

Book Reviews

EDITED BY MICHAEL D. GIBSON

Mighty Mississippi: Biography of a River, by Marcus W. Childs. New Haven: Ticknor and Fields, 1982. pp. 204. \$12.95 cloth.

Mighty Mississippi is a loving, long-ago look at the Father of Waters—loving because it brings an understanding and a storyteller's interpretation to raw facts, long-ago because it was written between 1932 and 1935 with a nine-page update added just before 1982 publication.

The story of the Mississippi flows chronologically from "Wilderness" to the "Invasion" of American settlers, from "Mark Twain's Mississippi" to the "Rivalry of the Railroads." Here are the tales and behind-the-scene decisions of the men and women who lived on the Mississippi. Childs brings us a different twist, a thoughtful perspective from which to view traditional Mississippi River history.

"Wilderness" tells of the European and French-Canadian explorers who discovered the rigorous yet resourceful lands of the Mississippi. Within a few decades of Joliet's 1673 exploration, French settlers in Kaskaskia and Cahokia were shipping grain, furs, and tallow down the river to New Orleans. The voyage of the *New Orleans*, the first steamboat on the river, is recounted, as is the invention of the improved high-pressure, low-draft steamboat, the *Washington*, by pioneer riverman Henry Shreve.

Luxurious and not-so-luxurious steamboat accommodations are described with quotes from traveler and gambler tales to provide excitement for the reader's voyage. The court case over the *Effie Afton* ramming the new Rock Island railroad bridge symbolizes the conflict between the railroad and the steamboat. Abraham Lincoln successfully defended the railroad, giving it the right to span the Mississippi and block the riverboat pilots' free run of the river. Other chapters deal with the rivalry of river towns, the Civil War, and the booming log and lumber raft industry.

The narrative moves quickly, perhaps too much so for those not familiar with the history of the river. Obviously *Mighty Mississippi* is

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well researched and well crafted. Facts and figures are woven throughout the text. Yet the events and little known details that make up Childs's tale are wholly undocumented. There is no bibliography, no essay on sources, and no footnotes. This is particularly vexing because the reader is intrigued by the events enough to want to know more. With no footnotes or sources, there is no direction given.

Mighty Mississippi paints a panorama of river history—deerskins down the Mississippi, floating debris from an exploded steamboat, and government towboats pushing barges down "Government River." Childs originally left off at the point in 1935 when "the federal government . . . stepped in to try and master the Mississippi. . . ." Now, forty-seven years later, Childs has added a brief closing to a 1935 manuscript that does not attempt to fill in the history of four decades but rather describes the political football game played in Washington with the Mississippi as the pigskin.

Mighty Mississippi is a well-written, factual, yet dramatic tale of the greatest of American rivers, written in the thirties and revealed to us for the first time in the eighties.

DUBUQUE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

JEROME A. ENZLER

Lion of the Valley: St. Louis, Missouri, by James Neal Primm. Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1981. pp. viii, 546. Illustrations, photographs, notes on the sources, index. \$19.95 cloth.

St. Louis deserves its label, "Gateway to the West." In February 1764, workmen led by Pierre de Laclède began to build the city following a pattern similar to New Orleans. The community was an important ingredient in the international rivalry for control of the Mississippi River Valley in the late eighteenth and first decade of the nineteenth century. Oriented westward from its early history, St. Louis maintained a French character while it served as "imperial Spain's borderland capital, the hub of the Missouri River trade, the place of contact with the powerful and capricious Plains tribes, and a key location in the competition with Great Britain" (38). There seems to have been neither a great outcry against nor much enthusiasm expressed for American control following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.

James Neal Primm, a Missouri native, professor of history at the University of Missouri—St. Louis, and author of several volumes related to the state's history, offers a lengthy, strictly chronological narrative history of St. Louis. Beginning with the pre-Columbian mound-builders who lived in "orderly, sophisticated urbanized" settlements, he carries the story through the 1970s, while concentrating on the

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