

## Thomas L. McKenney, Architect of America's Early Indian Policy: 1816-1830

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rather than the fictional accounts that form the largest part of this book. Finally, the "language illiteracy" to which Billington refers (p. xii) is also cultural illiteracy. American historians who read translations of European writings see words, but they do not see feelings or account for differences of words in local contexts any more than European observers who write about America without language competency or having made extended visits to the several regions of the United States. In short, images through American eyes from English translations are not necessarily what they appear in a native language in European eyes. Perhaps this is what Billington meant when he called upon European scholars to take up this subject. It is to be hoped that many will accept the challenge.

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*Thomas L. McKenney, Architect of America's Early Indian Policy: 1816-1830*, by Herman J. Viola. Chicago: The Swallow Press, Inc., 1974. pp. ii, 365. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index, maps. \$8.95 paperback, \$15.00 cloth.

The author of this book, Herman J. Viola, is an Indiana Ph.D. (1970) who is the director of the National Anthropological Archives in the Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution. He has written a number of articles, and has developed or edited three books: this biography, an edition of Thomas McKenney's memoirs, and a biography of Charles Bird King, a painter of Indian scenes who did many portraits for McKenney and the War Department.

Thomas McKenney was a figure of moderate importance in the Monroe and Adams administrations. As an experienced merchant, he became superintendent of the government's Indian trading posts in 1816. This role got him deeply involved in negotiations, in reform efforts, and in economic clashes with private traders. The latter, led by John Jacob Astor, saw McKenney interfering with their profits, and by 1822 they were able to get his posts and his office abolished. McKenney resurfaced as a Calhoun supporter. Since Secretary of War Calhoun hoped to create an overall "Bureau of Indian Affairs," he hired McKenney as a minor clerk and then gave him charge of all Indian matters. McKenney remained a moderately independent director of this non-existent bureau for some years, handling all Indian subjects and generally creating the groundwork for the future department. As a Calhounite, he was

finally discharged by Jackson. He devoted the remainder of his life to preparing a history and gallery of Indian life. In his day, McKenney was a well known figure, and he came into the public eye in several major congressional hearings or during his negotiations with western Indians.

For the most part, historians have ignored McKenney. Wiltse quietly notes that he was an aide to Calhoun. Grant Foreman and other Indian specialists do not mention him. Herman Viola seeks to correct this view; he believes that McKenney was the principal creator of Indian policy during the critical decade before Indian removal.

Viola sees McKenney as a sincere humanitarian who hoped to turn his Indian clients into peaceable, Protestant farmers. He adeptly marshalled the assistance and political support of eastern missionaries to promote this policy. He instructed his trading agents to stress farm implements. McKenney made a serious effort to persuade Indian delegations to adopt farming, and he raised, with mixed success, several Indian lads into American culture. Viola depicts McKenney as a skilled political infighter who survived the dissolution of his trading posts and attacks by William Crawford. Using his ties to Calhoun, he created from nothing a bureau for all Indian affairs.

The first portion of this book, I believe, is very well written and offers the reader an excellent look at both the trading system and the functioning of an already complex federal bureaucracy. It offers in addition a refreshing look at the struggle between Calhoun and Crawford to succeed Monroe. Unfortunately, the second half of the book is weaker. Viola gives a good account of McKenney's travels to the Great Lakes, but offers only a cursory explanation for McKenney's shift from humanitarianism to support for expulsion. He argues that the shift came from the disillusionment McKenney suffered when several of his wards, and Indians in general, failed to adjust to American farming culture. I might suggest a degree of political flexibility—that is, McKenney saw the way the political winds were shifting, and followed them. Viola mentions in passing McKenney's numerous and slightly disreputable dealings with men who advanced him money but, I fear, tends to give his hero the benefit of the doubt in these encounters. And Viola is clearly wrong when he gives McKenney credit for Jackson's Indian removal policy (p. 222) at a time when the Jackson administration was ignoring McKenney and preparing to fire him.

Still, this is a good book on the whole, well written and

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illustrated. It throws a good deal of light on a man who, if not in the first rank of American officials of the 1820s, was still a person of considerable importance. Anyone interested in the politics or bureaucratic evolution of the 1820s, or the evolution of our Indian policy will surely find this book very interesting.

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*Cowboy Culture: A Saga of Five Centuries*, by David Dary. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981. pp. xii, 384. Photographs, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$17.95.

David Dary's new book is appropriate for him. A sweeping history of America's cowmen—from Spanish and Mexican vaqueros to Anglo cowboys—this work makes a fine companion to Dary's earlier big one about the bison, *The Buffalo Book* (1974). *Cowboy Culture* is a broad history which touches almost every important aspect of its subject. Avoiding sentimentality, Dary attempts an objective report of the life and times he describes; his is a book packed with graphic detail and telling quotations from a great variety of primary sources. Here are Spanish Californios making sport of roping grizzlies, vaqueros breaking wild three-year-olds with rope and bosal or hackamore (in much the same way a few of the big cow ranches still break their colts—the Pitchforks in Texas and the Bells in New Mexico for example). Here are great figures like the famed priest Father Kino, remembered for his teaching of livestock husbandry and animal management. Here too is described the birth of roping. In the sixteenth century the vaquero, wielding a vicious desjarretadera or hocking knife bound to a wooden lance, hamstringed cattle from horseback. Because Spanish horsemen destroyed immense herds of cattle on the open range for sport as well as for hides, this practice was outlawed in 1574. Gradually the lasso replaced the hocking knife. In the earliest days, the vaquero rode in behind a wild cow and carried his lasso looped at the end of a lance. Closing on the cow, he slipped the loop to the brute's horns, then tightened gradually in order to slow the cow down and save himself and his horse. There was no saddle horn to tie to. At first, the vaquero, after tying to the cow, made fast the other end of the lasso to the saddle cinch or the horse's tail. Dary presents a couple of sixteenth-century drawings illustrating these precarious practices, ones which made modern rodeo look like a baby's game.

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