about the historical period in which the subject lived.

Excessive background may result in poor biography, but this study is not so much concerned with the "life" as with the "times." Irrelevance may blur the picture of the man, but it can upon occasion bring into sharp focus the environment in which he lived. In each of these instances the pitfalls of biography may be the flesh and sinews of historical description.

## THE WEST AS SEEN THROUGH FRONTIER BIOGRAPHY

The unending charm of history lies partially in the fact that, like a jigsaw puzzle, the picture of the past is never quite complete. There are always pieces missing. There are always fragments, which, though they seem to belong, are found on closer examination to be off-hue and out of place. There seem always to be corners where a fresh start must be made, with nothing to go by.

Historians have been at work diligently on the picture puzzle of the West -- that tremendous area with its "cutting edge of civilization," the frontier, moving now slowly, now rapidly, but ever to the West. At first the westward movement of the American people stood out only in its general outlines, but gradually, with painstaking research, more and more of its details have come to light. From diaries and logbooks, from ledger books and handbills, from maps and Congressional reports, from cattle brands and steel engravings, from newspapers and guide books, Indian mounds and bullet-scarred bars the story has been pieced together. The characters that move across the western stage -- explorers, Indians, trappers, traders, scouts, missionaries, settlers, and bad men -- are no longer shadowy figures without flesh and blood; they are real people, robust and human, for they swear and fight and make love and betray each other just as they also

endure hardships and make sacrifices for a fellow man in distress or for the sake of an ideal. The curtain of mystery surrounding the West and the frontier has been pushed ever farther back, and there is revealed the economic and political machinery of the West as well as its social and cultural aspects.

And still the quest goes on. As new documents and other bits of evidence are unearthed, previously formed conclusions must be reconsidered and discrepancies of fact arise to plague the historian. Like will-o'-the-wisp, the whole truth is always just out of reach. There is always the bright hope that some fresh approach will shed more light on the picture of the past.

Can frontier biography contribute to the search? Can the men who knew the frontier themselves and wrote about some of their contemporaries tell more than is already known? Perhaps they can. Perhaps -- if it is not forgotten that they, too, were men; that they were partisan and biased, as was Mrs. Waite who confesses that she wrote of Brigham Young and polygamy "as dispassionately as the writer's utter abhorrence of the system will permit";<sup>57</sup> that they wrote from a wide variety of motives; that they were not always careful observers, nor were they meticulous about the use they made of their materials; and that they wrote, very often, looking over their shoulders, having left the frontier behind them in spirit as well as in the

flesh. Being cognizant of the pitfalls of frontier biography, some good may be derived by viewing the elements of frontier life, the institutions of the frontier, its economic framework and its philosophical basis, through the imperfect eyes of the frontier biographers.

Part One: The Elements of Frontier Life

Chapter III

Shelter, Food, and Clothing on the Frontier

Frontier biographers were frugal in the detailed descriptions they have left of the most elemental needs of the pioneers: shelter, food, and clothing. Perhaps the omission is significant in itself, indicating that these factors were so ever present that the biographer, himself immersed in the task of providing them, dismissed them as unworthy of recording. Perhaps he felt they lacked romantic interest. Whatever the reason, the biographies contain relatively little about the homes that sheltered the pioneers.

Toward the close of the American revolution the frontier was pushing cautious fingers into the dark and bloody land of Kentucky. The Indian menace was great, as the settlers discovered, and it was unsafe for them to build isolated homesteads. Unity was strength, and the frontier "station," as it was called, developed. Timothy Flint took some pains to describe a typical wilderness fort of this kind. Its location, he said, was of utmost importance, for it should be on the summit of a gentle slope, surrounded by fertile soil. It should enclose or command a limestone spring, and if possible a salt lick and sugar orchard should be near by. A considerable area

had to be cleared around the station to prevent the approach of an enemy. The fort itself was the product of much thought and care:

The form was a perfect parallelogram, including from a half to a whole acre. A trench was then dug four or five feet deep, and large and contiguous pickets planted in this trench, so as to form a compact wall from ten to twelve feet high above the soil. The pickets were of hard and durable timber, about a foot in diameter. The soil above them was rammed hard. They formed a rampart beyond the power of man to leap, climb, or by unaided physical strength, to overthrow. At the angles were small projecting squares, of still stronger material and planting, technically called flankers, with oblique port-holes, so as that the sentinel within could rake the external of the station, without being exposed to a shot from without. Two folding gates in the front and rear, swinging on prodigious wooden hinges, gave ingress and egress to men and teams in times of security.

In periods of alarm a trusty sentinel on the roof of the building was so stationed, as to be able to descry every suspicious object while yet in the distance. The gates were always firmly barred by night; and sentinels took their alternate watch, and relieved each other until morning.<sup>58</sup>

As more settlers moved into the region, individual cabins were built in the area around the station, and the fort was then used only in time of actual Indian danger. Such a Kentucky cabin is described in the biography of Dr. Daniel Drake, whose family moved from New Jersey to Kentucky in the year 1788. In this instance the description is drawn from a letter written by the doctor himself in 1847, but the biographer considered it worthy

of inclusion.

"Father's cabin stood on a side hill, and was not underpinned. The lower end was three feet from the ground, and here was the winter shelter of the sheep, furnishing security from both wolves and weather; still, although there was protection from rain and snow, the cold wind was not excluded, and it often became necessary to bring the young lambs into the cabin above, and let them spend the night near the fire."<sup>59</sup>

The cabin, he continues, was "one story high, without a window, with a door opening to the South, with a half-finished wooden chimney, with a roof on one side only, without any upper or lower floor...." (380).

However, the family cabin in the course of time acquired "a roof, a puncheon floor below and a clap-board floor above, a small square window, and a chimney carried up with cats and clay to the height of the ridge pole. The rifle, indispensable for hunting and defence, lay on two pegs driven into one of the logs." (383). The cabin contained meager but essential equipment, and a regular routine developed:

"The axe and the scythe, (no Jerseyman emigrated without that instrument,) were kept at night under the bed, as weapons of defense against the Indians. In the morning, the first duty was to ascend to the loft and look through the cracks for Indians, lest they might have planted themselves near the door, to rush in when the strong cross-bar should be removed and the heavy latch raised."

In contrast to this picture of a Kentucky pioneer's home in the early 1790's is the description

of the Nathaniel Macon plantation along the Roanoke River in Warren County, North Carolina:

There we should have found instead of the lofty and magnificent mansion of splendid apartments and costly decorations, a neat little single-storied framed house, sixteen feet square, with an up-stairs and cellar, furnished in the plainest and least costly style, for his own dwelling, with a sufficient number of outhouses to accommodate visitors comfortably. And on examining the dwellings of his slaves, instead of the smoky hovel of dirt and gloom and discontent, .... we should there have found snug, well-built log houses about the same size, furnish'd with all the common necessities of convenient living, -- much better by far than many of the poor classes of the whites, who live in many parts of our country.<sup>61</sup>

Though this was at the foot of the Appalachians, it is apparent that the real frontier had already moved on!

The process of first building a fort-like shelter was repeated when frontiersmen first settled in Missouri. By 1810 the frontier line had not yet reached what is now the state of Missouri, but Kit Carson and a few other adventurers were already on the scene.

The few white men, some half a dozen in number, who had gathered around Mr. Carson, deemed it expedient for self-defence to unite and build a large log cabin, which should be to them both a house and a fort. This building of logs, quite long and but one story high, was pierced, at several points, with portholes, through which the muzzles of the rifles could be thrust. As an additional precaution they surrounded this house with palisades, consisting of sticks of timber, six or eight inches in diameter, and about ten feet high, planted as closely as possible together. These palisades were also pierced with portholes.<sup>62</sup>

As Carson became active in the Far West in hunting and trapping, he made long trips into hitherto unexplored regions. Here he would need shelter also, but the changed conditions of the plains and mountains forced hunters such as he to modify the type of shelters they built. Protection from attack, for example, was gained by eternal vigilance, rather than by thick walls and heavy palisades:

In a few hours young Carson would construct his half-faced cabin, as the hunting-camp was called. A large log generally furnished the foundation of the back part of the hut. Four stout stakes were then planted in the ground so as to inclose a space about eight feet square. These stakes were crotched at the ends, so as to support others for the roof. The front was about five feet high, the back not more than four. The whole slope of the roof was from the front to the back. The covering was made of bark or slabs and sometimes of skins. The sides were covered in a similar way. The whole of the front was open. The smooth ground floor was strewed with fragrant hemlock branches, over which were spread blankets or buffalo robes. In front of the opening the camp fire could be built, or on the one side or the other, in accordance with the wind.<sup>63</sup>

In striking contrast to the frontier along the Mississippi in 1820's and the 1830's were the Spanish settlements in California, which faced the Pacific Ocean on the west and the mountains and unoccupied plains on the east. Carson and his party visited Los Angeles in 1829 before returning to the states. What Carson found when he called on one of the ranchers furnishes a contrast:

.... [Carson] rode to the residence of the man he had been informed owned the best ranche in the vicinity, and dismounting at the wicket gate, entered the yard, which was fenced with a finely arranged growth of club cactus; and passing up the gravel walk several rods, between an avenue of fig trees, with an occasional patch of green shrubs, and a few flowers, he stood at the door of the spacious old Spanish mansion, which was built of adobe one story in height and nearly a hundred feet in length, its roof covered with asphaltum mingled with sand -- like all the houses in Los Angeles, a spring of this material existing a little way from the town. After waiting a few moments for an answer to his summons, made with the huge brass knocker, an Indian servant made his appearance, and ushered him to an elegantly furnished room, with several guitars lying about as if recently in use. The lordly owner of the ranche soon appeared in morning gown and slippers, the picture of a well to do oldtime gentleman, with an air evincing an acquaintance with the world of letters and of art, such as only travel can produce.<sup>64</sup>

This scene, however, was not typical of all Spanish or Mexican settlements, for the description of living conditions in El Paso, which Carson visited at about the same time, is quite different. "The houses are like those of Santa Fe, built of adobes with earthen floors. With abundance of natural advantages, the people are content to live without those appliances of civilized life, considered indispensable by the poorest American citizens. Glazed windows, chairs, tables, knives and forks, and similar every day conveniences are unknown even to the rich among the people of El Paso."<sup>65</sup>

While the frontier was reaching out toward California from the East, hunters and trappers were also

pushing eastward from California. One such was James Capen Adams, who becoming discontented with his lot in the settled areas of California, took up the hunting of grizzly bears as an occupation. In 1852 he established his camp in the Sierra Nevada mountains, about 125 miles east of San Francisco. The shelter he provided for himself was similar to Kit Carson's, but far less elaborate:

My camp consisted merely of a convenient spot where wood, water, and herbage were near at hand. There we would unpack our mules, turn them out to graze, and build a large fire, which was seldom allowed to go down. In the day, this fire served for culinary purposes; at night, for warmth and protection. I slept invariably in my blankets, upon the ground; never in any house, or within any inclosure, unless the weather was rainy, when a few boughs, disposed into a kind of booth, would constitute all my shelter from the elements. .... My bed consisted of coarse and heavy blankets, with a bag full of dried grass, by way of pillow; and, as there was always danger of being waked by wild beasts or thieves, my rifle was kept constantly wrapped with me in the blankets, -- thus protected from the dew, as well as being always ready for use at an instant's warning.<sup>66</sup>

Descriptions of the homes of pioneer farmers are almost entirely lacking from the frontier biographies -- chiefly because there were so few written about pioneers who settled the agricultural frontier. Bishop William Hare's sketch of a ranch in the Dakotas in 1873, is probably not typical, as he describes a farm home to which women had not yet come.

Thence a twelve hours' drive brings you to a solitary ranch kept by a French half-breed, peopled with vermin of several names, with accommodations (so-called) for traveling folk. These ranches are log huts, the chinks filled up with mud, roofed also with the same material. . . . .

. . . . .  
 The roofs were of earth supported on poles whole or split, with some hay under the earth. By mice, or by natural gravitation, or by force of the wind, the earth often came peppering down, and when it rained heavily drops or streamlets of mud were hard to escape. The floors were usually the virgin earth, and became saturated with filth, and the abode of innumerable fleas which made life wretched by day, or until the weary traveler sought relief in bed. Ah, those beds! the acme of luxury! A dirty tick stuffed with coarse slough hay, unevenly disposed, no sheets, blankets or quilts, in constant use, seldom or never aired or washed, calico or muslin pillowcases, sometimes very dirty.<sup>67</sup>

But if the frontier homes were crude and uncomfortable, some of the pioneers at least had definite ideas as to the kind of homes they wanted once they settled down. Buffalo Bill Cody, flamboyant scout of the Great Plains and a great showman in his later life, indulged his passion for display when he built a home one mile west of North Platte, Nebraska in 1881. The frontier had only recently been left behind, and not all parts of Nebraska then contained two people per square mile:

This house, built after a design furnished by his estimable wife, combines all the elegancies of a thorough mansion. It has three large intersecting parlors, the floors are covered with luxurious carpets, and the walls bedecked with handsome paintings, the more conspicuous being pictures of his family and frontier friends, Wild Bill, Capt. Jack Crawford, Texas Jack, hunting scenes, Indian battles, etc. In addition to these, there is a fine piano and an organ, on

both of which instruments Mrs. Cody and her elder daughter are excellent performers. The table is beautified with beaten silver, and the cellar filled with the finest wines and choicest liquors.<sup>68</sup>

When Buffalo Bill built his home he already belonged in point of fact to that part of a frontier community that wanted, as Boynton says, "to be polite and sophisticated." The density of population notwithstanding, the Cody home in North Platte was no longer on the frontier.

The biographies examined yield no more than this fragmentary description of frontier shelter. The reason is not entirely clear, but pioneer homes were not particularly inviting, and perhaps the biographers felt that accounts of them did not carry the appeal that their readers demanded.

There is more evidence in the case of what the different kinds of frontiersmen had to eat. The privations of explorers, trappers, and even soldiers could easily be made into a colorful narrative, and the authors of the frontier made use of this appeal. In her work on The Frontier in American Literature, Mrs. Lucy Hazard suggests that one of the paradoxes of frontier life is the existence of privation and plenty side by side. This is borne out somewhat by the descriptions of frontier foods by the biographers. At certain times of the year, in given portions of the country, Nature gave bounteously of food. At other times, in other places she was niggardly, and the frontiersmen suffered want and hardships

for lack of something to eat. On every frontier, the question of food for man and beast was always in the foreground.

During the Revolution an ill-organized Continental Congress failed to keep supplies and provisions moving in adequate quantities to the soldiers operating on the frontier. The biographer of Moses Van Campen, who was engaged in Indian fighting on the border, relates that the soldiers were occasionally saved from actual suffering by digging up the potatoes which the settlers, fleeing from their homes during Indian raids, left buried in the ground.<sup>69</sup> Timothy Flint, who left the detailed description of the early Kentucky stations, was favorably impressed by pioneer menus. "Venison and wild turkeys, sweet potatoes and pies, smoked on their table," he says, "and persimmon and maple beer, stood them well instead of the poisonous whisky of their children."<sup>70</sup> Daniel Drake personally recalled that during the first year or two following migration to Kentucky the food supply left something to be desired:

"The first and greatest labor of father was to clear sufficient land for a crop, which was of course to consist of corn and a few garden vegetables. ....[Frost killed the first crop.] From the time of their arrival in Kentucky, fourteen months before, they had suffered from want of bread, and now found themselves doomed to the same deficiency for another year.

"There was no fear of famine, but they cloyed on animal food, and sometimes almost loathed it, though of an excellent quality. Deer were numerous, and wild turkeys numberless. The latter were often so fat that in falling from the tree when shot, their skins would burst."<sup>71</sup>

It was not long, however, before greater variety was possible in the family meals:

"For several years our chief article of cultivation was Indian corn, but near the center of the field, in some spot not easily found by trespassers, was a truck-patch, in which watermelons and muskmelons were planted, while in some corner we had a turnip patch. If the former supplied the place of peaches in their season, the latter were a substitute for apples throughout the winter. The virgin soil of Kentucky produced the best turnips that ever grew; the tubers literally rested on the ground, and only sent their spindle-shaped roots into the loose black mold below. In Winter, when at night the family were seated round a warm fire, made blazing bright with pieces of hickory bark, a substitute for candles, and every number was engaged with a knife in scraping and eating a juicy turnip, the far-famed pears and apples of their native Jersey were forgotten by the old people, and the perils and privations which followed on their arrival were remembered only to be rehearsed to their children. Several luxuries from the surrounding woods were, on other evenings, substituted for that which, much more than the potatoe, deserves the name of pomme de terre. These luxuries were walnuts, hickory nuts, and winter grapes."<sup>72</sup>

Before the opening of the nineteenth century, some of the settlers along the Mississippi, between the latitude of thirty and thirty-one degrees, in territory then claimed by Georgia, were already at a stage where they were producing for an outside market, according to information furnished by a Mr. Hutchins:

"Although this country might produce all the valuable articles raised in other parts of the globe, situated in the same latitudes, yet the inhabitants principally cultivate indigo, rice, tobacco, Indian corn, and some wheat; and they raise large stocks of black cattle, horses, mules, hogs, sheep, and poultry. The sheep are said to make the sweetest mutton in the world. The black cattle, when fat enough for sale, which they commonly are the year round, are driven across the country to New-Orleans, where there is always a good market."<sup>73</sup>

In western Tennessee, as late as 1814, the biographer of Ben McCulloch records that bears were so much a menace that hogs could not be raised, "and the settlers principally depended upon bear meat for subsistence."<sup>74</sup>

Of all the frontiersmen, the hunters, trappers, and explorers lived closest to nature and depended most completely upon what they could find to sustain life. Of necessity, they learned to do without the variety of foods which the later agricultural frontier provided, and meat held the most important place in their diet. Cornbread and bacon, says Abbott, the biographer of Kit Carson, could make life hilarious on the frontier in Missouri in 1810.<sup>75</sup> On trapping expeditions in the far West, Carson and his fellows considered beaver tails "a great luxury."<sup>76</sup> When Kit took his turn as cook, he would surprise the rest with "the nice browning of his steak, and the delicacy of his acorn coffee" and with the berries which he offered as dessert.<sup>77</sup> The finding of a "bee-tree" was an occasion for celebration by hunters, for "'Bear-meat

and honey' is the frontiersman's choicest dish ...."<sup>78</sup>  
But the land did not always provide "bear-meat and honey."  
While trapping for beaver and otter along the Yellowstone River in the Blackfeet country, Carson and his party came into an unusually barren region, supporting nothing but sage brush. Their provisions were soon exhausted, and starvation threatened. Day after day went by and still neither game nor grass roots could be found until at length they were reduced to such dreadful extremities that to prevent death from starvation they bled their horses and drank the blood. Happily, when it was decided to kill one of the horses for its flesh, a body of Snake Indians appeared, from whom a fat pony was purchased and this the party killed and subsisted upon until they reached Ft. Hall."<sup>79</sup>

When James Capen Adams left the settled portions of California in 1852 to hunt grizzlies in the Sierra Nevadas, he was soon confronted with the problem of food supplies.

When the little stock of groceries, which I had brought along, ran out, various kinds of grass seeds, pounded into meal, served for flour, and roasted acorns made a substitute for coffee. The pine forests furnished that sweet gum, called pine sugar, which exudes from bruises in their trunks; and many were the receipts and expedients in mountain economy, which now became my special study.<sup>80</sup>

Dinner was the chief meal. "This meal rarely wanted an

excellent roast, and good drink of its kind; also such cakes and bread as we could make, and many little delicacies which nature threw with lavish hand before us. Plums, cherries, berries of various kinds, small game of all varieties, which the region afforded, and a thousand little titbits which our experience taught, or our ingenuity devised, graced our board at this meal."<sup>81</sup> Among the "titbits" which Adams devised was a peculiar dish, made possible after a successful bear hunt. "With the head of this bear we made a repast as splendid as it was strange. A hole large enough to receive the mass was dug in the ground, and a large brush fire built over it. When the fire had burnt to coals and ashes, the head was rolled in a cloth, placed in the hot hole, more brush piled on, and a fire kept up for several hours, when the head was entirely cooked; and delicious eating it made."<sup>82</sup>

The problem of maintaining adequate food supplies occurred on each of John C. Fremont's five expeditions into the far West between 1842 and 1853. On several of them it became acute. In spite of the fact that Fremont took along a three-months' supply of flour, peas, and tallow, in addition to cattle on the hoof, the second expedition of 1843-1844 was reduced to eating dog and horse flesh before returning to civilization.<sup>83</sup> Chiefly as a result of inadequate guide service, the fourth expedition, 1848-1849, underwent unusually severe hardships.

So bad did conditions become that some of the men "fed upon the others who had starved," according to one biographer.<sup>84</sup> On the fifth and last expedition, Fremont related to his party that an earlier expedition had been forced to cannibalism and made the entire group take an oath that under no circumstances would they do likewise.<sup>85</sup> Apparently the final expedition kept the oath, though they were reduced to the direst straits, as reported by a Mr. S. N. Carvalho who accompanied the group as daguerreotypist:

"When an animal gave out, he was shot down by the Indians, who immediately cut his throat, and saved all the blood in our camp kettle. .... The entrails of the horse were "well shaken" (for we had no water to wash them in) and boiled with snow, producing a highly flavored soup, which the men considered so valuable and delicious that they forbade the cook to skim the pot for fear any portion of it might be lost. The hide was divided into equal portions, and with the bones roasted and burnt to a crisp. This we munched on the road; .... When the snows admitted it we collected the thick leaves of a species of cactus which we also put in the fire to burn off the prickles, and ate. It then resembled in taste and nourishment an Irish potato peeling. We lived in this way for nearly fifty days ...."<sup>86</sup>

While it is true that these are extreme instances with which the biographer seemingly took pleasure in shocking his readers, the problem of food must certainly have been serious. During the Indian campaigns of the late winter and early spring of 1876, General Crook and his men, including the scout, Frank Grouard, were forced

toward the Black Hills country without sufficient food of their own to get there. They, too, were forced to live on horse meat, killing their mounts as soon as they became exhausted and issuing the carcass to the soldiers.<sup>87</sup>

Later in the same year, while on a scouting expedition, Grouard and his men "would catch little birds and eat them, feathers and all, and would not wait to kill them, even."<sup>88</sup>

Bishop Hare's work among the Indians during the 1870's took him on long carriage trips across Dakota Territory. At nightfall he would be forced to take refuge in one of the infrequent "ranches" previously described. Apparently the food was little better than the lodgings, for it "usually consisted of poor bacon swimming in grease, and soda or saleratus biscuit, often as yellow as gold and smelling like soft soap from the excess of alkali. Sometimes fortunately it was varied by potatoes, often wretchedly cooked, and -- luxury of luxuries -- stewed dried apples, and coffee prepared by adding a little fresh coffee to the grounds of any number of previous brewings, and in a pot which never knew a cleansing."<sup>89</sup>

All in all, the picture left by frontier biographers of the food available to the pioneers is not too appetizing. Even when there was plenty, variety was often lacking. In terms of present day nutritional standards, the frontier diet lacked balance. The evidence is incomplete, however, and the biographers very probably

selected their illustrations of living conditions with the interests of the readers in mind.

If the frontiersmen were self-conscious of their apparel, they were not sufficiently so to impress their biographers, for descriptions of what the pioneers wore are almost entirely lacking in the biographies examined. If only Timothy Flint had described Daniel Boone in some detail as he started over the Appalachians in May, 1769, instead of being content to remark that Boone and his party took only "the clothing deemed absolutely necessary for comfort upon the long route";<sup>90</sup> The few accounts we have of the dress of frontiersmen confirm, rightly or wrongly, the popular motion picture conception of what they wore.

Dr. Daniel Drake, who left a rather vivid picture of the Kentucky cabin in which he lived in the 1790's, has only this to say of the clothing he wore: "My equipments were a substantial suit of butternut linsey, a wool hat, a pair of mittens, and a pair of old stocking-legs, drawn down like gaiters over my shoes, to keep out the snow ...."<sup>91</sup> -- leaving to our imaginations what his clothing consisted of in summertime. Fortunately, the biographer of Father John Clark, an itinerant Methodist preacher on the trail from western Georgia to Kentucky in 1796, has left a picture:

He was on foot, with a small bundle of clothing tied in a handkerchief which hung over his shoulder. and was supported by a stout walking stick. His countenance was cheerful, as he tripped lightly along, without seeming to be wearied with the day's weary journey through the forest, with seldom a house on the public road. His dress was the ordinary garb of the country, coarse cotton and wool mixed, and of a greyish or light blue color. The outside garment was a hunting-shirt; an article then worn by all classes on the frontiers. This was a loose open frock that reached halfway down the thighs, with large sleeves, and the body open in front, unless fastened by a girdle or belt around the breast; the large cape fastened to the collar, and the edges fringed with strips of reddish cloth. The materials of all his garments were cotton with a mixture of wool, and spun and wove in the families where he had lived. On his head was a low-crowned felt hat, and his feet were shod with a kind of moccasins called 'shoe-packs.' These were made of thick leather, tanned by the farmers with oak bark in a trough, and dressed with the oil or fat of the raccoon, or opossum. The soles were fastened to the upper-leather by a leathern thong, called by backwoodsmen, a 'whang'.<sup>92</sup>

Not a very clerical garb, but practical, no doubt, and certainly indigenous to the region.

It is probably the trappers, hunters, and guides of the West who have contributed most to the popular stereotype of the "buckskin clad frontiersman." The biographer of Kit Carson has left a word-picture of the outfit and costume of the "Nestor of the Rocky Mountains." The arms a hunter carried and the clothes he wore were so equally important that one is rarely described without the other. Speaking of Carson as he appeared in 1830, Abbott says:

His outfit consists of a Mexican blanket, rough, thick and warm; a supply of ammunition; a kettle; possibly a coffee-pot and some coffee, which have been obtained at Santa Fe; several iron traps; some dressed deerskin for replacing clothing and moccasins, a hatchet and a few other similar articles. In addition to his mule he may also take a pony to bear him on the way. Thus, if by accident, one give out, he has another animal to rely upon. And if very successful he may have furs enough to load them both on his return.

His costume consists of a hunting shirt of the soft and pliable deerskin, ornamented with long fringes and often dyed with bright vermilion. Pantaloon of the same material are also ornamented with fringes and porcupine's quills of various colors. Many a tranquil hour has been beguiled, in the long evenings and when the storm has beaten upon the hut, in fashioning these garments with artistic taste, learned of the Indians. A flexible cap, often of rich fur, covers his head, and moccasins, upon which all the resources of barbaric embroidery have been expended, cover his feet.

His rifle is borne on his left shoulder. His powder horn and bullet pouch hang under his right arm. In his bullet pouch he also carries spare flints, steel and various odds and ends. Beneath the broad belt which encircles his waist there is a large butcher knife in a sheath of buffalo hide. There is a whetstone in a buckskin case made fast to the belt, and also a small hatchet or tomahawk.<sup>93</sup>

Abbott's description of Carson has much in common with that of John C. Fremont and his band of men, left by an English observer, and recorded by Fremont's biographer. On July 19, 1846 Fremont and his followers entered Monterey, California, and "captured" it. Lieutenant Frederick Walpole of the Royal Navy was aboard the Collingwood, at that time lying off the coast, and Walpole was an eye-witness of Fremont's entrance. Of the scene he wrote:

"They were true trappers, the class that produced the heroes of Fenimore Cooper's best works. These men had passed years in the wilds, living upon their own resources; they were a curious set. .... Fremont rode ahead, a spare, active-looking man, with such an eye! He was dressed in a blouse and leggings, and wore a felt hat. After him came five Delaware Indians, who were his body-guard, and have been with him through all his wanderings; they had charge of two baggage horses. The rest, many of them blacker than the Indians, rode two and two, the rifle held by one hand across the pommel of the saddle. Thirty-nine of them are his regular men, the rest are loafers picked up lately; his original men are principally backwoodsmen, from the State of Tennessee and the banks of the upper waters of the Missouri. .... The dress of these men was principally a long loose coat of deer skin, tied with thongs in front; trousers of the same, of their own manufacture, which, when wet through, they take off, scrape well inside with a knife, and put on as soon as dry; the saddles were of various fashions, though these and a large drove of horses, and a brass field-gun, were things they had picked up about California. .... The butts of the trappers' rifles resemble a Turkish musket, therefore fit light to the shoulder; they are very long and very heavy, carry ball about thirty-eight to the pound. A stick a little longer than the barrel is carried in the bore, in which it fits tightly; this keeps the bullet from moving, and in firing, which they do in a crouching position, they use it as a rest."<sup>94</sup>

Leather seems almost universally to have been the material from which the roving trappers, hunters, explorers, and scouts fashioned their clothing. James Capen Adams, the California grizzly bear hunter, had several suits of buckskin as his habitual costume. "Next my body I wore a heavy woolen garment, and on my head an untanned deer-skin cap, lined with rabbit's fur, and ornamented with a fox's tail; but all the rest of my clothing was buckskin, -- that is to say, coat, pantaloons, and moccasins."<sup>95</sup>

Many of the frontier characters took great pride in the ornamentation of their buckskin suits, probably because, as Everett Dick suggests, it gave them prestige among the Indians with whom they traded.<sup>96</sup> Duval, the biographer of Big-Foot Wallace, the Texas ranger and scout, has Wallace himself suggesting another motive:

Leather hunting-shirts and leggins are just the things for the prairies and chaparral; .... I had a splendid suit of buckskin given me by my old friend 'Bah-pish-na-ba-hoo-tee,' made of the skins of the 'big-horn', and rigged off with buffalo tags and little copper bells, that jingled musically as I walked along; and when I was dressed up in the suit, and had my coonskin cap on, with its tail hanging down behind, I do believe there wasn't a young woman in the settlement that could look at me with impunity.<sup>97</sup>

The biographies are silent about many things that the historian today would like to know. How were the less spectacular pioneers dressed? And what of the women? Were they content with buckskins? Is the biographers' failure to describe the habit of the pioneer woman an unconscious indication of the frontier view concerning her status? To these questions, as to many others, the biographies consulted give no answer.

Were the present conception of the shelter, food, and clothing of the West to depend on the descriptions left by frontier biographers, it would be a very partial picture indeed. The omissions are perhaps indicative of the fact that the biographers themselves took these elements

of frontier life for granted and deemed them unworthy of extended notice. The motives from which the authors wrote also influenced their selection of materials. What they do include, however, confirms much of what has been learned from other sources about these fundamental factors in frontier life.

## Chapter IV

### Red Man versus White Man

If sheer bulk, as measured by the number of pages, were a valid criterion, then the relationship of the white men to the Indians would certainly rank as the most important factor of frontier life, according to the biographers. It can safely be said, on the basis of the books examined, that no other single aspect received as much attention as did the Indians. Indian massacres and raids are pictured in detail; Indian campaigns are recounted with the greatest care; massacres are described in all their luridness; and the recital of scattered raids and sorties fills countless pages of the biographies. This is especially true of the books published before 1850. Not only do the publications of the second half of the century spend less time on the Indians, but the attitude toward them varies greatly from author to author.

It would be a pointless, as well as an unending task, to relate the Indian troubles of the frontier as they appear in the biographies. Instead, these books have been read with the following things in mind. First, to secure some representative illustrations of atrocities by the Indians, and their treatment of white captives, as related for the benefit of the gentle readers. Second, to note examples of atrocities committed by the whites

against the Indians and recorded, consciously or unconsciously, by the biographers. Third, to gain some conception of how the white men viewed the Indians and the Indian problem, basing this conception on the biographies written while the problem was still acute.

Beyond question, the warfare on the New York and Pennsylvania borders during the Revolutionary war was savage, cruel, and destructive. The flames of anger kindled by Indian raids burned long, and hatred of the red man was nourished by the reports found in the writings of the time. One biographer reports that following the Wyoming massacre in 1778 the Indians wantonly killed about half of twenty-eight unarmed captives, a squaw sinking her tomahawk in the skulls of every other one as the prisoners sat on the ground in a circle.<sup>98</sup> On the Pennsylvania frontier in 1778 the Indians attacked a Mr. Wells and his family while they were at prayer, killing the entire group, including the sister of Mr. Wells, who hid, but was discovered and tomahawked.<sup>99</sup>

Sometimes the vividness of detail must have turned the stomachs of the more sensitive readers. An example of this extreme type is given in Hubbard's life of Moses Van Campen, who spent most of the Revolution on the frontier fighting Indians. On the New York border in 1779 General Sullivan was conducting a campaign against the Indians, and a small party under Lieutenant Thomas Boyd

was sent to reconnoiter. Boyd was captured by the British who, according to Hubbard, turned him over to the Indians for torture when he refused to divulge military information wanted by the British. The treatment accorded him by the Indians is related as follows:

They first stripped him of his clothing, then tied him to a sapling, where the Indians gratified their fiendish tastes, by throwing the tomahawk at him so as to strike a little above his head, and by brandishing their scalping knives around him in a most frightful manner, accompanying their motions with terrific yells and dancing around with frantic demonstrations of joy.

They next proceeded to pull out his nails; this done, they cut off his nose and plucked out one of his eyes. In addition to these enormities they cut out his tongue and stabbed him in several places. But this was not the end of their more than savage cruelty. As if to tear him from life by the most excruciating pains, they made a small incision in his abdomen, from which they took one of his intestines, and fastened it to the tree. The suffering man was then unbound and with brute force compelled to move around the tree, until his entrails were literally drawn from his body and wound around its trunk. They ended his torments by severing his head from his body.<sup>100</sup>

As is the case with so many of the frontier biographies this tale was undocumented and is left without means of determining the reliability of the sources of Hubbard's information. In many cases, the authority consisted of the testimony of the subject of the biography, but this does not seem to be the case in this instance.

An incident in the Kentucky in June, 1780, is recounted by a biographer of Boone:

They [the Indians] carried this expedition so secretly, that the unwary inhabitants [sic] did not discover them, until they fired upon the forts; and, not being prepared to oppose them, were obliged to surrender themselves miserable captives to barbarous savages, who immediately after tomahawked one man and two women, and loaded all the others with heavy baggage, forcing them along toward their towns, able or unable to march. Such as were weak and faint by the way, they tomahawked. The tender women, and helpless children, fell victims to their cruelty.<sup>101</sup>

The second war with Great Britain brought renewed savagery to border warfare. Many of the men who later became presidential candidates were at this time young men serving with the army in the Northwest. Among these was William Henry Harrison, whose biographers include considerable material concerning the role he played in the Indian warfare of the time. The accounts are not confined to his activities alone, but include general information on the nature of Indian warfare of the period. A noticeable feature of many of these accounts is that the British and the Tories are credited with inciting the Indians to their treatment of the settlers, and in some cases the Indians are pictured as less vindictive than the British. An example of this occurs in Hall's account of the River Raisin massacre in 1813, when a group of American soldiers surrendered in the hopes that their lives would be spared:

The prisoners thus taken were given over to the Indians to be slain in cold blood. A few were saved by the interposition of some of the officers. Graves, Hart, Hickman, and other gallant

officers, with their brave companions, were coldly delivered up, by British officers, to the infuriated Indians, and butchered in their presence. Some of their bodies were thrown into the flames of the burning village, and others, shockingly mangled, left exposed in the streets.<sup>102</sup>

A short time later another detachment of American troops was captured by the British and the prisoners were placed in Fort Miami. Here the British permitted the Indians to stand on the ramparts and fire into the unarmed prisoners standing below. Some were made to pass through the gates of the fort, where the Indians tomahawked and scalped them as they came out, in full view of the British officers and men. This went on until the arrival of Tecumseh, who forced the warriors to stop. The biographer Hall comments on this by quoting an historian whom he does not identify: "'In this single act, Tecumseh displayed more humanity, magnanimity, and civilization, than Proctor, with all his British associates in command, displayed through the whole war on the north-western frontiers.'"<sup>103</sup>

Horrid tales of death and destruction came from all frontiers. The Southwest, too, had its massacres. On August 30, 1813 the garrison of Fort Mims on the Alabama river was surprised and overpowered. The scene which ensued, assuming that the biographer reported it accurately, was revolting:

At last, a yell of savage triumph rose over the crackling of flames, and cries and shrieks of terrified women and children. Then followed a scene which may not be described. The wholesale butchery, -- the ghastly spectacle of nearly three hundred mutilated bodies, hewed and hacked into fragments, were nothing to the inhuman indignities perpetrated on the women. Children were ripped from the maternal womb, and swung as war-clubs against the heads of the mothers, and all those horrible excesses, which seem the offspring of demons, were committed on the dead and dying. Not more than twenty or thirty out of the whole, escaped.<sup>104</sup>

When the frontier moved farther west, Indian atrocities were also reported, but with less frequency. Generalizing from the biographies consulted, it can be said that after 1850 the white men were more certain of their own position, and hence the attitude reported was less one of fear and horror and more one of bravado and a desire to match wits with the red men. The biographies of the second half of the century are still greatly concerned with the Indians, but the concern is chiefly with skirmishes and expeditions, and less with massacres and atrocities. The nature of the country and the changed conditions of warfare also help to explain this change. The old-time horror stories, however, have their counterpart in examples in the West.

Shortly after Kit Carson had established a home in what is now New Mexico in 1849, his biographer reports that the Indians took captive a Mrs. White and killed her son before her eyes. Mr. White and a party of men he led

were also slain, and when a second group of men set out to attack the Indians, Mrs. White was disposed of before they could effect her rescue.<sup>105</sup> Buel, the biographer of many of the most outstanding scouts and Indian fighters, records a massacre by the Indians in the spring of 1868, along the Republican River:

Their atrocities were peculiarly shocking because they spared none but two women whom they reserved for their own devilish purposes; ripping up the other females, dashing out the brains of children and horribly mutilating the men. .... A Mrs. Blinn, from St. Louis, was captured, together with her little boy, at the same time, and spared for a while, but being unable to endure the march, the Indians split her head open and butchered her six-year old boy, leaving their bodies lying in the trail, where the skeletons were afterward found.<sup>106</sup>

At about the same period, DeBarthe relates the story of Frank Grouard, who was suddenly surrounded by Indians while carrying the mail:

They partly pushed and partly pulled him off his horse, and stripped him of every vestige of clothing. Then they pointed in the direction he had come and told him to go. Emboldened by the fact that they were not going to take his life, Grouard asked them to give him one of the blankets they had taken from him. For an answer they mounted their horses, drew their quirts and lashed their defenseless victim until his body was filled with gaping gashes, from which the blood flowed in streams. Realizing that his only chance of escape lay in flight, Grouard struck out across the sandy plain, the Indians following for over two hundred yards, raining blow after blow upon his bleeding head and body.<sup>107</sup>

There is probably no accurate estimate of the total number of white men, women, and children killed by

the Indians while the frontier was in existence. One author quotes an estimate that fifteen hundred individuals had been killed or taken prisoner during the seven year period from 1783 to 1790, but the source is not given. This failure to document the incidents related is a serious shortcoming of frontier biography.

Reports of the treatment accorded white captives by the Indians indicate that the red men were not consistently cruel. Timothy Flint first narrates the customary treatment given to captives, and follows this with an account of Boone's treatment when he was taken prisoner:

Placed between two posts, and his arms and feet extended between them, nearly in the form of a person suffering crucifixion, he would have been burnt to death at a slow fire, while men, women, and children would have danced about him, occasionally applying torches and burning splinters to the most exquisitely sensible parts of the frame, prolonging his torture, and exulting in it with the demoniac exhilaration of gratified revenge.

This was the most common fate of prisoners of war at that time. Sometimes they fastened the victim to a single stake, built a fire of green wood about him, and then raising their yell of exultation, marched off into the desert, leaving him to expire unheeded and alone. At other times, they killed their prisoners by amputating their limbs joint by joint. Others they destroyed by pouring on them, from time to time, streams of scalding water. At other times they have been seen to bind their victim to a sapling tree by the hands, bending it down until the wretched sufferer has seen himself swinging up and down at the play of the breeze, his feet often within a foot of the ground.<sup>108</sup>

In contrast to this, Boone was treated with kindness and respect when captured. He was adopted by the tribe, and was given complete liberty, except the right to return to his family.<sup>109</sup> Flint, the same author who described the usual treatment accorded white male captives, states that the Indians "are universally seen to treat captive women with a decorous forbearance."<sup>110</sup> He attributed this to their peculiar code of honor.

It must constantly be kept in mind that the chroniclers of these events were seldom participants in them, that they usually made no attempt to verify their information or even to tell its source, and that the accounts were written when it was to the interest of the frontiersmen to have the sympathy of the people of the entire country. It was only by securing this sympathy that they could also secure the kind of strong governmental policy toward the Indians which their desire for free land and easy access to the riches of the wilderness made necessary.

The case for the Indian can be presented much more briefly because there are few instances of atrocities committed by the whites which are left on record in the frontier biographies. It is a one-sided story, for the lives of few Indians were recorded by their contemporaries.

Of the few illustrations to be cited, not all can properly be called atrocities. Some of them are

merely examples of extremely harsh treatment of the Indians by the whites, especially in view of the fact that the settlers usually had a superiority in arms which offset the Indians' superior knowledge of the topography of the country. An example of this is included in Filson and Imlay's book on the western territory. Boone and the white men took a severe beating from the Indians at Licking River in 1782, but getting up another party, Boone pursued them, and the Indians, upon learning of the approach of the whites, evacuated their towns. The expedition then systematically destroyed five Indian towns on the Miami River, "burnt them all to ashes, entirely destroyed their corn, and other fruit, and every where spread a scene of desolation in the country."<sup>111</sup>

On the other side of the continent, Indians were sometimes forced to work at the Spanish Missions. In 1829 Carson was near the San Gabriel mission at the time when some forty Indians, "restive under coerced labor" escaped to a tribe not faraway. The mission authorities attempted to get them back but were defeated by the tribe sheltering the fugitives. "Carson and eleven of his companions volunteered to aid the mission, and the attack upon the Indian village resulted in the destruction of a third of its inhabitants, and compelled them to submission."<sup>112</sup>

There were also some unsavory incidents on the middle western frontier. During the years 1830 to 1832,

Black Hawk was attempting to prevent the sale of land in Illinois and Iowa to the white people. General William Harney was stationed in the region around Rock Island at that time, and his biographer states that:

The white settlers in the neighborhood of Black Hawk's country behaved badly to his people. They robbed and beat some of them in a gross manner. A party of white men met Black Hawk in the woods hunting, and fell upon him with clubs. They beat him till he was lame and disabled for several weeks, and there was no remedy. These wrongs and outrages, unprovoked, undeserved and unrebuked by the authorities, goaded the Indians to desperation.<sup>113</sup>

This judgment is somewhat corroborated by another author, who cites an incident during the Black Hawk war: "Hearing that these men [the Illinois militia] were approaching, Black-Hawk sent three young men to meet them with a white flag. These young men were met by the whites, and one of them taken prisoner and killed. Of a party of five Indians who followed the former one, with pacific intentions, two were also killed."<sup>114</sup>

On the western plains Indian life was cheap. Big-Foot Wallace, a Texas ranger and scout, developed a ranch on the Medina River. Five Indians camped within half a mile of Wallace's ranch and killed one of his mavericks for a feast. Wallace and three of his men crept up on the party, killed two of them, took all the equipment they had left behind, as well as the maverick they had roasted -- all in payment for a single steer! The

episode is told matter-of-factly, clearly on the assumption that the propriety of the procedure could not be called into question.<sup>115</sup>

The Indians did not often get the opportunity to bring to light the injustices they sustained at the hands of the whites. S. M. Barrett was able to get the story of Geronimo, the Apache, before he died, mostly from his own dictation. Naturally the chief took advantage of the opportunity to air the Indian version of the racial conflict, but some of what he said has already been confirmed by independent sources. There is much reason to believe that he spoke truly when he made the remark that the soldiers sent out to the western country "never explained to the Government when an Indian was wronged, but always reported the misdeeds of the Indians. Much that was done by mean white men was reported at Washington as the deeds of my people."<sup>116</sup> One of Geronimo's greatest complaints was the murder of the Apache chief Mangus-Colorado after he had surrendered with a portion of an Apache tribe on the government's promise that if they settled in New Mexico they would receive rations. General Nelson A. Miles, who served in the Southwest subduing the Indians, confirmed the fact that Mangus-Colorado had been "fouly murdered after he had surrendered."<sup>117</sup>

It is possible that an intensive study of the treatment of the Indians by the military forces on the

western frontiers would bring to light more instances where the real story has never become known. The Indians have labored under the severe handicap of being a minority people, and frontier biography has left their side of the story almost untouched.

What kind of an attitude did the white people develop toward the Indians during their long years of struggle with them? Did they come to believe, as is often supposed, that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian"? Was it the frontiersman's viewpoint that, in its dealing with the tribes, the government was all right and the Indians all wrong? Frontier biography has some light to throw on these questions, judged by what the biographers themselves have to say as well as by the opinions which they credit to their subjects.

There are some examples of black and white judgments expressed by the authors, but they are uncommon. In them, of course, the treatment accorded the Indians by the whites and their government is painted in tones of virgin white.

There are few nations in the world [says John Eaton, a biographer of Andrew Jackson, writing in 1824] that would have acted with such justice and lenity towards a vanquished people. Few governments, under such circumstances, would have done less than to have taken what best suited their convenience, without attempting to bargain at all upon the subject; more especially when the territory in question occupied a space of more than two hundred miles, through which the western

people, seeking a market on the ocean, were, on their return home, under the necessity of passing; .... yet the administration, rather than leave themselves open even to suspicion, preferred and obtained the title of these people at an expense of at least three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Let other nations, if they can, produce an act, which for justice and liberality, can be compared with this.<sup>118</sup>

It did not occur to Mr. Eaton that a case could be made for Indian ownership of the land, or that \$350,000 was poor recompense for "more than two hundred miles" of some of the richest land in the world. He did, however, feel called upon to offer further justification for the treatment the Indians had received, for he says elsewhere in the book:

Though humanity may weep over the misfortunes of this misguided people [the Indians], and regret that they were sunk in such irretrievable woes, yet there is a consolation for the country left; that if it be a crime, it is in no wise chargeable on the American government. Towards them had been exercised every possible forbearance. For more than twenty years had the western people been the victims of their unrelenting cruelties; and many a parent lives at this day, whose recollection treasures a child that bled beneath their murderous hands.<sup>119</sup>

It is significant that another book appearing the same year (1824) and depicting the life of William Henry Harrison should voice a similar conviction:

At the same time that the government of the United States felt every disposition of humanity and solicitude for the welfare and preservation of the Indians .... they were extremely anxious to have the Indian title extinguished to those lands bordering upon their

western settlements .... In carrying into effect this important measure the original documents from which this history is drawn, give the most decided proof, that every possible just and generous feeling was entertained by the government of the United States toward the Indians, and that their directions to the superintendents of Indian affairs were dictated by the principles of benevolence as well as justice .... 120

Colonel Richard M. Johnson, who had some experience in Indian fighting, slew the red men with false benignity. "He has ever regarded them as the deluded instruments of their civilized allies; and though compelled in his country's defence to draw the sword, his heart melted with pity while he punished their cruelties."<sup>121</sup>

Vehement and sweeping denunciations of the Indians were not common in the biographies consulted, though a few examples were found. Speaking of the Indians in Kentucky during the early 1800's, at the time of Carson's birth, Abbott remarks that "But very little reliance could be placed even in the friendly protestations of the vagabond savages, ever prowling about, and almost as devoid of intelligence or conscience, as the wolves which at midnight were heard howling around the settler's door."<sup>122</sup> Yet the same author, only forty-six pages further on in the book, records that a tribe of Indians encountered by Carson "were very friendly though they had apparently never seen a white man before. Perhaps their friendliness was because they had never yet met any of the pale faces, from whom they subsequently suffered such great wrongs!"<sup>123</sup>

Such a confession represents a revolutionary change in point of view. These examples, though they are the most emphatic ones encountered, give evidence that not all frontiersmen considered "good Indian" and "dead Indian" as synonymous expressions.

An examination of the biographical writing done during the frontier period yields the significant discovery that there are many indications, some of them minor, that both the biographers and their subjects realized that there were two sides to the Indian question that plagued the frontier. Sometimes the biographer was voicing his own convictions and sometimes he was reporting, with more or less accuracy, the opinions and feelings of his subject. The year in which the book was written assumes added importance, for the stage of Indian conquest at the time of writing was sometimes different from what it was in the period described by the author. How much this influenced what he wrote it is impossible to say, but it conditioned the point of view. As the frontier moved West -- and as the Indian problem solved itself to the satisfaction of the whites -- biography reflects the fact that the white men increasingly took the view that they were to blame for much of the Indian trouble. Several illustrations will be necessary to substantiate this generalization.

As early as 1824 one author admits that "The

practice of hunting on the lands of the Indians in violation of law and existing treaties, had grown into a monstrous abuse . . . . The Indians for a length of time bore all those injuries with astonishing patience and forbearance, and still continued friendly to the United States."<sup>124</sup> In enumerating the causes for the Black Hawk war, an anonymous author writing in 1841 stated that "Trespasses [on Indian lands] however, did occur, by whites, in violation of the laws of Congress, and these acts, unrestrained by the United States government, were the exciting causes of the jealousy, irritation, and ultimate hostility of the Indians."<sup>125</sup>

A by-product of the publication of Francis Parkman's The Conspiracy of the Pontiac in 1851 was the letter of friendly criticism Parkman received from Theodore Parker of Boston. Parker felt that Parkman did not do justice to the Indians, especially because he brought the vices of the Indians into greater prominence than those of the white men. Actually, said Parker, the red men violated their own moral and ethical standards less than did the whites. It was his judgment, also, that Parkman did not sufficiently censure the whites in three particulars: the introduction of rum; the degradation of Indian women; and the treachery and cruelty which the whites too often displayed. This letter was written in 1851, when Indian troubles were still raging not more than 1500 miles from

where the letter was posted.<sup>126</sup>

The most balanced judgment encountered in the biographies was written only two years after Custer's last stand, and thirteen years before the last great Sioux uprising. The statement is worth quoting in full because of its character and because it was written when the relations between Indians and whites were far from solved, and emotions still ran high.

Our North American Indians have suffered much from two diverse views of their character, views widely separated and equally erroneous. One of these was promulgated by the natural Indian hater, who pictured him as cruel, rapacious, and unfeeling, a creature of vivacious tastes and brutal instincts. The other view was that of the impracticable sentimentalist, who looked upon the savage state as an arcadian existence, where exertion and repose were in their happiest combination, and where man, surrounded by untrammelled nature, was a creature of purity and truth, brave, courteous, hospitable, chivalric. The philanthropist who witnessed their heroic struggle and their unhappy fall, could but feel sad over each new development in their history, while the hardy frontiersman who felt the weight of the vengeance that their many wrongs had aroused, looked upon them as friends incarnate, and sought their extermination without pity and without remorse.

Between these two ideal creations the North American Indian stands out a well defined, and by no means a repulsive object, in the history of this country. His virtues were many, his discernment good, his character stable and devoid of petty meannesses, while his vices were such as we may excuse, for we can find for them a reasonable explanation. .... The advance of civilization was regarded by the Indian not as a blessing which was to furnish him with new means of subsistence but as a cause which was to sweep him from the earth. In time he came to see the futility of

the resistance he was making, and consented to treaties in which he made large concessions to the whites. It is the disgrace of our civilization that upon its out-posts there has always been found by the side of the true pioneer a class of white men who sought their own advantage by every possible means. These creatures, who were at once the basest and most unscrupulous of their species, were the refuse product of civilization, and they inflamed the passions of the Indians to fury.<sup>127</sup>

This is a post-frontier rather than a genuine frontier viewpoint. It illustrates the fact that the white man's attitude changed rapidly, once he was removed, even a little, from the actual "cutting edge of civilization."

There are many more examples of how the white man came to recognize and admit that the blame did not lie entirely with the Indians. Every major Indian uprising after 1830 has been declared, by one author or another, to be the responsibility of the white man or his government. This includes the Black-Hawk War, the Custer massacre in 1876, the trouble with the Nez Perces in 1878, and the final uprising of the Sioux in 1890.

In reviewing the relationships of the Indians and the settlers on the frontier as it moved westward it can be said that the Indians provided the most immediate and the most constant problem which the pioneers faced. Frontier biographies present evidence that recent historians have tended to underestimate and depreciate the actual Indian menace to life and morale on the frontier,

particularly before it reached the Mississippi. The idea that the red men were entirely in the wrong did not gain universal acceptance and the whites rapidly adopted a more tolerant attitude as the frontier moved on and the Indians became less and less effective in their opposition to the pioneer advance.

## Chapter V

### Pioneer Hardships

Although several recent inquiries have been made into the origin of the present day concept of hardship on the frontier, the influence of frontier biography has not been examined.<sup>128</sup> When the Indian menace and the difficulty of providing adequate shelter and food supplies are included, pioneer adversities occupy a predominant place in many of the contemporary life sketches. Since these books were widely read, they must have contributed to the tradition of hardship on the frontier which has developed.

Again and again the biographers give evidence that lack of food and water became nearly calamitous as the pioneers conducted their warfare against the Indians on the border. While conducting a campaign against the red men in the Southeast, Jackson and his men were forced to subsist for a time on the offal found in a cattle pen,<sup>129</sup> and a sortie of white men pursuing some Cheyenne Indians across the great salt plains toward New Mexico during the winter of 1868-1869 had to resort to the consumption of their pack animals.<sup>130</sup> Similar experiences of Carson and Fremont have already been enumerated. Particularly in the area west of the Mississippi, the insecurity of food supplies constituted a major hardship

to the frontiersmen.

Indian attacks were an even greater menace. To the actual suffering imposed by savage raids was added the mental hazard resulting from constant exposure to the threat of Indian attacks and capture. This aspect of the problem has received insufficient attention from historians. The evidence is overwhelming that the racial conflict which constantly threatened or actually raged was probably the most important adversity with which the pioneer contended. This is most true of the roving frontiersmen such as the explorers, trappers, and early settlers and increasingly less true of the more stable agricultural frontiers which followed in their wake.

Weather and climate provided severe reverses to pioneer ventures. Just before the opening of the nineteenth century a colony of one hundred and twenty-six emigrants from the south branch of the Potomac set out for Illinois. A season of unusually rainy and hot weather brought a "putrid fever" to the unacclimated colonists. Less than half of those who had started in the spring were alive in the fall. Older settlers in the same region were not affected.<sup>131</sup> Military expeditions on the frontier were seriously handicapped by weather conditions. On one of the Indian campaigns led by Harrison in the Northwest a forced march was necessary. One camp was made under

particularly adverse circumstances. "On the night referred to relates Richard Hildreth, the biographer, "they encamped on the banks of the Au Glaise, in a level beach woods, the ground nearly covered with water from the rain which fell in torrents all night. They had no axes, and could only procure such fuel as was furnished by the dry limbs scattered on the ground. Those who could find a dry log against which to kindle a fire were fortunate indeed. Many sat .... upon their saddles, leaning against the trunks of trees, and endeavoring to sleep. Being separated from the baggage, few had any thing to eat or drink. The men became peevish, and were not sparing in complaints."<sup>132</sup> A soldier campaigning on the border in Indiana Territory during the war of 1812 recounted similar hardships, and his recital was included in Moses Dawson's biography of William Henry Harrison:

On that day we marched 30 miles under an incessant rain; and I am afraid you will doubt my veracity when I tell you, that in eight miles of the best of the road, it took us over the knees, and often to the middle. The Black Swamp, (four miles from Portage River and four in the extent) would have been considered impassable by all but men determined to surmount every difficulty to accomplish the object of their march. In this swamp you lose sight of terra firma altogether -- the water was about six inches deep on the ice, which was very rotten, often breaking through to the depth of four or five feet.

The same night we encamped on very wet ground, but the driest that could be found, the rain still continuing. It was with difficulty we could raise fires; we had no tents, our clothes were wet, no axes, nothing to cook with, and very little to

eat. A brigade of pack horses being near us, we procured from them some flour, killed a hog, (there being plenty of them along the road;) our bread was baked in the ashes, and our pork we broiled on the coals -- a sweeter meal I never partook of. When we went to sleep, it was on two logs laid close to each other, to keep our bodies from the damp ground. Good God! what a pliant being is man in adversity: the loftiest spirit that ever inhabited the human breast would have been tamed amid the difficulties that surrounded us.<sup>133</sup>

Conditions on the plains and in the mountains were different but not less rigorous. Fremont's expedition encountered snow six feet deep on the level in September 1843.<sup>134</sup> The fourth expedition in 1848 was still more unfortunate, for the mules "froze stiff as they stood, and fell over like blocks, to become hillocks of snow," while about one-third of the men died on the road, "scattered at intervals as each had sunk exhausted and frozen, or half burned in the fire which had been kindled for them to die by."<sup>135</sup> Weather had to become extreme before it was noted by biographers or their subjects, but Bishop Hare reported temperatures of 30, 33, and 44 degrees below zero in Dakota Territory in 1875.<sup>136</sup> Grouard asserts that on the night of March 16, 1876, the temperature dropped to 63° below zero on the plains. This is probably an exaggeration, but the fact that he remembered the exact date may be evidence that the night was extremely bitter.<sup>137</sup> Grouard's biographer relates that the scout and another man were searching for a suitable mail route in the mountains of

Wyoming in 1894. "They were on top of the range for eight days, three of which were spent in huge snowdrifts without fire or food. .... One of Grouard's eyes was completely closed from snow blindness, and the other was nearly useless. His face was swollen to such an extent and frozen so badly that he was unable to leave the house for two weeks. .... The result of this journey, so far as Grouard is concerned, has proved very unfortunate, as the scout's eye-sight was permanently impaired ...."<sup>138</sup>

Frontier biography gives only fragmentary glimpses of the hostile aspects of nature that the pioneers encountered, but they confirm the authenticity of the accounts of ceaseless battles against the elements as portrayed in novels like Ole Rølvaag's Giants in the Earth.

Other types of hardships receive less attention than the weather, the biographers suggesting tribulations faced by the pioneers but leaving much to the imagination. Almost nothing is said of the many diseases which must have ravaged frontier communities. Cholera broke out among General Scott's men while on the way to Illinois to participate in the Black Hawk War. Fifty-two men died and eight were taken ill in a two day period.<sup>139</sup> Sufficient reference is made to the presence of vermin and lice to indicate that these were genuine afflictions on the frontier. The chronicler of Big-Foot Wallace quotes the Texas ranger

as having been troubled with lice while a captive of the Mexicans in 1842. "For want of a comb myself, I was compelled to have my hair cut off short and permit my finger nails to grow untrimmed. With these I became so expert, after long practice, that I could rake out a fellow above a certain size with unerring certainty, whenever by biting or crawling he designated sufficiently his exact locality."<sup>140</sup>

Lack of adequate surgical equipment and skill was the cause for intense suffering, especially on expeditions which took the frontiersmen far from settled communities. On his first trip across the plains in about 1826, one of the men in Carson's party was injured through the accidental discharge of a gun. Infection set in and amputation became necessary to save the man's life. Carson was chosen to do the job, with a razor, a handsaw, and a bar of iron as his only equipment. "He bound a ligature around the arm very tightly to arrest, as far as possible the flow of blood," writes John Abbott. "With the razor he cut through the quivering muscles, tendons and nerves. With the handsaw he severed the bone. With the bar of iron, at almost a white heat, he cauterized the wound. The cruel operation was successful. And the patient, under the influence of the pure mountain air, found his wound almost healed before he reached Santa Fe."<sup>141</sup>

A William Goodyear, quoted by Abbott, recalls a similar

incident during an Indian fight, when a rifle ball shattered a man's bone below the knee. The man crawled into a thicket, unseen by either Indians and whites. "Here, after tying up his own leg with buckskin thongs which he cut from his hunting shirt, he very coolly and deliberately went to work with his own knife, and cut his own leg off."<sup>142</sup> Unfortunately these incidents are not documented by the biographers, and they are in all likelihood overdrawn. There is no reason to suppose that they do not have some basis in fact.

The pioneers suffered serious reverses through the loss of property. Anthony Haswell narrates the case of Matthew Phelps, who removed with his family from Connecticut to the Mississippi River in 1776, pursued by misfortune after misfortune. Phelps, his family, and a group of New Englanders arrived at New Orleans in September, 1776, and started for the Big Black River some distance above New Orleans. First the family was stricken with "fever and ague," which cost the life of a daughter, Abigail, on September 16, a son, Atlantic, on September 26, and Mrs. Phelps on November 14. Phelps himself was exceedingly ill, and the shock of losing three members of his family within so short a time almost killed him. He continued on his way to the plantation he had previously bought on the Big Black, however, loading all his goods and his two remaining children on a small boat manned by

himself, a man called Knap, and a fourteen year old boy. As a climax to his misfortunes, the boat was sucked into a whirlpool as they proceeded up the swollen Big Black, and Phelps lost his two children and all his goods.<sup>143</sup> It is a tribute to his fortitude that he continued and established a home, though he returned to New England within ten years.

In the unsettled period just preceding the outbreak of the Civil War, raids into Kansas by the "Border Ruffians" of Missouri caused damage to the settlers. Wild Bill Hickok, according to his analyst, entered a claim for 160 acres in Johnson County, Kansas in 1857 and had his cabin burned while he was away, only to have it burned again after he had rebuilt it.<sup>144</sup> Joe DeBarthe cites the experience of a group of ranchers in Wyoming in 1868 who took an inventory following an Indian raid: "In counting up our loss we found we were out about sixteen thousand dollars in ranch property, goods, hay, stock, horses, mules, and work cattle, thirty-six head of the latter having been taken, not to say anything of the five hundred dollars in cash that had fallen into the hands of the Indians.... It pauperized us all, and we had nothing to do but "begin life over," as the saying goes."<sup>145</sup> While Bishop Hare was dedicating a church on the Dakota prairies in 1879 a prairie fire started near the settlement. All present went out to battle the flames. The

memorialist repeated the Bishop's account:

"We all worked as for dear life, some trying to whip out the fire with old coats, shawls, brooms, and indeed with whatever in the excitement we could lay our hands on, while others helped to empty the houses which were most threatened. .... One poor woman had invested her earnings as a school teacher in a millinery establishment. Her goods in the general alarm were snatched from her store to be carried to a safe place and were seized by the hurricane and whirled into the flames or blown over the blackened plains. Another sufferer is a man with a wife and four children, whose house was just built and all its contents were entirely consumed. He is reduced almost to beggary."<sup>146</sup>

The loss of horses while traveling on the frontier easily led to near-disaster. The animals of Reverend John Clark strayed as he was on his way to take up his mission work in Green Bay, Wisconsin in 1835. Reverend Clark was forced to spend two nights in the open country, without any equipment, and with no firearms to protect him from the prairie wolves who hovered near his camp all night.<sup>147</sup>

Though little is said of it, loneliness could be one of the major mental hazards which the pioneers encountered. If Filson's story is correct, Boone confessed that the lack of man, horse, or dog for company was as discomfoting as the lack of bread, salt, or sugar, when his brother left him alone in the Kentucky wilderness in May, 1770.<sup>148</sup> The frontier bishop Hare, says DeWolfe Howe, specifically recalled the desolate character of the Dakota region, stating that "on one of

my trips I remember not seeing a human face or a human habitation, not even an Indian lodge, for eight days."<sup>149</sup> Fremont's journal for the expedition of 1843-1844 asserts that two of the party went insane.<sup>150</sup> The effect of isolation on the mental health of the early settlers needs further study by historians. Archer Butler Hulbert states that "Indian attacks appeal picturesquely to the moving picture artists, but, if the truth were known, more pioneers to Oregon went insane on the journey in the '40ies and '50ies than were killed by redskins."<sup>151</sup> This assertion challenges further research.

It is likewise erroneous to assume that Indians were the only human menace to the welfare of the settlers. The early biographies contain instances where Tories betrayed their erstwhile neighbors,<sup>152</sup> and the British are repeatedly accused, in the biographies, of their part in inciting the Indians to attack the settlers. Desperadoes, outlaws and road agents were not uncommon in the far West. Frank Winch tells the story that, while riding the Pony Express in 1861, Wild Bill Hickok found himself trapped in a cabin by Jacob McCandless and his gang -- ten men in all. When they charged the cabin he shot the leader and succeeded in killing four additional men before they gained access to the cabin. He then engaged them with his bowie knife, killing the entire gang. "Hickok was wounded by three bullets, eleven buckshot, and was cut

in thirteen places. It was fully six months before 'Wild Bill' fully recovered from the results of what was one of the most thrilling exploits in border-story, one that is well authenticated -- that 'Wild Bill' Hickok, in single-handed conflict, killed ten men -- men of desperate character ...."<sup>153</sup> This incident appears in nearly every biography of Wild Bill Hickok and Buffalo Bill Cody. Miss Purdy, in her thesis entitled "Buffalo Bill in Truth and in Fiction" asserts that Wild Bill was too heavy to ride the Express and quotes William E. Connelley's Wild Bill and His Era (New York, 1933) to the effect that actually Hickok killed only one man and wounded two, while he himself did not get a scratch.

Ordinarily only the most calamitous and dramatic of the hardships encountered on the frontier found their way into the accounts of the biographers. The minor afflictions which were not remarkable in themselves but which when added together made life almost unendurable are largely omitted. Insect pests, continued cold, bleakness of landscape, isolation and loneliness are casually mentioned in the biographies. These are the factors which caused many to start the long trek back East before their goal was reached, but such people were failures, and biography does not record them nor the reasons for their lack of success. Biography written during the frontier period leaves the impression that much has been left unsaid about pioneer hardships.

## Chapter VI

## LAND AND SETTLEMENT ON THE FRONTIER

The call of free land and the ease with which the unsuccessful and the discontented in the East could make a new beginning in the West are commonly considered the basic motives for westward migration. The frontier biographies do not entirely confirm or deny this. The pioneer's love of the soil is never dwelt upon and is seldom expressed. There may be many explanations of this, but a perusal of frontier life writing leaves the conviction that the authors took it as a matter of course that their readers would understand and appreciate the powerful attraction which ownership of land exercised upon the frontiersman. As a consequence, they devote their pages primarily to the more tangible aspects of settlement on the frontier: the immensely troublesome problem of land titles; the government's land policy; and a description of early frontier settlements.

Timothy Flint came nearest to expressing the attachment which the pioneer felt for new land. In describing the scene in June, 1769, when Boone, Finley, and their companions first looked upon Kentucky, he suggests the emotions which these men felt. Or was he only a precursor of today's chambers of commerce?

What struck them with unfailling pleasure was, to observe the soil, in general, of a fertility without example on the other side of the mountains. From an eminence in the vicinity of their station, they could see, as far as vision could extend, the beautiful country of Kentucky. They remarked with astonishment the tall, straight trees, shading the exuberant soil, wholly clear from any other underbrush than the rich cane-brakes, the image of verdure and luxuriance, or tall grass and clover. Down the gentle slopes murmured clear limestone brooks.<sup>154</sup>

Frontiersmen were not given to putting their emotions into words, and their biographers did not attempt to interpret what their subjects felt. The authors hesitated to do so, perhaps, because many of them had not really experienced the same feelings, and hence were not qualified to write about them. Furthermore, their conception of their task as biographers did not include the interpretation of men's souls.

The hunger for land was reflected in the occasional references to the eagerness of the settlers and the government to extinguish the Indian title, and in the infrequent descriptions of land rushes. William L. Stone depicts the attitude of the land speculators (who do not truly represent the settlers) in getting the Indians to dispose of their land. Robert Morris of Philadelphia secured title to approximately 4,000,000 acres of land in western New York in 1791, for which he paid the sum of 100,000 pounds in Massachusetts money. The following year he sold the land to a group of men formed into the

Holland Land Company. Part of the sale contract stipulated that it was Morris' responsibility to extinguish the Indian title and survey the entire tract at his own expense.<sup>155</sup> Thus two transactions had taken place even though the Indians still legally held the land. There is no intimation in the biography that this procedure was questionable.

On at least two occasions the desire for land took the form of a wild stampede. One of these is described briefly and the other in some detail in the biographies consulted. Of the rush into Kansas Territory after the Enabling Act of 1853, J. W. Buel has this to say: "Pending its passage the Western boundary of Missouri was ablaze with the camp fires of intending settlers. Thousands of families were sheltered under the canvas of their ox wagons, impatiently awaiting the signal from the Nation announcing the opening of the territorial doors to the brawny immigrants, and when the news was heralded the waiting host poured over the boundary line and fairly deluged the new public domain."<sup>156</sup> The rush into Oklahoma was somewhat more dramatic and illustrates, according to Pawnee Bill's biographer, the strong measures land-starved settlers were willing to take in order to get land. According to this account, the Indian claims to the Oklahoma territory had long been extinguished and the land was public domain, open to entry, but pioneers

were unable to settle there. "Why was this? Simply because it was a rich and fertile district illegally held by unscrupulous cattlemen, and stocked with fatted cattle that were raised for market with but little cost or trouble, thus filling their coffers to overflowing. It was they who, with man's greatest weapon -- money -- held 25,000 rightful owners -- the pioneers -- at bay, and kept their families on the verge of starvation ...."<sup>157</sup>

Pawnee Bill [Major Gordon W. Lillie] assumed the leadership and organized the Consolidated Oklahoma Colonies, an organization designed to take the land by force, without the sanction of the Federal government. February 1, 1889, was set as the date for entry, when thousands of colonists were to converge from four directions on the territory, in order to foil the opposition expected from the military forces. The Seventh Cavalry moved to prevent the entry of the settlers and Lillie and his group camped on opposite sides of the line on the night of January 31. The zero hour was three o'clock February 1, 1889, but just as the colonists were ready to seize the land, word came from Washington that the House of Representatives had passed the bill legalizing colonization, and that Lillie's illegal entry would jeopardize the bill in the Senate. Pawnee Bill thereupon desisted, remarking "I am glad we have woke these fellows up in Washington."<sup>158</sup> The bill was passed and

noon of April 22, 1889 fixed as the time when the territory would officially be open to settlement. Pawnee Bill and his 4,200 colonists thereupon jockeyed for the most advantageous position on the boundary line, competing with 7,000 others. According to a newspaper report in the New York World quoted by the biographer, Lillie himself, mounted on his racing mare, led his party into Oklahoma, and all who went with him "secured very valuable claims." Only one fatality was recorded as a result of disputed claims.<sup>159</sup>

As is true of so many of the incidents related in the frontier biographies, these evidences of land hunger are the colorful and dramatic episodes which biographers felt certain would appeal to their readers. Of much greater intrinsic significance was the unquenchable desire of thousands of anonymous pioneers for the right to make a fresh beginning on cheap land. Biography does not record this.

The failure to establish legal title to the land upon which they settled was the danger which haunted the pioneers from the Appalachians to the Pacific. The problem was basically the same everywhere, though it wore different aspects in some regions. Timothy Flint clearly explained the nature and the consequences of the problem.

The state of Kentucky was not surveyed by the government and laid off into sections and townships, as has been the case with all the lands north of the Ohio. But the government of Virginia had issued land warrants, or certificates, entitling the holder to locate wherever he might choose, the number of acres named in the warrant. They also gave to actual settlers certain pre-emption rights to such lands as they might occupy and improve by building a cabin, raising a crop, &c. The holders of these warrants, after selecting the land which they intended to cover with their titles, were required to enter a survey and description of the tracts selected, in the Land office, which had been opened for the purpose, to be recorded there, for the information of others, and to prevent subsequent holders of warrants from locating the same lands. Yet notwithstanding these precautions, such was the careless manner in which these surveys were made, that many illiterate persons, ignorant of the forms of law, and the necessity of precision in the specification and descriptions of the tracts on which they had laid their warrants, made such loose and vague entries in the land office, as to afford no accurate information to subsequent locators, who frequently laid their warrants on the same tracts. It thus happened that the whole or a part of almost every tract was covered with different and conflicting titles -- forming what have been aptly called "shingle titles" -- overlaying and lapping upon each other, as shingles do upon the roof of a building. In this way twice the existing acres of land were sold, and the door opened for endless controversy about boundaries and titles. The following copy of an entry may serve as a specimen of the vagueness of the lines, butts and bounds of their claims, and as accounting for the flood of litigation that ensued.

"George Smith enters nine hundred acres of land on a treasury warrant, lying on the north side of Kentucky river, a mile below a creek; beginning about 20 poles below a lick; and running down the river westwardly, and northwestwardly for quantity."

It will easily be seen that a description, so general and indefinite in its terms, could serve as no guide to others who might wish to avoid entering the same lands. This defect in providing

for the certainty and safety of land titles, proved a sore evil to the state of Kentucky. As these lands increased in value and importance, controversies arose as to the ownership of almost every tract; and innumerable suits, great strife and excitement, prevailed in every neighborhood, and continued until within a late period, to agitate the whole body of society. The legislature of the state, by acts of limitation and judicious legislation upon the subject, have finally quieted the titles of the actual occupants.<sup>160</sup>

Land title trouble was no respecter of persons. Boone's title to his holdings became involved in endless litigation until he fled westward. Most of the decisions had been rendered against him.<sup>161</sup> Simon Kenton's services to the Republic failed to save his estates, for he became involved in a "labyrinth of lawsuits" which left him in poverty in his declining years.<sup>162</sup> Matthew Phelps, the doughty Englander whose hardships in migrating up the Mississippi to his land on the Big Black have been recounted, found the climax of his troubles when he arrived on the scene -- he no longer held title to the plantation. In 1774, in accordance with the custom of that region, he had made a small down payment to the owner and placed a man on the land to manage his affairs and to keep the title intact until Phelps could return. When he arrived in 1776, having lost his wife, four children, and all his goods on the way, he discovered that his employe had deserted his post, and in accordance with the laws of that region, Phelps had forfeited his title and his land

was in the possession of others.<sup>163</sup> William Henry Harrison, too, made a down payment on several tracts of land in Indiana Territory along the Ohio River. Payments fell due while he was serving in the army on the frontier, and, lacking money to make the payments, he was forced to relinquish the land.<sup>164</sup> In the case of John C. Fremont the outcome was happier, but litigation concerning a tract of land he acquired in California had to be carried to the Supreme Court to clear his title.<sup>165</sup>

This particular hardship of the pioneers was partially the result of the ignorance and carelessness of the settlers themselves. But unscrupulous land speculators capitalized on these shortcomings of the frontiersmen, and robbed many of them of their just deserts. Troubles over land titles occupy a prominent place in frontier biography because conflict of titles was universal and because the results in many cases violated the biographer's sense of justice.

The government's land policy, on the other hand, received hardly any attention at the hands of frontier life writers. Largely for political purposes, perhaps, the biographers of William Henry Harrison dwell on the fact that he was instrumental in securing a revision of the governmental land laws in favor of the common man. At the opening of the nineteenth century, says Caleb Cushing, the public lands, for the most part, were sold

only in large tracts of at least four thousand acres. Settlers with little or no capital were thus put under a tremendous handicap, for they could purchase small tracts only from men who had the capital to buy the large pieces from the government. Forced into second hand buying, the small settlers were taken advantage of by the large land holders. While serving as a delegate in Congress beginning in 1799, Harrison succeeded in having a bill introduced which provided that the public domain could be sold in half sections of 320 acres; that lands not purchased at public sales should be retained for public entry at the minimum price; and that land offices should be opened in the region of the sales, making it easier for the settlers to comply with the regulations for securing title. Harrison's bill became law.<sup>166</sup>

The size of frontier estates varied greatly. Three examples, gleaned from the biographies, afford contrasts. When the father of Daniel Drake emigrated to Kentucky in 1788, he joined with five other families in the purchase of fourteen hundred acres of land. The size of the tracts each received was determined by the size of the payments made. The elder Drake's share was thirty-eight acres, which he soon increased to fifty, and by 1794 he was able to purchase another farm of two hundred acres.<sup>167</sup> Judged by present day standards in

Iowa, this was a good sized farm, but it was exceeded by John Bidwell, who, in 1849 purchased an estate in California consisting of 22,000 acres which he soon increased to 25,000.<sup>168</sup>

The price of land varied as widely as the size of the settlers' tracts. As Governor of Indiana Territory, William Henry Harrison had the power to establish county seats, asserts Moses Dawson. He proposed to do so for Clarke County, and a town was planned a little above the falls of the Ohio, to be called Jeffersonville. "This town was laid out in the summer of 1802, and so well was it approved of that lots in it sold for 200 dollars in a few days after."<sup>169</sup> The size of the lots is not stated.

The Indians very often made poor bargains. A large portion of the old Northwest Territory owned by the Illinois Indians was sold by the Kaskaskias, according to Dawson's report, for a ridiculously low figure. "When we say the price fixed on was an annuity of \$396 66 cents, which in addition to a former annuity of \$500 made \$896 66 cents, for from 7 to 8,000,000 of acres of excellent land, we presume it will appear that the terms of the purchase were extremely low, and favorable to the purchasers."<sup>170</sup> Land along the Ohio River in the former Indiana Territory was reported selling, in 1840, for twenty dollars per acre.<sup>171</sup> Fremont's huge tract of land in California, containing "The two main gold bearing

ledges of California" and seventy square miles in extent, was purchased for \$3000 in 1847.<sup>172</sup> Duval reports that when Big-Foot Wallace decided to begin ranching in Texas at the close of the Mexican War, he commented: "So we bought two hundred acres of land here, from Uncle Josh, (and by the same token, he made us pay a 'swingeing' price for it -- twenty-five cents an acre, half cash down.)"<sup>173</sup> Land was indeed cheap, but it is easy to forget that even at twenty-five cents an acre establishing a homestead required an amount of capital which many land hungry settlers found it hard to raise.

In general, frontier communities did not merit a great deal of attention from the biographers. J. W. Buel, the biographer of Kit Carson, Wild Bill Hicock, Buffalo Bill Cody and a host of other "Heroes of the Plains" is an exception. Buel specialized in rather racy descriptions of the lusty frontier towns of the Far West. His portraits of Hays City in 1869, Kansas City in 1872, and Deadwood in 1876 are only one of several reasons for suspecting that he secured interest at the expense of historical accuracy. His description of Deadwood gives some basis for believing that he should be credited with originating the popular conception of the mining towns:

Deadwood, like every other big mining town that has yet been located in the West, was full

of rough characters, renegades, cut-throats, gamblers and the devil's agents generally. Night and day the wild orgies of depraved humanity continued; a fiddler was an important personage, provided he would hire out to saw all night in a saloon, and the concert singer was a bonanza, especially if the voice were clothed in petticoats. The arbiter of all disputes was either a knife or pistol, and the graveyard soon started with a steady run of victims. Sodom and Gomorrah were both dull, stupid towns compared with Deadwood, for in a square contest for the honors of moral depravity the Black Hills' capital could give the people of the Dead Sea cities three points in the game and then skunk them both.<sup>174</sup>

Hays City he characterized as "one of the liveliest towns on the frontier .... and nearly every 'soul' in it was a lively character."<sup>175</sup> Kansas City, he said, "was the parent block off which was chipped all the gambling towns along the Kansas Pacific railroad," and he recalled that in one evening he was detailed to report "three murders and one suspicious death."<sup>176</sup>

It is significant that land speculators and speculations were scarcely mentioned in the lives of frontiersmen written by their contemporaries. There are casual references to the hardships imposed by unscrupulous profiteers, as noted above, but details are lacking, and no clear picture is left of the extent of speculations or the methods employed. Buffalo Bill's venture is an exception. He and a William Rose planned to build a city -- ironically called Rome -- on the plains of Kansas in 1867. Their fortunes were to be

made by the rise in land values. A site was selected on Big Creek one mile from Fort Hays, the town was plotted, and a lot donated to every one who would build on it. "In one month's time there were 200 residences, 41 stores, and 20 saloons in Rome, and lots were selling at \$50 each." Just as the dream seemed about to be realized, the bubble burst. The partners refused to cooperate with the agent of the Kansas Pacific railroad, who thereupon established Hays City west of Rome. The railroad, machine shop, roundhouse, and depot proved so great an advantage for the new city that Rome died and the Cody-Rose bubble burst.<sup>177</sup> No other speculative schemes of empire were uncovered in the biographies consulted.

Though the possession of land and the settlement of new communities was a matter of the utmost importance to the pioneers, the treatment accorded to these topics by frontier life writers is sketchy and concerns itself primarily with the difficulties of retaining legal title. The role of free land in the lives of the frontiersmen and the formation of their characters is only indirectly hinted at in the biographies. No clue is given of the contribution of land troubles to the political machinery and philosophy of the pioneers. An examination of frontier biographies gives no clear picture of the changing governmental policy in the disposal of the public domain, or

the reasons for the change. In portraying the lives of men whose entire modus vivendi was affected by the land, frontier biographers, by and large, are content to discuss trivialities.

## Chapter VII

TRANSPORTATION, TRAVEL, AND COMMUNICATION  
ON THE FRONTIER

Movement from place to place on the frontier presented a major problem to the pioneers. In part it was the age old fear of the unknown -- a natural hesitancy to venture into the wilderness which lay at their doorstep. But the difficulties involved were more than mental. Transporting goods was slow, hard work that taxed the endurance even of toughened frontiersmen. Means of transportation were inadequate and uncomfortable. There were annoyances, inconveniences, and dangers on the route which had to be met and endured. Accommodations for the traveler from place to place on business or pleasure were frequently inhospitable and repulsive. These elements are reflected in the biographies written at the time.

Few of the other elements of frontier life are described in such vivid detail as are the means and methods of transportation and travel. The biographers of trappers, hunters, soldiers, missionaries, explorers, and doctors all have something to say about the subject. The emphasis in each case is different. One author enjoys describing the vehicle employed; another is more concerned with informing the reader about the organization required to bring a fleet of prairie schooners across the plains; and still another recounts the petty annoyances

which the frontier traveler had to endure. These writers had usually had personal experience in these matters, and their narratives were often drawn largely from the facts presented by the subject during the course of personal interviews.

Although no systematic attempt has been made to check the authenticity of the accounts found in the biographies, it is evident that not all are accurate. Occasionally authors reporting the same event will differ as to the details. There are fewer instances of this in the case of transportation and travel. Perhaps this is true because there was less to be gained by exaggerating the account. Perhaps the reading public was less credulous on this point and errors would be more easily detected. Whatever the reason, the information included in the life writing of the time does not suffer greatly when compared with a thoroughgoing and well documented work such as Seymour Dunbar's History of Travel in America.

Peculiar emphasis was placed in discussing transportation and travel. Its disagreeable aspects were elaborated. Invariably the annoyances, the discomforts, and the inconveniences were noted, so that anyone contemplating his first trip on the frontier would have found contemporary accounts almost as discouraging as the trip itself. If those engaged in moving about on the frontier found any enjoyment whatsoever in the scenery, the weather,

or in waiting expectantly for what lay beyond the hill ahead, it is not revealed in the biographies. This may be evidence that the difficulties of travel were of such magnitude that they made it impossible for the pioneers to see beyond them. It may also be evidence that conditions on the frontier blunted the finer aesthetic appreciations which the frontiersmen might have had.

Another aspect of transportation and travel receives great emphasis at the hands of the biographers. This was the decided pride which the pioneers took in individual or group achievements in reducing the time needed to move from place to place. Various biographers of Buffalo Bill Cody, for example, report his most notable rides, though usually the narrators disagree slightly as to the miles traveled or the time consumed. The American craving for speed did not have its origin in the twentieth century.

The movement of goods and passengers constituted one of the major business enterprises on the frontier. Fragmentary as they are, the accounts in pioneer biography leave the conviction that administrative ability was required to organize and maintain efficient transportational facilities, and that considerable business acumen was indispensable to assure profits.

The present day historian of the West is prone to divide the means of transportation employed on the

frontiers into neat categories starting with travel by foot, and continuing with travel by pack horse, cart, canoe, flatboat, steamboat, stage coach, and railroad. This is deceiving because a given means of travel which had outlived its usefulness in one area was still much in use in another. History does not lend itself to such rigid lines of demarcation.

The biographer of Moses Van Campen corroborates the fact that the great Durham boats were much in use on the agricultural frontier in Pennsylvania about 1770. Farmers living along the Delaware river depended upon them to get their wheat safely to market. The boats would carry from ten to twelve tons apiece.<sup>178</sup> Moving a family from Kentucky to Missouri in 1810 was another matter, however, and the Carson family, with Kit an infant in arms, walked the long distance, leading pack horses laden with household and farming utensils. The biographer's estimate that they covered about fifteen miles a day seems somewhat exaggerated in view of the fact that emigrants on the Oregon trail considered twenty miles per day good progress.<sup>179</sup>

Travel over the western plains in the 1830's was a strenuous job for trappers. But what about the hunter taken ill or injured? A trapping party of which Kit Carson was a member faced such an emergency. Two of the men had been wounded, and the wounds had become inflamed, making

it impossible for the men to ride their mounts. "The trappers, accustomed to such exigencies, prepared for them litters very ingeniously constructed. They cut two flexible poles about twenty-four feet long. These were laid upon the ground, three feet apart, and a buffalo robe laid between them, strongly fastened on either side, so as to present a swinging hammock about six feet in length. This left at either end shafts about six feet long. Two mules or horses, of about the same size were selected as carriers. The ends of these shafts were attached to saddles, on each of the animals. Thus the patient was borne by a gentle, swinging motion, over the roughest paths."<sup>180</sup> Passengers in western stage coaches would have envied the sick men's vehicle.

An individual making a trip across country presented quite a different problem from a family making the long trek from the Missouri to Oregon. In October, 1841, the Reverend John Clark set out on the trip from Illinois to Texas. "He had a good pair of horses, and light pleasurewagon hung on elliptic springs, with a standing cover. The carriage was easy and convenient, and carried about five hundred pounds weight of baggage, &c., for the comfort and use of the family. Among these articles was a marquee, or linen tent, glass lamp, ax, hammer, tea-kettle, frying-pan, coffee-mill, patient coffee-boiler, water bucket, provision-basket, plates,

knives and forks, spoons, &c."<sup>181</sup> In contrast, the Codys moved across Iowa to Kansas about 1854 by means of three prairie schooners and a roomy carriage in which the women rode.<sup>182</sup>

Overland freighting on the western plains required large and stout wagons. J. W. Buel asserts that they were built to carry loads up to 7,000 pounds and that it required from eight to ten yoke of oxen, depending on the weight of the cattle, to draw them.<sup>183</sup> The overland stage coaches were built for greater speed and rough terrain. "The coach itself was a roomy, swaying vehicle, swung on thorough-braces instead of springs. It always had a six-horse or six-mule team to draw it, and the speed was nerve-breaking. Passengers were allowed twenty-five pounds of baggage ...."<sup>184</sup>

The men in an exploring party such as Fremont's ordinarily traveled on horse back, but the camp and scientific equipment had to be transported otherwise. On his first expedition in 1842, Fremont took with him twelve carts, each drawn by two mules, for the food supplies and camp equipment. A special light covered wagon, fitted with good springs, carried the instruments, consisting of a telescope, a "reflecting circle", two sextants, two pocket chronometers, two barometers, six thermometers, and several small compasses.<sup>185</sup> Also included was a collapsible rubber boat twenty feet long and five feet wide,

which Fremont and Carson put to good use on the Great Salt Lake.<sup>186</sup> By the time he made his fifth and last expedition in 1853, the daguerreotype had been sufficiently perfected to warrant taking along S. N. Carvalho as daguerreotypist, who proudly reported that "all the arrangements I had made for taking pictures in the open air were perfectly successful."<sup>187</sup>

The inland rivers provided a different means of transportation for the pioneers, but they were not easy liquid highways as Timothy Fling suggested. Going downstream did not require a great deal of exertion, except on the part of the steersman, but the passage was fraught with its own dangers. The trunks of dead trees, entirely or partially submerged, formed "snags" which were the bane of the boatmen. Such snags were particularly dangerous when they pointed upstream and when they were sufficiently submerged so that they could not readily be seen but would still strike the bottom of the boat. On a trip down the Delaware River in Pennsylvania in 1770 Moses Van Campen encountered such a snag, with the result that, although most of the wheat on board was saved, the additional expenses incurred made the trip unprofitable.<sup>188</sup> Another danger had its origin in the brigands who would occasionally lurk near the shore and board and rob the boat when the channel and current carried it near the shore.

Going upstream was a different story. This was arduous work and involved several techniques of skill and brawn. One way of reaching Illinois from Kentucky, at the close of the eighteenth century, consisted of passing down the Ohio and then up the Mississippi. The biographer of Father John Clark, who made the trip with the Gilham family in 1798, has left an account of the passage:

They floated down the Ohio with the current, aided by the oars and setting-poles, but to stem the strong current of the Mississippi, they used the cordelle and setting-poles, and occasionally crept along the shore by "bush-whacking." The cordelle is a long rope attached to the bow of the boat, and drawn over the shoulders of the men, who walk along the bank. The setting-pole is about ten or twelve feet long, with the lower end shod with iron, and the upper end terminating in a knob, which is pressed against the shoulder, and the men who use them walk forwards on the narrow gunwale, in a very stooping posture, with their faces towards the stern. This shoves the boat against a strong current. When the hands on the gunwale next the shore drop their poles and catch hold of limbs and bushes that overhang the river and pull the boat forward, it is called "bush-whacking." Oars are used in crossing the river from one shore to the other. A long heavy oar with a wide blade is attached to the stern so as to move on a pivot, and the steersman, who is commandant for the occasion, directs the boatmen. .... They moved up the strong and turbid current of the Mississippi at the rate of twelve miles each day.<sup>189</sup>

Prior to the introduction of the steamboat, the Missouri River was travelled in the same way. About 1824 General William Harney commanded a party of about

350 men up the Missouri, and his biographer's account corroborates that given above.<sup>190</sup> Pioneers who floated their produce to market down the Ohio and the Mississippi rarely attempted to return with the craft, but chose to sell or break up the boats for lumber and return by foot.<sup>191</sup>

Trips by canoe presented difficulties which differed in kind, if not in degree, from those by flat-boats. Reverend John Clark [not the Father Clark noted above] was one of a party attempting the passage from Lake Superior to the Mississippi in 1836. There were twenty-one portages on the complete trip, and Clark himself described the laborious journey:

"One of those portages was nine miles long, and required two days to pass it; several others were from two to three miles. In making these our canoe was carried bottom upward, the cross-bars resting on the shoulders, and we rested every half mile. My canoe was eighteen feet long, and made a good load for two men. We passed our baggage by means of tump-lines, or as they are called, portage collars. They are wide straps of leather, about two feet long, with narrow straps at each end, which are fastened around the load to be carried. The load rests on the small of the back, and the wide strap passes across the forehead. On this bundle a second one is placed, resting against the back part of the head, to prevent its being drawn back by the weight of the first. While rather a raw hand at this business, my jaws would crack, my neck grow stiff, and every bone, and sinew, and muscle of my head was put to the test.<sup>192</sup>

Steamboat travel on the Missouri River in the 1870's was less arduous than overland travel for the

passengers, but it was accompanied by adventure and excitement, according to the biographer of Dr. Sheldon Jackson, the frontier Presbyterian missionary.

The return journey by steamboat from Fort Benton, at the head of navigation on the Missouri River, to Sioux City, Iowa, is described in Dr. Jackson's notes as "a wild romantic ride of ten days, during which the boat was twice on fire." At one point the steamer was delayed for some time by a large herd of buffalo which were swimming across the river. The distance between the above-mentioned points by the river's course is two thousand miles, one-half of which was through a wilderness region, abounding in game of all sorts .... The only signs of civilization along this part of the route were occasional clearings, at long intervals, occupied by United States forts, or stockade trading-posts. Many of the passengers on the boat, as it followed its course down the stream, were on the alert for game, within sight and range, and the crack of rifles was heard almost continuously at some points of the journey during the daytime. On the trip made by this boat up the river, "eleven buffaloes, a bear, and a score of mountain-sheep, deer, and lesser game, were taken." At frequent intervals large bands of Indians, whose camps were near by, flocked to the river's bank to see the boat pass. On one occasion "they showed their friendly feeling by firing into the boat." "Perhaps," as the narrator naively adds, "this was done for the fun of seeing the passengers scatter and dodge."<sup>193</sup>

Every means of transportation and travel was beset with dangers and annoyances of one sort or another. The pioneers who floated their surplus products down the Mississippi and then sold or broke up the flatboats, had a perilous trip home on foot. "Many perished of whom their friends never learned the particulars. Bands of robbers roamed through this wilderness, and doubtless many a farmer from Tennessee, Kentucky, and the country

along the Ohio and Wabash rivers, who never returned, was murdered for the money he attempted to transport."<sup>194</sup>

The lack of roads on the frontier and the wretched condition of those which did exist, made troop movements difficult and slow. In the attack on Detroit led by William Henry Harrison during the war of 1812, it required fourteen days to cover fifty miles because the heavy rains made the roads impassable.<sup>195</sup>

The fear of robbery from road agents and of attack from Indians was not an imaginary one when traveling by stagecoach in the West and Southwest. Missionary Sheldon Jackson planned a trip to the Zuni, Navajo, Moqui, and Jemex Indians of the Southwest in 1877. The local missionary, in arranging his itinerary, warned that "At present there is a band of some forty highwaymen on the road between Old Fort Wingate and Zuni, who are robbing nearly every traveller in all this section of the country, so that travelling is well-nigh impossible, except by large, armed parties."<sup>196</sup>

Jackson made the trip without trouble and shortly thereafter had an occasion to accompany some Indian children on a trip east to be educated. At Deming, Arizona all travel had been suspended on account of Indian raids. The stagecoaches were not running, and the freighters were laid up at the terminal or way stations. Jackson persuaded a driver to make the trip, and the

party came through safely, though they learned later that in the near vicinity of the route they travelled three herdsmen and two miners had been killed two days before they went through; two men had been killed the day before; a man, his wife, child, and mother-in-law had been massacred on the same day; five men had been killed the day following their trip; and two days thereafter the stage had been captured and the driver slain.<sup>197</sup>

Travel on the plains offered annoyances as well as dangers. Missionaries in the Dakotas in the 1880's were forced to take long trips to reach outlying Indian tribes. To Bishop Hare such journeys were sometimes far from pleasant:

"I have been on a trip now for ten days or more, a fairly comfortable one, though a heavy storm of wind and rain blew my tent down over my head last Tuesday night and gave me hours of work and much wretchedness, and my horse balked in the middle of the Cheyenne River on Friday last as I was fording it, broke the single-tree loose and left me in the middle of the rapidly running stream with the water running into my wagon box. .... It must be remembered that almost every night during the summer the mosquitoes wherever we camped were incredibly thick, causing quite as much annoyance in one's nose, mouth and ears as by biting, and sometimes so thick in the air that you could grasp them by rolling the fingers down in the palm of the hand and having a roll of dead mosquitoes in each palm. In other words, they were almost as thick as the grass on the ground. On one or two occasions, when we inadvertently camped where Indians had preceded us, our blankets became infested with fleas; and we had to stay up all night in a wagon in our coats, nearly freezing to death.

The water holes in the various dry creeks which we had to make, sometimes by forced marches, were covered with an iridescent scum which had to be pushed aside before the water was dipped up. Of course, none of it could be drunk, but had to be boiled and taken in the form of boiled coffee, and the cup of coffee was nearly always iridescent on its surface."<sup>198</sup>

Travel along the frontier, especially west of the Mississippi, demanded that the party travelling be well organized and that a routine be established and maintained. Kit Carson's trips across the plains in the late 1820's were "conducted with military precision." The men had to be roused at dawn because the task of securing the packs on the mules required time, labor, and skill. Once on the way, a white horse or mare was placed in the van of the cavalcade because "mules have a strange instinct which leads them to follow with a sort of fascination a white horse."<sup>199</sup> Fremont found it advisable to establish a regular procedure when making and breaking camp:

During the journey, it was the customary practice to encamp an hour or two before sunset, when the carts were disposed so as to form a sort of barricade around a circle some eighty yards in diameter. The tents were pitched, and the horses hobbled and turned loose to graze; and but a few minutes elapsed before the cooks of the messes, of which there were four, were busily engaged in preparing the evening meal. At nightfall, the horses, mules, and oxen, were driven in and picketed -- that is, secured by a halter, of which one end was tied to a small steel-shod picket, and driven

into the ground, the halter being twenty or thirty feet long, which enabled them to obtain a little food during the night. When they had reached a part of the country where such a precaution became necessary, the carts being regularly arranged for defending the camp, guard was mounted at eight o'clock consisting of three men, who were relieved every two hours; the morning watch being horse guard for the day. At day-break, the camp was roused, the animals turned loose to graze, and breakfast generally over between six and seven o'clock, when they resumed their march, making regularly a halt at noon for one or two hours. Such was usually the order of the day, except when accident of country forced a variation, which, however, happened but rarely.<sup>200</sup>

Freighting on the plains just prior to the Civil War was a large scale enterprise, due in large measure to the great quantities of government provisions to be transported for the use of the troops then engaged in fighting the Mormons. The firm of Russell, Majors and Waddell was the leader in the field and about 1857 operated 6,250 wagons, used 75,000 oxen, and employed 8,000 men. The enterprise represented capital of nearly \$2,000,000, according to one biographer.<sup>201</sup> The wagon trains were organized in a semi-military fashion. "A train of prairie schooners consisted of twenty-five wagons in charge of the following 'officers and seamen,' so to speak: The wagon-master, who acted as captain; then came the assistant wagon-master, then the extra hand, then the night herder, then the cavaliard driver, whose duty it is to attend the extra cattle. Besides these each team has

a driver, so that the full complement for a complete train is thirty-one men. .... Every man is expected to be thoroughly armed, and each knows where to 'fall in' when an attack is made, which at that date was anticipated at any time while passing over the route to Salt Lake."<sup>202</sup> Perhaps the size of the trains varied, for another biographer states that thirty-five wagons make up a full train.<sup>203</sup>

The overland stages presented different problems of organization. It was more difficult to make these pay, for they had to be run on schedule and the expenses involved in maintaining the lines were great. In 1859 according to Buffalo Bill's sister, Mrs. Wetmore, the old freighting firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell took over several existing lines and combined them into the Overland stage route which ran from the Missouri to California.

The distance from St. Joseph to Sacramento by this old stage route was nearly nineteen hundred miles. The time required by mail contracts and the government schedule was nineteen days. The trip was frequently made in fifteen, but there were so many causes for detention that the limit was more often reached.

Each two hundred and fifty miles of road was designated a "division," and was in charge of an agent, who had great authority in his own jurisdiction. He was commonly a man of more than ordinary intelligence, and all matters pertaining to his division were entirely under his control. He hired and discharged employees, purchased

horses, mules, harness and food, and attended to their distribution at the different stations. He superintended the erection of all buildings, had charge of the water supply, and he was the paymaster.

There was also a man known as the conductor, whose route was almost coincident with that of the agent. He sat with the driver, and often rode the whole two hundred and fifty miles of his division without any rest or sleep, except what he could catch sitting on the top of the flying coach.

.....

The overland stage-coaches were operated at a loss until 1862. In March of that year Russell, Majors and Waddell transferred the whole outfit to Ben Holliday [sic]. .... At the time he took charge of the route the United States mail was given to it; this put the line on a sound financial basis, as the government spent \$800,000 yearly in transporting the mail to San Francisco.<sup>204</sup>

Mrs. Wetmore's account is accurate for the most part, though later study shows that the mail contract was awarded to the company at the outbreak of the Civil War but that Russell, Majors and Waddell were unable to make the line pay in spite of it.<sup>205</sup>

There was danger from Indians along the stage routes. In organizing missions among the Indians in Wyoming in 1869, Sheldon Jackson was forced to take long rides by coach. "To guard as far as possible against the perils of this wilderness road, the company had constructed stockade forts at intervals of ten to twelve miles; and, when the Indians were known to be on the war-path, arms were provided for the defense of the

passengers. Between these fortified relay stations the mule or mustang teams, six to each coach, were driven at full speed. As they approached the stockade, the double gates were swung open and as soon as they were inside they were closed behind them. Here in seclusion and safety the necessary changes were made for the next run."<sup>206</sup> In spite of the difficulties involved, remarkable regularity was usually maintained. Jackson's biographer reports that on the southern stage route from St. Louis to San Francisco, a distance of 2,400 miles, such regularity was maintained that "during twelve months there was not a single failure to deliver the mail on schedule time; and every day, for two winter months, the stages from San Francisco and St. Louis met within three hundred yards of this half-way point."<sup>207</sup>

Until the coming of the Pony Express and the telegraph, communication between points on the frontier was carried on via the existing transportational systems. By 1860, however, the demand for more rapid communication was great enough so that the firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell decided to inaugurate what soon became known as the Pony Express. According to Mrs. Whetmore, Russell, the senior member of the firm, was the instigator of the plan, while Majors and Waddell opposed it on the ground that it could not be made to pay. The argument that it would be for the "good of the country" apparently won

them over.<sup>208</sup> Since the telegraph line extended from the Atlantic seaboard to St. Joseph, Missouri and from San Francisco to Sacramento, the problem lay in negotiating the 1,982 miles of desert from St. Joseph to Sacramento. Mail going via Central America required twenty-two days, if fortune favored the sea voyages. The stages took from twenty-one to twenty-five days, depending on the weather. The Pony Express was set up on a schedule designed to cover the distance in ten days.<sup>209</sup> The stations set up for the Overland stage route were to be used for changing mounts, and the express riders usually covered three of these stations, located twelve to fifteen miles apart. Some riders did double duty and rode eighty to eighty-five miles. Occasionally this was made necessary through the illness, injury, or death of another rider. The riders were unusual men, even for the frontier, for the job demanded the best. Perhaps the most widely known Pony Express riders were Wild Bill Hickok and Buffalo Bill Cody. "Riders received from a hundred and twenty to a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month, but they earned it."<sup>210</sup>

\*The keepers of the stations had the ponies already saddled, and the riders merely jumped from the back of one to another; and where the riders were changed the pouches were unbuckled and handed to the already mounted postman, who started at a lope as soon as his

hand clutched them." Weight was a highly important factor, and the weight of riders, saddles, and bridles was kept at a minimum. The letters were written on the finest tissue paper, and the pouches were not to carry over twenty pounds of mail. Two biographers of Buffalo Bill state that the pouches were sealed and locked in St. Joseph and not opened until Sacramento was reached, but this does not seem to have been true.<sup>211</sup> The through mail remained sealed but letters were picked up en route. The letters themselves were wrapped in oiled silk to protect them when the riders forded streams. First postage rates were \$5 per half ounce, but later two ounce letters were carried for \$5.

The time made by the Pony Express was good. "The first trip was made in ten days; this was a saving of eleven days over the best time ever made by the 'Butterfield Route.' Sometimes the time was shortened to eight days; but an average trip was made in nine. .... President Buchanan's last presidential message was carried in December, 1860, in a few hours over eight days. President Lincoln's inaugural the following March was transmitted in seven days and seventeen hours. This was the quickest trip ever made."<sup>212</sup> Buffalo Bill is credited with making the longest continuous ride -- 321 miles in twenty-one hours and thirty minutes.<sup>213</sup> The riders encountered many dangers along the route, not the least

of them being the Indians. One author reports that Charles Cliff, one of the riders, was attacked by Indians at Scotts Bluff and "received three balls in his body and twenty-seven in his clothes."<sup>214</sup>

Frontier biographies reflect the fact that the pioneers took great pride in individual and group feats of endurance and speed. The nature of these exploits changed as the frontier line moved from East to West. Timothy Flint records that in 1774 Boone guided a party of Surveyors to the falls of the Ohio, making the trip of eight hundred miles on foot in sixty-two days, "through a country entirely destitute of human habitations, save the camps of the Indians."<sup>215</sup> Filson, another biographer of Boone, reports that the pioneer scout, in escaping from Indian captivity, traveled one hundred and sixty miles from sunrise on June 16 to June 20, 1778.<sup>216</sup>

Buffalo Bill's biographers have established his reputation as a master rider, though their stories are open to question. In addition to the longest Pony Express ride made by one rider, Cody is credited with one of the most notable exhibitions of endurance on the frontier, while he was serving as courier for General Sheridan in 1868.

To this day the rides here described stand on record as the most remarkable ever made. They aggregated three hundred and fifty-five miles in fifty-eight riding hours, or an average of more than six miles an hour, including an enforced

walk of thirty-five miles. When it is considered that all this distance was made in the night-time, and through a country of hostile Indians, without a road to follow or a bridge to cross the streams, the feat appears too incredible for belief were it not for the most indisputable evidence, easily attainable, which makes disbelief impossible.<sup>217</sup>

Another author, quoting Sheridan himself, substantiates this claim, though the distance and time are slightly less than those quoted.<sup>218</sup> The chronicler of Frank Grouard relates that in 1876 Grouard covered 101 miles in four hours and ten minutes, killing three horses by overexertion.<sup>219</sup> The same scout, says his biographer, for a time regularly carried the mail between Fort McKinney and the Powder River, a distance 106 miles (round trip), from sun up to sunset.<sup>220</sup>

These individual exploits were matched by quick trips made by groups of men. Fremont and two men said by one of Carson's biographers to have ridden from Los Angeles to Monterey and back, a distance of 800 miles, in eight days, including all stops and a layover totaling two days at Monterey and San Luis Obispo. An average of 125 miles a day was maintained for several days. The trip was made with three horses per man. The horses not being ridden were driven ahead.<sup>221</sup> In 1847 Carson and ten or twelve men were sent by Fremont from California to Washington with dispatches. "... it was a journey of four thousand miles. It was accomplished in three

months."<sup>222</sup> Indian warfare often required long marches under adverse conditions. In 1877 General O. O. Howard and his men campaigned against the Nez Perces Indians under Chief Joseph. "From the beginning of the pursuit until the embarkation on the Missouri River for the homeward journey, including all halts and stoppages, occupied from July 27 to October 10 (seventy-five days), and General Howard's command marched one thousand three hundred and twenty-one miles."<sup>223</sup>

One other aspect of travel received attention at the hands of the biographers. Means of transportation preceded adequate accommodations for travellers, with the result that sojourners of the frontier had often to be content with poor quarters. Most of the reports were complaints in which the traditional hospitality of the West is not evident. All of the accounts were reported by clergymen or their biographers. One reason for this was that missionaries were forced to make long trips in sparsely settled countries. In addition, perhaps, the divines carried with them more of the fastidiousness of the East. The most favorable description was left by the biographer of Father John Clark, who was on his way from western Georgia to Kentucky about 1796 via the Clinch River region:

No public houses existed in that region, unless in a town or county seat, where lawyers and

clients, judges and jurymen, could purchase intoxicating liquors to wash down their corn-bread and bacon on court days. Every farmer through the country, who lived on a great road, and had a supply of "corn and fodder" for horse, and "chicken fixin's," and "corn dodgers," with comfortable beds for travelers, kept "private entertainment." No one thought of getting a license and selling intoxicating drinks. The bottle or jug of whiskey was always set on the table at such houses of entertainment, with a bowl of sugar, and a pitcher of water fresh from the spring, and "help yourselves, strangers," was the courteous invitation. Whether the traveler drank more or less, or none at all, made not the least difference in his bill. Fifty cents for horse-keeping, supper, and lodging, was the uniform price for nearly half a century, at these country houses of entertainment throughout this valley. And if any one had charged ~~Rather~~ Clark, a quarter or three bits (37½ cents) was ample compensation.<sup>224</sup>

Sheldon Jackson and his wife found accommodations in Arkansas in 1858 far less comfortable. "We had to share our room with the driver and some others, and the bed was alive with bugs. We thought the wagon preferable, and slept in that the next night."<sup>225</sup>

Farther north, conditions were no better. Arriving at South Pass in 1869, Jackson found the lodging places "crowded with adventurers" and he was "glad to accept of accommodations in an untidy room, twelve feet square, in which were three double beds. The basin of a mountain stream in rear of the hotel furnished the only available place for his morning ablutions. The charge for accommodations of this character was four dollars per day."<sup>226</sup> Bishop William Hare, aboard the steamer Far West on the Missouri River in 1875, found lodging

conditions uncomfortable. "They had nothing to offer me but a berth in the clerk's office and the soiled sheets of its previous occupant!"<sup>227</sup>

The evidence is clear that travel and transportation were important considerations to the frontiersmen. The desire to maintain contact with the East, and the necessity of having means of transporting goods to and from the frontier caused the pioneers to be highly conscious -- and critical -- of transportation facilities. The restless energy of the frontiersmen found one outlet in the constant effort to conquer distance by improving the means of transportation and communication.

Part Two: Frontier Institutions

Chapter VIII

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF PIONEER LIFE

The imperfect nature of the picture left by frontier biographers is best illustrated in the treatment accorded the lighter side of pioneer life: the recreation and amusements, the superstitions and the remedies, and the humor of the frontiersmen. In this respect biography is similar to the standard histories which Dr. Wilfred Black found "convey the impression that emigrants experienced nothing but hardships, trials, and tribulations."<sup>228</sup> Writers on pioneer life did not adopt a condemnatory attitude toward the pleasures of life -- they simply neglected them and did not deem them worthy of description. The biographer's conception of what his readers were most interested in is partly responsible for the omission. He saw it as his duty to stress the peculiar and unique phases of frontier life -- the Indian raids, the privations, the difficulties of travel, and the problems involved in settlement. The pioneer at play was not as colorful, the author thought, as the pioneer braving the elements and the aborigines. He selected his material accordingly.

The subjects selected for portrayal also aid in understanding why the frontier biographers were not

more generous in their recital of frontier fun making. Organized recreation and amusement is the product of a relatively stable society whose members have a certain amount of leisure at their disposal. Such a situation did not exist until the agricultural frontier had been reached. As previously indicated, characters representative of this stage of frontier development were seldom made the subjects of biography. The roving pioneers, on the other hand, though they were frequently portrayed by life writers, did not have the leisure to develop a great variety of amusements. Consequently, the picture of this aspect of pioneer life is singularly incomplete.

Certain characteristics of frontier fun stand out in the accounts, brief as they are. Particularly on the agricultural frontier, recreation and amusement was robust in nature, and called for physical skill, strength, and endurance. Those who participated did so actively. Spectator sports were practically unknown. On the Western frontiers, however, the more sedentary amusements of card playing and various games of chance were prevalent. On all the frontiers the recital of unusual events, exciting adventures, and narrow escapes constituted a major form of amusement. Story telling could be carried on around the hearth or camp fire, it required no lengthy preparation, it involved no expense, and it could be enjoyed even after a strenuous day in the

open when physical energies were running low. The spirit of competition which characterized much of the pioneer's recreation invaded the field of story telling as well, and the men squatting around the camp fire vied with each other in the narration of the narrowest escape or the most skillful shot. It is not difficult to understand why exaggeration and hyperbole sometimes entered into the recital.

When the frontiersman played, he ordinarily played hard. He gave himself with abandon to his amusements and leaves the conviction that what he sought in his spare time was relief from the tensions, difficulties, and monotony of frontier life. The element of chance was conspicuous in both his daily life and in his leisure time activities, but it was of a different nature. Money was the stake, not the pioneer's life. He risked the one daily as he went about his appointed tasks; he enjoyed risking the other when he set out to have a good time.

Humor is an intangible thing at best and difficult to record. Frontier humor is no exception. There is little of it to be found in the biographies. The pioneer enjoyed practical jokes. His wit was broad, not subtle. Usually a pioneer prank carried a lesson of some kind. Individuals whose idiosyncracies or faults could not be pointed out openly were made to see the light by

means of a practical joke whose meaning could not be misinterpreted.

The boisterous quality of the pioneer's fun was the outcome of his environment and the life he lived. Since the frontiersman lacked the cultural means of entertainment settled community life made possible, he found -- and created -- his own pastimes. The regrettable thing is that the biographers left so fragmentary an account of what these pastimes were.

The amusements in the compact frontier settlements east of the Mississippi consisted chiefly of wrestling, dancing, and cooperative enterprises such as corn-husking. Wrestling was a common exercise in the settlements on the Susquehanna River in 1777, according to the biographer of Moses Van Campen. Usually it was done in good fun, but occasionally it would have a more serious aspect. There were two types of settlers living along the Susquehanna, the squatters or "Indian-landmen," who received their title directly from the Indians, and the regular settlers who took their title from the government. Sometimes feeling between the groups would come to the surface. In one such instance, when the squatters challenged the settlers to a wrestling match, Van Campen was chosen to represent the settlers. "Gentlemanly arrangements were made so that no unfair advantage might be taken, but that each of the combatants might

have an equal chance. Both were to stand perfectly still till the question was put 'are you ready?' As soon as this was put and answered it was considered perfectly fair to take all the advantage you possibly could."<sup>229</sup> Van Campen saw to it that it was he who asked the question, and he succeeded immediately in throwing his opponent upon his neck and shoulders. A second try was made, and Van Campen was again successful, as he reports, though with greater difficulty:

"I slipped his lock and made out in the struggle to obtain a firm foothold upon the ground and as soon as I felt it, I gave him the hoist in my turn, took the hip lock upon him, that is, threw my hip under him, bent forward with my hand clenched in his trowsers, near the waistband, raised him and swung him through the air with his feet extended and hit a tall militia man, six feet high, knocked him down and several others at his side and left my man in their midst, all kicking and tumbling in a heap."<sup>230</sup>

Children on the frontier had to find much of their entertainment in the domestic activities of the family. Dr. Daniel Drake spent his childhood on the Kentucky frontier, and as a twelve-year old boy, helped with the cooking, and with the making of butter, cheese, and soap, and assisted in the butchering. He was forced to make these his amusements as well as his tasks. As he grew older, he recalled in later life, he was able to participate in corn husking bees. The competition and antagonisms engendered by these events impressed him greatly. Whisky circulated freely and helped to make

tempers short. Captains were chosen by acclamation, and the rival teams then descended upon the rick of corn, using every device imaginable to secure the smaller half of the corn rick by moving the dividing rail or by surreptitiously moving the corn to the other side. The victors would march in triumph around the defeated party to the accompaniment of lusty shouts. "Then came the supper, in which the women had been busily employed, and which always included a pot pie. Either before or after eating, the fighting took place; and, by midnight, the sober were found assisting the drunken home."<sup>231</sup>

The rendezvous was the distinctive social event on the trappers' frontier. The biographer of Kit Carson describes the outward aspects of the rendezvous on the Green River in the heart of the fur country, but he gives no details of the merrymaking:

In some unexplained way intelligence had been conveyed, through the wilderness, to the widely dispersed trappers, that a Fair for trading, would be held at a very commodious and well-known spot on the above-mentioned stream [the Green]. .... Here they reared their camps and built their roaring fires. Band after band of trappers and traders came in with loud huzzas. Within a few days between two and three hundred men were assembled there, with five or six hundred horses or mules. .... Before all these huts, fires were burning at all times of the day, and food was being cooked and devoured by these ever-hungry men. .... It was indeed a wild, weird-like, semi-barbaric Fair which was thus held in the very heart of the wilderness. Men of many nationalities were present, in every variety of grotesque costume; and not a few Indians were there, with scarcely any costume at all. For nearly two months the

Fair continued, with comings and goings, while hill and plain often resounded with revelry.<sup>232</sup>

The rendezvous gave the trappers an opportunity to swap yarns and compare trapping experiences. Above all, it afforded them the opportunity of talking to their heart's content before returning to the solitude of the fur country.

Dancing was a popular pastime on all the frontiers. The type of dance varied widely from region to region. The biographer of Kit Carson relates that "the fandango is so much an institution in a town of the size of Taos [New Mexico], that, during the winter, scarcely a night passes without a dance."<sup>233</sup> A grand ball celebrated the close of the California Constitutional Convention of 1849. "In the whirl of the waltz, a plain, dark, nun-like robe would be followed by one of pink satin and gauze; next, perhaps, a bodice of scarlet velvet, with gold buttons, and then a rich figured brocade.... The band consisted of two violins and two guitars, whose music made up in spirit what it lacked in skill. .... The refreshments consisted of turkey, roast-pig, beef, tongue, and patés, with wines and liquors of various sorts, and coffee. .... The ladies began to leave about two o'clock, but an hour later the dance was still going on with spirit."<sup>234</sup> Such a function would not have interested a frontiersman such as Big-Foot Wallace. On his way back to Virginia

in the 1840's, Wallace stopped in New Orleans to see the sights. He attended a "Quadroon Ball," but remarked to a chance acquaintance that he was disappointed because the "stampede dance," the "Texas national dance," had not been called. His acquaintance asked for a description, and Wallace was glad to oblige him:

The "Stampede" is danced in this way: The ladies range themselves on one side of the room, and the gentlemen on the other. Then one of the gentlemen neighs, and if a lady "whinnies" in answer, they both step forward, and become partners for the dance. If the gentleman is very homely, and, after neighing three times, no lady should answer, he steps out of the "ring," and hopes for better luck next time.

When the couples are all paired off in this way, the manager calls out, "Gallopade all," and all "lope" around the room briskly three or four times. Then the gentlemen "curvet" to their partners, and the ladies coquettishly back their ears and kick up at the gentlemen. Then the ladies canter up to the gentlemen, who rear and plunge for a while, then seize the ladies' hands, and pace gracefully off in couples around the room. First couple then wheel and go off at a two-forty lick, second couple ditto, and so on till the race becomes general, when the manager calls out, "Whoa!" and everybody comes to a sudden halt. The manager then calls out, "Walk your partners;" "pace your partners;" "trot your partners;" and "gallopade all" again, faster and faster, until the "sprained" and "wind-galled" and "short stock" begin to "cave in," when he calls out "Boo!" and throws his hat in the "ring." A general "stampede" follows; the gentlemen neigh, curvet, and pitch; the ladies whinny, prance, and kick, chairs and tables are knocked over, lights blown out and everybody tumbles over everybody else, till the whole set is piled up in the middle of the room; and so the dance ends. <sup>255</sup>

The biographer did not cite references for the story, and Wallace may have been inebriated at the time, but the mood of the frontier dance is there.

Few descriptions of theatrical performances were found. In 1808 the frontier was not far removed from the city of Cincinnati, where Daniel Drake was establishing himself as an independent doctor. Drake joined a debating society, and the group produced several "private theatricals" in which the men took the parts of both males and females.<sup>236</sup> Lake's circus is reported as having played in Hays City, Kansas during August, 1871, and J. W. Buel, the author, states that "it was a rare occasion to see a circus so far West at that time ...."<sup>237</sup>

Horse racing was more to the taste of the western plainsmen. Buffalo Bill was addicted to it, according to his biographer, and on one occasion "put up all his available cash, even to the last paper five-cent piece. His winnings amounted to just seven hundred dollars in cash, three jack knives, two scalps and a two-stringed fiddle."<sup>238</sup> He was not always so fortunate.

The frontiersman with money in his pocket was certain to spend some or all of it for drink. Frank Winch's description of cowboys in Wichita in 1875 brings to mind Frederic Remington's picture of a similar scene:

They ["Pawnee Bill" Lillie and a friend] stopped for a couple of days at Wichita for there was an unusual gathering of cowboys, who had driven in cattle for shipment to the eastern markets, and day and night without pause or let up they were "whooping things up to a finish." It wasn't in the nature of a cowboy to overlook a chance like this, so they drank and galloped, fired off revolvers, and gambled, danced and sang, yelled and got sentimental, and slept and woke up, and started pandemonium all over again, until their money was gone. They would then return to their different ranches, carrying little else with them than thoughts of the "high old time" they had had; and they cherished and dwelt in these recollections until they had saved up more money and opportunity once more came their way to visit town again.<sup>239</sup>

Killings would sometimes follow in the wake of such celebrations. Wild Bill Hickok participated in such an event in 1858 on the Kansas-Nebraska frontier, and "the row which followed as a matter of course, resulted in the killing of only one man, a stage driver, by Alf. Slade, one of the company bosses."<sup>240</sup>

Hunting exhibitions appealed to the frontiersmen. Samuel J. Bayard records that among the Californians in 1846 the "hunting and capture of wild horses and cattle was a favorite amusement with them, and the practice of this sport made them bold and skilful in the saddle. At full gallop they would throw the lasso or hurl the lance with unerring certainty and precision."<sup>241</sup> Buffalo Bill's contest with Billy Comstock to discover which was to bear the title of "champion buffalo-killer

of America" attracted much attention. Five hundred dollars were wagered, and a crowd gathered. Cody won without much difficulty, and ended the contest in typical Cody style by driving a buffalo almost into the spectators and then killing it at their feet.<sup>242</sup> Sometimes the tables were turned, and travellers and sportsmen from the east or from foreign countries would provide amusement for the frontiersmen. Such events became fairly common after 1870. The visit of the Grand Duke Alexis to the West in 1872 was the most notable.<sup>243</sup>

#### Frontier humor

The tall story and the practical joke were the frontiersman's chief outlets for his sense of humor. In the case of the stories, the teller often got his effect by exaggeration. Big-Foot Wallace, for example, while out hunting deer in Texas about the year 1838, was attacked and pursued by a pack of wolves. When he told the story he related that he managed to outrun them, but that he "split the air so fast with my nose that it took the skin off of it, and for a week afterward it looked like a peeled onion."<sup>244</sup> Wallace's account of the stampede dance quoted above has much of the same element in it.

The practical joke was just what its name implied -- it served a purpose. At one time while Moses Van Campen was serving as a soldier on the Pennsylvania

frontier in 1779, he and his company were sent to bring in some settlers in anticipation of an Indian raid. One of the members of the company was a braggart, Lieutenant Hays, who insisted on recounting all the feats of daring and bravery he had performed in the past and would perform in the future. The rest of the party soon tired of Hays' braggadocio, and Van Campen and his friend Salmon decided to put his bravery to a test. They arranged to have the party stop at a river, Van Campen and Salmon would put on Indian clothes, and when Hays was sent out to look for Indian tracks, they would rush out and frighten him. The scheme worked as planned:

Hays, frightened near to death, turned upon his heels and began to run, with the utmost speed, crying out as loud as he could yell, "Boys-in-the-house! Boys-in-the-house! Engens! Engens! -- Boys-in-the-house! Engens!" He continued to run with all his might, not stopping before entering the house, and in his haste stubbed his foot against the door-sill, which threw him, with his whole length upon the floor. The soldiers, instead of being pale through fear, were immediately convulsed with laughter, which continued to break forth, peal after peal, as though it could find no end. The Indians too, who had occasioned the alarm, came in directly after, and joined in the sport. Hays perceiving his mistake, showed by his appearance, that he felt extremely mortified. During the remainder of their march, however, he made no further boasts of his extraordinary courage. <sup>245</sup>

A somewhat similar situation is reported by the biographer of James Capen Adams, the bear hunter of the Sierra Nevadas. Adams had been on an antelope hunt, had

succeeded in killing more animals than the party could carry back to camp, and he therefore ordered one of his men, an Indian, to remain and guard the meat. When Adams returned, he found the guard asleep. Determined to teach him a lesson, Adams covered himself with a bearskin that he had used as a saddle blanket, and with this frightened the Indian, who ran pell-mell back to camp. Adams returned to the camp shortly after, and amused himself further by listening to the exaggerated story the Indian was telling, in which he described the bear as "not so very large, but exceedingly fierce." The joke did not have quite the effect Adams anticipated, however, for when he confessed his part of the prank, the Indian refused to believe that he had not actually seen a bear.<sup>246</sup>

#### Superstitions and remedies

Viewed from the vantage point of the twentieth century, frontier remedies should be classified among the lighter aspects of pioneer life. Lack of medical facilities on the frontier forced the pioneers to exercise their ingenuity in finding treatments for the lesser ills which befell them. In characteristic style Big-Foot Wallace specified his treatment for snake bite. "In going through a thick chaparral to-day, my pony was bitten on the leg by a rattlesnake. An old hunter told

me to chew up some tobacco, and tie it on the wound, which I did, and, except a slight swelling, no bad results followed from the bite. (I have seen tobacco used frequently since as a remedy for the bite of a rattlesnake; and there is no doubt it is a good one, but not equal to whisky or brandy taken in large quantities.)"247

Tobacco was useful as a stimulant as well, according to the biographer of Captain David L. Payne. Payne had been sent on a long and difficult overland journey, in which he was forced to cover 365 miles in 100 hours, which allowed him little time for rest. Before reaching his destination, "Payne had to rub tobacco in his eyes to keep from falling asleep on the way."248 While engaged in providing game for the outlying posts in New Mexico in the 1870's, California Joe (whose surname seems never to have been known) was attacked by a spotted panther. Joe fought off the lion with his knife, but he received severe lacerations about the neck. ".... but for his great knowledge of the medicinal virtues contained in several plants in convenient proximity, he would surely have died of his wounds. He was still able to secure the plants needed, from which he prepared a balsamic poultice with which he bound up his neck, the properties of the plants being to stay the flow of blood and absorb the poison which always appears after

the bite of an animal. But when the wound healed a very large and prominent scar remained, which marked him until his death."<sup>249</sup> On the Missouri frontier about 1812, says the biographer of Father John Clark, the clergyman bathed frequently in ice water. To this account the writer added an illuminating footnote:

The author tried the practice of bathing the feet in cold water in the morning, while traveling on these frontiers, and found it invariably injurious to him. The application of cold water to the feet and body of more than one-fourth is positively injurious. To others it is highly beneficial. This depends on the temperament. Mr. Clark had a sanguine-nervous temperament, and received benefit. The writer has a bilious-nervous temperament, and the circulation sluggish. To such, the experience and observation of fifty years have taught that the cold bath is injurious, while the hot bath is exhilarating. Careful observation and experience are the only safe guides. It is sheer quackery to prescribe the same treatment to all persons.<sup>250</sup>

If superstition held a strong grip on the minds of the frontiersmen, it is not evident from the biographies. The only two cases reported were by Big-Foot Wallace, the Texas ranger. Having been attacked by wolves, Wallace was at a loss to discover the reason for their assault until he discovered that a bottle of assafoetida he carried had been broken and run over his clothes. "I had often heard that assafoetida would attract wolves, but I always thought, before this, that it was a sort of old-woman's yarn; but it's a fact ...."<sup>251</sup>

Wallace was given a dried terrapin's tail by an Indian squaw to protect him from all danger of bullets in battle. But he was not so certain of its worth: "In the many 'scrimmages' I have been in since then with the Mexicans and Indians, I have had more faith in the efficacy of a tree or a stump to protect me from bullets, than in the charm she gave me."<sup>252</sup>

Whatever the reasons might have been, frontier biographers depreciated the lighter aspects of pioneer life by failing to include complete descriptions of the fun they had. Piecing the fragments together brings the conviction that on the more settled agricultural frontier different kinds of recreation were organized which were actively participated in by all the members of the community. Chance and the competitive spirit were characteristic of pioneer recreation. Judged by eastern standards, many of their amusements were boisterous and rude. When the frontiersmen did have the opportunity to relax, however, they sought relief from the strains of every day life on the frontier. Biography reflects the fact that when they played, they played hard.

## Chapter IX

## GLIMPSES OF FRONTIER CULTURE

Compared with other aspects of pioneer life, education receives a surprising amount of attention from the frontier biographers. Educational systems on the frontier, or the lack of them, are not given systematic consideration. But the authors apparently felt that their readers were interested in the early educational opportunities of the frontiersmen, and few of them neglected the subject altogether. An occasional author, like John C. Duval, the biographer of Big-Foot Wallace, warned the reading public that the product of his pen might not stand the test of criticism as a literary production because of his limited education. Much of this concern with formal learning sprang from a feeling of inferiority by both the biographers and their subjects. They felt their lack of formal education greatly and wanted to justify themselves to their readers in the east who had the advantages of a well developed system of schools.

As portrayed by the biographers, the pioneer attitude toward education was not at all that of opposition to "book-larnin'", as tradition has it. Instead, they uniformly exhibited a very favorable attitude toward schools, and were willing to sacrifice in order to secure

them. They gave freely of their time in erecting the early school houses; they taxed themselves to support them; they suffered the inconvenience of taking in the teacher as boarder and roomer to secure the advantages of an education for their children. It was the older people in the community, not the youngsters, who felt this urge for learning. But the political leaders on the frontier, and especially the frontiersmen themselves as they grew older, emphasized the necessity for establishing schools.

The obstacles to be overcome were great. Foremost among these were the untrained teachers who made a scanty living teaching school and were utterly devoid of professional principles and methods. A community considered itself fortunate if the school master did not have a criminal record. Community pressure as well as the decision of the teacher to move on made teacher tenure short. The pioneers were often in the disagreeable position of trying to encourage their children to attend school under a master who was known to be a drunkard or a criminal and who was unjust, tyrannical, and even cruel toward the students.

Coupled with this difficulty was the lack of teaching materials. Books were the sole media of instruction, and they were exceedingly scarce, as the accounts testify. Those available were poorly bound,

the typography was execrable, and the cost was high. Lack of ready cash on the frontier made it impossible to purchase new books.

Irregular attendance at school was a serious handicap to the frontier child. There was no law compelling him to go, and he often chose to stay away. Often he went only because of the pressure brought to bear at home, but he freed himself of that as soon as possible. The school year was short because work at home came first, and in winter, when the work was lightest, weather conditions made attendance at school a hardship. The school buildings were not conducive to study, for they were ill-lighted, ill-ventilated, and highly uncomfortable.

The interest which the clergymen and missionaries on the frontier took in education speaks well for the characters of these men. Prominent missionaries among the Indians of the far West showed unusual foresight by working with tireless zeal for the education of Indian youth. These mission workers grasped the implications of the Indian problem with more statesmanship than did the politicians on the eastern seaboard.

Biographies indicate that the pioneer's cultural interest was limited to schools and formal education. Chautauquas, lectures, art, museums, music, poetry -- none of the other aspects of culture receive any attention

from the biographers. First things come first, and to the practical pioneer mind, the immediate problem was that of establishing schools.

Education was a cooperative venture on the frontier, participated in by those who were to benefit from the school. The teacher was secured by the promise of families with children to provide board, lodging, and clothing. If any money were to be paid the school master, it was raised by subscription, each patron paying in relation to the number of children he was sending to the school. The school house itself was cooperatively built, though usually the entire community turned out with axes and teams to aid in its construction.<sup>253</sup> As time went on, education was conceived of as a community project, disregarding the fact that not all benefited directly from it. In 1884 the people of Sioux Falls, South Dakota offered Bishop Hare \$10,000 in cash and lands if he would raise an equal amount and establish a school for girls. He succeeded in doing so, and the school opened its doors in September, 1885.<sup>254</sup> Occasionally a military man would concern himself with the problem of education. In addressing the Territorial Legislature of Indiana Territory in 1809, Governor William Henry Harrison assumed that the people of the territory would establish a system of education, and he strongly urged that the "military branch" be not forgotten. He

recommended limited military training for the "inferior schools and wanted the university to include a professorship of tactics, in which all the sciences connected with the art of war may be taught."<sup>255</sup> Commodore Robert Stockton, as naval commander of California following its conquest, provided a financial basis for the school system:

Upon the first organization of a civil government in California, Commodore Stockton ordained that the proceeds of the confiscation of enemy's property, or of property which escheated to the existing government for the want of an owner, should be appropriated to the construction of school-houses and for the employment of teachers and the support of a free school. The first school-house was built at San Francisco, and the first free-school organized, and put in operation by the funds thus appropriated by Stockton.<sup>256</sup>

The willingness of parents to make all manner of sacrifices in order that their children might have an education evidences their attitude toward the importance of schooling. Some of the boys felt quite differently. When, in 1856, the first school was built in the settlement around the Kickapoo Agency where the Codys were living, Bill Cody was enrolled. Before the establishment of the school, however, Mr. Cody had hired a Miss Lyons to tutor the five girls and two boys in the Cody family. Bill did not take advantage of his opportunities, however, for after a love affair which resulted in a fight, he left school and made several

overland freighting trips. When he was fourteen his mother persuaded him to go back to school -- for ten weeks.

"This was the longest term of school he ever attended, and it is doubtful if all the schooling he ever received would aggregate six months, though he is now comparatively well educated, acquired almost wholly by extensive travel and association with polished people."<sup>257</sup> Major Gordon Lillie,

"Pawnee Bill," had much the same experience as a boy.

At thirteen he wanted to strike out for himself, but his father insisted that he continue until he graduated from high school.<sup>258</sup> Bishop Hare had established St. Paul's School for Boys at the Yankton Agency in South Dakota in 1873-1874. His biographer's description of the eagerness which the Indian boys exhibited toward the prospect of going to school offers a contrast to the attitude of the white boys. "He had recently met on the prairie two boys trudging from their homes at Santee, thirtyfive miles away. .... But another Indian boy made his way on foot to St. Paul's from Flandreau, a hundred and fifty miles away, and two others from Cheyenne Agency, a distance of two hundred miles."<sup>259</sup>

Wilburn Waters furnishes an example of a frontiersman who, as a young man of eighteen, realized his lack of education and determined to remedy it:

Having had no education or good counsel up to this time he felt his great need of both, and determined to go to his oldest brother,

William P. Waters, for advice and direction, who was keeping a school at a place called Whiteoak Grove, in Wilkes [North Carolina]. He carried out his determination, was kindly received by his brother, taken into the school, where he continued six months, paying his board at a neighboring house by working nights and mornings and Saturdays. While going to school he cut down and split up two very large hickory trees for a flax and cotton shirt.<sup>260</sup>

Captain Jack Crawford, the "Poet Scout of the Black Hills," is an illustration of the illiterate boy who became famous. Crawford never had the opportunity of going to a school of any kind, and at fifteen, when he enlisted in the Union army, he did not know a single letter of the alphabet, according to his biographer. His start in education was made as he lay in a hospital recovering from wounds received in the battle of Spottsylvania Court House. His nurse taught him the alphabet and he soon learned to read and write. He later became famous on the plains as a poet, and a collection of his poems, entitled The Poet Scout, was published in 1879. One of his better ballads is included in Appendix C.<sup>261</sup>

The schoolhouse of the trans-Appalachian frontier was a crude and uncomfortable affair. Timothy Flint was enough of the historian to include a clear description of the typical school in the days of Daniel Boone:

It will not be amiss to describe this school-house; for it stood as a sample of thousands of west country school-houses of the present day [1833]. It was of logs, after the usual fashion of the time and place. In dimension, it was spacious and convenient. The chimney was peculiarly ample, occupying one entire

side of the whole building, which was an exact square. Of course, a log could be "snaked" to the fire place as long as the building, and a file of boys thirty feet in length, could all stand in front of the fire on a footing of the most democratic equality. Sections of logs cut out here and there furnished ample light and air instead of windows. The surrounding forest furnished ample supplies of fuel. A spring at hand, furnished with various gourds, quenched the frequent thirst of the pupils. A ponderous puncheon door, swinging on substantial wooden hinges, and shutting with a wooden latch, completed the appendages of this primeval seminary.<sup>262</sup>

Reverend John Peck, the biographer of Father John Clark, corroborates Flint's description in most details, but represents the schoolhouse as somewhat more uncomfortable than did Flint. The schoolhouses, said Peck, were the "most inferior of the whole race of 'log-cabins.'" The floor was the earth, and a slab placed under the opening left as a window served the purpose of desks. Father Clark taught in Kentucky about 1796, and after he had established himself as a teacher of unusual competence, the community honored him by erecting a school which was unusually fine for that period. The windows were covered with paper saturated with coon oil. "And as quite an advancement in the style of frontier school houses at that period, planks, as the term was in Kentucky, or boards an inch and a quarter thick, cut at a saw-mill on a branch of Crab Orchard Creek, made a tight floor. It is doubtful if out of Lexington, and a half-dozen other towns, a school house

existed in the country settlements with any other floor than the natural earth beaten hard, until this improvement was made both as an accommodation and a compliment to their teacher."<sup>263</sup> School houses in Missouri about 1850 were similar.<sup>264</sup> The school buildings erected for the Indian children by Bishop Hare in the Dakotas were of stone, but the lack of adequate plumbing and heating facilities made life in these boarding schools far from comfortable.<sup>265</sup>

The curriculum of the common school on the middle western frontier was severely limited. "Spelling, reading, writing and the mere elements of simple arithmetic were all that these and many others pretended to teach."<sup>266</sup> The quality of the teachers and their lack of preparation, together with the utter inadequacy of books, was chiefly responsible for this condition. On the Illinois frontier, Reverend Peck asserts, some of the priests and "elderly females" taught religion and the native language [French] to the children. This instruction was inadequate, but it was preferable to the treatment accorded to the children in some schools kept by masters who were drunkards, of violent and uncontrolled tempers, who themselves were illiterate. Flint relates an incident in the school attended by Daniel Boone. The master was a violent-tempered Irishman who used the recess period to drink whisky in the woods surrounding the school.

The ill-treatment accorded the students as the liquor took effect on the teacher finally prompted Boone and his companions to substitute an emetic for the whisky in the Irishman's bottle. The incident caused a furore in the community, Boone was reprimanded, but the teacher was dismissed.<sup>267</sup>

But the teachers were not the only source of discipline problems. The age of the pupils in the school varied widely, and eighteen and twenty year old boys sat side by side with youngsters of eight and nine. The standard of conduct demanded at home were just as diverse, and this was reflected in the children's conduct at school. In the region where Father Clark began teaching, the tradition had taken root that at Christmas time the students took complete charge of the school, leaving the schoolmaster without any authority. In communities where public opinion permitted, the students would require the teacher to provide sufficient cherry bounce, that is, whisky in which cherries had been steeped, to supply all the children. Failure to do so on the part of the teacher sometimes meant severe punishment, such as a ducking in the nearest river. The teacher just preceding Father Clark, says his biographer, was not at all adverse to this tradition and provided refreshments so lavishly that half the students got sick, some had to be carried home to their parents, "and the

master required a wide path, and made tracts in a zigzag form, in reaching his lodging place."<sup>268</sup> The incident helped to oust him, and when Clark took charge, he determined to use a different approach to discipline, and immediately tried an experiment in democracy. "He read a few plain, simple rules, and proposed them to the scholars for adoption, and even gave opportunity for objections to be made, or alterations proposed. This was another new feature in school-discipline and called forth expressions of astonishment and approbation from the older scholars. .... The code appeared so reasonable and proper, that a large majority seemed anxious for its adoption at once, and every one present gave hearty assent."<sup>269</sup> The plan worked so well that Father Clark had no trouble at Christmas time.

Without books or other equipment, even a superior teacher such as Father Clark is reported to have been, found instruction exceedingly difficult. One of Clark's first steps when taking over the school in Kentucky in 1796 was to ascertain what books the students had available. Each was expected to bring a book from home which was to be used in the teaching of reading.

One had a mutilated copy of Dilworth's "New Guide to the English Tongue;" another showed a volume of old sermons; a third had the "Romance of the Forest," an old novel, and a specimen of the "yellow covered literature" of a former age. A fourth, fifth, and sixth, could show Testaments or pieces of Bibles, with the binding in tatters,

and the print dim, and paper brown, such as were gotten up for sale to merchants in that day. Some came without books or any aid to learn the art and mystery of spelling and reading. The Psalter that had descended from some Virginia families whose ancestors belonged to the Colonial English Church, was presented by three or four more. The marvellous story of "Valentine and Orson," answered for the whole stock of literature for a family of three children. .... There was not a book in the three retail stores in Lincoln County, for sale, and it was between fifty and sixty miles to Lexington where purchases could be made.<sup>270</sup>

Noah Webster's First Part of a Grammatical Institute of the English Language, more commonly known as the American Spelling-Book, first published in 1783, had not yet reached the backwoods region of Kentucky by 1796. When Father Clark returned from a business trip to Lexington, bringing with him two dozen of Webster's spellers, "it was a real holiday for the boys and girls to look over these books."<sup>271</sup> Conditions on the Illinois frontier at the opening of the new century were even worse. "The price of a single copy of 'Dilworth's New Guide to the English Tongue' as the title page read, was one dollar. And none but old copies of the coarsest paper, the refuse of old stores and printing offices, sold at auction, were brought to this remote frontier."<sup>272</sup>

The private libraries of individual frontiersmen were not always as meager as Father Clark's experience indicated. Daniel Drake, a pioneer resident and doctor of Cincinnati, spent his childhood on the Kentucky frontier. His formal education was scanty, but he learned from

nature and from his father's library, which consisted of the Bible, Rippon's Collection of Hymns, Dilworth's Spelling Book, an Almanac, and the famous History of Montellion -- a romance of chivalry. To these were afterwards made considerable additions, as the young Daniel advanced in the scholastics. He got Webster's Spelling Book -- at that time quite a novelty -- Entick's Dictionary, Scott's Lessons, Aesop's Fables, and Franklin's Life."<sup>273</sup>

Like Lincoln, Drake resorted to borrowing books as his intellectual curiosity developed. Some pioneers prized certain books highly. On what is said to the first expedition of whites across the plains with the intention of settling, John Bidwell "brought his Burritt's Astronomy and Celestial Atlas across the plains in 1841, though all else had to be discarded."<sup>274</sup> Wild Bill Hickok's education was desultory, but Peters' Life of Kit Carson and The Trapper's Guide interested him greatly. "The former made such an impression upon him that he declared to his brothers that he would 'one day beat anything Kit Carson ever did or attempted.'"<sup>275</sup>

It is noteworthy that the most detailed descriptions of frontier schools and education are found in books by authors who experienced life on the frontiers east of the Mississippi River and wrote about it. The biographies of frontiersmen in the far West have little to say about education. A system of schools, like

organized recreation and amusements, implies the existence of somewhat stable community life. The biographers of pioneers who lived on the frontiers between the Appalachians and the Mississippi described such an agricultural frontier. The authors of the lives of men like Kit Carson, Bill Cody, Big-Foot Wallace, and John Fremont, on the other hand, were dealing with a highly mobile frontier where conditions were inimical to the creation of a thoroughly organized system of education. This explains in large measure the failure of the biographers of the far West to discuss in detail the schools of that area. In addition, the influence of the Atlantic seaboard and its traditions was greater in the immediate trans-Appalachian region than it was farther west. The high regard for formal education which characterized the gentry in the original thirteen states was felt more keenly in the frontier regions of Kentucky, Tennessee, Indiana, and Illinois than it was in Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, and the great plains. The desire to imitate and emulate was also stronger.

References to aspects of culture other than schools and education are notably absent from the frontier biographies. Edward Mansfield, the biographer of Daniel Drake, makes mention that a group of young men in Cincinnati in 1807 formed a debating society. "At each meeting, the subject was chosen and the speakers appointed for the

next discussion; and, as at that time there were many important and interesting public questions, and the members belonged to all the professions and pursuits of society, we may well suppose that these discussions were really improving -- at once exciting, and developing the intellectual activities.\*<sup>276</sup> Though the frontier line ran but little west of Cincinnati in 1807, the very existence of a debating society is some evidence that the community had already adopted a post-frontier point of view.

Art, music, and poetry, as evidences of culture, are not discussed in the biographies. The long evenings around the hearth or the campfire did produce both music and poetry, but most of it went unrecorded. The frontiersmen enjoyed the rhythm of poetry, and some of the poems produced by frontier characters is recorded in the biographies. Captain John C. Crawford, or Captain Jack, the Poet Scout, as he came to be known, wrote prolifically about the West as he himself experienced it. By present day standards it was not good poetry, but it appealed to the frontiersmen, for Crawford caught their moods. "The Courtship and Marriage of California Joe" is a representative example. Four stanzas suffice to suggest its lilt and rhythm, but the entire poem is included in Appendix C:

While drinking in the grandeur,  
 And resting in my saddle,  
 I heard a gentle ripple,  
 Like the dipping of a paddle.  
 I turned toward the eddy --  
 A strange sight met my view:  
 A maiden, with her rifle,  
 In a little bark canoe.

She stood up in the centre,  
 The rifle to her eye;  
 I thought (just for a second)  
 My time had come to die.  
 I doffed my hat and told her  
 (If it was all the same)  
 To drop her little shooter,  
 For I was not her game.

She dropped the deadly weapon,  
 And leaped from the canoe.  
 Said she: "I beg your pardon,  
 I thought you were a Sioux;  
 Your long hair and your buckskin  
 Looked warrior-like and rough;  
 My bead was spoiled by sunshine,  
 Or I'd killed you, sure enough."

"Perhaps it had been better  
 You dropped me then," said I;  
 "For surely such an angel  
 Would bear me to the sky."  
 She blushed and dropped her eyelids;  
 Her cheeks were crimson red;  
 One half-shy glance she gave me,  
 And then hung down her head.<sup>277</sup>

The neglect of evidences of culture other than the interest taken in education, is further evidence of the incomplete nature of the portrait of the frontier as drawn by the biographers. Perhaps they were correct in believing that the public for which they were writing would not be interested in these aspects of pioneer life. They were not writing for future generations avid for

the social history of a dramatic period in American history.

A few of the biographers attempted to enhance the interest of their recitals by couching their stories in the language of their subjects, as accurately as they could recall it. John C. Duval, the biographer of Big-Foot Wallace, is an example. Others, such as J. W. Buel, and John M. Burke, quoted freely the conversations of the frontiersmen they depicted. In doing so they have left a record of some of the colorful idioms, phrases, and peculiar expressions of the pioneers, though it is impossible to discover how typical or widespread these expressions really were. As in the case of many other tools, the pioneers did not hesitate to improvise and invent words if the occasion demanded. The vocabulary and phraseology of the West were not always elegant or refined, but they were highly functional and descriptive.

Since death in many different guises was a prominent feature of frontier life, it was spoken of in various ways. To send a man "up the spout" implied killing him without a trial or court-martial.<sup>278</sup> If, in conversation, a plainsman remarked that he intended to "call in your checks" he indicated that he intended to shoot the man to whom he was speaking.<sup>279</sup> At a rendezvous a fellow scout's only requiem might be the casual remark that he had gone "shuffling off this mortal coil"<sup>280</sup>

or had "pegged off."<sup>281</sup> "I has 'em to plant" was one way of expressing a responsibility for the burial of enemies killed in a gun fight.<sup>282</sup> Whisky and other spiritous liquors were variously known as "red-eye," "wake robin," "sour mash," or "Monongahela." If there was "sign" of "Mr. Lo" or "Mr. John" the frontiersmen knew that Indians were about, and that he needed to act quickly if he hoped to "save his hair" or avoid having his "sign taken in" by "dogwood switches" [Indian arrows]. Men like Wallace and Cody became greatly attached to the weapons which had served them well in dangerous situations, and they named them affectionately. To Wallace his rifle was "sweet lips" and his knife "old butch"<sup>283</sup> while Buffalo Bill christened his improved breech-loading needle gun "Lucretia Borgia" -- "in testimony of its murderous qualities."<sup>284</sup>

Life on the outermost frontiers was not conducive to the development of a culture resembling that found in the older regions. Aesthetic tastes and their various modes of expression are the by-products of a society in which at least a portion of the people have achieved considerable leisure and wealth. These conditions did not exist on the frontier. To the pioneer public schools represented the first step in the development of the finer things in life, and the biographies reflect the devotion felt by frontiersmen toward education.

## Chapter X

## PIONEER RELIGION AND MORALITY

Two kinds of biographical writing chiefly delineate pioneer religion and morality. Several frontier biographers chose as their subjects the itinerant preachers of circuit riders who dominated the religious life of the trans-Appalachian frontier, particularly that of Kentucky and Tennessee. These biographies are concerned primarily with the nature of the religious meetings which characterized the settlements east of the Mississippi, and with the activities of the circuit riders. A second group of annalists took as their subjects the frontier missionaries who did their work in the region beyond the Mississippi. These clergymen served both the Indians and the whites, and the portrayals of their lives are primarily concerned with an account of their difficult labors. These two kinds of biographies reflect the dissimilarities in religious life east and west of the Mississippi River. The church bodies which were interested in extending the Kingdom of God to the frontier were forced to adapt their methods and organization to the conditions found.

The Baptists, the Methodists, and the Presbyterians were the most active denominations at work among the pioneers, and receive the major attention from the

biographers. Few references are made to the work of the Catholics, the Lutherans, or the Episcopalians. The reason for this is not clear, for all of these bodies maintained home missions, and the Lutherans were particularly active in the middle west. Perhaps these denominations have been less zealous in recording the work of their frontier clergymen in biographical form. It is true, however, that the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians provided a form of religious experience and organization which appealed especially to the pioneers. The informality and lack of emphasis on ritual was a contributing factor. The emotional appeals made use of by these denominations greatly attracted the frontiersmen. A certain amount of resentment against Catholicism appears in the accounts, but it is primarily opposition to the work of the Catholic Church as represented by the missions in California in the early nineteenth century. The chroniclers of Fremont and Carson took exception to the powerful temporal position of the Catholic clergy in the California missions, and resented their dictatorial rule of the natives. In part this resentment was grounded in the frontiersman's respect for the individual and his freedom; in part, it had its own basis in envy of the prosperity of the missions and the clergy.

The pioneers participated in religious activities in somewhat the same manner and mood that marked

their amusements and recreations. Camp meetings and revivals provided an emotional outlet and an escape from the monotony and hardships of everyday life in much the same fashion as dances, horse races, or corn husking bees. Like these, religious meetings also provided an opportunity for the settlers to meet socially, and they welcomed all such chances. These factors did not operate to the same extent in the Far West. The distances were too great, and the communities were sufficiently scattered that the support of regular congregations was a financial burden too great for the settlers who had little ready cash and extensive debts.

Because the frontier narrators give most of their attention to the dramatic aspects of frontier religion, whether the camp meetings of the East, or the hardships of the missionary in the West, the impression is conveyed that religious convictions were not deep-seated among the pioneers. The social aspects of religious life, and the graphic portrayal of its emotional content, lend color to the conviction that most pioneers were not sincere. Such a judgment may be entirely erroneous, for religious motivation defies analysis. An account of a frontier conversion which was heart-felt and genuine may appear hypocritical and superficial when read a hundred years after it occurred, under conditions immeasurably different.

Clues to the moral atmosphere of the frontier are few in number and unrevealing in character. Of all the frontiersmen, the outlaws and guerrillas were most conscious of a moral code. Quite possibly this represents a form of defense mechanism or rationalization on the part of men whose position and status, even among the pioneers, was insecure. The other members of frontier society were too preoccupied with more pressing problems and could not, or did not, find the time to examine their motives or measure their deeds by moral and ethical standards. Among most of the early settlers killing an Indian carried no moral stigma because the issue involved was survival, and all other considerations were subordinated to it. The fact that frontiersmen and their portray-ers did not discuss moral codes is a significant index of pioneer character. There are few allusions even to sexual morality, and the few that occur are in veiled terms. The frontiersmen developed practical solutions to the physical demands for emotional outlets, but their biographers did not record them.

The decade from 1795 to 1805 is often titled the Great Revival by historians of the West. During this period the Methodists were particularly active on the Kentucky frontier. Father Clark's narrator estimates that in 1796 "the Methodists had five circuits in Kentucky, ten preachers in the traveling connection, and

1880 whites and 64 blacks in their societies."<sup>285</sup> By 1800, reports Minton Thrift, the biographer of Jesse Lee, "Methodist preachers were spread all over the United States, and had penetrated into the wilds of Upper Canada, and the province of Nova Scotia. They enumerated one hundred and fifty-six traveling preachers, and between sixty and seventy thousand church members."<sup>286</sup> The same author gives 1803 as the year in which camp meetings were first introduced, but modern historians fix the date somewhat earlier.<sup>287</sup>

The arrival of the circuit preacher in the backwoods settlements ushered in a period of great excitement and bustle. It made little difference, says the biographer of Father Clark, whether he happened to arrive on Sunday or any other day of the week, for everybody turned out, in working clothes, to be sure, but in a clean change specifically kept for such occasions. The settlers cared little to what denomination the visiting preacher belonged, so long as he could preach. The events which followed the arrival of the circuit rider are chronicled by John Mason Peck:

The youngsters of the family were on their horses before the sun peered his bright face over the hills of Georgia, and rode throughout the settlements, and hallooed at every cabin to give the inmates notice that "mother's preacher" had come, and would preach at 'Squire Redman's that day. Of course every body understood the hour for meeting would be twelve o'clock.

Though the people were scattered over the hills and along the valleys for many miles distant, the news spread, and by eleven o'clock men, women and children, two and three often on one horse, were approaching 'Squire Redman's plantation from every point of the compass. A full complement of dogs to every family were on foot, coursing along the margin of the woods near the pathway, smelling for game, and barking up hollow trees. The children of course, large and small, had to be taken, or the mothers could not go, and the dogs, accustomed to follow their masters and the horses would go, whether wanted or not. And should the young children cry and the dogs bark, both the preacher and hearers were used to such trifling annoyances, and never went into spasms.... In the vicinity of Mr. Redman's house, and near a large spring, was the "stand" for the circuit preacher, when the weather was favorable; and the dwelling house afforded shelter in stormy weather, for which the owner had provided rough moveable seats for the accommodation of his neighbors.<sup>288</sup>

The sermon itself usually lasted about an hour, but in addition there was "singing, praying, and conversation with persons in distress." As the afternoon wore on, the women went into the house to start the meal, " and by four o'clock, two or three tables were filled in succession by hungry guests, the men first served, the females next, and then the children. Bountiful were the supplies of meat, chickens, eggs, corn-dodgers, and sweet potatoes, with pickles, beets, cucumbers, and divers other condiments; enough to supply a whole settlement, including the dogs."<sup>289</sup>

Honored indeed was the family with whom the preacher made his home while in the settlement. The lady of the house insisted upon fixing up Father Clark's

clothes before he continued on his way, according to the biographer, and the clergyman in turn instituted family devotions and even left his own Bible with his hosts because there was none in the house. As a typical circuit rider, Father Clark's life was not an easy one. Horseback was the common means of transportation, but, in addition to not being a good rider and having a fear of horses, Father Clark also "had some singular scruples against using a beast of burden," and consequently he walked his circuit. While serving on the Illinois-Missouri frontiers between 1815 and 1830, his route totaled about two hundred and forty miles in length, and he preached from thirty to forty times as he made the circuit.<sup>290</sup> He rarely received all his salary of sixty-four dollars a year. The fifty dollars he actually received were paid him in silver coins.<sup>291</sup>

The revivals and camp meetings were the great events of pioneer religious life. John Mason Peck; who was a minister himself and well acquainted with Father Clark, recorded a meeting in which Clark participated:

It was a powerful time on the frontiers; there was shaking among the dry bones; and many a stout-hearted sinner fell as if slain before the Lord. There were three preachers present, each with gifts differing from those of his brethren. The first we shall describe, was considered as a sort of Boanerges [an appellation given by Christ to James and John and meaning "sons of thunder"] among his brethren; at least

so far as lungs and voice were concerned. And he used many "big words," quite beyond the comprehension of plain, illiterate people. Some supposed him to be a great preacher, and very learned, because they could not understand him. The second preacher was what the people called "a powerful exhorter." He could not work in the lead to any advantage, but he could follow a clear-headed preacher, and enforce the things said on the consciences of the people by persuasive language and apt illustrations with great effect. Mr. Clark after all did most of the real preaching, and every one on the ground heard him with fixed attention.

The meeting was held in the shade of the forest, where a "stand" had been prepared for the purpose. This was an elevated platform of split slabs, and a book board, breast high in front of the preacher, on which he might lean. Seats were made of the halves of small timbers, the ends of which were placed on logs, and covered over a space of ground large enough to accommodate several hundred hearers. In front of the stand was an open space, with low seats around, and called the altar, where the "mourners," or persons who were seriously impressed, were invited. At a late hour they separated and went to the houses of the people who lived within a convenient distance for refreshment and lodging. Prayer meetings were held at the houses at night, until late bedtime. Some families that came from a distance with wagons, brought provisions and encamped on the ground. Others .... were accommodated by the hospitality of the people, and invitations were given publicly each day, if any strangers had arrived, they would find a welcome. This was not a regular camp-meeting, for those religious gatherings had not been instituted.<sup>292</sup>

According to E. Douglas Branch, camp meetings did originate in 1794, the time of which Peck was writing. The meeting he described differed little from the camp meetings, except perhaps in size. When the Great Revival was at its height about 1800, attendance ran into

the thousands. The annalist of Jesse Lee, a colleague of Bishop Francis Asbury, reports that at the first camp meeting Lee attended there were between 2500 and 3000 hearers on Sunday and as many whites on Monday, but not as many blacks. Two stands for preaching had been erected, both of which were in use at the same time by some of the twenty-nine Methodist preachers who were present. On this occasion thirty-five souls were converted -- approximately one percent of those who came.<sup>293</sup> The same biographer intimates that there were "accidental evils" which accompanied the camp meetings, but that these originated with the "disorderly spectators, and not from the orderly worshippers who assemble for the sole purpose of spiritual benefit." The total effect, he declared, was "to inspire a spirit of devotion."<sup>294</sup>

The religious development of the Spanish settlements on the opposite edge of the American continent presents a deep contrast to that of the trans-Appalachian frontiers. The Catholic missions of California attracted the attention of the biographers of Kit Carson, and one of them particularly, Charles Burdett, discussed them in some detail, his information being drawn mostly from accounts and annals available to him at the time of writing. Burdett described the San Gabriel mission most minutely, probably because

he had the most data concerning it:

This is one of these extensive establishments formed by the Roman Catholic clergy in the early times in California, which form so striking a feature in the country. This Mission of San Gabriel, about the time of Carson's visit [ca. 1830], was in a flourishing condition. By statistical accounts, in 1829, it had 70,000 head of cattle, 1,200 horses, 3,000 mares, 400 mules, 120 yoke of working cattle, and 254,000 sheep. From the vineyards of the mission were made 600 barrels of wine, the sale of which produced an income of upwards of \$12,000. There were between twenty and thirty such missions in California at that time, of which San Gabriel was by no means the largest. .... The labor in these establishments was performed by Indian converts, who received in return a bare support, and a very small modicum of what was called religious instruction. Each mission had its Catholic priests, a few Spanish or Mexican soldiers, and hundreds, sometimes thousands of Indians.<sup>295</sup>

The political and religious autonomy of Catholic clergy impressed and disturbed Burdett. for, he said, "these monks were practically the sovereign rulers of California -- passing laws affecting not only property, but even life and death -- declaring peace and war against their Indian neighbors -- regulating, receiving, and spending the finances at discretion ...." The individual priests Burdett characterized as "generally ignorant and unlettered men, knowing little more than the mechanical rites of their church .... but they seem to have been personally devout, self-denying, and beneficent in their own simple way."<sup>296</sup> Samuel J. Bayard, the biographer of Commodore Robert F. Stockton, was not so generous when

he wrote in 1856. "It is said that the priests, who were aware of the existence of gold in California, concealed its discovery, and in various ways discouraged colonization, lest a knowledge of the abundance of the precious metals might lead to a large emigration, which would interfere with their ascendancy in California."<sup>297</sup>

While Spain held the Louisiana territory, states John Peck, an edict was issued permitting Protestants to enter the region only on condition that their children would be reared as Catholics. All but Catholic clergyman were excluded, but in spite of this Father Clark ministered to the religious needs of the Baptists, Methodists, and other protestants who came into the area after 1794. Meetings were held in private homes, at night, for fear of the Spanish authorities.<sup>298</sup>

Religious activities on the frontiers west of the Mississippi presented problems different from those of the Kentucky backwoods. Distances were immense, roads and means of transportation were inadequate and uncomfortable, and settlements were widely scattered. The most complete record of the characteristics of frontier missionary work in the Far West has been left by Robert L. Stewart, the biographer of Sheldon Jackson, perhaps the foremost Presbyterian missionary to the whites in the trans-Mississippi region.

Jackson's first assignment was on the frontier

in southern Minnesota, in a district extending over 13,000 square miles. Jackson preached, visited the sick, buried the dead, started Sunday schools, and distributed religious books and papers. Even during the coldest part of the year, from January 1 to April 1, 1860, Jackson remained active: he travelled 1,043 miles of which he walked 233; he met 64 appointments, chiefly church meetings, and preached to 1,858 individuals; the total contributions to general benevolence and church support came to \$11.58. But the figures do not reveal the fact that some of the trips were made in temperatures ranging as low as 28 degrees below zero; that he and Mrs. Jackson lost their way innumerable times and travelled, on one occasion, for twenty-seven miles without seeing a single human habitation; or that he narrowly escaped death by freezing by taking shelter overnight with a settler's family where he shared a bed with his host. Stewart quotes Jackson as writing to his parents that "... my last trip was 110 miles. Of that I walked eighty, and caught a ride of about thirty. .. Thursday I walked twenty-two miles. My arm, my nose and one side of my face, were frost-bitten. .. Last week, I took an extended tour of 175 miles back in the country, meeting with much encouragement and preaching every day. At one place a list of fifteen communicant members were secured with a view to the organization of a Presbyterian

Church. At another, I found ten communicants; at a third, eight or more; at a fourth, seven or eight."<sup>299</sup>

From 1869 to 1881 Jackson acted as superintendent of the western territory, comprising the present states of Nebraska, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah, together with parts of western Iowa and eastern Idaho and Nevada. The difficulties encountered were similar to those in Minnesota, but distances were greater. From July 15 to August 17, 1869 he travelled 2,300 miles by rail and 1,200 by stage coach. That he worked hard is witnessed by the fact that between August 1 and 16, 1869, he established embryonic churches in Helena, Montana, Rawlins and Laramie, Wyoming, Grand Island, Columbus, Blair, and Fremont, Nebraska. The church at Grand Island almost failed of organization because "the mosquitoes gathered in such numbers that it 'was not deemed expedient to preach.' The assembly remained long enough, as the record assures us, to organize a church, and elect two good elders, after which the congregation beat a hasty retreat."<sup>300</sup>

Frontier conditions demanded that religious work among the pioneers be manned by individuals who were able to adjust to conditions as they found them and to win the respect of the settlers with whom they worked. The circuit riders met these requirements in their own way. The missionaries in the West did likewise.

While on a trip in Colorado in 1870-1, Jackson conducted church services in a mining camp. The only building large enough was the one used for crushing ore, and the only available pulpit was the engine. The biographer, quoting a contemporary account, states that Jackson stood on the engine and delivered a rousing sermon. "That, says the writer, is the sort of men needed in these frontier settlements -- men who can "Stand on an engine" and preach. My friend Jackson, I know, would not hesitate, if he thought he could reach an old hardened sinner, to mount a locomotive and let fly a Gospel message at a group by the wayside while going at a speed of forty miles an hour."\*301

Mission work in the West was not generously supported by the regular church bodies. While serving in Minnesota, Jackson received only \$300 per year. At first missionaries were expected to pay their own traveling expenses. This was a real hardship when long trips had to be made on railroads and stage lines among the mountains, where the fare usually ranged from ten to twenty-five cents a mile. The problem was somewhat alleviated by the later policy of the church to furnish travelling expenses, but even so mission work would have been immeasurably impeded had not the railroads and stage lines been generous in providing passes granting free or reduced fares to clergymen. "The most notable

of all the long-distance transportation cards which Dr. Jackson has preserved," says his biographer, "is an annual for the year 1880, issued by the Gilmer, Salisbury & Co. Stage Line, which was good for free passage over all the lines of this company in Utah, Nevada, California, Colorado, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Dakota, Washington Territory, Wyoming, and Nebraska."<sup>302</sup> In spite of long and uncomfortable trips, cold and wet weather, heat, insects, inadequate pay, and discouraging small numbers of people interested in religion, the pioneer missionaries persisted in their efforts to bring the gospel to the frontier.

Morality on the frontier and the moral code of the frontiersmen is suggested, rather than explicitly stated, by occasional references in the biographies. The descriptions of western cow towns and mining settlements do little more than hint at the immorality which existed. References to specific types of vice, other than gambling and drinking, are generally couched in veiled terms. In fact, the annalists of the West leave the impression that immorality consisted chiefly of drinking and gambling. In describing conditions in the army on the northwest frontier in 1790, James Hall, a chronicler of William Henry Harrison, mentions only "the vice of intemperance" and gambling.<sup>303</sup> Kit Dalton, whose book is both autobiographical and biographical because he

himself served under Charles Quantrell, the guerrilla chief, says in describing a frontier character and comparing him with another, "He was in every way a moral man. Neither of these gentlemen ever took a drink across the bar. Neither of them was a habitue of questionable places."<sup>304</sup>

The now famous pledge exacted of every freighter entering the employ of Russell, Majors and Waddell found its way into more than one biography of western plainsmen. The moral code it attempted to establish was inclusive, for the employe agreed not to swear, drink, quarrel, or fight but to conduct himself honestly and faithfully toward his employers so as to win their confidence and respect. But J. W. Buel was not impressed by the efficacy of the oath. "This oath was the creation of Mr. Majors, who was a very pious and rigid disciplinarian; he tried hard to enforce it, but how great was his failure it is needless to say. It would have been equally profitable had the old gentleman read the riot act to a herd of stampeded buffaloes. And he believes it himself now."<sup>305</sup> Helen Cody Wetmore, who wrote her brother's biography, illustrates the fact that biographers of the frontier sometimes overlooked their ethical obligations as faithful reporters. She quotes the Major's pledge, but makes no mention of the fact that the men promised not to drink. At several

places in her book she depicts her brother as a teetotaler, which, according to recent inquiry, he certainly was not.<sup>306</sup>

Public opinion on the frontier sometimes condoned the killing of individuals under circumstances which at a later stage of development might have been a case for the courts. Buel, the biographer of Wild Bill Hickok, cites an instance when Bill was marshal of Abilene, Kansas. The details of the case are not given, but in the course of events, Hickok shot and killed Phil Cole, described by Buel as a gambler and trouble-raiser. "The killing of Cole was regarded by the community as a 'Christian act,' because it was like riding the country of a ferocious and destructive beast; but to make the act yet more righteous Bill raised the necessary money with which to give his victim a decent burial."<sup>307</sup> It is the same author who, still portraying Hickok, wrote specifically of his sense of sexual morality. While trapping on the Niobrara River on the Nebraska frontier, Hickok met a beautiful Sioux Indian girl who invited him to make his home with her brother and her. He did so, and the three lived in the closest intimacy for six months. "Notwithstanding this truly remarkable intimacy, in many particulars equally close as the most devoted man and wife, Bill always declared that the girl never lost her virtue, that her

honesty was almost phenomenal, for she would readily have sacrificed her life rather than have forfeited the jewel of her chastity."<sup>308</sup> Buel gives no authority other than Hickok's own word, and the incident reflected creditably on his subject. It is noteworthy as an illustration of the biographical whitewashing of which frontier authors were capable.

The guerrillas and outlaws who operated in the West after the Civil War took pride in the moral code they developed. Since public opinion condemned the life they led, men like Quantrell and the James brothers were meticulous in the observation of their personal standards. This is reflected especially in the book by Kit Dalton, who belonged to the Quantrell gang. "Outlaws rob banks, hold up trains and kill whoever may seek to thwart their undertaking," he states, "but they do not lie. The James boys' gang is above such a petty vice."<sup>309</sup> Dalton refuted the charge that the James brothers or their followers had killed a Mr. Long during a bank raid. The evidence he presents is revealing. "Mr. Long, the president of the bank, was shot. Mr. Long was unarmed. Cole Younger never shot an unarmed man in his life. Mr. Long was a close personal friend of the Reverend Mr. James, father of Frank and Jesse. There was not enough money in the whole state of Kentucky to induce either Frank or Jesse to do violence

to anyone who was a friend of their father, or to anyone who had ever done the old gentleman the slightest kindness."<sup>310</sup> Still speaking of Jesse James and his gang, of which Dalton was a part, he comments: "It mattered not how we acquired our funds, the bread we ate was honest bread, for it was paid for; and we always paid a liberal price for our raiment. I have seen him [Jesse James] borrow from a friend to give to the needy and in turn extort a loan from the enemy to repay his friend ...."<sup>311</sup> Courage and loyalty to friends were important components of the outlaw's moral code.

## Chapter XI

## LAW, JUSTICE, and POLITICS ON THE FRONTIER

Frontier biographers are noticeably remiss in their description of the legal and political framework of the West. There is considerable detail concerning specific lawless acts which occurred, but many of these are repetitions, and most of them are not very revealing as to legal or political structure. The biographers make occasional comments about the attitude of certain frontier communities toward the enforcement of law or its lack of enforcement, but more is left unsaid. Political institutions get meager treatment and little detail. Above all, if the pioneers felt any concern over democracy, the biographers do not give evidence of it. When personal rights were invaded, some solution was ordinarily found by the frontiersman, but it was action prompted by necessity, and apparently the pioneers gave little thought to the larger problems involved in maintaining a democratic way of life.

Pioneer biographies reveal that preservation of the individual's life was the first consideration from the frontiersman's point of view. Courts, trials, and judges were of secondary concern unless it was proved that they could successfully deal with this matter of basic importance. If an act of violence contained an

element of self-defense, or if a case could be made that the community benefited from the event, the crime was usually condoned by the community, regardless of the dictates of abstract justice. Usually the exigencies of the situation were such that the individual was forced to make the decision himself, without awaiting the action of legal machinery, assuming it existed. The extent of lawlessness on the frontier has been exaggerated. The standards as to what constitutes law and order change rapidly as civilization advances and settled community life becomes a fact.

This change in standards is suggested by the biographers. Three stages of legal development stand out. On the outermost frontier no legal machinery existed, and relationships were entirely on a personal basis -- individual vs. individual, individual vs. group, or group vs. group. There was no impartial institution which could be appealed to when conflict occurred. This stage, however, did not exist long, and the biographies reflect the fact. In the second stage some legal institutions existed, but they were largely ineffective. The machinery was there because some groups in the community demanded it and because, as the population grew, the need became obvious. But though the form of law was present, it was not uniformly looked upon as the final arbiter, and recourse was often

taken to extra-legal procedure. This was the transition period. The final stage was marked by the increasing prestige of the legal institutions and the recognition by all the groups in the community of its effectiveness. Extra-legal procedure still occasionally occurred, but it was rightly considered an aberration of the established process of law. When this stage had been reached, the frontier was gone.

American pioneers are justly famous for their ability to develop some kind of feasible government for their protection when the occasion demands. In writing the life of Matthew Phelps, Anthony Haswell reports that the settlement on the Big Black River north of New Orleans, of which Phelps was a member, was threatened, in 1778, by the depredations of a band of men posing as American patriots. Lacking any organized defense, the settlers immediately formed an "armed association" of about five hundred men. The size and determination of the volunteers was impressive enough to convince the attacking party of the wisdom of negotiating.<sup>312</sup> On the trans-Appalachian frontiers a strong leader was often selected who maintained order until the customary legal institutions could be established. The narrator of Father Clark's life cites an illustration taken from the Illinois frontier. "From the spring of 1784 to 1790, there was in fact no organized government

in the Illinois country. Some of the forms of law were kept up, but in a truthful sense the people were 'a law unto themselves,' and Captain Ogle whom everybody respected, was exactly the kind of man to preserve order . . . With uncommon firmness and energy, he united kindness and gentleness, and ruled the people by a happy blending of fear and love."<sup>313</sup> These leaders were not usually versed in the law, but they understood human nature. Andrew Jackson is a case in point. Jackson's biographer, J. T. Headley, tells the story of Russell Bean, who refused to submit to arrest on the Tennessee frontier in 1798. Jackson ordered the sheriff to organize a posse, and the sheriff saw to it that Jackson was included. Jackson was chosen to call upon the offender to surrender. "The bold borderer instantly threw down his pistols, exclaiming, 'I will surrender to you, sir, but to no one else.' Jackson might have spared himself the trouble of evoking the majesty of the law; it was not the law the fellow was afraid of, but the man, who was never known to flinch from danger, or turn back from his purpose."<sup>314</sup>

The accounts left by biographers cite many lawless deeds. The story of the guerrillas who operated in the West following the Civil War is little else than the recital of the many ways which men like Charles Quantrell, Frank and Jesse James, Sam Bass, and Clell

Miller found to break the law or ignore it. This chapter of American history warrants further study. But men who did not gain a livelihood through lawlessness, as did the outlaws, occasionally took the law entirely into their own hands. In the course of his book on Buffalo Bill, John Burke relates the story of Jack Slade, a Vermont Yankee who had killed a Frenchman and then drifted West, settling on a ranch near Virginia City. He came into town often, and soon the suspicion grew that he had some connection with a band of road agents who had recently killed a man and robbed a train of \$65,000. When the suspicion of the miners had grown into conviction, though without real evidence, they took the administration of justice into their own hands:

The suggestive and mysterious triangular pieces of paper dropped upon the streets, surmounted with the skull and arrows, called the vigilantes to a meeting at which the death of Slade and two companions was determined. On the fated morning following the meeting he came to town duly sober and went to a drugstore for a prescription, and while awaiting its preparation he was suddenly covered with twelve shot-guns and ordered to throw up his hands. He complied smilingly, but proposed to reason with them as to the absurdity of taking him for a bad man. The only concession was permission to send a note to his wife at the ranch, and an hour was allotted him to make peace with the Unknown; ropes were placed around the three, and at the end of the time they were given short shrift, and were soon hanging between heaven and earth."315

The evidence on which these frontier executions were based is never given, but there is little reason to believe that the vigilantes often acted without having a modicum of circumstantial facts.

The transition period between lawlessness in the absence of legal machinery and a full-fledged reign of law is illustrated by the trial of John McCall following the murder of Wild Bill Hickok on August 2, 1876. The most complete report is contained in J. W. Buel's Heroes of the Plains, a book which has many of the faults of frontier biography. The crime occurred in Deadwood, and preparation for the trial began immediately. "There was no regular court at Deadwood, and in the absence of duly qualified officers it was determined to conduct the trial according to the usages of self-constituted courts outside the pale of established legal jurisdiction."<sup>316</sup> The local theater was selected for the trial because it would accommodate the large crowds which were expected. The chairman appointed a committee of three, each of whom was to submit the names of thirty-three residents of their districts and the jury was to be selected from the ninety-nine names submitted.

Meanwhile, the case was thoroughly discussed by the miners on the streets. "Some favored a lynching before trial, a few deemed the act justifiable, while a

greater number were disposed to abide by the finding of the jury after a fair trial." This discussion and holding the trial in the same locale where the crime was committed made it difficult to select a jury. The list of ninety-nine names assembled as prospective jurors was almost exhausted before a panel of twelve could be found who had an unbiased opinion as to the guilt of the prisoner.

Twenty-three hours after the commission of the act, and during the funeral of Wild Bill, the trial began. McCall was permitted to state his case, explaining that Hickok had killed his, McCall's, brother, and that therefore he slew Hickok by way of revenge. Character witnesses were called for both sides.

The trial was not concluded until six o'clock in the evening [August 3, the day following the event], at which time the case was given to the jury, and they repaired to a wing of the theatre to prepare their verdict. As was afterward ascertained, when the jury first voted there were eleven for acquittal and one for conviction. Some debate then followed among them, when another juror proposed that the prisoner be fined the sum of twenty dollars and then released, or be committed until the fine should be paid. After an hour and thirty minutes of discussion the jury came to a compromise conclusion, and when they returned into court, which remained in session awaiting a verdict, the foreman handed to the clerk their finding, which read as follows: "We, the jurors find the prisoner, Mr. John McCall, not guilty."<sup>317</sup>

Thus a verdict came within about thirty hours after the crime had been committed. Having thus

described the trial, the biographer added:

Thus ended this self-constituted farcial court, and the citizens who attended the trial at once went to their homes and cleaned up their weapons. If the society of Deadwood permitted one man to slaughter another with impunity in the manner McCall had killed Wild Bill, then every person in the place recognized the overshadowing importance of being prepared for emergencies.<sup>318</sup>

The sequel to the story was the later arrest and trial of McCall by Federal authorities. He was sentenced to death by the U. S. District Court at Yankton. McCall's death on the gallows about seven months after he killed Wild Bill was the first official hanging in Dakota Territory, according to Buel. The most significant feature of the entire proceeding was the method used by the frontiersmen in coping with a situation for which the legal structure had not yet been provided, though it existed nearby. The trial was as nearly a replica of the court system with which the frontiersmen had been familiar before coming to the frontier as they could make it. At the same time, the trial was more a gesture than anything else, if Buel's report is correct.

The biographies contain several suggestive clues as to why acts of lawlessness were permitted to occur. Moses Dawson, who committed the life of William Henry Harrison to writing, tells of an incident in Indians Territory about 1802. An Indian family had been

murdered in the Territory, and the murderers had escaped to other states. Two were in Kentucky, and Governor Harrison was able to secure their extradition. The man sent to bring them to Indiana to stand trial was able to arrest the one man, but when he attempted to secure the other the people of the village prevented:

The interference of the people in favor of the criminal, Cutchelow, it appears, was the consequence of the prevailing opinion that a white man ought not in justice to suffer for killing an Indian. And so prevalent was the mischievous notion, that the Governor had great doubts that he would not be able with all his power and influence to prevail upon the witnesses to come forward and prove against the accused, though the circumstances were known to as many as twenty persons.<sup>319</sup>

Quite a different motive for the passive attitude of the settlers toward proper law enforcement is suggested by J. W. Buel, quoted above. The incident concerned Wild Bill Hickok and another gambler to whom he had lost heavily. A dispute arose, and a duel was chosen as the means of settlement. News of the affair leaked out, and all the men turned out to witness the event. "The law-abiding and peace-preserving class was too small, or indisposed, to restrain the two men from fighting to the death in the most prominent spot of the town [the public square] . In fact any attempt at interference would not have been tolerated. The event promised altogether too much amusement for the crowd to endure a postponement."<sup>320</sup>

Still another explanation is offered by the anonymous author of the Life and Adventures of Sam Bass. The outlaws and guerrillas of the 1870's were only able to escape justice because they received the active help of individuals in the areas where they operated. Willingness on the part of some of the citizens to aid the bandits is ascribed by this unknown author to the attraction of the money which the bank and train robbers were able to dispense generously, and to the fact that certain elements in the community were in sympathy with the outlaws and would take great risks to assist them in escaping the law.<sup>321</sup>

If frontier political life and political campaigns were colorful, there is little concrete evidence of it in the frontier biographies. The many political and campaign biographies which appeared are singularly uninteresting and reveal little beside the fact that much the same methods of persuasion were used in the campaigns of the nineteenth century as are employed in those of the twentieth. The biographies of men like Cass, Harrison, Scott, and Jackson, cited in the bibliography, are all cast in the same mold. They emphasize the candidate's service on the frontier in some capacity or another. Any feats of courage or daring are recounted -- and probably exaggerated. Military campaigns in which the subject participated are rehearsed in endless detail.

Letters written by him which reveal insight into contemporary affairs or take a stand of any kind are reprinted, together with letters to him or about him which extol his virtues. His position on public policies, past or present, is particularized, with corroborative evidence from speeches he has made or letters he has written. The technique of developing the conviction that the candidate is a "man of the people" is as well carried out in the early biographies as in the most recent presidential election. His mistakes are depreciated, explained, or more commonly, entirely omitted. His virtues are extolled and elaborated. Without exception, the campaign documents consulted were largely dull and unrevealing of political life and institutions of the frontier.

More revealing glimpses are contained in one or two of the biographies which were not primarily political in their nature or intent. William Emmons repeats an incident in the political life of his subject, Richard M. Johnson. While serving in the House of Representatives in 1815, Johnson had introduced a bill providing that the compensation of Congressmen should be \$1500 yearly. The bill became law, but it was unpopular, particularly with Johnson's frontier constituents. He felt their disapproval keenly and campaigned vigorously, but it appeared that he would lose. An

analogy and a compromise saved the situation, according to Emmons:

On one of these occasions, finding himself in the midst of those who disapproved the measure, though most of them had been his companions in danger, and were reluctant to abandon him, he exclaimed, while addressing them, "admitting this measure to be as injurious as some represent it; if you owned a rifle which had never missed fire -- if with it, you had shot a hundred deer and twenty of your country's enemies -- but on one unfortunate occasion it should miss fire would you throw it away? or would you pick the flint and try it again?" "Stop there;" interrupted a veteran warrior, "stop there -- Do you admit it to be a snap?" "A snap," answered the Colonel. "Then," replied he, amid the shouts of the people, -- "then we will pick the flint and try the old rifle again." Here the Colonel ceased, and the company in a body moved onward to the poll and gave him their vote. He was re-elected by a majority of nearly a thousand votes over his opponent.<sup>322</sup>

It is difficult to explain satisfactorily the inattention which legal and political organization received from frontier biographers. The most fundamental explanation seems to be that courts of law and political parties are institutions, and as such are the accompaniment of a relatively stable community life. The pioneers on the genuine cutting edge of civilization were unable to develop any but the most rudimentary institutions, and law courts and political parties were not among them. The task of building homes, securing food, defending themselves from the savages, and discovering new and better means of transportation and communication seem to have absorbed their energies. Legal and political

machinery was a superstructure which could not be erected until the agricultural frontier had been achieved. What evidence there is confirms the fact that, lacking the structure which the more settled communities had, the frontiersmen improvised freely, and the action they took was generally swift and severe, though not, perhaps, always just. As the population increased and the need for more formal machinery was felt, the biographies attest the fact that the settlers imitated with considerable exactitude the institutions to which they had been accustomed in the settled areas from which they had come.

Part Three: Economic Aspects of the Frontier

Chapter XII

PIONEER OCCUPATIONS AND THE COST OF LIVING

Economic structure is not elaborate in primitive societies nor was it so on the American frontier. As in the case of religious institutions and legal machinery such as courts, the existence of financial institutions such as banks is part evidence that the outermost frontier is gone and an agricultural frontier already exists. The real frontiersmen had first to make a living. To the first settlers in the region beyond the Appalachians this generally implied subsistence agriculture. As settlement increased and the Indian menace decreased, clearings became greater and export of food products was possible. Beyond the Mississippi, trapping for furs was a lucrative occupation for a time, but the depletion of fur bearing animals and the substitution of silk for fur in hats gradually forced the trappers into other lines of work. Supply and service occupations became increasingly common, and preceded farming on the great plains. In the Pacific region, subsistence agriculture was again the work upon which the early settlers depended, but it soon developed into a thriving export industry. The discovery of gold and other precious metals brought large numbers of people to portions of the West

within a short time and the service occupations rapidly assumed added importance. On all frontiers, the professions with few exceptions were last to establish a foothold, for the professions are part and parcel of institutional development.

Frontier biographies suggest this progression, though the economic framework of the frontier is treated less adequately than any single phase of pioneer life. The rudimentary nature of economic development in the West and the lack of interest which the reading public customarily displays in this aspect of life are the basis reasons for the omissions by the narrators. Instead, the biographers confine their accounts to brief mention of the great variety of occupations found on the frontier, and to casual mention of the prices prevalent at given periods. Banks and banking, money troubles, credit, barter, and exchange are scarcely mentioned. Most significant of all, the chronicles of the pioneers give no indication that the frontiersmen were debtors. The fact was directly mentioned by but one or two of the books consulted, and indirect mention was made in only a small number more. If the burden of indebtedness was an important element in pioneer mentality, the biographers do not record it.

The general impression conveyed is that money played a relatively minor role in the West, although

the disparity between prices of consumer goods and the wages and rewards of industry occasionally worked hardships. Speculation and the difficulty of transportation made the cost of living high on the frontier. Money was looked upon chiefly as a means for extending the holding of lands and as a sine qua non for indulging the desire for recreation and amusement.

The pioneer had the gift of improvising and creating remunerative jobs. James Capen Adams, for example, dissatisfied with his success in more prosaic lines of work, turned to the collection and training of wild animals as an occupation. He made it pay. Others were not so fortunate, and occasional biographies report the failure of their subjects in some business enterprise. Profits on the plains were relatively insecure. If conditions were favorable, fantastic gains were possible. The risks involved usually equalized the situation within a short time. Easy come, easy go was something more than a platitude on the prairies. Speaking generally, however, the biographers give disappointingly little significant information about the economic life of the frontier.

Trapping accompanied as well as preceded settlement in the trans-Appalachian region. Timothy Flint points out that that while Father Boone and his other sons "settled down to the severe labor of making

a farm" on the Yadkin River in North Carolina, about 1760, Daniel was allowed to hunt and trap. "The peltries of the young hunter yielded all the money which such an establishment required...."<sup>323</sup> While trapping in Kentucky in 1774, Simon Kenton and his party cleared a small piece of land with their tomahawks and planted it to corn. They soon had "the pleasure of eating roasting ears and of seeing their infant plantation produce the ripened fruit."<sup>324</sup>

As prices indicate, trapping in the Far West was lucrative for many years. Beaver trapping required great skill because of the peculiar habits of the beaver. Charles Burdett, the chronicler of Kit Carson, quotes a length from an unidentified source describing the techniques employed. The rapid exploitation of the fur bearing animals glutted the market with beaver pelts. It is noteworthy that the same author quoted above reports that in 1840 Carson was dissatisfied with the prices quoted him on his furs. A contemporary source cited by Burdett stated that beaver skins were being sold in some cases at twenty-five cents a bale.<sup>325</sup> Ten years earlier, according to a different biographer, Carson and a party of hunters had had no trouble of disposing of their catch of furs at twelve dollars a pound. Inasmuch as the party had collected two thousand pounds, their expedition brought in \$24,000.<sup>326</sup>

Agriculture on the middle west frontier seems to have been taken for granted to such an extent that the biographers make little mention of it, except to remark generally that it was "severe labor." Agriculture in California, however, was in an advanced stage at an early date, due to the influence of the Spanish missions. Kit Carson became interested in it while on a trip there in the fall of 1829 and made an effort to learn more about it. A visit to a Spanish ranch showed that the production of wine and the export of fruit and raisins were in large measure responsible for the prosperity of the ranchmen. Already, however, the rancher complained that his market for oranges was being invaded by the Hudson Bay Company who shipped in oranges from the Sandwich Islands before the California crop was ripe.<sup>327</sup> John Bidwell began farming in California about 1847, says his relater, and immediately began diversified agriculture. "In 1847, Bidwell planted the first fruit trees and vines in the vicinity [Sacramento] and a few years later he had orchards of peach, apple, fig, and other fruits, including grapes, and among the first raisins ever made in California were those produced by him."<sup>328</sup> The latter part of the statement is undoubtedly an error on the part of the author.

The evidence is that farm workers in the region east of the Mississippi were not well paid during the

first half of the nineteenth century. Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina, says Edward Cotten, reported to Congress while he was serving there that in the section of the state where he lived a man could be hired for twenty-five cents per day.<sup>329</sup> This is corroborated by Coale, the annalist of Wilburn Waters. In about 1832, when Waters was twenty years old, he hired out to a man in North Carolina for twenty-five cents per day. He became dissatisfied when he discovered that his employer was in turn hiring him out and receiving fifty cents for his services, but paying Waters only twenty-five.

Providing supplies or performing services which were in demand furnished occupation for many pioneers, particularly in the region west of the Mississippi. The variety of such jobs evidences the ingenuity of the settlers. Anthony Haswell has recorded the hardships endured by Matthew Phelps who migrated from New England to the Big Black River north of New Orleans in 1778. Phelps tried farming but found conditions too unsettled to make it profitable. He attached himself, therefore, to a fort in the vicinity, and decided to go into business within the garrison. Though he lacked capital he persisted in his undertaking. The biographer quotes Phelps' account:

I borrowed a dollar of a British sergeant, and having purchased the necessary ingredients, I brewed a barrèl of good beer, and sold it out at a reasonable rate, and yet to exceeding good advantage, to the garison; .... I was so successful, and so well rewarded for my industry, that I was enabled by the middle of May, having then been in the fort but a few weeks, to purchase and bring up the river, on my own account from Manchac, a puncheon [sic] of rum, a puncheon of Molasses, a tierce of sugar, and a barrel of coffee." <sup>330</sup>

Phelps eventually earned enough to enable him to return to New England.

Men who knew the topography of the plains and mountains as well as Kit Carson seldom lacked employment as guides or scouts. In June, 1842, John C. Fremont first employed Carson as a guide on the expedition to explore and map the northern region. According to one of Carson's biographers, he was paid a hundred dollars per month.<sup>331</sup> A similar occupation was that of scout for the United States army forces engaged in campaigning against the Mormons and the Indians. Buffalo Bill Cody performed such service, but he was not, as various biographers have asserted, chief of scouts in the U.S. Army. John Burke states that Cody received horses, subsistence, quarters, and \$10 per day for scouting, and special bonuses ranging from \$100 to \$500 when engaged on particularly dangerous missions.<sup>332</sup> Another narrator, Winch, reports an extra payment of \$1,200 for one such trip completed in the Black Hills about 1876.<sup>333</sup>

Shortly after 1870 it became fashionable for parties of foreigners or Eastern business men to organize hunting expeditions in the West. These parties required guides who knew how to care for tenderfeet, and Cody assisted with several. In 1872 he served in this capacity for a party of Englishmen -- a job which paid him a thousand dollars a month, if his sister's report is accurate.<sup>334</sup> According to Joe DeBarthe, O. P. Hanna, an early settler in Wyoming, performed a similar service for a group of Englishmen for far less pay. He received only eight dollars per day.<sup>335</sup>

Freighting became a major industry on the frontier during the 1850's and 1860's, giving employment to thousands of men. Although the chroniclers of Buffalo Bill give widely divergent reports of many of the incidents in his life, all are agreed that he received forty dollars a month when freighting for Russell, Majors and Waddell. This was regular freighter's pay, but Cody received it although he was only a boy of 12 or 13.<sup>336</sup>

Processing or providing food supplies for emigrants or the army was a source of income for many settlers. Frank Winch relates that Pawnee Bill Lillie's father crated the flour mill he operated in Illinois and transplanted it to Wellington, Kansas, in 1861, and presumably found it a profitable undertaking.<sup>337</sup> James

Capen Adams, the hunter of the Sierra Nevadas, crossed eastward to the Rockies in 1854, hunting as he went and amassing "quite a sum of cash by selling buffalo-meat to the emigrants."<sup>338</sup> The construction of the trans-continental railroads required great quantities of food for the laborers on the road. Buffalo Bill Cody added to his list of other accomplishments that of buffalo hunter for the Kansas Pacific Railroad about 1867. Details vary in the several sketches of his life, but all are agreed that he killed 4,280 buffalo during the course of a year and a half. He was paid \$500 a month, according to the records.<sup>339</sup> O. P. Hanna, the early Wyoming settler referred to above, located a ranch in what is now Sheridan County about 1879. Finding himself short of ready money, Hanna made application for the job of supplying fresh meat for the soldiers of Fort McKinney. He found the task relatively easy, according to his recollection, quoted by Joe DeBarthe:

"I soon closed a contract with the commanding officer to furnish three thousand pounds of elk, deer and other wild meat every week. I got a hunter by the name of White, as he had two mule teams and wagons, to go with me. We got two men to drive the teams and deliver the meat to the fort, and while he and I did the hunting. Game was so plentiful that we would often load down both wagons in half a day. Bear was plentiful. I killed eight the first two months I was hunting. Fishing was fine; could catch forty or fifty pounds daily."<sup>340</sup>

The great cattle drives from the southwest were

a characteristic feature of the 1870's and 1880's. Driving the cattle provided work for many men, ten to fifteen for each herd of one to three thousand cattle, according to John Burke. The magnitude of the undertaking can be appreciated when it is realized that single owners sometimes moved droves of thirty thousand or more.<sup>341</sup> Kit Dalton relates that he received \$240 for a cattle drive extending over a four month period.<sup>342</sup>

Perhaps the most unique of the supply occupations devised by the frontiersmen was that of James Capen Adams. According to Hittell, who took down and edited Adams' story, the hunter entered into a partnership with his brother in 1852 whereby Adams was to collect wild animals of California and the neighboring country while his brother provided the capital. Adams' brother developed a market for the animals captured, and when an order for two large and one small grizzly bears came from Lima, Peru, Adams was able to deliver the goods.<sup>343</sup>

The professions made a place for themselves as population advanced, though a few professional people were usually found on the earliest frontiers. Father Clark, later a circuit rider, entered the backwoods region of western Georgia about 1786, recounts his biographer. He supposed that surveyors would be in demand in that area, but was disappointed to find they were not. He turned to school teaching instead, in

which his success and remuneration have been recorded above.<sup>344</sup> When William Selby Harney's father migrated to Tennessee prior to 1800, however, he found that surveying was "a profession of which there was at that time much need and which few were competent to fill."<sup>345</sup> Andrew Jackson, says his friendly biographer, Eaton, went to Nashville, Tennessee, in 1788, determined to practice law. He found that the creditors of the region had retained the only lawyers, leaving the debtors without legal counsel. Jackson was kept busy, for he issued seventy writs on the morning after his arrival, and though his fees were small and not always paid, he was repaid later by the political popularity he enjoyed in this region.<sup>346</sup>

The lot of the doctor in the new settlements was usually not an enviable one. Apprenticeship was long and arduous. Edward Mansfield's biography of Daniel Drake gives considerable insight into the practice of medicine as it was carried on in Cincinnati in the early 1800's, when Cincinnati was still on the edge of the westward advance. Physicians were all country practitioners, making long calls into the country over bad roads and in all kinds of weather. "The ordinary charge was twenty-five cents a mile, one half being deducted, and the other half paid in provender for his horse, or produce for his family. These pioneers, moreover, were

their own bleeders and cuppers, and practiced dentistry not less certainly than physic; charged a quarter of a dollar for extracting a tooth, with an understood deduction if two or more were drawn at the same time."<sup>347</sup>

The doctors also served as their own druggists. Unpaid accounts were one of the annoyances of the doctor's life. Drake wrote to his father that in three years in Cincinnati as a practicing physician he had not had three dollars in cash.<sup>348</sup> Clergyman had a similar problem.

Prices are an indication of the cost of living and the rewards of labor. The pioneers were deeply concerned with both of these, and to a limited degree the biographies reflect this interest. The table summarizes the main references to prices of commodities encountered in the biographies. The items are arranged in chronological order, and the locality where the price was paid or the goods sold is indicated when that information was available.

Prices were generally quoted by the authors for some specific reasons. Often they were designed to show the high cost of living or the inflation of values which had occurred in a given locality. Items 26 to 39 illustrate boom times in the mining areas of Montana. Item 14 was cited to show the depreciation in the value of furs and to reveal the fact that trapping was becoming unprofitable. Items 15 to 24 occurred in an

Prices on the Frontier

Commodity or Service	Price	Quantity or Rate	Approximate Date	Locality
1. Corn	\$ 1.00	bushel	1788	Kentucky
2. Salt	3.00	bushel	1788	Kentucky
3. Hay	20.00	ton	1807	Cincinnati
4. Corn	.50	bushel	1807	Cincinnati
5. Tea	2.25	pound	1813	Cincinnati
6. Coffee	.37 $\frac{1}{2}$	pound	1813	Cincinnati
7. Sugar, loaf	.37 $\frac{1}{2}$	pound	1813	Cincinnati
8. Cotton cloth	3.00	yard	1825	Santa Fe
9. Beaver pelts	8.00	pound	1827	
10. Pelts	12.00	pound	1830	Santa Fe
11. Wolf scalps	20.00	each <sup>a</sup>	1830	North Carolina
12. Horses	200.00	each	1832	Old Spanish Trail between N. Mex. and California
13. Schoolhouse built and furnished	131.00		1836	Sault Ste. Marie
14. Beaver pelts	.25	bale	1840	
15. Horses, best	100.00	each	1846	California
16. Horses, ordinary	75.00	each	1846	California
17. Wild mares	25.00	each	1846	California
18. saddles, complete	50.00	each	1846	California
19. Spurs	5.00	pair	1846	California
20. Blankets	5.00	each	1846	California
21. Cows, first grade	15.00	each	1846	California
22. Cattle, second grade	12.00	each	1846	California
23. Cattle, third grade	8.00	each	1846	California
24. Sheep	5.00	each	1846	California
25. Sheep	5.50	each	1853	California
26. Hotel board	1200.00	per year	1864	Virginia City, Mont.
27. Bed tick and pillow	28.00	each	1864	Virginia City, Mont.
28. Flour	500.00	barrel	1864	Virginia City, Mont.
29. Flour	500.00	sack	1868	Helena, Mont.
30. Indian scalps	5.00	each <sup>b,c</sup>	1870	New Mexico
31. Silver gray fox pelt	50.00	to each	1875	
32. Oats	10.00	sack		
	.10	pound	1879	Wyoming

a. The data are taken from the biographies consulted.

The books by Mansfield, Flint, Burdett, and Stewart, listed in the bibliography, are the chief sources.

b. A bounty

c. Sold as souvenirs

anonymous campaign entitled Black Republican Imposture Exposed. The figures were cited as examples of the inflated values placed on articles supplied to Fremont's forces while campaigning in California in 1846 and 1847. The document stated that Fremont was careless in the handling of public money and implied that he was dishonest. According to the author, Congress later allowed the actual amounts of \$40 for first quality horses (Item 15), \$25 for ordinary mounts (Item 16), \$10 for wild mares (Item 17), and \$30 for saddles (Item 18).<sup>349</sup> There are not sufficient prices given to generalize concerning the cost of living on the various frontiers. They are, however, representative of the values considered important or unusual enough to warrant inclusion in the biographies.

The other aspects of economic organization are largely neglected by the writers of the frontier. Barter was an important means of exchange, but little is said of it. The biographer of Father Clark reports that "Bank bills at that period [1796] were wholly unknown in Kentucky, silver coin was very scarce, and much of the business among the people was done by barter."<sup>350</sup> Edward Mansfield corroborates this by recording that the father of Daniel Drake exchanged as much hay as two horses could draw for a bushel of salt in Kentucky in 1795.<sup>351</sup> Trading with the Indians was carried on both by barter and

by the use of money. James Capen Adams traded two wolf whelps, two sacks of dried venison and a black bear for two horses when dealing with a party of Indians in the Sierra Nevadas in 1853.<sup>352</sup> Geronimo, on the other hand, reports that he and his band of Apaches first made the acquaintance of money when trading with white men in 1858.<sup>353</sup>

Only two references were found to banks and banking facilities and a similar number of allusions to the granting of credit. Mansfield, the chronicler of Daniel Drake, records from Drake's recollections that the period from 1815 to 1816 in Cincinnati was marked by excessive speculation, aggravated by the easy credit which the banks made available.<sup>354</sup> However, the frontier had really passed Cincinnati by that time. Mrs. Wetmore recalls that there were no banking facilities on the Kansas frontier in 1871, and large quantities of cash were kept around the house as a result.<sup>355</sup>

The biographers are entirely silent on other fundamental aspects of economic life. The burden of debts with which the settlers reached the West, the difficulty of raising sufficient capital to buy the cheap lands, the political repercussions of the fact that frontier society was a debtor to society -- on these issues the authors shed no light. The picture of frontier economic organization is singularly incomplete.

## Chapter XIII

## SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THE FRONTIER BIOGRAPHERS' WEST

Only three years after the frontier was officially closed in the census records of 1890, Frederick Jackson Turner proposed what has since come to be known as the "Turner thesis" or hypothesis regarding the influence of the frontier on American life and development. Turner himself developed his original suggestions further, but his writings were prolific and he made his influence felt largely through the activities of a large and active group of students whom he infected with his enthusiasms and predilections. Frederic L. Paxson, Joseph Schafer, and Grace Lee Nute are probably his outstanding disciples. It is only in comparatively recent times that the thesis of Jackson as elaborated by his students has been subjected to extended criticism.

Turner's views on the frontier and its influence in American development can be briefly summarized:

1. The westward advance of the American people is the basic explanation of American evolution to 1890. As he himself put it, "The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development."<sup>356</sup>

2. The frontier was an active agency for

nationalization. It produced men of a distinctive American nationality by Americanizing the various foreign groups which found their way to the frontier. These men were aggressive, direct, inclined to be instable, practical, and materialistic. At the same time, the frontier conditioned the legislation which most extended the power of the central government at the expense of the states and encouraged a loose construction of the Constitution. According to Turner it was frontier society which was primarily responsible for the legislation concerned with land, tariff, and internal improvements.

3. The frontier promoted democracy and individualism to a marked extent. Pioneer conditions stressed the essential equality of men and placed a premium on self-reliance, independence, and freedom from restraint. It resulted in the development of democratic institutions.

4. The existence of free land provided a safety valve for the industrial classes of the East by making it possible for individuals who felt themselves to be unsuccessful or oppressed to migrate westward and become land holders in their own right. This served to prevent the formation of distinct classes within American society.

5. Each successive frontier experienced the re-enactment of social evolution, from primitive society to a state of civilization. As this occurred, old methods and institutions were modified, changed, and adapted

to frontier conditions, and new methods, institutions, and ideas were devised and developed. This affected the older settled areas as well as the frontier.

What contribution, if any, does an examination of frontier biographies make toward verifying or challenging the soundness of Turner's hypothesis? It neither confirms nor denies the thesis in its entirety. The fragmentary nature of the biographers' portrayal of the West precludes any sweeping generalizations. For various reasons, important aspects of pioneer life, such as the political framework and the economic organization, were either entirely neglected or treated in the most desultory fashion. Occasionally the very emphasis is indicative of a frame of mind which is significant in the light of Turner's contentions. But there are far too many pieces of the puzzle missing to justify wholesale approval or disapproval.

The limitations inherent in frontier biography make further caution necessary in drawing conclusions. For the most part the chroniclers of frontier life did not cite the sources of their information. There is considerable evidence that major and minor errors found their way into their works as a result. The biographers were often biased, usually in favor of their subjects, and the motives they ascribe or the opinions they express cannot be accepted uncritically. In spite of these

qualifications, frontier biography does offer some evidence which supports some of Turner's conclusions and challenges others.

Biography supports the conviction that pioneer conditions produced or encouraged distinctive characteristics in the frontiersmen. Life in the early West was undeniably a struggle for survival, and those who succeeded were those who already possessed or developed courage, endurance, energy, and ambition. At the same time, continued contact with a nature and with savages who were frequently hostile made the pioneer somewhat rough and direct in his actions with a certain disregard for and impatience with methods which did not produce the desired ends, regardless of the means employed in achieving them. In an article entitled "The Mature Significance of 'New' Countries" in the Hibbert Journal, Mr. F. Clarke points out that the pioneers possessed a curiously contradictory attitude toward tradition, marked by a spirit of creativeness and a willingness to experiment with things but possessing an almost uncritical reverence for established ideas and values.<sup>357</sup> The biographies support at least the first part of the statement, though there is not as much evidence for the latter part. Faced by an emergency, the pioneer was forced to find his own solution, and it often involved creating something new. Necessity, in this case the great distance from civilization, was

the mother of invention.

George W. Pierson, among the most competent of Turner's critics, ventures the opinion that perhaps the rigors of frontier life produced qualities, other than those enumerated by Turner, which were not as admirable.<sup>358</sup> There is some reason to believe that this is true. Pioneer tempers had a tendency to be short, and punishments imposed were not uniformly just nor were they tempered with mercy. Tolerance was not a typical trait. The frontier demanded functional institutions, and the frontiersmen became exceedingly practical, but there is reason to believe that many of them developed a materialistic attitude which blinded them to the significance of less tangible values. Dixon Ryan Fox commented that the pioneers never developed any "overpowering respect" for the professional man,<sup>359</sup> and the same thing may be said concerning moral values and the niceties of conduct. Frontiersmen were not remarkable for their devotion to fair play, at least according to the records left by their annalists.

Several historians have challenged the importance ascribed by Turner to the democratic tendencies of the West.<sup>360</sup> Biography supports the fact that frontier conditions fostered a genuine belief in the equality of men, but this equality was not extended to women or to Indians. The settlers' regard for democracy seems to

have been negative rather than positive, for they detested tyranny and feared abuse of power, but they gave little thought, according to the accounts, to positive means of correcting these abuses. The Turner school of historians imply that the West sponsored new democratic techniques, but biography does not reflect that fact, nor does it suggest the role which the West is supposed to have played in changing the course of national legislation and the judicial interpretation of the Constitution. Perhaps the fault lies with the imperfect picture of pioneer life left by the biographers. Perhaps the frontiersman's preoccupation with the immediate struggle for existence has been underestimated.

Charles A. Beard believes that the Turner hypothesis overworks the concept of individualism on the frontier. Basing his conviction on his own knowledge of pioneer life in Indiana he remarks, "Of individuals I heard much, of individualism little. I doubt whether anywhere in the United States there was more community spirit, more mutual aid in all times of need, so little expectation of material reward for services rendered to neighbors."<sup>361</sup> The point is well taken. That the pioneers found recreation and amusement in corn-huskings, quilting bees, and house raisings does not alter the fact that these were cooperative enterprises performed gladly for the benefit of others. And the little sketches

contain numerous citations of valorous deeds done without thought of personal remuneration. It is true that the pioneers prized self-reliance highly, but they were also keenly aware of the benefits to be derived from group action. Perhaps it is largely a matter of defining and qualifying the term individualism as Turner uses it. If the word implies a disregard for public opinion, evidence is present in the biographies that George Pierson is correct when he contends that pioneer individualism was not as real as it seemed.<sup>362</sup> What others thought, particularly those who remained in the settled areas back east, did matter to the frontiersmen. One factor in the settlers' zeal for establishing schools lay in their desire not to be thought unlettered by the people of the eastern seaboard. The wish to emulate the East never became a slavish imitation but developed into a feeling of pride in the distinctive qualities of western life.

Because it lends itself to statistical treatment, the theory of the frontier as a safety valve for the discontented classes in the east has received extended criticism.<sup>363</sup> The doctrine is neither proved nor disproved by frontier biography, which largely ignores the issue. Those who wrote the lives of frontier characters said singularly little about the motives which caused their subjects to take their way West. When

the reason is suggested, however, it appears that migration was often the outcome of dissatisfaction or discontent on the part of men who were engaged in agricultural pursuits which were proving unprofitable. Religious zeal inspired clergymen to go West, and the belief that the frontier offered unusual opportunity caused men like Andrew Jackson and Dr. Daniel Drake to inaugurate their professional careers in the West. The biographers tend to confirm Murray Kane's contention that the really destitute laborers of the East could not raise sufficient capital to make the trip West and buy land, cheap as it was.<sup>364</sup> The frontier acted as a safety valve, in the judgment of Carter Goodrich and Sol Davison, only insofar as it removed potential wage-earners, in the form of farmers, from the East and encouraged them to migrate.<sup>365</sup> The accounts examined tend to support this view by implication rather than with proof.

The repetition of frontier processes is an integral part of Turner's thesis. That this recurrence did take place is borne out by the annalists of the pioneers. Certain aspects of frontier experience were almost identical on the successive frontier lines. But it is easy to overestimate the uniformity of frontier experience, as Pierson suggests.<sup>366</sup> The discovery of precious metals in the West profoundly changed certain

phases of the westward extension. Generally speaking, the biographies produced on the frontier accentuate the similarities and depreciate the contrasts and differences. However, they confirm Paxson's proposition that the West performed a useful function by experimenting with the institutions of older societies, modifying them and adapting them to changed conditions.<sup>367</sup>

P. H. Boynton saw Turner's statement of the relationship of the colonist to the environment as one of his most fundamental contributions. Speaking of Dorothy Dondore's The Prairie and the Making of Middle America, Boynton says, "Nowhere does it follow the most striking Turner observation -- that the wilderness overcomes the individual pioneer, though the relentless and inexhaustible army of frontiersmen inevitably subdue the wilderness."<sup>368</sup> His comment applies with equal validity to the frontier biographies. The triumphant conquest of nature and the aborigines is portrayed, but the individual failures are not recorded. Writers who were themselves pioneers did not dare to depict Western life in its entirety. They were still too much concerned with its idealization.

Frontier biography is a curious mixture of fact and fiction, of literature written for the reading public and a literature truly indigenous to the West. Its imperfections are many; its virtues few. It is not

great literature nor dependable history. Little of it is as sensational and melodramatic as the dime novel; none of it as truly revealing as Ole Rølvaag's Giants in the Earth. It ignores many of the elemental factors requisite to an understanding of the frontier. Yet for all its inadequacies it contributes in many subtle ways to a more perfect delineation of the West. Its omissions are on occasion as pregnant with meaning as its descriptions. The historian's most difficult task is to recreate the motives and the mentality of men who lived in the past. The biography of the frontier has a small and modest contribution to make toward an understanding of the West as it was and as it was said to be.

## FOOTNOTES

## Chapter I

1. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Frontier in American History (New York, 1920), 1.
2. For a summary statement of the major points comprising "Turner's Thesis", cf. Chapter IV.
3. Percy H. Boynton, The Rediscovery of the Frontier, (Chicago, 1931).
4. Wilfred W. Black, "The Historians and the Tradition of Pioneer Hardships". Unpublished Doctor's dissertation of the State University of Iowa, 1942.  
Lenora A. Purdy, "Buffalo Bill in Truth and in Fiction". Unpublished Master's thesis of the State University of Iowa, 1941.
5. Ralph L. Rusk, The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier (New York, 1925), vol. I, 249-254.
6. Boynton, op. cit., 66.
7. Ibid., 24, 25.
8. Allen Johnson, The Historian and Historical Evidence (New York, 1926), 24.
9. Frederic L. Paxson, When the West is Gone (New York, 1920), 24.
10. John Filson and George Imray, A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America (London, 1793), second edition.
11. Rusk, op. cit., 250.

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12. Edward H. O'Neill, A History of American Biography 1800-1935 (Philadelphia, 1935), 3.
13. William Roscoe Thayer, "Biography," The North American Review 180 (February, 1905), 263.

14. O'Neill, op. cit., 3.
15. "Biography", The Southern Literary Messenger, 23 (October, 1856), 285.
16. The quotation is from James C. Johnston's Biography: The Literature of Personality (New York, 1927), 91, 92. Johnston took it from the translation by John Dryden and others of Plutarch's Lives of Illustrious Men.
17. O'Neill, op. cit., 6.
18. William Roscoe Thayer, The Art of Biography (New York, 1920), 107, 108.
19. O'Neill, op. cit., 70.
20. Ibid., 18.
21. Ibid., 38-43.
22. The libraries of the State University of Iowa alone contain fifteen "contemporary" biographies of Jackson, as defined in terms of this study. This excludes collective biographies.
23. Annie Russell Marble, "Popular Forms of Modern Biography," The Dial 31 (September 1, 1901), 125.
24. O'Neill, op. cit., 73.
25. William Roscoe Thayer, The Art of Biography, op. cit., 16, 17.
26. Johnston, op. cit., 19.
27. George F. Bowerman, The New Biography (Washington, D. C., 1929), 4. Bowerman quotes Bradford himself.
28. O'Neill, op. cit., 7.
29. Ibid., 16.
30. William Roscoe Thayer, The Art of Biography, op. cit., 34, 35.
31. Anon., Taylor and His Generals (Hartford, Conn., 1848). There were 326 pages of these "full accounts."

32. Charles Burdett, Life of Kit Carson (Philadelphia, 1869).
33. John W. Gray, The Life of Joseph Bishop (Nashville, Tenn., 1858).
34. Anon., Life and Adventures of Sam Bass (Dallas, Texas, 1878).
35. Edward D. Mansfield, Memoirs of the Life and Services of Daniel Drake, M.D. (Cincinnati, 1855), preface p. iv.
36. J. W. Buel, Heroes of the Plains (New York and St. Louis, 1882), 10.
37. Lenora A. Purdy's unpublished master's thesis entitled "Buffalo Bill in Truth and in Fiction" (State University of Iowa, 1941), analyzes the historical inaccuracies included in some of the many biographies and autobiographies dealing with William F. Cody. Many of these are of the same nature as the biographies forming the basis of this study. Studies similar to Miss Purdy's could profitably be made of the lives of men like John C. Fremont and Kit Carson. It is the writer's judgment that the nature of Buffalo Bill himself made his case unrepresentative in that biographies of him were unusually unreliable.
38. Anon., "Aspects of Biography," The Nation 73 (December 5, 1901), 431.
39. Hesketh Pearson, Ventilations: Being Biographical Asides (Philadelphia, 1930), 52, 53.
40. The quotation is from Johnston, op. cit., xvii.
41. O'Neill, op. cit., 46.
42. H. H. Asquith, "Biography", The Living Age 232 (February 8, 1902), 321-331.
43. Lenora A. Purdy's thesis noted above.
44. Percy H. Boynton, The Rediscovery of the Frontier (Chicago, 1931), 75.
45. John Filson, Adventures of col. Daniel Boone (1795).

46. John McCorkle, Three Years with Quantrell (Armstrong, Mo., 1914). The title page states: "Written by O. S. Barton from the dictation of McCorkle."
47. John C. Cuval, The Adventures of Big-Foot Wallace (Macon, Georgia, 1870), iii.
48. William H. Venable, William Davis Gallagher (no date or publisher), 36 pp.
49. George Whitefield Samson, Henry R. Schoolcraft (Washington, D. C.), 8 pp. The pamphlet contains no date but internal evidence indicates that it was published very shortly after Schoolcraft's death on December 10, 1864.
50. Edward R. Cotten, Life of Hon. Nathaniel Macon, of North Carolina (Baltimore, 1840), 272 pp.
51. Moses Dawson, A Historical Narrative of the Civil and Military Services of Major-General William H. Harrison (Cincinnati, 1824), 464 pp.
52. Pearson, op. cit., 82.
53. Frederic L. Paxson, When the West is Gone (New York, 1930), 37.
54. Sidney Lee, Principles of Biography (London, 1911), 10.
55. Boynton, op. cit., 34, 35.
56. Gamaliel Bradford, "The Art of Biography", The Saturday Review of Literature 1 (May 23, 1925), 769, 770.

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57. Mrs. Catherine V. Waite, The Mormon Prophet and His Harem (Cambridge, Mass., 1867), iv.
58. Timothy Flint, Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone (Cincinnati, 1833), 113, 114. Flint was a clergyman who spent considerable time in the West and had the opportunity of observing men like Boone and the early Kentucky settlements.

He knew Boone personally and talked with him before his death. Edward O'Neill believes this biography of Boone is still the best (1935). Cf. his History of American Biography (Philadelphia, 1935), 30.

59. Edward D. Mansfield, Memoirs of the Life and Services of Daniel Drake, M.D. (Cincinnati, 1855), 17, 18. While it is not true in this instance, biographers often wrote in the first person, even though they were not actually quoting the subject. Mansfield was unusually meticulous in the use of his sources.
60. Ibid., 383.
61. Edward R. Cotten, Life of the Hon. Nathaniel Macon, of North Carolina (Baltimore, 1840), 80.
62. John S. C. Abbott, Christopher Carson (New York, 1873), 15.
63. Ibid., 48.
64. Ibid., 66, 67.
65. Ibid., 19.
66. Theodore H. Hittell, The Adventures of James Capen Adams (Boston, 1860), 82-85. This book is one of the borderline cases in this study. It is really more autobiographical than biographical, for it was dictated by Adams to Hittell, and Hittell followed the dictated narrative quite closely when he wrote the book. It is classified as biography, however, and is included because Cowan and Cowan, in their A Bibliography of the History of California (San Francisco, 1933) speak of it as "Probably the most popular work of its time issued in California" (284). They also state that Hittell was known for his accuracy.
67. M. A. De Wolfe Howe, The Life and Labors of Bishop Hare, Apostle to the Sioux (New York, 1912), 63, 64; 71-75.
68. J. W. Buel, Heroes of the Plains (St. Louis, 1882), 410, 411.
69. John Niles Hubbard, Sketches of the Life and Adventures of Moses Van Campen (Dansville, N.Y., 1841), 68, 69.

70. Flint, op. cit., 115.
71. Mansfield, op. cit., 383
72. Ibid., 386, 387.
73. Anthony Haswell, Memoirs and Adventures of Captain Matthew Phelps (Bennington, Vermont, 1802), appendix, 41.
74. Samuel C. Reid, The Scouting Expeditions of McCulloch's Texas Rangers (Philadelphia, 1848), 23, 24.
75. Abbott, op. cit., 16.
76. Ibid., 49, 50.
77. Charles Burdett, Life of Kit Carson (Philadelphia, 1869), 49.
78. John C. Duval, The Adventures of Big-Foot Wallace (Macon, Georgia, 1870), 21, 22.
79. Buel, op. cit., 479.
80. Hittell, op. cit., 15, 16.
81. Ibid., 82-85.
82. Ibid., 94.
83. Burdett, op. cit., 206-227, passim.
84. Ibid., 329.
85. Ibid., 341-346. Almost the same account is found in John Bigelow's Memoirs of the Life and Public Services of John Charles Fremont (New York, 1856), 439.
86. Bigelow, op. cit., 440, 441.
87. Joe DeBarthe, The Life and Adventures of Frank Grouard (St. Joseph, Mo., 1894), 301.
88. Ibid., 278.
89. Howe, op. cit., 71-75.
90. Flint, op. cit., 43.

91. Mansfield, op. cit., 17, 18.
92. Rev. John Mason Peck, "Father Clark", or The Pioneer Preacher (New York, 1855), 105, 106.
93. Abbott, op. cit., 43, 44.
94. Charles W. Upham, Life Explorations and Public Services of John Charles Fremont (Boston, 1856), 235-237. The quotation is taken by Upham from Frederick Walpole's Four Years in the Pacific, in Her Majesty's Ship "Collingwood," from 1844 to 1848.
95. Hittell, op. cit., 15.
96. Everett Dick, Vanguards of the Frontier (New York, 1941), 46-48.
97. Duval, op. cit., 230.

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98. Hubbard, op. cit., 98-106.
99. Ibid., 121-124.
- 100.. Ibid., 169, 170.
101. John Filson and George Imlay, A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America, second edition, (London, 1793), 350. One section is entitled "the Adventures of Col. Daniel Boon" and was presumably written by Filson.
102. James Hall, A Memoir of the Public Services of William Henry Harrison of Ohio (Philadelphia, 1836), 213, 214.
103. Ibid., 234, 235.
104. J. T. Headley, The Lives of Winfield Scott and Andrew Jackson (New York, 1852), 260, 261.
105. Burdett, op. cit., 352, 353.
106. Buel, op. cit., 508.

107. De Barthe, op. cit., 69, 70.
108. Flint, op. cit., 136.
109. Ibid., 130-135.
110. Ibid., 89, 90.
111. Filson and Imlay, op. cit., 358, 359.
112. Burdett, op. cit., 55.
113. Logan Uriah Reavis, The Life and Military Services of Gen. William Selby Horney. (St. Louis, 1878), 77.
114. Illustrated Life of General Winfield Scott, Commander-in-chief of the Army in Mexico (New York, 1847), 66.
115. Duval, op. cit., 156-159.
116. S. M. Barrett, Geronimo's Story of His Life (New York, 1907)
117. Ibid., 119.
118. John Henry Eaton, The Life of Andrew Jackson (Philadelphia, 1824), 207, 208.
119. Ibid., 189.
120. Moses Dawson, A Historical Narrative of the Civil and Military Services of Major-General William H. Harrison (Cincinnati, 1824), 6.
121. William Emmons, Authentic Biography of Colonel Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky (New York, 1833), 58.
122. Abbott, op. cit., 10.
123. Ibid., 56.
124. Dawson, op. cit., 8.
125. Illustrated Life of General Winfield Scott, op. cit., 64.
126. Charles H. Farnham, A Life of Francis Parkman (Boston, 1900), 374, 375 (Appendix C).

127. Reavis, op. cit., 395, 396.

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128. Cf. two unpublished doctoral dissertations at the State University of Iowa: Wilfred W. Black, "Historians and the Tradition of Pioneer Hardships" (1942), and Carlton F. Culmsee, "The Rise of the Concept of Hostile Nature in Novelists of the American Frontier" (1940).

129. Eaton, op. cit., 65.

130. Buel, op. cit., 515.

131. Peck, op. cit., 193-195.

132. Richard Hildreth, The People's Presidential Candidate (Boston, 1840), 79.

133. Dawson, op. cit., 369.

134. Abbott, op. cit., 242.

135. Bigelow, op. cit., 362-364.

136. Howe, op. cit., 143.

137. DeBarthe, op. cit., 189.

138. Ibid., 481, 482.

139. Headley, op. cit., 62-65.

140. Duval, op. cit., 204, 205.

141. Abbott, op. cit., 32.

142. Ibid., 310, 311.

143. Haswell, op. cit., 68-87.

144. Buel, op. cit., 29.

145. DeBarthe, op. cit., 539, 540.

146. Howe, op. cit., 183-185.

147. Hall, op. cit., 146, 147.

148. Filson and Imlay, op. cit., 330.
149. Howe, op. cit., 54.
150. Burdett, op. cit., 242, 243.
151. Archer B. Hulbert, The American Transcontinental Trails, The Crown Commission of American Maps, Series IV (Stewart Commission in Western History, 1926), vol. I, no. 30.
152. Hubbard, op. cit., 126, 127.
153. Winch, op. cit., 65, 66.

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154. Flint, op. cit., 52.
155. William L. Stone, The Life and Times of Red-Jacket, or Sa-Go-Ye-Wat-He (New York, 1841), 147-163.
156. Buel, op. cit., 227, 228.
157. Winch, op. cit., 189, 190.
158. Ibid., 197.
159. Ibid., 198-201.
160. Flint, op. cit., 243-245.
161. Ibid., 246; 249.
162. James B. Longacre and James Herring, The National Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans (Philadelphia, 1839), vol. IV, 7.
163. Haswell, op. cit., 30, 31; 102.
164. Hall, op. cit., 311, 312.
165. Bigelow, op. cit., 379-383.
166. Caleb Cushing, Outlines of the Public Services, Civil and Military, of William Henry Harrison (Boston, 1840), 15, 16. Cf. Hildreth, op. cit., 23.

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168. Marcus Benjamin, John Bidwell, Pioneer (Washington, D. C., 1907), 16, 17.
169. Dawson, op. cit., 40.
170. Ibid., 51.
171. Hall, op. cit., 311, 312.
172. Bigelow, op. cit., 379-383.
173. Duval, op. cit., 284.
174. Buel, op. cit., 186, 187.
175. Ibid., 112.
176. Ibid., 153.
177. John M. Burke, "Buffalo Bill" From Prairie to Palace (Chicago, 1893), 142, 143.

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178. Hubbard, op. cit., 21.
179. Abbott, op. cit., 12.
180. Ibid., 105.
181. Hall, op. cit., 195.
182. Helen Cody Wetmore, Last of the Great Scouts (Duluth, Minn., 1899), 3, 4.
183. Buel, op. cit., 244.
184. Wetmore, op. cit., 113, 114.
185. Bigelow, op. cit., 71-73.
186. Abbott, op. cit., 204, 205.
187. Bigelow, op. cit., 430, 431.
188. Hubbard, op. cit., 21 ff.

189. Peck, op. cit., 190, 191.
190. Reavis, op. cit., 61.
191. Peck, op. cit., 249, 250.
192. Rev. B. M. Hall, The Life of Rev. John Clark (New York, 1856), 175, 176.
193. Robert L. Stewart, Sheldon Jackson (New York, 1908), 183, 184.
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195. Hildreth, op. cit., 91.
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197. Ibid., 238 ff.
198. Howe, op. cit., 175-177.
199. Abbott, op. cit., 38, 39.
200. Burdett, op. cit., 153, 154.
201. Buel, op. cit., 246.
202. Ibid., 244.
203. Wetmore, op. cit., 29.
204. Ibid., 113, 114.
205. Dick, op. cit., 314, 315.
206. Stewart, op. cit., 114, 115.
207. Ibid., 225.
208. Wetmore, op. cit., 58, 59.
209. Burke, op. cit., 113-115.
210. Wetmore, op. cit., 58, 59.
211. The account of the Pony Express is compiled from the account given in wetmore and Burdett op. cit.

212. Wetmore, op. cit., 58, 59.
213. Winch, op. cit., 35. Winch quotes Alexander Majors' Seventy Years on the Frontier. Almost all the biographies mention this feat, though the distances and time vary somewhat from author to author.
214. Burke, op. cit., 117, 118.
215. Flint, op. cit., 84.
216. Filson and Imlay, op. cit., 344.
217. Burke, op. cit., 83, 84.
218. Winch, op. cit., 88.
219. De Barthe, op. cit., 316.
220. Ibid., 476, 477.
221. Burdett, op. cit., 307-314.
222. Abbott, op. cit., 265.
223. Laura C. Hollaway, Howard: The Christian Hero (New York, 1885), 195.
224. Peck, op. cit., 138-141.
225. Stewart, op. cit., 42-44.
226. Ibid., 115.
227. Howe, op. cit., 70, 71.

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228. Black, op. cit., 51.
229. Hubbard, op. cit., 74, 75.
230. Ibid., 75.
231. Mansfield, op. cit., 23-27.
232. Abbott, op. cit., 122, 123.

233. Burdett, op. cit., 252.  
234. Ibid., 317-320.  
235. Duval, op.cit., 247, 248.  
236. Mansfield, op. cit., 73.  
237. Buel, op. cit., 150.  
238. Ibid., 345.  
239. Winch, op. cit., 14, 142.  
240. Buel, op. cit., 36.  
241. Bayard, op. cit., 111.  
242. Burke, op. cit., 146-150.  
243. Buel, op. cit., 345-363.  
244. Duval, op. cit., 68.  
245. Hubbard, op. cit., 222, 223.  
246. Hittell, op. cit., 49, 50.  
247. Duval, op.cit., 22, 23.  
248. Buel, op. cit., 526.  
249. Ibid., 445.  
250. Peck, op. cit., 265, 266.  
251. Duval, op. cit., 69.  
252. Ibid., 63.

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253. Peck, op. cit., 150-165.  
254. Howe, op. cit., 219-221.  
255. Dawson, op. cit., 171.

256. Bayard, op. cit., 158.
257. Buel, op. cit., 235; 254.
258. Winch, op. cit., 139.
259. Howe, op. cit., 107.
260. Lewis P. Summers, Annals of Southwest Virginia 1769-1800 (Abingdon, Virginia, 1929), 1523. This book contains the text of Charles B. Coale's The Life and Adventures of Wilburn Waters, the Famous Hunter and Trapper of White Top Mountain (Richmond, Virginia, 1878). Waters was born in 1812, and about 1832 he decided to make his home on White Top Mountain, a peak in the Appalachian Range near the point where the three states of Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee all come together, and he remained there as a hermit-hunter. Coale visited him about 1850 and the two became friends. The book was started about 1874, when Waters was still living. It contains "tall stories" -- supposedly true -- of various hunting exploits and adventures on the frontier.
261. Buel, op. cit., 536, 537.
262. Flint, op. cit., 14.
263. Peck, op. cit., 58, 59; 150-165.
264. Kit Dalton, Under the Black Flag (Memphis, Tennessee, 1914 [?]), 10, 11.
265. Howe, op. cit., 98, 99.
266. Peck, op. cit., 239-242.
267. Flint, op. cit., 14 ff
268. Peck, op. cit., 167.
269. Ibid., 150-165.
270. Ibid.
271. Ibid.
272. Ibid., 239-242.

273. Mansfield, op. cit., 34-36.
274. Benjamin, op. cit., 44.
275. Buel, op. cit., 24.
276. Mansfield, op. cit., 73.
277. Buel, op. cit., 426-432.
278. Duval, op. cit., 175.
279. Burke, op. cit., 128.
280. Duval, op. cit., 228.
281. Ibid., 238.
282. Wetmore, op. cit., 72.
283. Duval, op. cit., 64, 65.
284. Wetmore, op. cit., 135.

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285. Peck, op. cit., 149 footnote.
286. Minton Thrift, Memoir of the Rev. Jesse Lee (New York, 1823), 265, 266.
287. Ibid., 288, 289. E. Douglas Branch, in his book Westward (New York, 1938) sets 1794 as the beginning of camp meetings.
288. Oeck, op. cit., 122-124.
289. Ibid., 126, 127.
290. Ibid., 268-270.
291. Ibid., 101.
292. Ibid., 116, 117.
293. Thrift, op. cit., 26.

294. Ibid., 288, 289.
295. Burdett, op. cit., 32, 33.
296. Ibid., 34-39.
297. Bayard, op. cit., 111.
298. Peck, op. cit., 223-228.
299. Stewart, op. cit., 61-63. The entire account is summarized from 55-63.
300. Ibid., 118.
301. Ibid., 150.
302. Ibid., 134.
303. Hall, op. cit., 29, 30.
304. Dalton, op. cit., 214.
305. Buel, op. cit., 247.
306. Wetmore, op. cit., 27, 28. Cf. Purdy, op. cit., 72, 73; 84; 97.
307. Buel, op. cit., 137.
308. Ibid., 87.
309. Dalton, op. cit., 191.
310. Ibid., 134.
311. Ibid., 181.

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312. Haswell, op. cit., 113, 114.
313. Peck, op. cit., 210-212.
314. Headley, op. cit., 237, 238.
315. Burke, op. cit., 119, 120.

316. The paragraph is condensed from Buel's account, 192-204.
317. Ibid., 192-198.
318. Ibid.
319. Dawson, op. cit., 31.
320. Buel, op. cit., 94.
321. Life and Adventures of Sam Bass (Dallas, Texas 1878), 25-33.
322. Emmons, op. cit., 48, 49.

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323. Flint, op. cit., 23.
324. Longacre and Herring, op. cit., 3.
325. Burdett, op. cit., 140, 141.
326. Abbott, op. cit., 84.
327. Burdett, op. cit., 68-70.
328. Benjamin, op. cit., 21-23.
329. Cotten, op. cit., 149.
330. Haswell, op. cit., 124.
331. Abbott, op. cit., 201.
332. Burke, op. cit., 33.
333. Winch, op. cit., 124.
334. Wetmore, op. cit., 188.
335. DeBarthe, op. cit., 517.
336. Wetmore, op. cit., 39; Winch, op. cit., 25; Buel, op. cit., 243; Burke, op. cit., 105.
337. Winch, op. cit., 139.
338. Hittell, op. cit., 288.

339. Wetmore, op. cit., 134-138; Winch, op. cit., 75, 76; Burke, op. cit., 145.
340. DeBarthe, op. cit., 510.
341. Burke, op. cit., 42, 43.
342. Dalton, op. cit., 157.
343. Hittell, op. cit., 297.
344. Peck, op. cit., 57, 58. Cf. Chapter IX.
345. Reavis, op. cit., 41.
346. Eaton, op. cit., 16.
347. Mansfield, op. cit., 61.
348. Ibid., 62-64.
349. Black Republican Imposture Exposed! (Washington, 1856), 5. This pamphlet is catalogued under biography. It consists of only fourteen pages and is not, of course, a complete life sketch.
350. Peck, op. cit., 176.
351. Mansfield, op. cit., 25, 26.
352. Hittell, op. cit., 127, 128.
353. Barrett, op. cit., 113.
354. Mansfield, op. cit., 117, 118.
355. Wetmore, op. cit., 168.

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356. Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York, 1920), 1.
357. F. Clarke, "The Mature Significance of 'New' Countries," Hibbert Journal 31 (January, 1933), 195.

358. George W. Pierson, "The Frontier and the Frontiersmen of Turner's Essays," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 64 (October, 1940), 449-478.
359. Dixon Ryan Fox, "Civilization in Transit," American Historical Review 32 (July, 1927), 763.
360. Cf. Benjamin F. Wright, "American Democracy and the Frontier," Yale Review 20 (December, 1930), 349-365; Pierson, op. cit., 449-478; Charles A. Beard, "The Frontier in American History," New Republic 98 (February 1, 1939), 359-362; and John C. Almack, "The Shibboleth of the Frontier," Historical Outlook 16 (May, 1925), 197-202.
361. Beard, op. cit., 361.
362. Pierson, op. cit., 472.
363. Cf. Murray Kane, "Some Considerations on the Safety Valve Doctrine," Mississippi Valley Historical Review 23 (September, 1936), 169-188; Beard, op. cit., 359-362; Carter Goodrich and Sol Davison, "The Wage-earner in the Westward Movement," Political Science Quarterly 50 (June, 1935), 161-185 and 51 (March, 1936), 61-116; and Fred Shannon, "The Homestead Act and the labor Surplus," American Historical Review 41 (July, 1936), 639 ff.
364. Kane, op. cit., 169-188.
365. Cf. the two articles in the Political Science Quarterly cited above.
366. Pierson, op. cit., 449-478.
367. Frederic L. Paxson, "A Generation of the Frontier Hypothesis," Pacific Historical Review 2 (March, 1933), 49.
368. Percy H. Boynton, The Rediscovery of the Frontier, (Chicago, 1931), 48.

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## Appendix A

A Description of an Early Kentucky School.

Rev. John Mason Peck's description of a pioneer school in Kentucky before the opening of the nineteenth century is worthy of inclusion in more complete form than was possible in the body of the dissertation. Peck, by his own admission, was intimately acquainted with his subject, Rev. John Clark, or "Father Clark." Peck persuaded Clark to begin his autobiography, but the pioneer preacher soon became enfeebled and Peck continued the work in the form of a biography. "By correspondence and personal interviews with many who knew Father Clark, and from his verbal narratives in our interviews for many years, the writer has been enabled to give a truthful sketch of the most important incidents of his life." (iv)

Father Clark came to the Kentucky backwoods in about the year 1796 and soon began teaching in Lincoln County, near Crab Orchard Creek.

He drew up no article of agreement, made no conditions about the number of scholars, and exacted no pay; but left the whole arrangement about the terms of the school with the people who patronized him; only requesting them to furnish him with board and lodging at their houses, or log cabins, and such articles of clothing as he might need. .... The school opened, and about twenty stout lads and lasses were there the first day. Mr. Clark received each one with a

pleasant, smiling countenance, gave them his hand in friendly greeting as they approached him, with a cheerful "good morning," and appeared at once to be on friendly terms. This conduct on the part of the schoolmaster, was, to them, a new feature in discipline. They had been accustomed to be greeted with a wand of hickory or hazel, (the genuine birch not being a growth of that region) and a stern, commanding voice. [There follows a discussion of the first day, in which Clark continued his policy of kindness. Then he tried an experiment in democracy] .... He read a few plain, simple rules, and proposed them to the scholars for adoption, and even gave opportunity for objections to be made, or alterations proposed. This was another new feature in school-discipline and called forth expressions of astonishment and approbation from the older scholars. He was not anxious to enforce these rules on the first day, but to give every pupil time to consider their bearing, and suggested they could be postponed until next day, if all were not prepared to decide. The code appeared so reasonable and proper, that a large majority seemed anxious for its adoption at once, and every one present gave hearty assent.

The next movement was to make inquiry about books; and here no small difficulty and inconvenience appeared. Each pupil had brought such an article for the reading lessons as first came to hand. One had a mutilated copy of Dilworth's "New Guide to the English Tongue;" another showed a volume of old sermons; a third had the "Romance of the Forest," an old novel, and a specimen of the "yellow covered literature" of a former age. A fourth, fifth, and sixth, could show Testaments or pieces of Bibles, with the binding in tatters, and the print dim, and paper brown, such as were gotten up for sale to merchants in that day. Some came without books or any aid to learn the art and mystery of spelling and reading. The Psalter that had descended from some Virginia families whose ancestors belonged to the Colonial English Church, was presented by three or four more. The marvellous story of "Valentine and Orson," answered for the whole stock of literature for a family of three children. .... There was not a book in the three retail stores in Lincoln County, for sale, and it was between fifty and

sixty miles to Lexington where purchases could be made. The world-renowned Noah Webster had commenced the great work of providing his young countrymen with the means of learning their mother tongue, about thirteen years previous. His "First Part of a Grammatical Institute of the English Language," more popularly known as the "American Spelling-Book," was published for the first time in 1783, but it had scarcely found its way into the wilderness of Kentucky. .... The old books had to be used until Mr. Clark's new method of teaching became known, and one of the employers visited Lexington on business. He returned with two dozen of Webster's Spelling-Book, and more other school-books than ever before reached Lincoln County at one time. It was a real holiday for the boys and girls to look over these books. .... [Peck includes a description of the contents of the spelling book, the anecdotes, pictures, etc.]

Time passed away; -- the school increased, until the dirty old cabin was more than crowded. During the warm season, those who studied their lessons (and this was one of the new fashions introduced), could retire to the shade of the forest, and in groups of two, three and four, might have been seen by the passers by, intently conning their lessons. But cold weather approached, the people became quite spirited in providing a new and better house for winter; and the whole settlement turned out with their axes and teams. Large trees were felled in the adjacent forest, and rough hewn on two sides to a suitable thickness. Clap boards, four feet long, were split from a straight oak for the roof; the ends of the logs were securely notched together and were placed one on top of another, as the four sides of the house were raised. In a few days a commodious house, about twenty feet square, and covered in, stood a few yards from the old log cabin. The spaces between the logs were soon "chinked and daubed;" that is, filled with small flat stones and chumps of wood, and mud plastered over the cracks both within and without.

For windows, a log was cut out from each side at a suitable height for the light to shine on the

writing desks, which were slabs placed under the windows. The apertures were a foot wide and extended the length of the room, over which paper saturated with coon oil was placed as a substitute for glass. The chimney was built of rough stones from the neighboring quarry. And as quite an advancement in the style of frontier school houses at that period, planks, as the term was in Kentucky, or boards an inch and a quarter thick, cut at a saw-mill on a branch of Crab Orchard Creek, made a tight floor. It is doubtful if out of Lexington, and a half-dozen other towns, a school house existed in the country settlements with any other floor than the natural earth beaten hard, until this improvement was made both as an accommodation and a compliment to their teacher.

Mr. Clark had two or three young men from eighteen to twenty years of age, who had been under his tuition from the opening of the school, and who desired to qualify themselves for teachers. They were good tempered, affable, constant in their studies, and made good progress. The school now promised to have a greater number and variety of pupils than Mr. Clark could attend to and do justice to all. He proposed to these young men to assist him in the smaller classes, and by that means they would be qualified the sooner and the more thoroughly to teach and govern a school.

John Mason Peck, "Father Clark," or The Pioneer-Preacher (New York, 1855),  
150-165.

An occasional frontier biographer displayed antipathy to higher education. Edward R. Cotten's opinion of academic degrees deserves a better fate than burial in a little-read biography:

Such is not the process to acquire college honors; by college honors, we do not wish to be understood those A.B.'s and M.A.'s that may be so highly prized by the fashionable part of the

literary world: -- No. We look upon these as mere adventitious circumstances, -- the glittering evidences of things unseen, and in many instances do not exist, -- and believe that they are the appendages of many who the least deserve them. We have too often detected such impositions ever to be again deceived by them.

Edward R. Cotten, Life of the Hon.  
Nathaniel Macon, of North Carolina  
(Baltimore, 1840), 27.

## Appendix B

Glossary of Frontier Idioms

Frontier biography contains many illustrations of the idiomatic expressions and phrases current on the frontier. A glossary of frontier idioms encountered in the biographies follows. The numbers at the conclusion of the expression indicate the page on which the term was found.

1. stretched his blanket. Lied; exaggerated. 120
2. as green as a red blackberry. Inexperienced in woodcraft; and frontier life; a tenderfoot. 16
3. nooned. Refers to the common procedure followed by pioneer trains crossing the plains or resting during the heat of the day, usually between 12 and 2 P.M. 18
4. stirred my gall. Irritated me; annoyed me. 33
5. green as cut-seed watermelon. A tender foot; inexperienced in wood craft. Cf. #2. 35
6. sweet-lips. Term of endearment for a well-liked rifle. 64.
7. old butch. Term of endearment for the butcher knife which was standard equipment for Texas hunters. 65
8. red-eye. Liquor; whisky. 70
9. leaning to. Partial to; liked; almost loved. 75
10. taken my sign in. To kill or to die, depending on how used. Thus, "and if luck hadn't been against you, you would have 'taken my sign in.'" 76
11. dogwood switches. Indian arrows. 82
12. Mr. John. The Indians; an Indian. 89
13. sign. Indications that Indians are about; a trail. 91

14. up to time. Prompt; on time; on schedule; as arranged. 109
15. armed and equipped as the law directs. Having the necessary guns, knives, and equipment needed on the frontier. 109
16. no great shakes. Inept; unimportant; No-account. 113
17. and I wish I may be kicked to death by grasshoppers. Used when about to recite something incredible or unbelievable, which was nevertheless true. 124
18. hair lifted. Scalped. 128
19. boging about. Wandering around, rather aimlessly. 128
20. scant pattern. Small stature; a small man; not robust. 144
21. got sand in his craw. Has courage; is brave; fearless. 153
22. upped. Killed. 153
23. up the spout. Killed without a trial or court-martial; killed in cold blood, with little opportunity for justice. 175
24. shuffling off this mortal coil. Dying. 228
25. pegged out. Died. 238
26. Cuffee. The Negroes, in the same sense as "Mr. John" for the Indians. Cf. #12. 266
27. palaver. Talk, conversation, negotiation, argument. 282
28. drove my pegs down. Settled down to ranching or farming. 283
29. as thick as pig tracks around a corn-crib door. Denotes a great number. 283
30. chicken fixings. The chevrons on an army officer. 284
31. old Ned. A southern term for bacon. 285

32. wake robin. Liquor. 291

John C. Duval, The Adventures of Big-Foot Wallace  
3d edition, 1885. (Macon, Georgia, 1870).

33. sinch up. Saddle up. 250

34. boot. The driver's seat on an overland stage. 268

35. pistol cathartic. A bullet, thus: "Billy was  
complimented .... for expending a pistol cathartic  
on one of the number." 274

36. sour mash. Frontier whisky. 452

37. he got his washing done in that hole. Resided there;  
established somewhat permanent residence.

38. sat on. Used in connection with a coroner's examina-  
tion and trial of a murder or homicide.

J. W. Buel, Heroes of the Plains (New York, 1882).

39. Monongahela. Strong whiskey. 255

40. shining the eyes. A method of hunting deer whereby  
two men hunted together, one going ahead bearing a  
pan of blazing pine knots, the other following behind  
with gun cocked. When a deer is awakened, instead  
of running, it remains rooted to the spot, watching  
the fire, thus permitting the second hunter to come  
up close for a shot. 25

41. never being beaten out of his track. Tenacity of  
purpose; refusal to give up or surrender. In this  
instance, used in connection with Boone's wooing  
of Rebecca Bryan -- he refused to give up his suit  
of her. 28

Timothy Flint, Biographical Memoir of Daniel Boone  
(Cincinnati, 1833).

42. lariat. The rope or cord used for picketing or  
fastening horses while grazing, and also the thong  
used for catching wild animals; the lasso. 63

43. parfleches. Boxes or trunks made from buffalo bulls'  
hides with the hair removed, stretched on a form,  
and there allowed to dry. These were of various

shapes and sizes, some like huge pocket-books, others like trunks. The hide became almost as hard as iron when dry.

44. save his hair. Avoid being scalped by Indians. 78

45. irrigating. Drinking, especially hard liquors. 81

46. call in your checks. Kill you; shoot you. 128

John M. Burke, "Buffalo Bill" From Prairie to Palace (Chicago, 1893).

47. to slope. To escape; to make a getaway before detected. 197

48. the Gallant Knights of the Rail. Bandits, especially those engaged in holding up railroad trains. 173

49. Knights of the Shaded Eyes. Bandits and outlaws; stick-up men. Not limited to the railroad bandits. 246

50. Border Outlaw Dynasty. Dalton's name for the guerillas and outlaws prevalent in the years following the Civil War. 247

Kit Dalton, Under the Black Flag (Memphis, Tennessee, 1914 [?]).

51. I has 'em to plant. I have to bury them; in this case, referred two robbers who had been killed. 72

52. Lucretia Borgia. The name given by Cody to his improved breech-loading needle-gun, used in killing buffalo for the Kansas Pacific Railroad. Named thus "in testimony of its murderous qualities." 135

53. guying. Staring at; e.g. "guying that horse." 177

Helen Cody Wetmore, Last of the Great Scouts (Duluth, Minnesota, 1899).

54. gee-string. A breech-clout; used by Frank Grouard, who says that the breech-clout was "more commonly" known as the gee-string. 134

Joe DeBarthe, The Life and Adventures of Frank Grouard, Chief of Scouts, U.S.A. (St. Joseph, Missouri, 1894).

55. Indian-land-men. Squatters; men of great muscular strength and activity. They derived their title to the land from the Indians. 72

John N. Hubbard, Sketches of the Life and Adventures of Moses Van Campen (Dansville, N.Y., 1841).

56. Mr. Lo. An Indian, or Indians. Apparently the term was derived from the expression "Lo, the poor Indian." 75

Logan U. Reavis, The Rifle and Military Services of Gen. William Selby Herney (St. Louis, 1878).

57. el canalo. A Mexican or Spanish name for horses which were cinnamon colored. The word itself means cinnamon. 155

58. a grass. A year. Used when comparing the age of horses. "They [the horses] were brothers, one a grass younger than the other ...." 155

John Bigelow, Memoir of the Life and Public Services of John Charles Fremont (New York, 1856).

59. poudrerie. Dry snow driven through the air with violent wind, in which objects are visible only at a short distance. 282

Charles W. Upham, Life, Explorations, and Public Services of John Charles Fremont (Boston, 1856).

60. tickled with a hoe to laugh with a harvest. An expression used to indicate the fertility of the soil in the West, particularly that bordering upon the streams. 202

John Abbott, Christopher Carson (New York, 1873).

## Appendix C

Captain Jack Crawford's "The Courtship and Marriage of California Joe."

John W. Crawford became known as the Poet Scout of the Black Hills because he was adept at rhyming. A native of County Donegal, Ireland, "Captain Jack" came to America at the age of eight or nine. His father drank heavily and Jack was forced to help support the family, which prevented him from getting any schooling whatever. He did not know the alphabet at fifteen. He enlisted in the Union Army and was wounded in 1864. While convalescing in a hospital he learned to read and write under the tutoring of his nurse. After the war Crawford served as scout and trailer for United States army forces, particularly in the Black Hills region. While thus engaged he had the opportunity of seeing at first hand the events he put into poetry, and of hearing the campfire legends and stories which he made into verse. A book of his poems was published in 1879 under the title The Poet Scout by H. Keller and Company of San Francisco.

The ballad reproduced below is a good example of Crawford's style. It is supposedly based on fact.

**"THE COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE OF CALIFORNIA JOE"**

By Capt. Jack Crawford

Well, mates, I don't like stories,  
Nor am I going to act

A part around this camp fire  
 That ain't a truthful fact.  
 So fill your pipes and listen,  
 I'll tell you -- let me see,  
 I think it was in fifty,  
 From that till sixty-three.

You've all heard tell of Bridger  
 I used to run with Jim,  
 And many a hard day's scouting  
 I've done 'longside of him.  
 Well, once, near old Fort Reno,  
 A trapper used to dwell;  
 We called him old Pap Reynolds--  
 The scouts all knew him well.

One night -- the spring of fifty --  
 We camped on Powder River;  
 We killed a calf of buffalo,  
 And cooked a slice of liver;  
 While eating, quite contented,  
 We heard three shots or four;  
 Put out the fire and listened,  
 Then heard a dozen more.

We knew that old man Reynolds  
 Had moved his traps up here;  
 So, picking up our rifles,  
 And fixing on our gear,  
 We mounted quick as lightnin'--  
 To save was our desire.  
 Too late; the painted heathens  
 Had set the house on fire.

We tied our horses quickly,  
 And waded up the stream;  
 While close beside the water  
 I heard a muffled scream,  
 And there among the bushes,  
 A little girl did lie;  
 I picked her up and whispered,  
 "I'll save you, or I'll die!"

Lord, what a ride! Old Bridger,  
 He covered my retreat,  
 Sometimes the child would whisper,  
 In voice so low and sweet,  
 "Poor papa! God will take him  
 To mamma up above;  
 There's no one left to love me --  
 There's no one left to love."

The little one was thirteen,  
 And I was twenty-two.  
 Said I: "I'll be your father,  
 And love you jst as true."  
 She nestled to my bosom,  
 Her hazel eyes so bright,  
 Looked up and made me happy,  
 Though close pursued that night.

A month had passed, and Maggie  
 (We called her Hazel-Eye),  
 In truth, was going to leave me --  
 Was going to say "good-bye."  
 Her uncle, mad Jack Reynolds --  
 Reported long since dead --  
 Had come to claim my angel,  
 His brother's child, he said.

What could I say? We parted.  
 Mad Jack was growing old;  
 I handed him a bank-note,  
 And all I had in gold.  
 They rode away at sunrise,  
 I went a mile or two,  
 And, parting, said: "We'll meet again --  
 May God watch over you."

\*\* \*\* \* \*\* \* \*\* \* \*\* \* \*\* \* \*\* \* \*\* \* \*\* \*

Beside a laughing, dancing brook,  
 A little cabin stood,  
 As, weary with a long day's scout,  
 I spied it in the wood.  
 A pretty valley stretched beyond,  
 The mountains towered above,  
 While near the willow bank I heard  
 The cooing of a dove.

'Twas one grand panorama;  
 The brook was plainly seen,  
 Like a long thread of silver  
 In a cloth of lovely green.  
 The laughter of the waters,  
 The cooing of the dove,  
 Was like some painted picture --  
 Some well-told tale of love.

While drinking in the grandeur,  
 And resting in my saddle,  
 I heard a gentle ripple,  
 Like the dipping of a paddle.  
 I turned toward the eddy --  
 A strange sight met my view:  
 A maiden, with her rifle,  
 In a little bark canoe.

She stood up in the centre,  
 The rifle to her eye;  
 I thought (just for a second)  
 My time had come to die.  
 I doffed my hat and told her  
 (If it was all the same)  
 To drop her little shooter,  
 For I was not her game.

She dropped the deadly weapon,  
 And leaped from the canoe.  
 Said she: "I beg your pardon,  
 I thought you were a Sioux;  
 Your long hair and your buckskin  
 Looked warrior-like and rough;  
 My bead was spoiled by sunshine,  
 Or I'd killed you, sure enough."

"Perhaps it had been better  
 You dropped me then," said I;  
 "For surely such an angel  
 Would bear me to the sky."  
 She blushed and dropped her eyelids;  
 Her cheeks were crimson red;  
 One half-shy glance she gave me,  
 And then hung down her head.

I took her little hand in mine --  
 She wondered what I meant,  
 And yet she drew it not away,  
 But rather seemed content.  
 We sat upon the mossy bank --  
 Her eyes began to fill --  
 The brook was rippling at our feet,  
 The dove was cooing still.

I smoothed the golden tresses,  
 Her eyes looked up in mine.  
 She seemed in doubt -- then whispered:  
 "'Tis such a long, long time  
 Strong arms were thrown around me --  
I'll save you, or I'll die."  
 I clasped her to my bosom --  
 My long-lost Hazel-Eye.

The rapture of that moment  
 Was almost heaven to me;  
 I kissed her 'mid her tear-drops,  
 Her innocence and glee;  
 Her heart near mine was beating,  
 While sobbingly she said:  
 "My dear, my brave preserver,  
 They told me you were dead.

"But oh! those parting words, Joe,  
 Have never left my mind,  
 You said: 'We'll meet again, Mag,'  
 Then rode off like the wind;  
 And, oh! how I have prayed, Joe,  
 For you, who saved my life,  
 That God would send an angel  
 To guard you through all strife.

"And he who claimed me from you,  
 My uncle, good and true --  
 Now sick in yonder cabin --  
 Has talked so much of you.  
 'If Joe were living, darling,'  
 He said to me last night,  
 'He would care for Maggie,  
 When God puts out my light.'"

We found the old man sleeping,  
 "Hush! Maggie, let him rest."  
 The sun was slowly sinking  
 In the far-off glowing west;  
 And tho' we talked in whispers,  
 He opened wide his eyes,  
 "A dream -- a dream!" he murmured,  
 "Alas! a dream of lies!"

She drifted like a shadow  
 To where the old man lay,  
 "You had a dream, dear uncle,  
 Another dream to-day?"  
 "Oh, yes; I saw an angel,  
 As pure as mountain snow,  
 And near her, at my bedside,  
 Stood California Joe."

"I'm sure I'm not an angel,  
 Dear uncle, that you know;  
 These arms are brown, my hands, too --  
My face is not like snow;  
 Now, listen while I tell you,  
 For I have news to cheer,  
 And Hazel-Eye is happy,  
 For Joe is truly here."

And when a few days after,  
 The old man said to me,  
 "Joe, boy, she ar' a angel,  
 An' good as angels be;  
 For three long months she's hunted  
 An' trapped an' nurs'd me, too;  
 God bless ye, boy! I believe it --  
 She's safe along wi' you."

\*\* \*\* \* \* \* \* \* \*\* \*\* \*\* \*\*

The sun was slowly sinking,  
 When Mag (my wife) and I  
 Came riding through the valley,  
 The tear-drops in her eye,  
 "One year ago, to-day, Joe --  
 I see the mossy grave --  
 We laid him 'neath the daisies,  
 My uncle, good and brave."

And, comrades, every spring-time  
 Was sure to find me there --  
 A something in that valley  
 Was always fresh and fair;  
 Our loves were newly kindled  
 While sitting by the stream,  
 Where two hearts were united  
 In love's sweet, happy dream.

J. W. Buel, Heroes of the Plains. (New York,  
 1882), 426-432.