

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

in historical institutions of Arkansas and Missouri, have been rewarded with research and writing grants, articles, the Allan Nevins Prize in 1999 for the best-written Ph.D. dissertation in American history, and with the appearance of this handsome volume. The book is grounded in the geographical area that became the states of Arkansas and Missouri, but its intellectual framework is that of western civilization. While charting trails through frontier, medical, and environmental literature, Valencius discovered that the trails frequently converge. She works this theme effectively.

Historians of the American frontier and of early Iowa should read at least the introduction, where Valencius sets up her intellectual framework and begins explaining concepts that dominated both popular and professional thought about health before the dominance of the germ theory, "before antibiotics, before many effective public health measures—before the revolution of medical theory and practice that began in the latter decades of the nineteenth century" (5). Those inclined to scoff at the miasmatic theory, prevalent when much of North America was settled, are reminded that current medical theory does not effectively address some of the most pernicious health problems of the twenty-first century.

The Health of the Country is about settlers' search for order in early nineteenth-century America, when matters of health were to be balanced with geographical considerations. In chapters on "New Country" and "Body," Valencius explains how this played out; "settling" referred to a bodily and environmental process, "one national in scope and personal in meaning" (19). Bottomland along rivers might be fertile, capable of producing large yields of cash crops, but "insalubrious" because of rotting vegetable matter. Resulting "miasmata" could carry "imbalance" from a swamp into the interior of a human body and give rise to "ague" or "chills and fever." Especially during a period of "acclimation" to a new environment in the West, this disease, now known as malaria, could debilitate victims and block their road to health and prosperity. Until a newcomer had, with or without assistance from a doctor, "managed" and passed through a health crisis to become acclimated, it might be better to occupy less fertile but more salubrious land on higher ground.

Under chapter headings borrowed from the world of classical medicine, Valencius localizes and refines points about the roles of "Places," "Airs," and "Waters" in nineteenth-century medical thought and practice. An excellent chapter on the science of medical geography follows. Even a backwoods practitioner who never darkened the door of a medical college could contribute to the mounting body of scien-

tific knowledge by collecting data on the environment, and he could use that same material to attract settlers to his locale. Blatant boosterism and medical science went hand in hand on the American frontier.

The remaining chapters on "Cultivation" (both land and body could be "cultivated" and brought into harmony through diligent work) and "Racial Anxiety" (involving prejudice about blacks, whites, and Indians; blurred boundaries between races; pseudoscience; and environmental and other complexities) and the conclusion held my interest to the end.

Valencius frequently pushes the metaphorical potential of her texts to the limit. A case in point involves the "Red River Raft," a troublesome blockage of trees and debris in that stream in southwestern Arkansas. "To a people plagued with constipation," she writes, "and outfitted with a series of remedies designed to loosen various obstructions and release stubborn menstrual flow, the raft was another reflection of the ways the natural world and the human body were subject to a consistent set of properties, functions, and problems" (144).

More comfortable with narrative sources than with the numerical data compiled to advance the science of medical geography, Valencius shows no awareness of the mountain of statistics collected by the Provost Marshal General of the United States during the Civil War. Processed thereafter and technically beyond the chronological scope of this book, the material is noteworthy as the last ripe fruit of medical theory rooted in the classical world. The microbe hunters found little use for medical geography.

There is much to praise and little to criticize in this important book. The conceptual apparatus is as applicable to Iowa as it is to Missouri and Arkansas.

Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War, by T. J. Stiles. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002. xiii, 510 pp. Map, notes, index. \$27.50 cloth.

Reviewer Roger A. Bruns is a historian and retired deputy executive director of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission at the National Archives in Washington, DC. His latest books are *Almost History* (2000) and *Desert Honkytonk* (2000).

When we think of bandits, we think of the Old West of the nineteenth century, the West of train robberies and six-shooters, horses and gunfights in dust-blown streets of no-account towns. We think of the revered legends—the heroes of dime and pulp novels and the misunderstood loners of the silver screen. We think of Jesse James riding into Northfield in *The Long Riders*. From novelists and journalists, historians

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