Brown Water: A Narrative of My Personal Journey in the Wake of Lewis and Clark

Norma Fry
Southeastern Community College
sources into a comprehensive account of some of the dangers that faced
the newly formed United States at that time, an account that casts new
light on the life of one of America’s most famous figures between late
1797 and 1803. The voyage down the Mississippi helped shape the river
experiences and skills that Clark put to such good use on what he
would call his “western travels” — the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Brown Water: A Narrative of My Personal Journey in the Wake of Lewis and
Clark, by Butch Bouvier. Onawa, Iowa: Butch Bouvier (keelboat@long-
lines.com), 2015. xv, 186 pp. Illustrations, glossary. $20.00 paperback.

Reviewer Norman Fry is a retired Southeastern Community College American
history instructor with a longstanding interest in life in Iowa’s small towns and
along the Mississippi River.

Brown Water is Butch Bouvier’s personal narrative of his boat journey
along the route taken by Lewis and Clark on the Missouri River. Bouvier
describes himself as a “hands on” historian with a passion for living
history, and his goal is not only to take the journey but to recreate the
boats used by early river explorers. The narrative of Brown Water is com-
posed of three parts. The first is Bouvier’s own narrative describing the
boat building and the journey. The second narrative, written in journals
given to the crew by the author, offers the volunteer crew’s perspective
on the river journey. The third narrative includes “Knowledge Nooks,”
short explanatory inserts that illustrate the history and techniques of
boat building.

Rather than a standard history, Brown Water is a modern boat-
wright’s account of the building of traditional riverboats. Bouvier gives
abundant details on the selection of wood for boat construction, the con-
struction process, and the navigation by shallow draft keelboats and pi-
rogues. Readers interested in riverboat architecture will find Bouvier’s
book an informative read. Readers fascinated by a personal adventure
story, one that relates that adventure to the history of early Iowa and the
perils of navigating the Missouri River, will find Brown Water a racon-
teur’s delight.

Working the Mississippi: Two Centuries of Life on the River, by Bonnie
Illustrations, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. $36.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Patrick Nunnally is editor of Open Rivers: Rethinking the Mississippi, a
digital journal published by the University of Minnesota.