The Material Culture of Steamboat Passengers: Archaeological Evidence From the Missouri River

ISSN 0003-4827
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Recommended Citation
"The Material Culture of Steamboat Passengers: Archaeological Evidence From the Missouri River."
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.10601

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tember 1846 with the struggling Poor Camp, the last group to leave Nauvoo. An English scribe who later became the official church historian, Bullock began his service under Brigham Young during this time.

Invaluable to Iowa historians are Bullock’s details of the Poor Camp. Through the spring and summer of 1846, leaders of the church, and as many others as could equip themselves, left Nauvoo. Finally, by September, the mob had driven all of the Saints who were left in Nauvoo across the Mississippi River. Bullock was there and recorded their experience. Those late exiles from Nauvoo (157 by his trail count) were leaderless, poor, and sick, waiting for help from Brigham Young. Their enemies subjected them to threats, humiliation, and constant raiding of their limited supplies. Eventually, the “miracle of the quail” came to sustain the faith of this group in Iowa.

The poor organization and low morale evidenced in the 1846 journal contrast with the confidence and positive outlook of the well-organized pioneer company of earlier exiles who continued to Salt Lake. These journals contain Bullock’s singular view as a man. They contrast with the accounts of women journal keepers that must be read also if one is to understand these LDS pioneers. The text, with its explanatory footnotes, list of Mormon pioneers, and appendixes, would be a valuable addition to any Iowa historical library.


Reviewer William E. Lass is professor of history emeritus at Minnesota State University, Mankato. His books include A History of Steamboating on the Upper Missouri River (1962).

With the aim of analyzing social and economic traits of Missouri River steamboat passengers, Annalies Corbin studied artifacts (material culture) retrieved from the wrecks of the Arabia and the Bertrand, which sank in 1856 and 1865 respectively. Items recovered from the Arabia are on display in the Steamboat Arabia Museum in Kansas City, Missouri, and those from the Bertrand are in the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge Museum near Missouri Valley, Iowa. Corbin’s primary study is limited to the contents of five boxes of personal possessions found in the remains of the two vessels. Her systematic descriptions of each item in the boxes enable her to reach logical conclusions about the lifestyles of selected passengers.
Additionally, appendixes provide valuable insights into the nature of steamboat cargoes and frontier merchandising. Corbin lists the type and quantity of all artifacts found in both boats. One-third of the book is brief descriptions of 631 boats that plied the Missouri River in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although this section is the most complete listing ever done of Missouri River boats, it would have benefitted from an introduction about its coverage. Contrary to a statement in the foreword, the listing is not limited to boat wrecks.

Anyone interested in frontier society will find this to be a very useful volume. It helps explain the development of the Missouri River route that was vital to western Iowa and other portions of the Midwest.


Reviewer Brian W. Beltman is an adjunct professor of history at the University of South Carolina and the author of Dutch Farmer in the Missouri Valley: The Life and Letters of Ulbe Eringa, 1866–1950. His research interests include rural social history and Dutch ethnic studies.

Historical studies about nineteenth-century Dutch immigration and settlement in the United States are distinguished from similar histories of other American ethnic groups by a remarkably high level of scholarship that has been sustained across three generations of research and writing. The first standard source appeared in the 1920s; Dutch historian Jacob Van Hinte crafted a monumental narrative that served as a definitive history for at least a generation. As a Netherlandic publication, however, it was not available in English until the 1980s. In the 1950s American scholar Henry S. Lucas produced the second encyclopedic survey of Dutch migration to the United States that became the basic reference source for students limited by their inability to read Dutch. This second-generation tome has been supplemented by the more recent works of Robert P. Swierenga, the latest component of an impressive scholarly triad that details Dutch ethnic history.

Swierenga's forays into the subject have been fully within the context of the "new immigration history," a body of research that relies heavily on statistical data rather than traditional narrative source material and reflects a longitudinal approach to the transplantation experience of ethnic groups. Both emigration from the Old Country and immigration to the New receive careful attention to fashion as completely as possible a holistic portrait of ethnocultural relocation. Swier-