

the War of 1812 in British-occupied Detroit. After the war he settled in Maumee, Ohio. He was deeply involved in the Indian trade and was well liked by the local tribes. Hunt's memories of American and British officers give the reader a lively view of their personalities. His adventures when forced to seek lodging with a Canadian cutthroat named Ward are hair raising. Throughout his narrative, Hunt is generally sympathetic to the Indians. Other parts of his memoirs reveal more common frontier attitudes to native Americans. There is pathos, however, in his scenes of the rapid deterioration of their culture after the War of 1812.

The book is attractively printed. The many illustrations are generally well-chosen, but the color plates do not seem to have reproduced particularly well. A few errors have crept in, such as the identification of a sketch of William Whistler as his father, Major John Whistler (p. 47). These are few, however, and the publication is a worthwhile addition to the literature of the early Maumee Valley and Detroit.

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The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-60. By John D. Unruh, Jr. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979. Pp. xviii, 565. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$22.50.)

For more than a century, Americans have been fascinated by the romance, the drama, the poignancy, of the epic overland adventure of the 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s. The overland experience has been traced in hundreds of trail diaries and reminiscences and in a number of popular and scholarly trail histories. But, as John D. Unruh points out in his introduction, there are few "comprehensive analytical and interpretive" accounts of the trail and its impact on American life and character (p. 4). Unruh has sought to fill that void for the California-Oregon trail. In this exhaustive study, begun as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Kansas, he has structured a comprehensive synthesis that moves far beyond earlier studies and hypothesizes a "concept of change through time" (p. 27) that offers new insights and perspectives about the overland emigration.

It is impossible to summarize this impressive work (over 500 oversize pages of text and notes) in a short review. Every aspect of the overland trail has been covered. Beginning with a

review essay on trail literature and histories, Unruh proceeds to document public opinion about overlanders and the trail, to discuss motivations, emigrant interaction, emigrant-Indian relations, the role of the Mormon "Halfway House," and to examine the impact of both the federal government and private enterprise on trail development. Of particular merit is Unruh's analysis of the federal services "as a significant nationalizing force and as an important factor in the growth and justification of federal power" (p. 400).

Unruh also succeeds in shattering many of the myths about "The Wagon Train" which have been perpetuated by Hollywood, television, and the popular press. For example, he points out that no more than 4 percent of emigrant deaths on the California-Oregon trail were attributable to Indians. In fact, during the first twenty years of trail travel Indians provided overlanders with needed information and supplies and "should henceforth be regarded more positively as helpful assistants. . . ." (p. 386). Similarly, Unruh challenges other prevailing media stereotypes of the trail experience and underlines the need for "an awareness that changing travel conditions must be complemented with an appreciation of the long-neglected factors of cooperation and community" which existed along the trail (p. 385).

Until the publication of *The Plains Across*, the best trail studies were George Stewart's undocumented *The California Trail* and Merrill Mattes' *Great Platte River Road* which dealt only with the trail along the South Platte as far as Fort Laramie. Unruh overcomes both these limitations and provides, for the first time, a thorough, well-documented study of the entire northern trail. He combines crisp interpretation with full, rich detail, and the result is a very readable as well as an informative volume. It is indeed tragic that Unruh died prior to the publication of his work. The profession is richer for his contribution and the poorer for not having the opportunity to see more of his work. He might have provided the southern trail study which is still needed if the story of overlanding is to be completely understood.

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