

Wanderer on the American Frontier: The Travels of John Maley, 1803-1813

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Book Reviews and Notices

Wanderer on the American Frontier: The Travels of John Maley, 1803–1813, edited by F. Andrew Dowdy. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018. xx, 244 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$45 hardcover.

Review Roger L. Nichols is emeritus professor of history at the University of Arizona. He has written extensively about American Indian history and about the history of the frontier and the American West, including frontier exploration.

This book is an edited version of a frontier travel narrative written during the early nineteenth century by John Maley, an obscure but enthusiastic adventurer. His wanderings between 1808 and 1813 took him from Pittsburgh down the Ohio River to Indiana and Illinois and then beyond the Mississippi River into present-day Missouri, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and possibly Texas. Clearly interested in business prospects in the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase, he described his ramblings there. Although the narrative describes crossing Illinois and Missouri as well as traveling on the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers just a few years after Zebulon Pike and Lewis and Clark, it focuses primarily on the Red River, Arkansas, and the southern plains. He discusses frontier travel by boat and overland, recounts dealing with Indians, and describes hardship and near starvation on the plains. During those travels, Maley kept some field notes from which he constructed the narrative. However, as editor Andrew Dowdy admits, his notes are incomplete, and he seems to have depended on memory for much of his descriptions (xv).

Little is known about the author. A New York native, he died in June 1891 at Charleston, South Carolina. His writing suggests only a modest education. His narrative pictures him as an energetic, even athletic, person who enjoyed the challenges of frontier travel. Clearly he had enough money to pay for the horses, weapons, and trade goods needed for successful journeys into unsettled areas and while meeting various bands of Indians in the Southwest of that day. His account suggests that he got along well with the trappers, hunters, and boatmen he met during his travels.

For readers interested in frontier travel and exploration, what this book offers is not a day-to-day travel journal but less-organized descriptions of Maley's frontier travels. Apparently, he expected to publish

this account but instead sold his two journals to a Philadelphia publisher. During the early 1820s, Professor Benjamin Silliman acquired one volume, which remained in his papers at Yale. The second volume came to light in 2012 and is now held by the DeGolyer Library at Southern Methodist University. Some misgivings about its authenticity exist because of Maley's frequent errors concerning distances and travel times. The editor suggests that these mistakes occurred because, unlike government explorers, he had only incomplete travel notes. He praises the author for giving "a rare blue-collar view of the frontier," something others rarely did (xvi).

The book is well done, but its excellent maps would have been more useful if they had marked Maley's travels more clearly. Also, the table of contents needs some identifying terms, not just dates for each section.

The Making of Pioneer Wisconsin: Voices of Early Settlers, by Michael E. Stevens. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2018. xviii, 173 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$18.95 paperback.

Reviewer Wayne Duerkes is a Ph.D. candidate in history at Iowa State University. He is working on a dissertation on community and market creation in the antebellum rural Midwest.

In his latest publication, Michael E. Stevens, Wisconsin State Historian Emeritus, provides "an opportunity to meet, if only briefly, people from the past" (163). To accomplish that, Stevens compiles an assortment of primary source documents written by early Wisconsin pioneers up to the 1850s. The diversity of the 52 introduced sources is represented by excerpts from travel guides, personal correspondence, letters printed in newspapers, petitions, and memorials. He categorizes the documents into three main thematic groupings: migration, adaptation, and community creation. These groupings chronologically follow the general emigration pattern of new settlers to the region, although there is slight, unavoidable overlap. In the end, he seeks to demonstrate the resolve and mettle most of these pioneers displayed, laying the foundation for the Wisconsin character.

Stevens highlights a cross section of Wisconsin pioneers both demographically and thematically. There are sources written by a member of the Ho-Chunk tribe, free blacks, and white men and women, with a special focus on German and Norwegian immigrants. In the documents, the authors describe travel to their new homeland, environmental conditions, sickness, loneliness, assimilation, temperance, abolitionism, and the western stereotype of lawlessness. But the stalwart pioneers also allude to visions of the potential and opportunity of settling in