

Summer 2017

Book Review of, *Fur Trade Gamble: North West Company on the Pacific Slope, 1800-1820* by Lloyd Keith and John C. Jackson

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Citation Details

Lang, William L., "Book Review of, *Fur Trade Gamble: North West Company on the Pacific Slope, 1800-1820* by Lloyd Keith and John C. Jackson" (2017). *History Faculty Publications and Presentations*. 37.

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efforts to encourage and support immigration, which attracted many largely secular eastern European Jews less interested in religion than in social and economic opportunity to Portland.

Throughout the narrative the author analyzes the Oregon Jewish experience clearly, and her data supports her thesis that Jews in the state changed as did the regional society. Her thematic approach is effective, her research is prodigious, using records of local ethnic organizations, media and newspapers, as well as oral history files from participants. In the "Preface," Eisenberg warns that when doing ethnic history "focusing on a particular group or a specific region can easily lead to uncritical exceptionalism," and while looking at Jewish matters nationally at times, this study does not avoid that issue entirely (p. xvii). Her bibliography includes only two items, one on African and another on Italian Americans, that might offer ideas for comparison, and it overlooks the many solid ethnic studies that would have allowed a few judiciously placed comparative paragraphs to achieve a broader context for her well-told narrative. While usually readable, a few places in the prose are loaded with terms many non-Jewish readers may find unclear — page four offers a good example. Despite these minor complaints this book is a worthy successor to Steven Lowenstein's 1987 *The Jews of Oregon, 1850–1950*.

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**FUR TRADE GAMBLE: NORTH WEST
COMPANY ON THE PACIFIC SLOPE,
1800–1820**

by Lloyd Keith and John C. Jackson

Washington State University Press, 2016. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index, appendices. 336 pages. \$42.00, cloth; \$24.95, paper.

In 1821, under pressure from Parliament, the North West Company (NWC) merged with and became subsumed into the larger Hudson's

Bay Company (HBC), thereby consolidating British fur trading activity in western North America in one capital-rich and domineering chartered corporation. Created in 1784 in Montreal among a group of established traders (including venturesome partners Alexander McKenzie, David Thompson, and Peter Pond), the NWC operated as a cooperative partnership and without the bureaucracy that characterized HBC functions. It allowed them to pioneer the British fur trade west across the Continental Divide, thrusting them into the American Pacific Northwest and Canada's British Columbia. That bold action is always included in fur trade histories, but the HBC's nineteenth-century entrepreneurial achievements generally dominate the larger story. The NWC's push to the Pacific generally merits diluted coverage.

In the posthumously published *The Fur Trade Gamble*, two accomplished fur trade historians redirect our attention to why, how, and with what consequences the NWC bet their future on trade in developing the Columbia River Basin fur resources. Lloyd Keith and John Jackson set out to document two decades of contributions NWC traders made to the fur business in the Pacific Northwest by recounting in considerable detail the tasks they undertook. The story they tell is punctuated by descriptions of NWC fur men's tactical exploits against HBC rivals, their negotiations with Piikani bands for trespass on Native homelands, and ongoing difficulties carrying out their instructions in the face of slow communications with NWC managing partners hundreds of miles east of the Columbia. Keith and Jackson leave little out, with particular focus on the laborious travel — by canoe, foot, and horseback — fur traders endured to collect furs for packaging and shipment to market.

The "gamble" refers to the NWC's business plan to tap the fur resources on the Pacific and reward their effort with highly advantageous trade in China. The company's inability to overcome the East India Company's stranglehold on British trade in China, the complications created by the War of 1812, and insufficient management resources doomed the enterprise. Keith and Jackson are most effective in

detailing NWC's challenges and disappointments. Their discussion of how John Astor's Pacific Fur Company base at Fort Astoria fell into British hands at the conclusion of the War of 1812 is particularly revealing, for the fate of Fort Astoria was far from certain. The authors emphasize the objections some British naval officers on the HMS *Raccoon* expressed over their participation in handing off Fort Astoria to the NWC, rather than claiming it a prize of war. "The officer and crew of the *Raccoon*, who expected prize money would be theirs," Keith and Jackson note, "had to be satisfied with the knowledge that they had done their duty 'to the North West Company'" (p. 100). In addition, the authors point out, NWC partners at the newly named Fort George at Astoria had divided interests and internecine disputes that further hampered the company's ability to fulfill its plan in the Pacific Northwest.

Many readers familiar with NWC's interior fur trade will find the sections on its maritime operations revealing, especially the voyages of the *Isaac Todd* and two vessels named *Columbia*, which attempted to tap the China trade and fell far short, and the *Colonel Allen*, a trading vessel meant to ferry NWC furs to the London market. The authors also cover the interior trade in the Columbia Basin after 1815, but in fleshing out NWC personalities they often repeat descriptions of events and relationships dealt with earlier in the book. The authors also admit in notes that they often had to speculate on events that went undocumented by participants. Nonetheless, they have compiled considerable materials from NWC correspondence and set it all in a broad context. For anyone curious about how NWC men, often traveling with their families, tackled difficult and frustrating challenges on the west side of the Divide in the early nineteenth century, *The Fur Trade Gamble* is a most informative account. In addition, the authors include two comprehensive appendices that cover all NWC personnel and business returns up to the merger with HBC, when NWC ceased to exist and began to fade from memory.

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DIVIDING THE RESERVATION: ALICE C. FLETCHER'S NEZ PERCE ALLOTMENT DIARIES AND LETTERS 1889–1892

by Nicole Tonkovich

Washington State University Press, Pullman, 2016.
Illustrations, maps, bibliography, index. 334 pages.
\$29.95 paper.

An extraordinary collection of primary sources, *Dividing the Reservation* provides important details into how Indian agent Alice C. Fletcher carried out the General Allotment Act on the Nez Perce reservation. Under the General Allotment Act, or Dawes Act, of 1887, U.S. Indian agents surveyed and broke up millions of acres of American Indian tribal lands, allotting them to individual tribal members and selling off the so-called surplus lands to non-Natives and corporations for a fraction of their value. For Indigenous communities in the United States, the Dawes Act stands as one of many devastating federal policies of the nineteenth century. Indeed, scholarship on the Dawes Act is robust, in part because the effect on each reservation community was unique.

Literary scholar Nicole Tonkovich has curated this excellent collection of documentary sources — many of which appear for the first time in this book. With an accomplished career, Fletcher was both the first woman to serve as a federal Indian agent and hold an endowed chair at Harvard's Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology. Tonkovich focuses only on the years of Fletcher's work with the Nez Perce and organizes this impressive assemblage of personal correspondence and field diaries chronologically. As the letters and diaries show, every summer from 1889 to 1892, Fletcher traveled from Washington, D.C., to the Nez Perce reservation to carry out the survey and allotment of the reservation. In her seemingly procedural daily records and personal correspondence, readers will see Fletcher's "realization of the gap between governmentality — in this case the federal policy she had helped regulate — and the daily lives of those it sought to regulate" (p. 1).

Throughout her work on the reservation, Fletcher, an agent of the federal government on the one hand and an intellectual fascinated