

mother, imminent financial ruin, and poor health throughout the family. The year 1811 was one of strange omens, from heavy flights of passenger pigeons to Halley's Comet, and the troubled Lilburne began to show a strain of madness that led to heavy drinking and frequent abuse of his slaves. He turned on a seventeen year old slave named George and, with the help of his ne'er do well younger brother Isham, tied him on the floor and attacked him with an ax while his horrified slaves were forced to watch. The corpse was dismembered and the pieces thrown into the fire when suddenly the first shock of the great New Madrid earthquake brought down the chimney on the terrible scene. The slave's remains were hidden in the rebuilt chimney. Later shocks tumbled it again, however, and a neighbor discovered the head.

Lilburne and Isham Lewis were indicted for murder, and Lilburne's new wife abandoned him. Faced with total ruin and utter disgrace, Lilburne talked Isham into a suicide pact. They went to the family graveyard, and Lilburne dropped his unwitnessed will and some last words on the ground near the grave of his beloved first wife, describing himself as "a victim to my beloved but cruel Letitia. I die in the hope of being united to my other wife in Heaven" (p. 295). The brothers prepared to shoot one another, but Lilburne paused to show how a survivor could dispatch himself in the event of a misfire. While demonstrating how to fire a rifle with a stick, Lilburne shot himself through the heart, and Isham ran from the scene. He was arrested and jailed, but he somehow made his escape and vanished without a trace.

The Lewis tragedy is a fascinating counterpoint to the more familiar story of frontier success. Indeed, this contrast between success and failure provides a subtle moral for this gruesome tale, an essential reminder that frontier hardship did not inevitably lead to the democratic prosperity imagined by uncritical readers of Frederick Jackson Turner and John D. Barnhart.

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Joseph N. Nicollet on the Plains and Prairies: The Expeditions of 1838-39 With Journals, Letters, and Notes on the Dakota Indians. Translated and edited by Edmund C. Bray and Martha Coleman Bray. (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1976. Pp. 294. Maps, notes, illustrations, appendixes, index. \$14.50.)

In 1838 and 1839 Joseph N. Nicollet led small parties on two exploratory expeditions for the United States government into the region between the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. The expedition in 1838 began at Fort Snelling and penetrated the Coteau des Prairies in eastern South Dakota. The one of 1839 moved from St. Louis up the Missouri River to Fort Pierre, crossed over to Devil's Lake in North Dakota, and moved down into the Minnesota River Valley. Federal officials published Nicollet's map and report dealing with the geography of the region, but his personal papers remained unprinted and, after his death in 1843, scattered in many repositories. This volume contains notes and journals kept by Nicollet that supplement the observations of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, Stephen H. Long, George Catlin, and other earlier travelers about flora, fauna, geography, geology, and climatic conditions in the same area, and about aboriginal Dakota Indian politics, language, and sociology.

Editors Edmund C. Bray and Martha Coleman Bray have written a substantial introduction to describe circumstances surrounding the initiation and completion of Nicollet's two expeditions. They have explained the contents of his journals with chapter introductions and explanatory footnotes. They have included three appendixes, which contain some of Nicollet's correspondence, expeditionary lists, and ethnographic writings on the Dakota Indians. And they have prepared an eleven page index, which makes their book valuable as a source for researchers as well as for general readers with interest in the problems of nineteenth century exploration, in historic places between the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, in the work of missionaries along the Minnesota River Valley during the 1830s, and in other subjects.

Prospective readers should be aware that Nicollet's appraisal of Sioux Indian culture is neither as accurate nor as complete as those written by others later on—those published by James William Lynd, Stephen Return Riggs, John P. Williamson, James Owen Dorsey, and Alice Cunningham Fletcher, to name a few. But that is not the fault of the editors. They have done an excellent job assembling and editing a valuable collection of material on topography, ecology, native American society, and exploration in the north central United States during the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

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