

Pioneer Photographers From the Mississippi to the Continental Divide: a Biographical Dictionary, 1839-1865

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Book Reviews and Notices

Pioneer Photographers from the Mississippi to the Continental Divide: A Biographical Dictionary, 1839-1865, by Peter E. Palmquist and Thomas R. Kailbourn. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005. xviii, 742 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendixes, bibliography. \$150.00 cloth.

Reviewer Becki Plunkett is special collections archivist at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Des Moines), where she manages an extensive collection of vintage photographs.

With the introduction of the daguerreotype process in 1839, photography entered the cultural landscape as both art form and occupation. Its earliest practitioners in the frontier regions of America broke ground in this fledgling profession against the backdrop of westward expansion. Their individual stories, as much as their collective body of work, help illustrate the progress of a nation.

In their previous collaborative work, *Pioneer Photographers of the Far West: A Biographical Dictionary, 1840-1865* (2000), Peter E. Palmquist and Thomas R. Kailbourn presented sketches of some 1,500 individuals who worked the trade in the territory from the Pacific Coast to the Rocky Mountains. In this second volume they push eastward to document those photographers operating in a geographic corridor bounded by the Continental Divide and the Mississippi River in the United States and extending into adjoining areas of Canada and Mexico.

Based on the authors' exhaustive research in primary and secondary sources, and incorporating shared resources from a number of regional photo historians, this book contains biographical entries for more than 3,000 individuals who practiced photography and related professions in the prescribed study area before 1866. Included along with actual photographers are persons occupied in supporting and associated trades: photo-lithographers, product suppliers and distributors, media-enhancement artists, and producers of such visual entertainments as moving panoramas and magic lantern slide shows.

Before this cast of characters is introduced, the authors provide essential context information in an introductory chapter describing photography's technical development and progression across the western frontier, its transition into a documentary medium, its cooperative (if sometimes competitive) relationship with the graphic arts, and the challenges and opportunities met by its early practitioners.

The biographical entries that follow draw on a variety of historical resources, including census records, city directories, tax lists, newspapers, and photo imprints. Although the depth of each artist's vita was obviously determined by the volume of material the authors unearthed in their research, one finds at least dates and locations of documented activity. Additional career and personal information flesh out a large proportion of the profiles, with many entries expanding into substantial narratives. The biographies are individually footnoted and frequently illustrated with samples of the photographer's work. The artists are presented alphabetically in the main body of the book; an appendix that cross-references individuals by geographic distribution facilitates regional study of the profession. Another appendix listing women photographers provides a useful resource for those sharing Palmquist's special interest in that demographic. Three additional appendixes and a comprehensive bibliography equip the reader for further exploration of the book's subject matter.

This biographical dictionary will have a ready audience of photo historians, archivists, and art curators who will appreciate it both as a reference tool for locating information on specific photographers and as a composite study of the profession. However, its value as a resource for broader historical research should not be overlooked, as these vignettes of individual experience are interwoven into larger stories of the American West. This point is illustrated in the profiles of several Iowa artists. In the early 1850s, Mormon photographers Louis Chaffin, Joseph Ellis Johnson, and William Alexander Smith emigrated to Kaneshville (Council Bluffs), where they drew customers from the stream of Latter-day Saints passing through that community en route to Salt Lake City. Dubuque resident John Plumbe Jr., a nationally known photographer and gallery franchiser, became a daguerreotype artist to raise revenue to promote an intercontinental railroad he pitched to Congress in 1839. L. D. Campbell left his Burlington gallery for Missouri's Benton Barracks when the Civil War created a booming market for soldiers' portraits. Both personalities and prototypes can be discovered within this book's fascinating mix of innovators, opportunists, transient successes, and enduring talents.

The inclusion of photography's peripheral characters in the dictionary—the derivative artists, gallery owners, promoters, and others like them—may be distracting for some readers, but most will find that these auxiliary workers help define the role of the featured subjects within the era's socioeconomic structure. As with any professional census attempted for this time period, certain details and individuals will remain elusive. Although this work comes as close to a

definitive product as one can imagine, the authors presumably hoped that it would inspire perpetual research and supplementation.

Peter Palmquist's untimely death in 2003 ended prospects for additional regional surveys by this research team. This second volume, however, completes a thorough study of early photographers in the American West. Exceeding the utility of a desktop reference, this book provides a sweeping, personalized history of an emerging profession.

John Brown, Abolitionist: The Man Who Killed Slavery, Sparked the Civil War, and Seeded Civil Rights, by David S. Reynolds. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005. x, 578 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$35.00 cloth.

Terrible Swift Sword: The Legacy of John Brown, edited by Peggy A. Russo and Paul Finkelman. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005. xxx, 228 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$59.95 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

Reviewer Galin Berrier is adjunct instructor in history at Des Moines Area Community College. He is the author of the chapter, "The Underground Railroad in Iowa," in *Outside In: African American History in Iowa, 1838-2000* (2001).

David S. Reynolds describes his thoroughly researched and engagingly written *John Brown, Abolitionist* as a "cultural biography . . . based on the idea that human beings have a dynamic, dialogic relationship to many aspects of their historical surroundings, such as politics, society, literature, and religion" (9). He portrays John Brown as free of racial prejudice, respectful of black culture, and inspired by the example of successful slave revolts. Like other biographers, he stresses Brown's stern Calvinism and shows how he followed the example of the seventeenth-century English Puritan General Oliver Cromwell. Whereas most abolitionists were pacifists, Brown employed violence and perhaps terrorism in a holy cause.

Those who view John Brown as a crazed fanatic or criminal have stressed his part in the slaughter of five proslavery settlers on Pottawatomie Creek in Kansas in May 1856. Reynolds, while not condoning those killings, insists that they were explainable, given "the special conditions of time and place" (139). He thinks the ill-fated Harpers Ferry raid was not necessarily doomed to failure if viewed in the context of American slave insurrections (105). Disavowed by many after the raid, Brown, with his noble demeanor facing the gallows, earned the admiration of the Concord Transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, who rescued his memory "from infamy and possible oblivion" (344).

Terrible Swift Sword collects 13 essays from various disciplines, including literature, creative writing, psychology, African American studies, political science, film studies, and anthropology, as well as

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