

that each had rendered in the past and the potential for future service. Although these records must be used cautiously, they can reveal a great deal about family lineage, patterns of social relations between native families and their intermarried kin, relationships between native women and federal government officials and soldiers, and many other historical issues.

Linda M. Waggoner provides a helpful preface and a careful essay regarding the controversy over alleged fraud in the commission's actions of 1838. The appendix includes copies of the 1837 treaty and the payment roll for the first commission. Researchers will appreciate a helpful index and bibliography of relevant primary and secondary sources. This is a useful resource for researchers interested in the nineteenth-century Midwest.

Pathfinder: John Charles Frémont and the Course of American Empire, by Tom Chaffin. New York: Hill and Wang, 2002. xxx, 559 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 cloth, \$16.00 paper.

Reviewer Roger L. Nichols is professor of history at the University of Arizona. His research and writing have focused on the history of frontier exploration and American Indians.

The subject of considerable public interest during his lifetime and numerous biographies during the past half-century, John Charles Frémont continues to attract attention. For Chaffin, as for most previous authors, Frémont's ideas, motivations, and personality prove to be illusive. The result is a long, detailed, interesting book that is a well-done life-and-times of the man, rather than his biography. For modern readers, it depicts a West characterized by almost unimaginable size and emptiness. Moving into that region during the 1830s and '40s, the young army officer personally represented the United States and its government. A federally supported explorer by the time he was 25, Frémont tended to be brash and reckless, to ignore orders, to act in self-serving ways, and to indulge in considerable wishful thinking about the American presence in the West. The narrative, then, looks at the decades between the War of 1812 and the building of the early transcontinental railroads later in the nineteenth century.

In his discussion, author Tom Chaffin steers away from any complex analysis of Frémont's thinking or motivations. Instead, his primary emphasis remains on a detailed narrative of the subject's actions at crucial points during his career. The book's main thrust is to present Frémont in the context of early and mid-nineteenth century ideas about American empire and the reasons for and means to achieve national

expansion to the Pacific. A second broad theme is that throughout much of his career the explorer benefited from his ability to attach himself to a series of older, influential men who repeatedly helped his career: Secretary of War Joel Poinsett, scientist and explorer Joseph Nicollet, Colonel John Abert (commanding officer of the Army Corps of Topographical Engineers), and his father-in-law, Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, all played significant roles in his life.

The bulk of the narrative, 20 of 28 chapters, focuses on Frémont's western expeditions. From the cartographic surveys with Joseph Nicollet in Minnesota and the Dakotas in the late 1830s through five treks through the West between 1842 and 1854, these expeditions provided the basis for his fame. During that decade and a half, his life touched many of the most important western people and events. With the help of former mountainmen and traders such as Kit Carson, Bill Williams, Thomas Fitzpatrick, and Joseph Walker, he mapped parts of the trails leading to Oregon, California, and Santa Fe. As an explorer, he contributed to the growing American cartographic knowledge of the West. His surveys and reports directly contradicted earlier ideas of the Plains as a Great American Desert. He correctly identified the western continental divide, and depicted the Great Basin as well.

In this detailed but interesting account, the author emphasizes Frémont's explorations as the high points of his career. He shows that whenever the "Pathfinder" strayed into military, political, economic, or administrative matters he demonstrated few skills. His actions in California during the war with Mexico, as a mining and railroad promoter, in national politics, or as a Civil War general all turned out badly. The narrative depicts Frémont as a man who enjoyed the freedom to move through the West, but whose actions there changed it and his nation forever. In many ways his life demonstrated how the individualism of the mid-nineteenth century gave way to the complexities of the modern, industrial society that followed.

The Health of the Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land, by Conevery Bolton Valencius. New York: Basic Books, 2002. viii, 388 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$30.00 cloth.

Forty years ago, reviewer Peter T. Harstad completed a dissertation on the status of health and the practice of medicine on the Upper Mississippi River Valley frontier. He now resides in Lakeville, Minnesota. Retired from teaching and historical society administration, he is writing a biography of Thomas R. Marshall, Woodrow Wilson's vice president.

Conevery Bolton Valencius's 15 years devoted to the study of first-hand accounts of the settlement process, particularly those preserved

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