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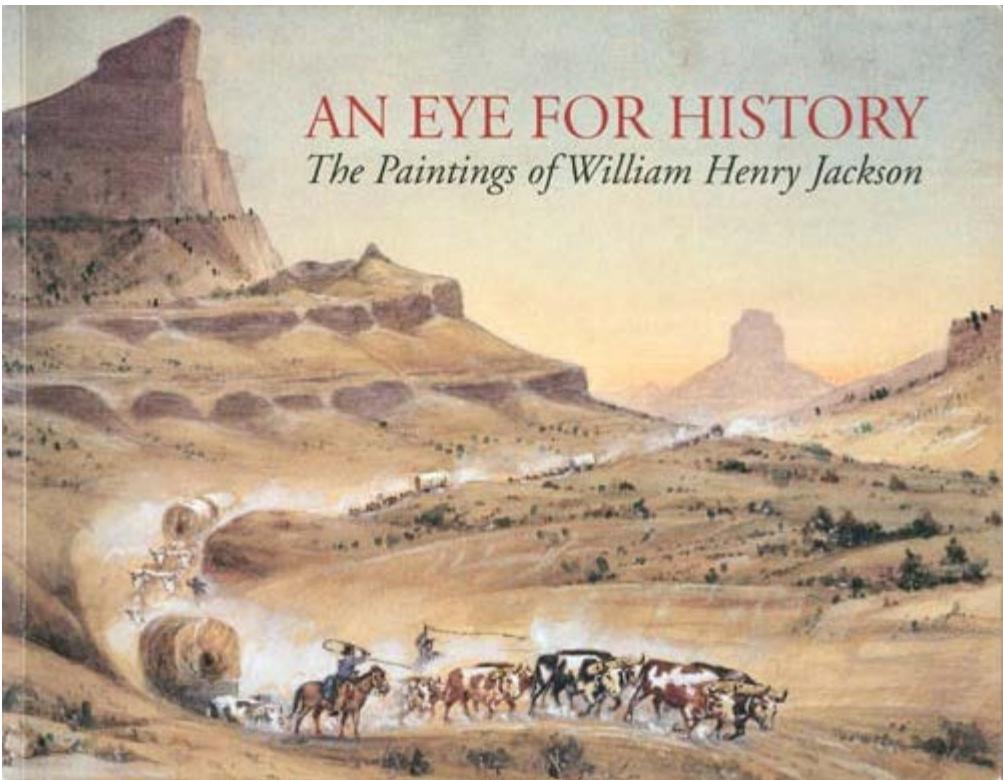
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AN EYE FOR HISTORY
The Paintings of William Henry Jackson

From the Collection at the Oregon Trail Museum

by Dean Knudsen

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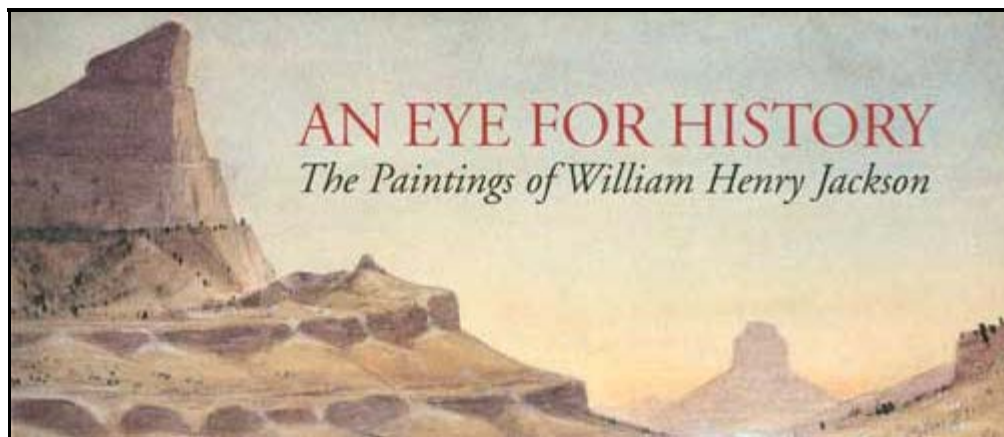
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William Henry
Jackson, 1872—
Photographer,
Explorer, Artist.



INTRODUCTION

Union soldier in the Civil War, bullwhacker on the Oregon Trail, explorer, photographer and artist for the famous Hayden Surveys of the Territories in the 1870s, author, publisher, world traveler, and businessman—William Henry Jackson was still utilizing and honing his skills until the day of his death. He was then nearly one hundred years old. Retiring from his normal routine of business after 1920, Mr. Jackson entered a new active, exciting, and productive life. From that time until the 1940s, he returned to the scenes of his young manhood in the West, especially those of Yellowstone, the Great Plains, and the Rocky Mountains. He occupied these days with sketching, photographing, writing, identifying historic sites, and dedicating monuments and markers. He was the author and illustrator of books, an active member of the Grand Army of the Republic, and secretary for the American Pioneer Trails Association.

After his ninetieth birthday he wrote his autobiography, *Time Exposure*. He painted murals of the four famous Geological Surveys of the West for the new Department of the Interior Building in Washington, D.C. He created more than one hundred watercolor paintings of early western events, many of which were used to illustrate books, such as Dr. Howard Driggs', *Westward America*, published in 1942. Many of these paintings were based on his nineteenth century pencil sketches and early photographs of western historic places, many of which had long since disappeared. Added to these were his careful notes, made day by day during his early travels, and of course, his incisive memory.

When I was growing up, my favorite person was William Henry Jackson. When I knew him, he was in his nineties, lived alone in his New York apartment in the Latham Hotel, and was carefully watched over by Arthur Proctor, Joe Robinson, and my dad, Horace Albright. My dad would often bring Mr. Jackson home to spend a weekend with the family. I had heard a great deal about him before he visited us the first time and was totally surprised when he walked in the door. My imagination had made him a tall, rugged, outdoorsman with a booming voice and vigorous physique.

Instead, he still matched the description my dad had made of him at their first meeting in 1925: "When Bob Ellison entered, he had with him a trim little fellow with a neat goatee and a nice head of hair and wearing plus fours." Well of course, Mr. Jackson wasn't wearing plus fours in his nineties,

but he wasn't much bigger than I and had a surprisingly high-pitched voice. Not a feeble, elderly voice, just one that was somewhere above a tenor. Anyone meeting him was instantly riveted by his brilliant, sparkling eyes peering out over his spectacles, which were always half-way down his nose. Then the attention would focus on his personality and stream of memories.

When I knew Mr. Jackson was coming for a visit, I would give up girlfriends, boyfriends, movies, and any other pastime to stay around him and hang on every word he uttered. He had done everything, photographed everything, sketched everything, recorded everything, and forgot nothing. He was endlessly fascinating, a natural raconteur. He took you along with him through the Civil War, life on the trails to California, adventures with the Geological Surveys, and visits to unusual places around the world, which revealed his intriguing character, his remarkable memory, and his delightful sense of humor. He was a real one-of-a-kind. My dad used to say that God threw away the mold after he made William Henry Jackson.

Even though Mr. Jackson's photographs, paintings, and writings are in a class by themselves, they fail to reflect the real man. He was such an electric personality and presence that only those privileged to experience him in person can even begin to describe and appreciate him. They can only remember him and miss him, smile quietly and be grateful that this man touched their lives. Never would I, or anyone else that knew him, forget his rapid, high-pitched voice telling an exciting story, his grabbing a pencil and paper to illustrate part of an adventure seventy years before, his burst of laughter recalling an episode from the past, his appreciation of people and his inability to condemn or criticize anyone, and above all his love for his country and its history.

I wrote in my diary about one of his visits. "Mr. Jackson here on the weekend. He told about the Oregon Trail, the one Great grandmother Albright came across in 1854. He made it all so real, and he seemed to be so proud of our country. He said, 'The Old West was my land.'"

Marian Albright Schenk

November 6, 1997



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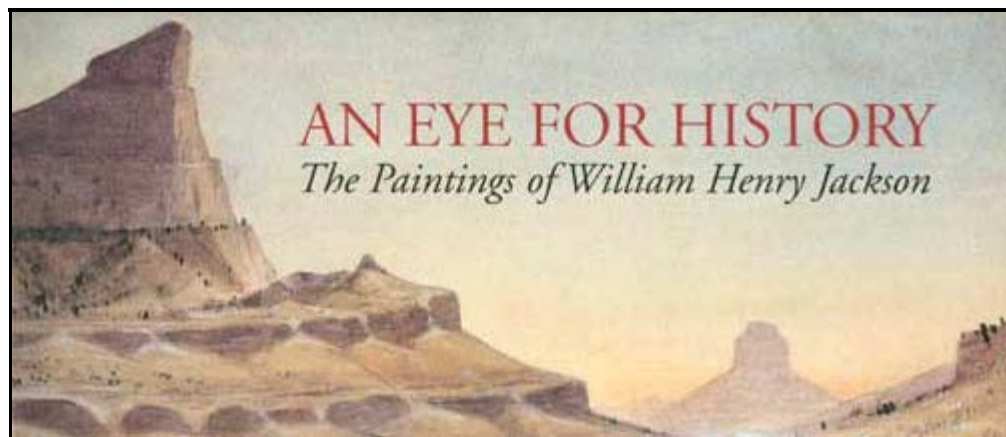
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Scotts Bluff
National
Monument is
located 1 mile west
of Gering,
Nebraska on State
Highway 92.
Established in
1919, the
monument consists
of 3,000 acres of
prairie and scenic
sandstone bluffs,
and is dedicated to
preserving the
legacy of
America's
westward
movement.
Vestiges of the old
trail can still be
seen, and the
Oregon Trail



FOREWORD

William Henry Jackson was a man driven to record the world around him. He is best known as a pioneering photographer, who captured the first images of Yellowstone, The Tetons, and Mesa Verde. Jackson was an active professional photographer for almost 50 years, and in that time he amassed a huge body of work. However, his efforts to document important events in American history did not end with his camera.

Jackson also kept journals in which he recorded his impressions of the American West when he first saw it in 1866, as well as his experiences in the West with the U.S. Geological Survey from 1869 until 1878. But it is as an artist that Jackson first began to record the things he saw. As a soldier in the Union's Army of the Potomac, Private Jackson sketched his comrades and surroundings, and in the process left a marvelous account of the everyday camp life experienced by a Civil War soldier.

After the war, Jackson sought to escape the confines of society by seeking his fortune in the West. His sketches of his experiences as a freight-hauling bullwhacker bound for the mines of Montana are a fascinating glimpse into life on the frontier before it was changed forever by the coming of the railroads. Jackson never found any silver or gold, but he did find his life's calling. His distinctive photographs reveal an affection for the land as well as a 19th century man's faith in progress and technology.

After a lifetime devoted to photography and approaching the age of 90, Jackson picked up a paintbrush and produced a series of paintings to illustrate books on the American West. These paintings are impressive enough for their attention to detail and the telltale photographer's eye for perspective and composition, but they are all the more remarkable since Jackson had no formal training as an artist.

William Henry Jackson died on April 23, 1942, at the age of 99. A few years after his death, his good friend, Howard Driggs, began to search for a suitable home for the Jackson art work that had been left to him. Due to Jackson's connection with the overland trails and the Far West, Scotts Bluff National Monument was chosen as a repository. A new wing was built onto the Oregon Trail Museum, and the William Henry Jackson Collection found a new home.

Museum offers a variety of exhibits that tell the stories of early pioneers.

Several other museums and private individuals around the country own works by Jackson, but Scotts Bluff National Monument has the largest single holding of Jackson paintings, and it is this collection that is the focus of this book. Over the years, Jackson's artwork has become increasingly popular as illustrative material for books, magazines, and video documentaries and as such has generated renewed interest among the general public.

This book was written with the dual purposes of showcasing what has become the centerpiece of the Scotts Bluff museum collection, while at the same time making more of the William Henry Jackson Collection available to the general public. In so doing, we are able to tell not only the story of Jackson's long and productive life, but also the history and development of the American West.

Dean Knudsen

Historian

Scotts Bluff National Monument

Dedicated to the memory of Merrill J. Mattes
Friend, Historian, and Inspiration





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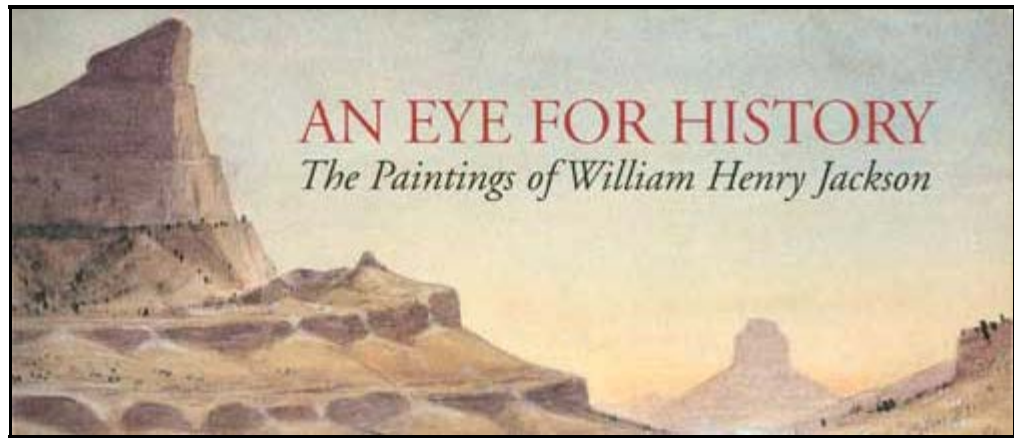
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In this formal portrait taken in 1935, William Henry Jackson was 92 years old, and was just beginning to produce the paintings that comprise the most important part of the Oregon Trail Museum Collection at Scotts Bluff National Monument. (SCBL 928)



Section 1: Primary Themes of Jackson's Art

CHALLENGES OF THE TRAIL

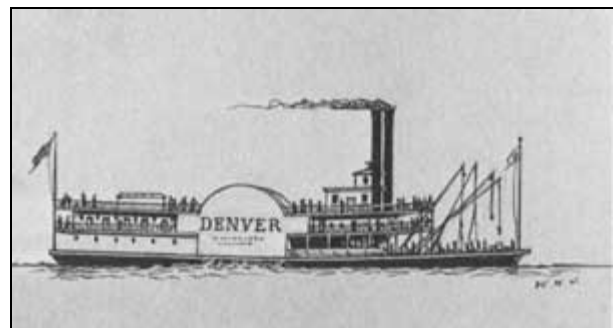
The trials and tribulations posed by life on the overland trails were a subject close to Jackson's heart. He himself had endured these same hardships by crossing the Plains in 1866, and his paintings often focus on the many dangerous incidents that could arise during the 2,000-mile journey.

The first monumental challenge emigrants encountered involved crossing the Missouri River. The river's width, depth and swift current made it unwise to try and float wagons across on individual rafts, and unless crossed in the dead of winter when the river was frozen solid, it was safer to transport the wagons and teams across the river on the small steam ferries operated by opportunistic businessmen.

Long delays while waiting a turn on the ferry were common, and it is this bottleneck that Jackson depicts in his work, *Emigrants at Kaneshville*. A handwritten note by Jackson in the upper left corner of the painting describes this as an 1856 river crossing, which would have been near the peak of Mormon emigration.

Kaneshville was one of several temporary Mormon settlements that sprang up near present-day Council Bluffs, Iowa. The Mormons—or more properly, the Latter-Day Saints of the Church of Jesus Christ—first arrived at the east bank of the Missouri River in the winter of 1846, after having been forced from their homes in Nauvoo, Illinois. This first winter at Kaneshville and Omaha was a difficult time for the Mormons, and several hundred people died of disease and exposure.¹

In the spring of 1847, the first group of Mormons ventured out onto the Plains and arrived in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake in July of that same year. In the years that followed, the increased numbers of emigrants and gold-seekers resulted in Omaha, Council



Bluffs, Brownville, and Nebraska City developing as major river crossing sites and towns.

When Jackson first journeyed west in 1866 he did not need to cross the Missouri River at Kanesville, Iowa. Along with many other emigrants he booked passage on the riverboat *Denver* at Kansas City and disembarked on the river's western bank at Nebraska City, Nebraska. (SCBL 91)

The overland trails and the relatively slow pace of the wagon trains were deceptively peaceful. Although normally a placid river, when swollen by melting snow or heavy rains, the Platte River developed dangerous currents. Unstable riverbanks, quicksand and hidden tree stumps or logs took a heavy toll in drowned teamsters and damaged wagons when unwary emigrants tried to ford the Platte or even the smallest streams. As such, crossings were only attempted when it was absolutely necessary.

Life on the trails was primarily an endurance test. Long hot days of monotonous travel, interspersed with violent storms, lack of fuel and forage, fear of Indian attacks, dust and disease—all took a tremendous physical and psychological toll on the emigrants. No records were kept on how many people gave up and turned back, although in some years the numbers must have been rather high. The wonder is that the majority of the emigrants continued their westward journey.

Jackson's admiration for the courage of those brave souls who continued their trek in spite of the many hardships on the trail is seen in many of his paintings. Rather than depicting patriotic vignettes, Jackson concentrated on the quiet stoicism of people in pursuit of a better life.

1. Stanley B. Kimball, *Historic Resource Study; The Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1991), 66.



Emigrants at Kanesville. Signed and undated. 25.4 x 38.1 cm. (SCBL 275)





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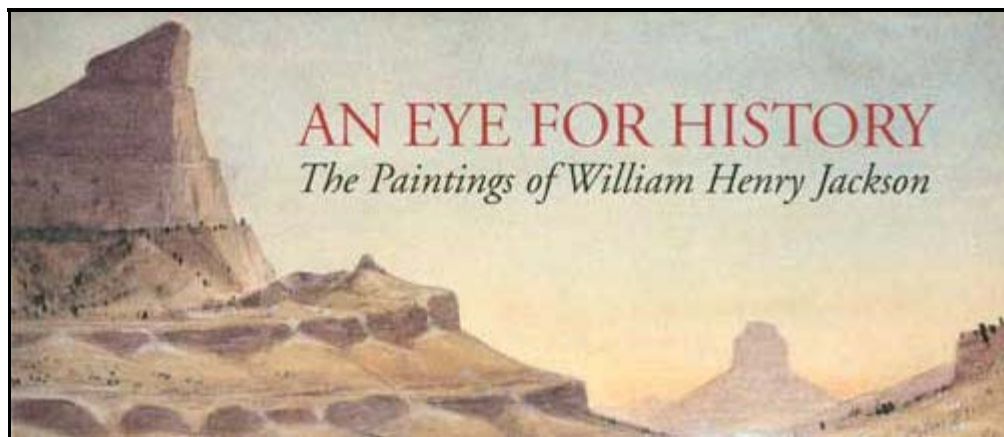
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This may be the earliest photograph of William Henry Jackson. A notation on the back reads, "William Henry Jackson 1860—Troy, NY." The nattily dressed young man, complete with a fashionable straw hat, was seventeen years old at the time, and already working as an artist in a



Section 2: Paintings of the Oregon Trail

MISSOURI RIVER TOWNS

The Missouri River served as the most direct initial means of transport for people making their way west. Steam-powered riverboats could transport cargo from St. Louis and New Orleans, and many emigrants had their wagons and belongings brought down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. They would then steam up the Missouri River to be disembarked at one of the many river towns along the Missouri River.

For several years Independence, Missouri, was the eastern terminus for the Santa Fe, California and Oregon Trails, and nearby Westport Landing was one of the busiest places on the river. Here riverboats were used to ferry emigrants and their wagons across the Missouri. After off-loading the passengers and their wagons, the trains of emigrants would organize themselves and begin their epic overland journey west. In time, other towns along the Missouri River sprang up to serve the river traffic. These included St. Joseph and Weston, Missouri; Brownville, Nebraska City, Plattsmouth, and Omaha, Nebraska Territory.

Before the railroads finally made their way out onto the Plains in the late 1860s, riverboats were the fastest means of moving people and cargo. Some daring captains took their shallow-draft boats as far north as Fort Benton in Montana, but for emigrants wishing to make a new life in the west, the Missouri River towns were the jumping-off points. These towns handled so much boat traffic that they were often referred to as the "Nebraska seacoast."

From each of these river towns, individual trails wound their way westward, forming an informal network of roadways that eventually merged near Fort Kearny in central Nebraska. Jackson's first encounter with a riverboat came on June 19, 1866, when he boarded the steamer, SAVANNA at Rock Island,



photographic
studio. (SCBL
2005)

Illinois.¹ A four hour ride down the Mississippi River brought him to Quincy, Illinois, where he and two friends bought railway tickets to St. Joseph, Missouri.

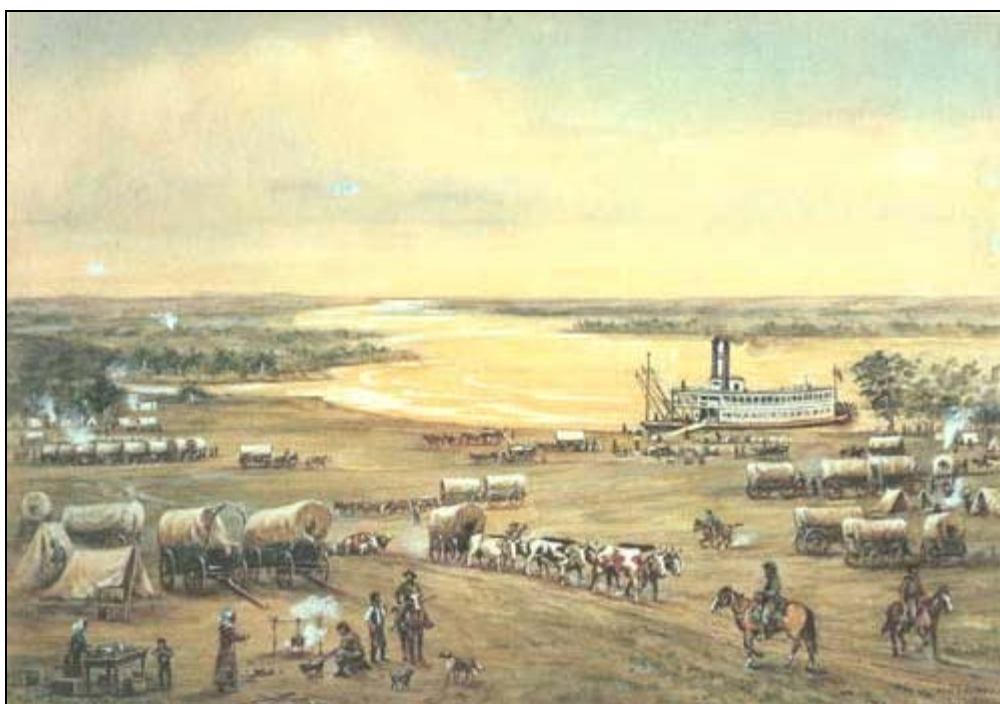
Westport. A note by the artist on the back of this painting, dated 1931 reads, "An imaginary conception of what it may have looked like at Westport Landing, MO, about 1850." (SCBL 19)

On their arrival the three young adventurers learned of a freighting outfit that was hiring teamsters for a trip to Montana. The catch lay in the fact that applicants had to apply in person at Nebraska City. Their passage to Nebraska City would be paid by the freighters. However, neither Jackson nor his traveling companions had the \$1.50 commission needed to pay the agency that would hire them. Jackson spent a day unsuccessfully trying to sell his box of watercolors to raise the needed money. Luckily, a new acquaintance generously offered the destitute adventurers five dollars to help the young men on their way.²

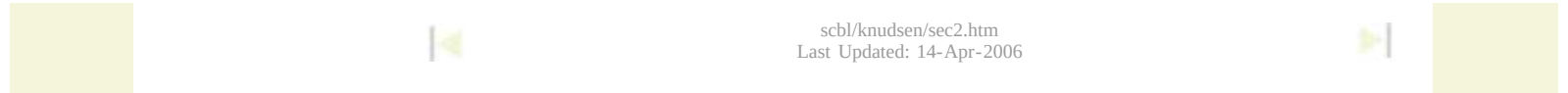
Thus it was that William Henry Jackson found himself aboard the riverboat DENVER, plying its way northward on the Missouri River. Arriving at Nebraska City at 2:30 A.M., Jackson and his friends were ready to pursue their fortunes in the West. Jackson's two nearly-identical paintings of Westport Landing seek to capture the energy and capabilities of these boats, as well as the importance of the river towns they served.

1. Leroy R. Hafen, *The Diaries of William Henry Jackson* (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Company; 1959) 29.

2. William Henry Jackson, *Time Exposure*, (Tucson: The Patrice Press; 1994) 106.



Westport Landing. Signed and dated, 1937. 40.7 x 50.9 cm. (SCBL 280)





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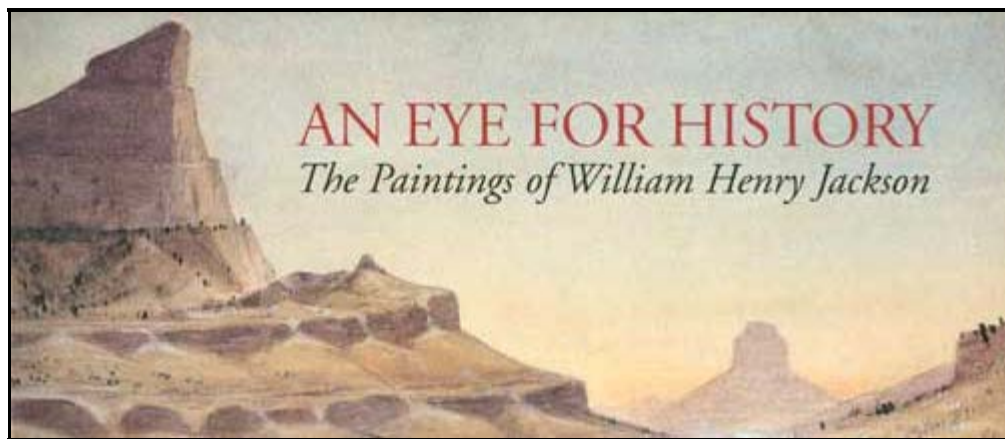
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In this 1935 photograph, William Henry Jackson poses in the Lincoln Room during a visit to Gettysburg. The Lincoln Room is in the home of David Wills, where Lincoln stayed the night prior to delivering the Gettysburg Address. (SCBL 2662)



Section 3: Historic Scenes from the West

ENCOUNTERS

The early fur trade resulted in many of the first contacts between Euro-Americans and the Plains tribes. Enterprising fur trappers and traders quickly learned to bring gifts and trade goods for Indian tribes living in the prime hunting grounds. At first, the gifts were intended to gain permission to trap beaver on tribal lands. However, eventually the fur dealers traded directly with the Indians, who would exchange furs for manufactured items that made their lives easier; guns, knives, iron cooking pots, blankets and bolts of cloth.

When the demand for furs declined in the 1830s, many of these early mountain men used their language skills and knowledge of the land to serve as intermediaries between the native tribes and those Americans who were just beginning to venture into the Far West. Some mountaineers, such as Kit Carson served as scouts for the U.S. Army, while others, like Jim Bridget, guided wagon trains to California and Oregon.

The diversity and complexities of Native American cultures have fascinated Americans for centuries, and William Henry Jackson was no exception to the rule. Jackson's 1866 transcontinental journey resulted in very few encounters with American Indians. However, his interest was piqued and when he opened his photographic studio in Omaha, Nebraska, Jackson left the lucrative portrait work to his brother and visited the Omaha and Otoe Reservations just north of town.

On these reservations, Jackson produced a number of photographic images that first brought him public attention. Sales of these prints were brisk, and their publication was noticed by Ferdinand Hayden, who was organizing an expedition for the U.S. Geological Survey to explore the Yellowstone Country, and it occurred to him that it might prove



useful to have a photographer along. He visited Jackson in Omaha and offered him the position—without pay! The newly-married Jackson leaped at the opportunity and within a year his images of Yellowstone's wonders made him a household name.

During his travels with the U.S. Geological Survey, William Henry Jackson did not only photograph landscapes. The various native American tribes he encountered also interested him. This photograph is captioned, "Shoshone village—War Chief's tent." (SCBL 2761)

Jackson's travels throughout the West gave him the opportunity to meet and photograph many different American Indians. Among those recorded on film were the Ute, Bannock, and Shoshone of the western mountains, as well as the Navajo of the Southwest.

William Henry Jackson's painting, "Council" depicts a parley between Plains Indians and a party of early fur trappers. The mountain peaks in the background are the Grand Tetons of western Wyoming, which Jackson first visited in 1872. At that time he described them as follows:

The Teton region at this time was a game paradise. Our various parties were kept supplied with fresh meat without having to hunt for it, deer, moose, or mountain sheep being nearly always in sight when needed. It was equally easy to get a mess of trout from the streams nearby. Bears were abundant also. The first day in the main camp, two of the younger boys went fishing and unexpectedly happened on bruin. This was larger game than they expected to meet, but they succeeded in killing the bear with pistols only.¹

1. Jackson & Driggs, *The Pioneer Photographer*, 132.



Council. Initialed and dated 1936. 25.4 x 35.0 cm. (SCBL 159)



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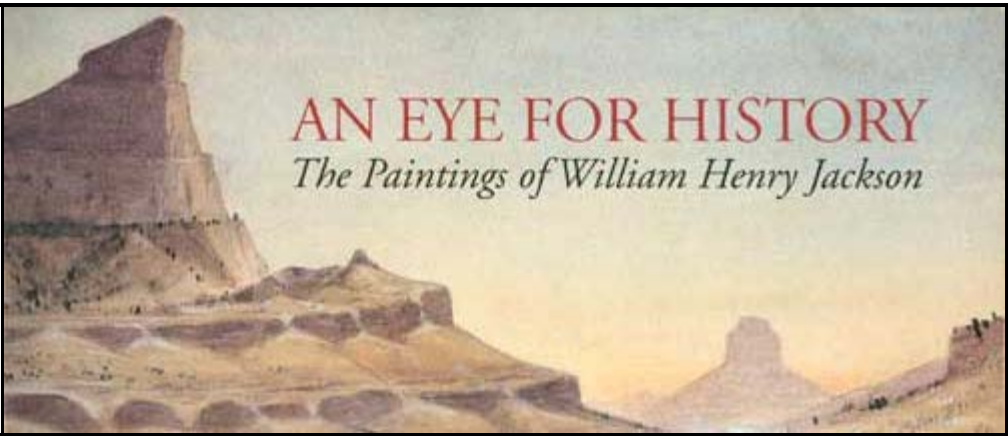
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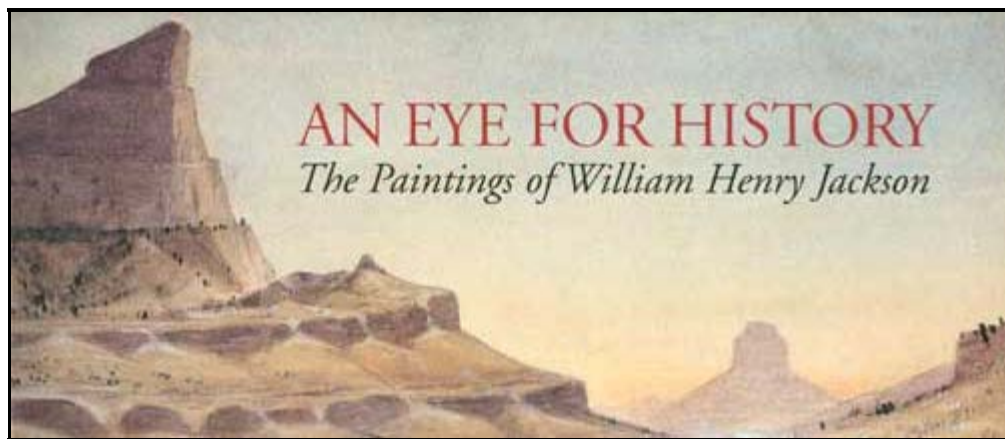
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William Henry Jackson's fascination with the American West never wavered, and he did much to instill that same interest in younger generations. A handwritten notation on the back of this photograph reads, "WHJ before high school class at Edison Institute, Ford Museum. Detroit 1936." (SCBL 2696)



Section 1: Primary Themes of Jackson's Art

THE PONY EXPRESS

Few aspects of frontier history have captured the imaginations of Americans more than the Pony Express. Romantic images persist of a courageous lone rider, crossing a hostile wilderness with saddlebags full of vital letters, ignoring threats from marauding Indians and serving as a mainstay of civilization in the Far West throughout America's western expansion.

While this image has been the subject of hundreds of dime novels and Hollywood screenplays, in reality the Pony Express was designed as a stop-gap operation, intended to provide express mail delivery until the transcontinental telegraph line could be completed. In the short 18 months of its existence, the Pony Express lost so much money that it bankrupted its parent company—Russell, Majors and Waddell.¹

The scope of the Pony Express operation was impressive. A total of 190 stations were established every twenty miles along the 1,600 mile route. Each of these stations was staffed and equipped to provide a fresh horse for each of the eighty riders who made a 120-mile ride before handing the mail off to the next man. In this manner, the mail could be delivered between St. Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California, in just 10 days.

The first run was made on April 3, 1860, and the last was completed on November 20, 1861. The Pony Express has been credited with maintaining the ties between California and the Union in the early days of the Civil War. Although the Pony Express was a financial disaster, it did



Also known as Rocky Ridge Station, St. Mary's Station was located in an especially remote region in central Wyoming. It is interesting that Jackson chose to include several soldiers at the station, at a time when tensions between the North and South were building. (SCBL 34)

prove conclusively that the overland trail along the Platte River was an efficient and workable route that within a few years was also used by the transcontinental railroad.

Like so many members of his generation, William Henry Jackson was enamored of the Pony Express. The courage, commitment, and rugged sense of adventure that the Pony Express embodied was especially appealing to an artist, and Jackson did much to immortalize the achievements of the Pony Express. Pony Express riders, as well as the all-important home and relay stations were the subjects of many of his paintings.

Jackson's painting, *Pony Express Rider*, is probably one of his best-known works. Two notes on the back of the painting provide some interesting information about Jackson's subject. A handwritten note reads, "Ideal composition based on old notes and records," while a typed notation reads, "This courier of the first fast mail is speeding up the Valley of the Sweetwater in what is now Wyoming."

1. Raymond W. Settle and Mary Lund Settle, *Saddles and Spurs* (Harrisburg: The Stackpole Company, 1955), 176f.



Pony Express Rider. Signed and undated. 25.4 x 38.1 cm (SCBL 164)



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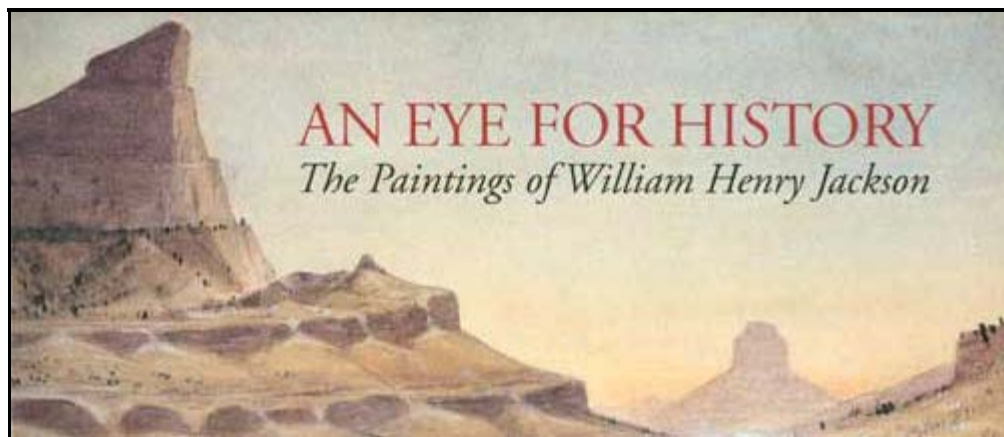
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William Henry Jackson's frailty is showing in this undated photograph. Jackson's normally robust health never fully recovered from a 1937 fall in Cheyenne, Wyoming, in which he chipped a vertebrae in his back. However, even a serious injury such as that



Section 1: Primary Themes of Jackson's Art

THE LURE OF GOLD

On January 28, 1848, a man employed at Sutter's Fort in California Territory made an entry in his diary; *This day, some kind of metal that looks like gold was found. . . .*¹ No other single event influenced America's westward expansion more than the discovery of gold in California. In a very short time, thousands of people flocked to the new gold strike in hopes that they too could make a fortune. Most of the prospectors were disappointed in their search for gold, but their mere presence in the West changed the frontier forever.

Prior to the discovery of gold in California, the Far West was a quiet, primarily Spanish-speaking territory still struggling to get used to the idea that they had suddenly become Americans. For example, when it was surrendered to the United States by Mexico in 1849, California had a population of only 20,000. California was admitted as a state in the Union in 1850 and by 1852 the population to grown to 225,000.²

This pattern was repeated several times in the settlement of the West. In the late 1850s there was the Pikes Peak Gold Rush to Colorado. In the 1860s it was gold in Montana and silver in Nevada that drew thousands of would-be miners to the frontier. Of course, with all these men scrambling to make their fortunes, there was a ready market for anyone who could supply the miners with tools, food, and other diversions.

Thus was born the second wave of overland travel, the freighting companies whose wagons rolled alongside those of the emigrants making their way west. As a young man, William Henry Jackson took advantage of this commercial effort to supply the mining towns to make his way to the Far West. Although frustrated in his



A hand-written note by the artist along the front of this pencil sketch reads, "The Mission Los Angeles April 9,

did not prevent Jackson from attending a Battle of Gettysburg reunion in 1938. (SCBL 975)	efforts to reach the gold and silver mines in Montana, Jackson eventually made his way to California in 1867.	1867." This drawing dates from Jackson's first visit to California. (SCBL 135)
	Throughout the history of the pursuit of mineral wealth on the frontier, little if any thought was given to the effect the mining had on the ecology of the West. Entire valleys were stripped, gouged, dynamited, flooded, polluted and abandoned in a relentless effort to extract ore. Just reaching California was not an easy task for the would-be miner. There were two basic ways for a prospector to make his way to California; he could book passage on a ship, or he could make his way overland. Both methods were expensive and had their inherent dangers. Travel by ship was generally faster and more expensive and but offered the advantage of being able to bring more in the way of supplies. In addition, travel by ship allowed a person to leave at any time of year. It has been estimated that between 1849-1860, 200,335 gold-seekers made the overland journey to California.³ Almost anyone could afford to set out for the goldfields on foot, but they were limited in what they could carry and the vast distances and changing seasons determined when it was feasible to make the journey. No reliable figures are available as to how many died enroute to California, but it has been estimated that as many as 2,000 died of disease during each year of the Gold Rush.⁴	

1. George R. Stewart, *The California Trail* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 193.

2. Joseph Henry Jackson, *The Gold Rush Album*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), vi.

3. John Unruh, *The Plains Across* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 120.

4. William E. Hill, *The California Trail Yesterday and Today*, (Boise: Tamarack Books, Inc., 1993), xxv.



Hydraulic Gold Mining. Initialed and dated, 1936. 25.4 x 35.0 cm. (SCBL 160)

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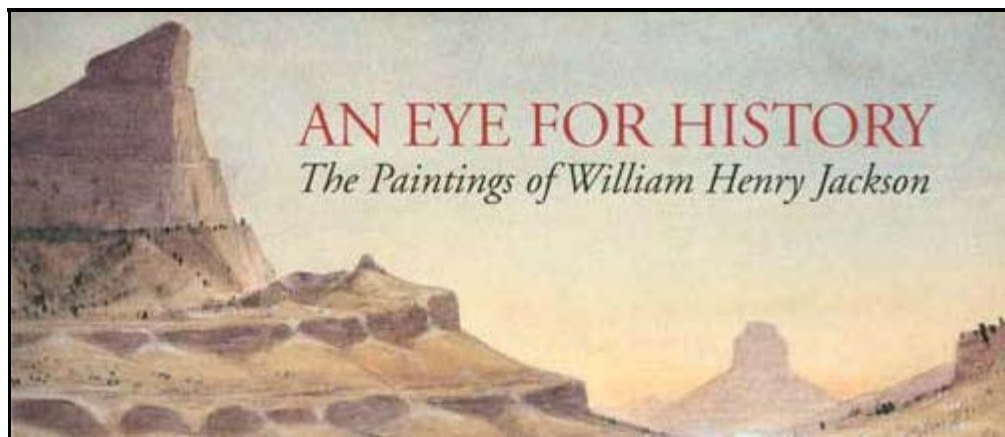
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A carte-de-visite of a young William Henry Jackson, dated 1864. At the time, Jackson was 21 years old and had been mustered out of the Union Army the previous year. The carte-de-visite was very popular in the 19th century and served as a combination business card and keepsake. (SCBL 3043)



Section 2: Paintings of the Oregon Trail

ALCOVE SPRINGS

Located along the Big Blue River in eastern Kansas, Alcove Springs was one of the first landmarks reached by Oregon Trail emigrants after leaving the Missouri River at Westport. This lovely oasis, consisting of a cold-water spring surrounded by a ledge of rocks, was named by Edwin Bryant on May 27, 1846, who was traveling with the ill-fated Donner Party who passed by in the spring of that year.

It was at Alcove Springs that the Donner party suffered their first loss. On May 29, 1846, Sarah Keyes, a blind and deaf 70-year-old member of the party who had been suffering from what was called consumption—or as we know it today, tuberculosis, died. That evening she was buried nearby. The next day, George McKinstry, another man traveling with the Donner Party, made the following entry in his journal:

. . . about a half mile from Camp up the spring branch on the right hand fork is a most beautiful spring and a fall of over of 12 feet Mr Bryant of our party has named it the 'Alcove Spring' the water is of the most excellent kind the spring is surrounded with Ash Cotton wood & Cedar trees it is an excellent place to camp for a day or two to wash, recruit the cattle et I this day cut the name of the spring in the rock on Table at the top of the falls. . . ¹

It was this event that Jackson chose to portray in his painting of Alcove Springs.

The early pioneers who made their way onto the Plains did not stop to settle there. Despite the apparent availability of water at places such as Alcove Springs, it was generally felt that the prairie was simply too dry to be farmed.



The lack of wood was another factor in their determination to continue westward, as without wood there would be no ready source of fuel or building material.

Initialed and dated 1936. Settlement on the treeless western plains did not increase until after 1869, when the growth of railroads made shipping of goods and produce economically feasible. (SCBL 161)

This attitude changed in the 1870s when railroads and irrigation made settling on the Plains more attractive. Some settlers followed the example of the Pawnee earth lodges and built homes from the thickly matted prairie sod. Depending on the skill of the builder, a sod house could be quite comfortable. However, the crumbling nature of the sod required a good deal of maintenance and upkeep.

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1. Aubrey L. Haines, *Historic Sites Along the Oregon Trail* (Gerald: The Patrice Press, 1994), 46.



Alcove Springs. Signed and undated. 29.2 x 39.4 cm. (SCBL 20)



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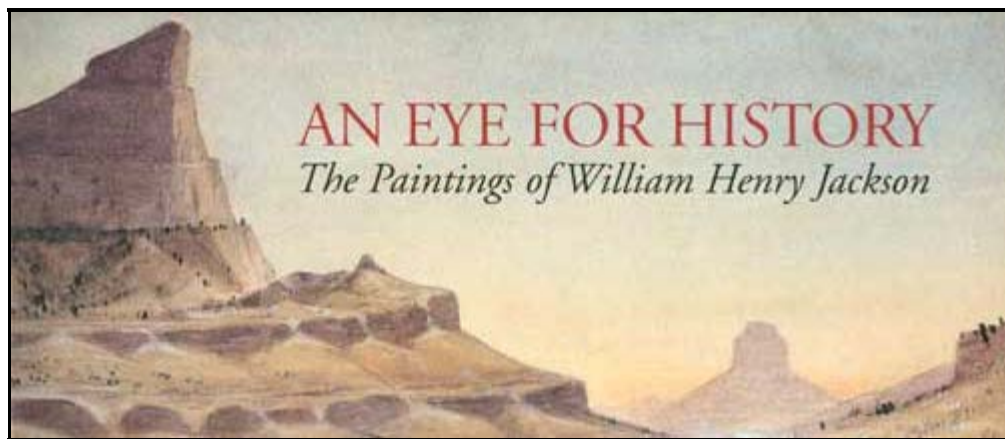
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William Henry Jackson provided his own caption on the back of this photograph. It reads, "Sept. 30, 1921. WHJ in Mancos Canyon—under the X at the top of the mesa is located the 2 story cliff house discovered and photographed by him in 1874." (SCBL 1048)



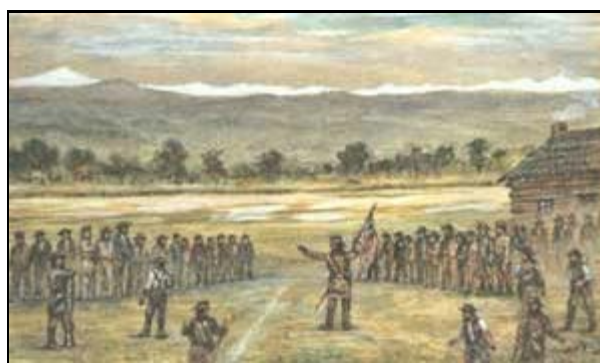
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NEARING THE JOURNEY'S END

Two hundred miles west of Three Island Crossing, emigrants on the Oregon Trail caught their first glimpse of the Blue Mountains. These mountains formed a natural barrier along the eastern border of the Oregon Territory, and emigrants had to be sure to make their way through them before the first heavy snowfall, or risk the fate suffered by the Donner Party in the Sierra Nevada mountains in California.

After walking halfway across a continent, and making hundreds of decisions about such things as what type of wagon they should use, when to leave, how much food to bring along, what tools and furniture will they need, which cut-off to take, and so on—at this point there was only one last major decision to make. Should they pay a toll and continue overland, or should they build a raft and float down the Columbia River?

The Barlow Toll Road was established in 1846 by an enterprising businessman named Samuel Barlow. When Barlow first saw the Columbia River in 1845, he did not want to risk rafting. So he and several other people blazed a trail south of the river. Although their efforts nearly cost them their lives due to becoming snowbound, they proved that the new route could work, and the next year Barlow set up the toll road.



Completed in 1941, this painting depicts the assembly of early pioneers voting to establish the Oregon Territory. This event took place at Champoege, along the Willamette River on May 2, 1843—one month before Jackson's birth. (SCBL 47)

While most emigrants complained about having to pay any kind of toll, the improved 30 mile roadway was undoubtedly a welcomed experience after 1,900 miles on the trail. Emigrants had to make the climb up to Barlow Pass, which was the primary route through the Cascade Range. After passing south of Mount Hood the road then made a fairly easy descent into the northern end

of the Willamette Valley, south of present-day Portland, Oregon. This toll road was in operation from 1846-1912.

The alternative of floating wagons downriver on rafts was both faster and more dangerous. The river offered an uninterrupted route into the heart of the Oregon Territory, except for the Cascades of the Columbia, where the rafts and their contents had to be hauled several miles around the impassable rapids. The rafts were then reassembled and the perilous journey could be resumed.

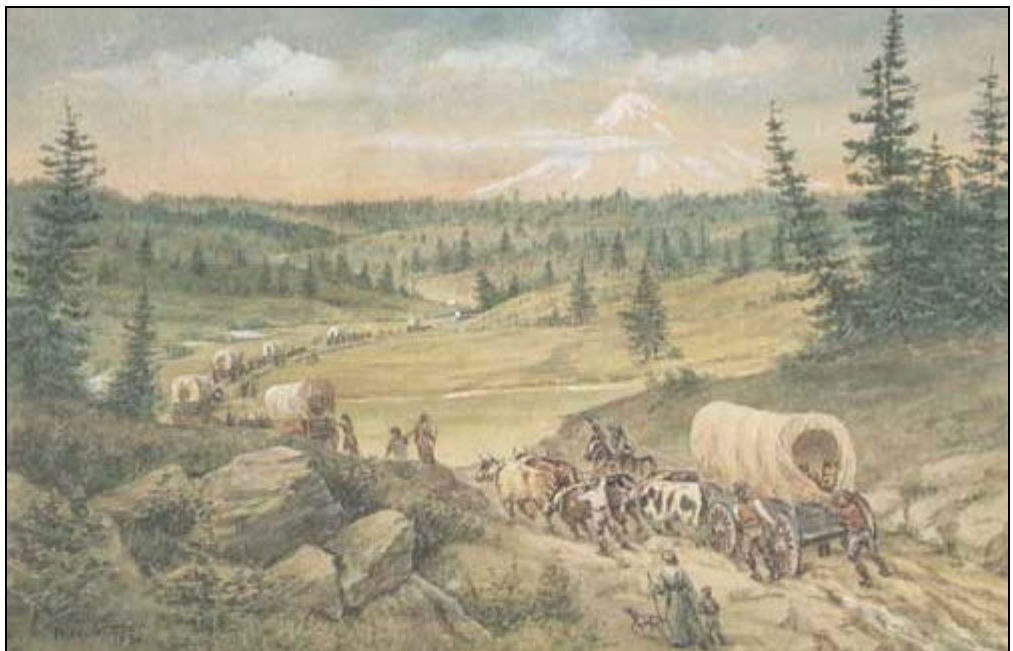
An 1847 emigrant named Josiah Beal left this account of his arduous experience on the river:

As soon as the botes were finished, were filled with contents of our wagons and a few wagons were taken to pieces & stowed in the Bote. Stock driven down the Indian Trail. When we got to the cascades we had to unlode our botes and set up our wagons & fill them and make a drive of 5 miles to the lower cascades. The botes were run over the falls and caught below by some Indians that were hired to look after them.¹

No one knows for certain how many people made the westward journey on the Oregon Trail. John Unruh, a highly respected scholar of the westward movement has estimated that between 1840 and 1860, 53,062 people emigrated to Oregon, with 1852 as the peak year.² The problem with these statistics is the inconsistency in which records were kept. The military kept a haphazard count as people passed Fort Laramie, but these are incomplete and sketchy at best, so no irrefutable figures are available.

1. Haines, *Historic Sites*, 393.

2. Unruh, *The Plains Across*, 120.



The Barlow Cutoff. Signed and dated 1930. 23.5 x 36.3 cm. (SCBL 46)

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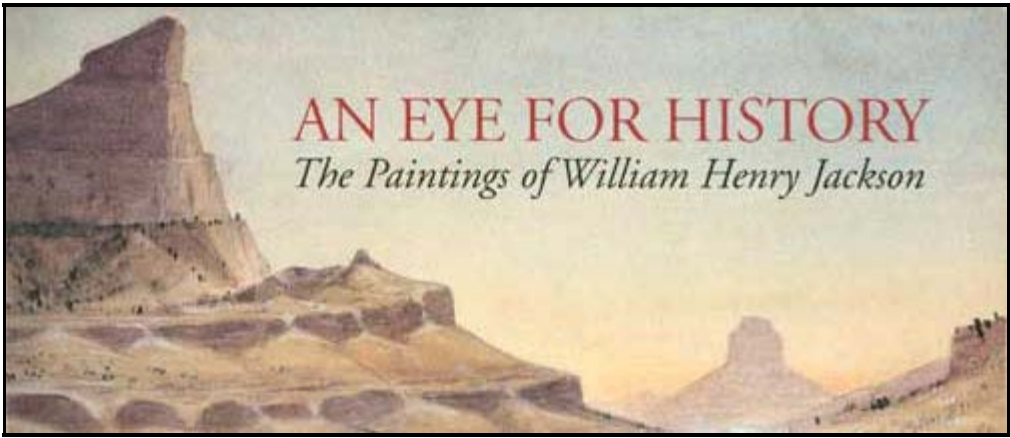
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When William Henry Jackson moved to New York in 1929 he decided to live in the Explorer's Club. In 1932 he moved into the Army and Navy Club. In this undated photograph, Jackson is seated in his room at the Explorer's Club, surrounded by some of his



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BUFFALO HUNT

If any creature can be said to symbolize the American West, it would have to be the buffalo. Prior to the encroachment of the Euro-Americans, millions of the animals thundered across the high plains in single, massive herds. Native American tribes had hunted the buffalo for thousands of years.

Prior to the acquisition of the horse, Plains Indians could only hunt the buffalo herds on foot, and movement was limited by what they could carry. This lack of mobility limited the amount of game that could be taken and carried away at any one time.

To overcome these limitations, early native hunters sometimes drove buffalo over "jumps," where their herd instinct, poor vision and the sheer weight of numbers would force the animals over a cliff. Those animals not killed in the fall could be dispatched with relative ease and safety.

The popular image of nomadic tribes following the herds of migrating buffalo and living free on the wide open prairie is accurate—to a point. But it should be remembered that the culture that evolved around the buffalo and the horse was a recent development, since only three generations of Lakota had lived on the Plains prior to the Lewis and Clark Expedition.¹

Before 1700 the prairies were very sparsely populated. Plains tribes spent most of the year in semi-permanent villages along the major rivers and relied on farming for subsistence, and only ventured onto the Plains to supplement their diets with annual buffalo hunts.² The vast distances on the prairies simply made travel by foot impractical, and it was the acquisition of the



In an explanatory note on the back of this painting, Jackson wrote, "On the plains pioneers frequently encountered vast herds of bison or buffalo, and at times met with serious difficulty." (SCBL 153)

paintings. (SCBL
2644)

horse that revolutionized the culture of the Plains Indians.

For example, the Sioux had been an eastern Woodland people living in Minnesota, and only became buffalo hunters when conflict with the larger Cree tribe forced them out onto the Plains in the late 18th Century.³ Their transformation into a culture based on the horse and buffalo was both rapid and stunning. No longer limited to traveling on foot, Sioux horsemen were able to follow the buffalo herds and raid enemy camps with impunity.

Other tribes developed similar cultures; the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Crow, Kiowa, and Comanche are primary examples of peoples who re-fashioned their cultures to suit their new Plains environment. The use of the horse and the mobility it offered made year-round life on the prairie possible. This culture which flowered for only a short time, developed such powerful cultural features—such as the tipi, flowing eagle feather headdresses, and sun dances, that they have become fixed in the mind of the general public as representing all Native American tribes.

William Henry Jackson had the good fortune to personally witness many of these Plains peoples before they were relegated to reservations, and their distinctive cultures were altered forever. This is undoubtedly the reason Jackson chose to portray an old-fashioned buffalo hunt in one of his paintings.

1. Royal B. Hassrick, *The Sioux; Life and Customs of a Warrior Society* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 64.

2. Robert H. Lowie, *Indians of the Plains* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 13.

3. Hassrick, *The Sioux*, 62.



Indians Driving Buffalo Over a Cliff. Initialed and undated. 25.4 x 38.1 cm.
(SCBL 157)

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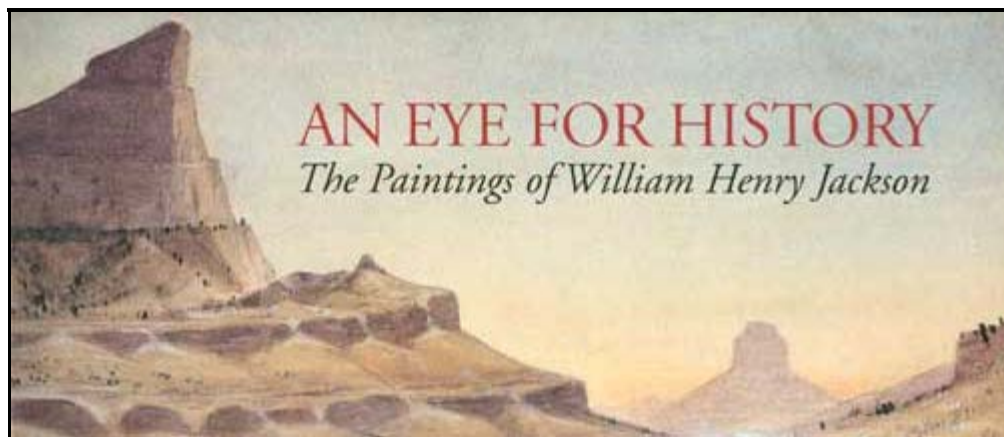
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On April 4, 1942, William Henry Jackson celebrated his 99th birthday. Sadly it was to be his last, as he passed away 3 months later. A revealing note on the back of this photograph simply reads, "100 springs." (SCBL 2721)



Section 3: Historic Scenes from the West

THE HOLY CROSS

After spending a long cold night on an exposed mountain, dawn was welcomed by Jackson and his comrades. With the light, the photographers again began to make their way back up to the peak and were rewarded by an unobstructed view of the Mount of the Holy Cross. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. But there was one problem. There wasn't any water to be used to prepare the emulsion for the glass plate negatives!

After enduring the previous evening's hardships, Jackson was in no mood to allow a simple matter like that to keep him from the opportunity of a lifetime. After a short time, the warmth of the sun began to melt the snow, and soon there was enough water to prepare eight of the delicate glass plates. Working quickly and confidently, Jackson set up his cameras and went to work.

It was a perfect day for the making of the first photographs of the Mountain of the Holy Cross. The early morning is just the time, too, for this particular subject. I do not think it can be successfully photographed later in the day, Having but one point of view from which to make the negatives, I was through by noon. Quick time was made in assembling and repacking the apparatus, and we got down the mountain in very much less time than it took to go up.¹

Jackson was so confident of his work, and anxious to join the rest of the survey team that he uncharacteristically waited to complete the development process until after leaving the field. Jackson's efforts were rewarded with eight striking photographic images of the cross. He later wrote,



One of the 8 photographs that William Henry Jackson took of the elusive mountain in 1873, this image was

Since 1873 I have

*been back four or five times. I have used the best cameras and the most sensitive emulsions on the market. I have snapped my shutter morning, noon, and afternoon. And I have never come close to matching those first plates.*²

recreated in his painting, "Photographing the Mount of the Holy Cross." (SCBL 805)

Photographing of the Mount of the Holy Cross was a pivotal moment in Jackson's life. Just as he had done with Yellowstone, William Henry Jackson used his skills as an intrepid photographer to prove the existence of a phenomenon that had generally been dismissed as mythical. The photographs and the exploit made him famous and it helped make him financially secure.

In August of 1893, twenty years after taking the first photographs of the Mount of the Holy Cross, Jackson returned to the site, accompanied by his son Clarence, to commemorate the occasion. Much later in life, Jackson used his artistic skills to tell the story of his excursions in the Colorado Rockies by combining images based on his original photographs with those from 1893 to compose these two paintings.³ The images on these final two pages are the only oil paintings in the William Henry Jackson collection at Scotts Bluff National Monument.

1. Jackson & Driggs, *Pioneer Photographer*, 186-187.

2. Jackson, *Time Exposure*, 218.

3. Clarence S. Jackson and Lawrence W. Marshall, *Quest of the Holy Cross* (Denver: University of Denver Press, 1952), 32f.



Photographing the Mount of the Holy Cross. Signed and dated 1936. 62.0 x 75.0 cm. (SCBL 2129)

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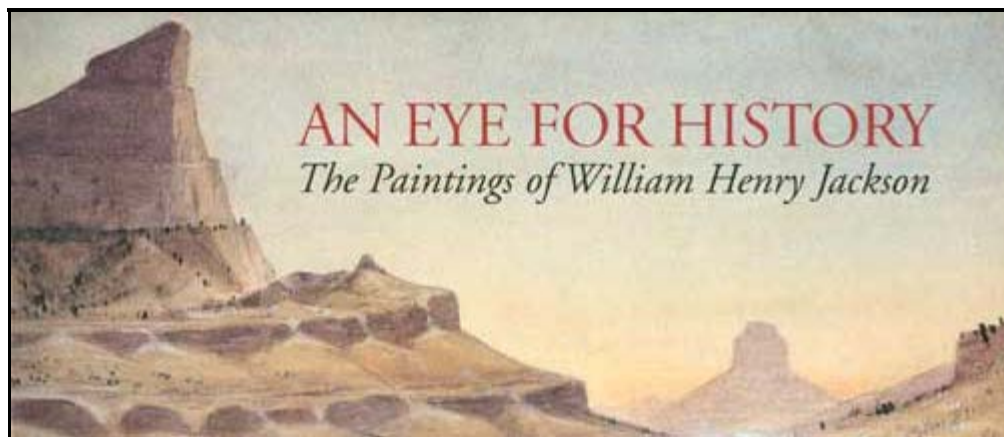
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Jackson the painter. At a time in life when most men are thinking of rocking chairs and grandchildren, William Henry Jackson embarked on a new career as an artist. His paintings have been used to illustrate many books on the history of the American West. (SCBL 2701)



Section 1: Primary Themes of Jackson's Art

THE EARLY FUR TRADE

William Henry Jackson was intrigued by the process by which the Far West became a part of the United States. Jackson saw a logical progression of events that first brought early explorers and fur traders onto the high plains. The knowledge they brought back with them led missionaries and prospectors to try their luck in the West. In time, the trails that they established were used by emigrants in pursuit of new opportunities and a better life, thus simply continuing the well-established American tradition of moving West. At first, the early trails served only as a corridor for people making their way to Oregon and California. There was no particular interest in settling what was then known as the Great American Desert, so the emigrants simply passed through Nebraska and Wyoming, leaving nothing behind but the graves of loved ones who died along the way.

It wasn't until the railroads were completed that settlers claimed homesteads and tried to farm on the High Plains. These settlers may not have been aware of it, but they owed a great debt to the early fur traders who, in the 1820s and 1830s ventured out into the West to make their fortune. At first only a few bales of furs were all a trader could transport back to the East. But soon the market for fur was so good and the supply so great, that these traders brought the first wheeled vehicles onto the Plains to haul the profitable furs back to St. Louis.



Fur Trader Caravan Leaving St. Louis. A notation by the artist on the back of the painting reads, "The Smith, Jackson, and Sublette train leaving St. Louis April 3, 1830. The first train to cross the plains to the Rocky Mtns." This image is a near duplicate of the painting on the opposite page, and is signed and dated 1930. (SCBL 17)

Of course these wagons could only be hauled over relatively even ground, and

the most practical routes had to be found. This was done by following the already established Indian trails, which themselves had followed migratory buffalo trails. Over time, the buffalo had learned the easiest route was along the Platte River, and benefiting from nature's wisdom, the Oregon Trail was born. Eventually much of this same route was used by the Union Pacific Railroad, and even modern engineers could not improve upon it and decided to take advantage of the old trade route and built Interstate Highway 80 along it.

To illustrate the important role played by the first fur traders, Jackson decided to depict the first party to take wagons into the Far West. This was done by the American Fur Company, owned by Jedediah Smith, William Sublette, and David Jackson, and they are shown leaving St. Louis, Missouri, on April 10, 1830. They were bound for a fur trader's rendezvous in the Rocky Mountains, and within the year they succeeded in returning with ten wagons full of furs. The fur trade proved to be short-lived and began to decline in the 1840s, but the stage had been set for the great westward migration.¹

1. Leroy R. Hafen, *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West* (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clarke Company, 1965), 102.



Smith, Jackson, and Sublette Expedition. Signed and dated, 1936. 34.1 x 25.3 cm. (SCBL 14)



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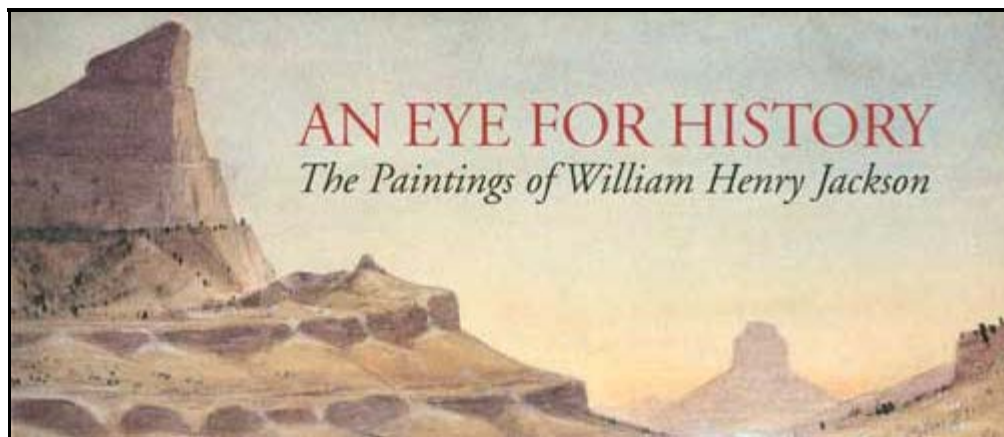
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Such relaxed moments as portrayed in this informal portrait of Jackson, dated 1869-1870, were rare. Besides operating a photographic studio in Omaha, Nebraska, he married Mollie Greer on May 10, 1869, and the next year he accompanied the U.S. Geological Survey on its first



Section 2: Paintings of the Oregon Trail

EMIGRANTS ON THE TRAIL

Rock Creek Station, also known as East Ranch, is located near present-day Endicott, Nebraska. This historic site once served as a Pony Express and stage station, but is probably most famous for having been the site of a gunfight between James Butler Hickok and David McCanles. The story is told that on July 12, 1861, David McCanles, the owner of Rock Creek Station and two of his hired men were shot and killed by "Wild Bill" Hickok. Circumstances surrounding the fight are unclear, but Hickok later became a famous shootist and lawman.

Such violence made for good reading in the pulp novels of the day, and thanks to Hollywood's vision of the West, gun play is generally accepted to have played a major role in America's westward expansion. However, in reality, the greatest threat of violent death did not come from gunfighters, but rather from the accidental discharge of firearms in the hands of inexperienced travelers.

Perhaps wishing to emphasize the unrelenting exertions of the emigrants on the Oregon Trail, as opposed to the murderous violence that was only an occasional occurrence in the westward movement, Jackson has ignored the Hickok story altogether, and chosen to portray an ox team passing peacefully by Rock Creek Station.

This particular painting provides a number of details about the use of oxen. One advantage pioneers had in using oxen to pull their wagons was the relative simplicity of the hardware that was required. Unlike mules and horses, no special harness, halters and reins were needed. The oxen were placed in heavy wooden yokes, which were attached directly to the



Lightning Storm. By using black ink and a few dabs of white paint Jackson captured a group of wet and

expedition to the Yellowstone country in Wyoming. (SCBL 3058)	tongue of the wagon. The oxen were guided by a bullwhacker who walked alongside the teams. As can also be seen in the painting, the number of teams used could vary. Heavier wagons, such as the one in the background, would require more oxen (in this case 3 yokes), while the lighter wagon in the foreground only needed two. It was unusual for emigrants to ride in their wagons, as this added to the strain on their draft animals. It was more common for people to walk alongside the wagons. For people making their way west, there was another type of violence that intimidated them—that of the weather. Nothing in their experience in the East prepared them for the sudden violence that erupts on the High Plains. Diaries and journals are full of comments about the power and fury of the thunderstorms which would seemingly form in a matter of minutes and buffet the pioneers with torrential rains, high winds, sheet lightning, and hailstones. Jackson experienced such a storm just after crossing the South Platte River and described the event: <i>Then, almost in a moment, the sky filled with black clouds and a strong east wind blew upon us. . . The storm grew more furious. Our wagons rocked in the gale, and it seemed that we must surely be turned over; and only the tons of goods under the cover kept us upright, and at that, we were blown some little distance in our tracks. The rain beat down so hard that it came through the canvas roof as if it had been a sieve. . .</i> 1. Jackson, <i>Time Exposure</i>, 121-122.	miserable emigrants as they are startled by lightning striking a nearby telegraph pole. (SCBL 122)
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Rock Creek Station. Initialed and undated. 26.0 x 36.2 cm. (SCBL 21)

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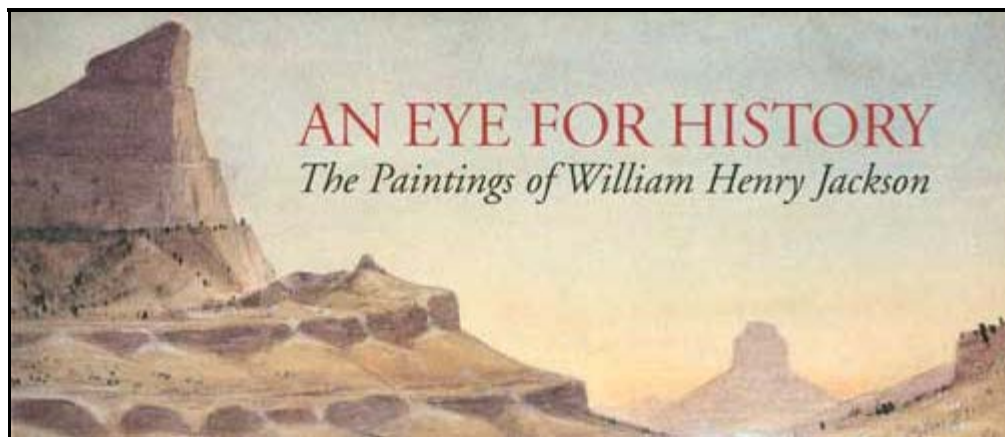
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An enigmatic note on the back of this photograph reads, "Honey, please have my PB (pinched-back?) suit pressed and ink taken out." This image probably dates from around 1910. (SCBL 2637)



Section 2: Paintings of the Oregon Trail

THE OREGON TRAIL

After separating from the California and Mormon Trails in western Wyoming, the Oregon Trail veered to the northwest across Idaho toward Fort Hall. Even then, there really wasn't any "One" Oregon Trail. Rather, the Oregon Trail consisted of a network of shortcuts and cutoffs that were used at various times and with varying degrees of success.

For example, while still in Wyoming, emigrants had the option of following what was known as the Lander Road or Cutoff East of South Pass, this trail struck off to the northwest to Fort Hall. If they had continued on the trail past South Pass, the emigrants again had a decision to make. In this case there was the option of taking the Sublette Cutoff which sought to save many miles. It eventually joined up with the main route of the Oregon Trail, which jogged south to Fort Bridger before swinging back to the northwest into Idaho. This part of the trail was referred to as the Bear River Divide.

It was the wagon master's decision to use the Bear River Cutoff and by-pass Salt Lake City that caused William Henry Jackson to quit his job with the freight wagons and make his way to Utah. If Jackson had continued on the Oregon Trail, he would have come to Soda Springs, which is where the trail branched again—this time to the west. This route was taken by many people bound for California. Farther along on the Oregon Trail, the road branched off to the north, and this is the route Jackson's wagon would have taken into western Montana.

One of the most unique and dramatic crossings of any river along the Oregon Trail took place in south central Idaho. Although river crossings were avoided unless there no other alternative, fording the Snake River at this point offered emigrants a difficult choice. They could remain safely on the south bank of



the river until they were about ten miles west of Fort Boise, however, the trail on the north bank offered easy access to fresh water and a less difficult roadbed.

A notation in Jackson's handwriting reads, "From the Blue Mountains to the Valley of the Columbia in Oregon. Ideal composition by W.H. Jackson." (SCBL 44)

Oftentimes the choice would depend on the water level of the river, for while nature provided some small islands to serve as stepping stones for the wagon trains, the final channel was fairly deep and the current could be very swift. In high water the crossing could be very dangerous, and there are stories of several accidents that took place here.

An 1845 account by Samuel Hancock describes the risky procedures that were used at Three Island Crossing:

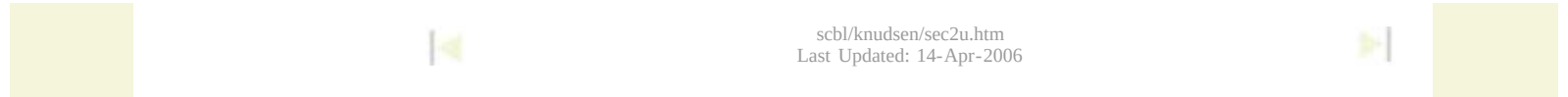
We now made preparations for crossing the river, which was very rapid and deep, and perhaps 200 yards wide; the crossing was affected by propping up the wagon beds above the reach of the water and having three men on horseback by the team of the first wagon, to which the others were all chained to the preceding one, and with a man on horseback to keep the teams straight, we reached the opposite bank safely. . .¹

Eventually these two branches of the Oregon Trail came together again near Fort Boise, which was located near the border of present-day Oregon. Although the emigrants had covered 1500 miles to this point, some of the most difficult terrain was in the 400 miles still ahead of them.

1. Samuel Hancock, *Samuel Hancock 1845-1860*, (New York City: R.M. McBride & Co., 1927), 26.



Three Island Crossing. Signed and undated. 23.5 x 35.8 cm. (SCBL 43)





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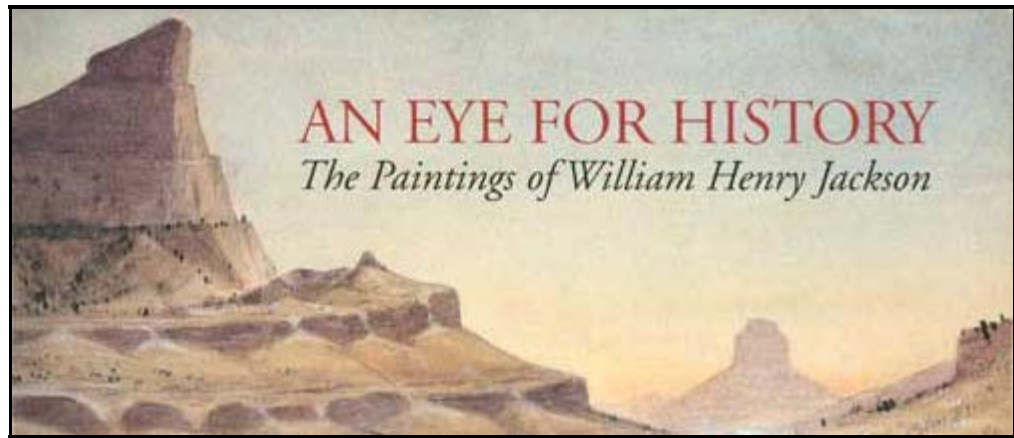
SECTION 3

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In 1934
Yellowstone
National Park
sponsored a special
exhibit of the work
of William Henry
Jackson. In this
photograph the
men are identified
as Farley, Jackson,
and Wyoming
Governor
O'Mahoney.
(SCBL 2708)



Section 3: Historic Scenes from the West

LEWIS AND CLARK

The importance of the Lewis and Clark Expedition to the opening of the Far West cannot be overstated. Although the expedition failed to find an easy trade route to the Northwest, this epic two-year journey up the Missouri River, across the Rocky Mountains, and down the Columbia River to the Pacific Ocean proved that it was possible to travel safely through the vastness of the Far West.

An added bonus that paid dividends for later explorers came in the form of the meticulous maps and observations that Meriwether Lewis and William Clark made of the people, land features, animals and plants that they saw along the way. The final success of the expedition, if not their very survival, may have been due to the presence of a Shoshone woman named Sacagawea.

Few individuals in American history have been the subject of as much romantic speculation as Sacagawea. The facts that are known about this woman are sparse. What is known is that Sacagawea had been kidnapped as a young girl and raised by the Minutemen. Later she was purchased and made a wife of Toussaint Charbonneau, a fur trading French-Canadian employed by the Northwest Company.

Charbonneau was hired as an interpreter and guide in November 1804 while Lewis and Clark were spending the winter at the Mandan villages on the



This photograph of the Lower Falls of the Yellowstone

upper Missouri River. Although Sacagawea was pregnant at the time, Lewis and Clark allowed her to accompany the expedition when their westward journey was resumed in the spring of 1805. Lewis and Clark knew that having a Shoshone along might help them to establish good relations when they came into contact with that powerful tribe.¹

was taken by Jackson in 1871. Images such as this were very popular, and were sold as prints and stereo cards, which when seen through a special viewer appeared to be three-dimensional. (SCBL 989)

Jackson's painting, "*Historic Homecoming*" depicts Lewis and Clark returning Sacagawea to her Shoshone tribe on Horse Prairie Creek, in western Montana. This event took place on the morning of August 15, 1805, near a site that came to be known as Camp Fortunate. No better name could have been chosen, for during a council with a Shoshone chieftain named Cameahwait, Sacagawea recognized him as her brother.² Needless to say, Sacagawea's presence on this particular occasion justified the decision to bring her on the expedition.

1. Roy E. Appleman, *Lewis and Clark* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1975), 114-115.

2. *Ibid.*, 160-161.



Historic Homecoming. Signed and dated 1940. 28.0 x 38.1 cm. (SCBL 152)



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Schenk

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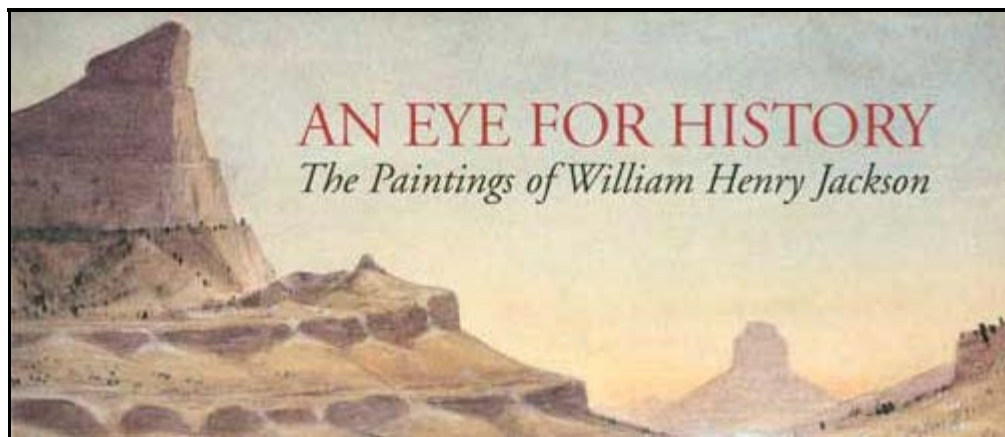
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William Henry Jackson in his element. Here Jackson is photographing E.W. Deming, J. Hare and Stephen Horgan. (SCBL 2700)



Section 3: Historic Scenes from the West

A LEGENDARY MOUNTAIN

If William Henry Jackson's photographs of Yellowstone established him as a one of America's premier photographers, his photographs of the Mount of the Holy Cross made him a household name. Ever since the early days of the fur trade, stories about a snow-capped Colorado mountain with a huge cross etched in its side circulated throughout the West. Many people claimed to have seen the fabled cross, but proof of its existence was always elusive.

Jackson's instincts told him that if he were able to capture the snowy cross on film that he would be able to sell thousands of prints. Therefore, in 1873, when the U.S. Geological Survey was scheduled to explore and map Colorado, one of Jackson's goals was to find the mythic mountain. On May 14, 1873, the survey's photographic division, led by Jackson, arrived in the survey's headquarters near Denver and received its final instructions. Jackson was to explore the Snowy Range and make his way south to Pikes Peak. From Pikes Peak, they were to cross the Sawatch Range and explore the Elk Mountains.

After spending three months photographing the mountains of central Colorado, Jackson finally approached the Elk Mountains, where the Mount of the Holy Cross was reportedly located. On August 23 Jackson began an ascent of Notch Mountain, which he hoped would provide a view of the mountain with a snowy cross. The going was difficult, as all the equipment had to be carried on the men's backs.

As Jackson later told the



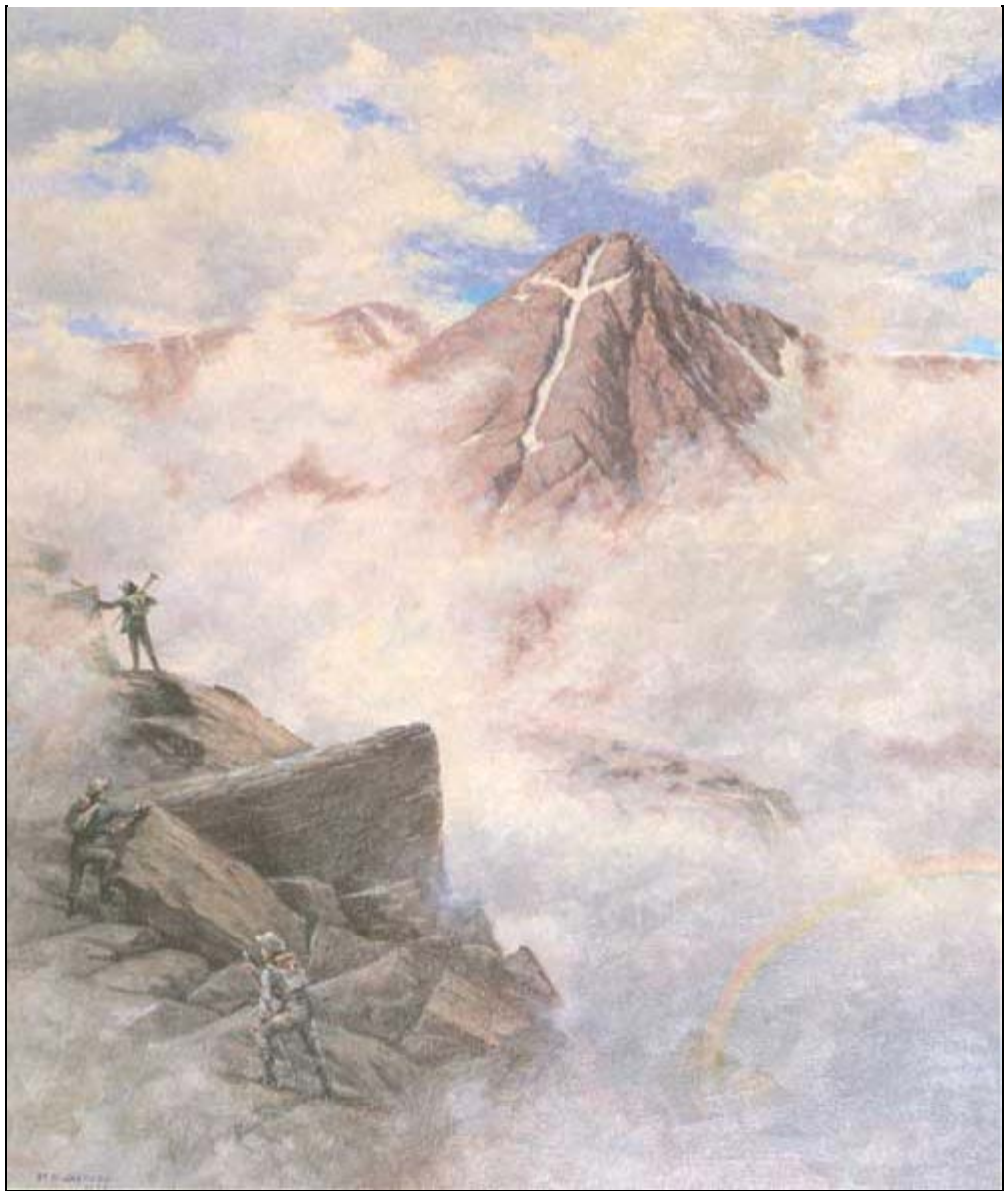
story:

When prospecting for views it was my custom to keep well ahead of my companions, for in that way they could often be spared the meanderings that I had to make. On this day, as usual, I pushed on ahead, and thus it was that I became the first member of the Survey to sight the cross. Near the top of the ridge I emerged above the timber line and the clouds, and suddenly, as I clambered over a vast mass of jagged rocks, I discovered the great shining cross dead before me, tilted against the mountainside.¹

A note on the back of this drawing simply reads, "Camera in High Places." This caption could well be used to describe not only William Henry Jackson's efforts at the Mount of the Holy Cross, but also his career as an explorer and an innovator. (SCBL 52)

Unfortunately, by the time Jackson and his comrades had all arrived at the summit, there was not enough light to make an exposure. Rather than climb back down and return the next day, they decided to spend the night on the mountain and take the pictures they wanted so desperately in the morning. Without food, coats or blankets, the men returned to the timberline and spent a cold, sleepless night huddled around a fire—hoping the next day's weather would allow them to successfully photograph the cross.

1. Jackson, *Time Exposure*, 217.



The Mount of the Holy Cross. Signed and undated. 75.0 x 62.0 cm. (SCBL 2130)