

Narratives of North American Exploration

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[Editor's note—Among the volumes in the rare book collection of The University of Iowa Libraries are a number of first and early editions of North American travel narratives. Ranging from the late seventeenth century of Hennepin and Tonti to the early nineteenth century of Pike and Long, these accounts are individual journals of discovery, adventure, and intrigue. Viewed together, however, they constitute an important collection of works on the progress of exploration in the New World. The narratives here discussed, all of which the Library owns in the editions indicated, are seldom available in these earlier versions.]

Before his assassination in 1687, Robert Cavalier Sieur de La Salle had fulfilled two personal ambitions: in 1682 he had descended the Mississippi to the sea, claiming for France the vast territory drained by the Father of Waters; and in 1686 he had extended French colonization to the lower Mississippi Valley. La Salle's own account of his adventures was not made public until 1879 when his letters and documents were published in Pierre Margry's *Découvertes et établissements des Français dans l'ouest et dans le sud de l'Amérique Septentrionale, 1614-1754* (6 vols., Paris, 1876-1886); however, several contemporary accounts of the visionary Frenchman's life and death were published by his companions and followers.

The first to write of La Salle's exploits was Louis Hennepin, the Recollect friar attached to La Salle's Great Lakes expeditions of 1677-1679. When he returned from his travels, Hennepin published a complete account of La Salle's adventures in which he presented the first description and delineation of Niagara Falls.¹ Fifteen years later he published another edition of his travels entitled *A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America . . .* (London, 1698), wherein

¹ Louis Hennepin, *Description de la Louisiane . . .* (Paris, 1683).

he described his discovery of the Falls of St. Anthony (now the site of Minneapolis, Minnesota). But, more important, he boldly repudiated La Salle's genuine claim to glory:

I was then oblig'd to say nothing of the Course of the River Meschasipi [sic], from the Mouth of the River of the Illinois down to the sea, for fear of disobliging M. la Salle, with whom I began my Discovery. This Gentleman wou'd alone have the Glory of having discover'd the Course of that River: But when he heard that I had done it two years before him, he could never forgive me, tohugh [sic] as I have said, I was so modest as to publish nothing of it.²

This boastful pretension was regarded with as much distrust as curiosity, for, in his earlier work, the author distinctly denied that he had made the voyage.³ Even though Hennepin's audacious claim was disregarded, the popularity of his narratives never diminished; they were immediately translated into Dutch, English, German, Italian, and Spanish in at least twenty editions.

In 1698, the same year that Hennepin's dubious work was translated into English, there was published, in London, *An Account of Monsieur de la Salle's Last Expedition and Discoveries in North America. Presented to the French King, and Published by the Chevalier Tonti, Governour of Fort St. Louis, in the Province of Islinois*. Shortly after the book's publication, Chevalier Henri de Tonti, La Salle's faithful lieutenant, disclaimed authorship of the narrative even though it concluded with Tonti's discovery that La Salle was murdered by his own men. This account, however, was too accurate a description of La Salle's adventures to be the work of anyone other than the lieutenant.

The most trustworthy account of La Salle's assassination was Henri Joutel's *A Journal of the Last Voyage Perform'd by Monsr. de la Sale . . . Written in French by Monsieur Joutel, a Commander in that Expedition; and Translated from the Edition just Publish'd at Paris* (London, 1714).⁴ After La Salle's death, Joutel crossed the Texas region to the Red River, then to the Arkansas and up the Mississippi to Fort St. Louis. His narrative included the first accurate description of that region.

² Louis Hennepin, *A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America . . .* (London, 1698) [p. xi]

³ See Francis Parkman, *La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West* (Boston, 1880), pp. 225-226.

⁴ This first English edition includes the text of the grant of Commerce of Louisiana by Louis XIV to Crozat.

Still another account of La Salle's death was recorded by Baron de Lahontan, who reported in his *Nouveaux Voyages De Mr Le Baron De Lahontan, dans l'Amerique Septentrionale* (Hague, 1704) that he had encountered some of La Salle's men who were purposely concealing the death of their commander. Lahontan's narrative, however, was more important for his pretended trip west of the Mississippi River. To validate this claim, the author drew a map on which he delineated the Rocky Mountains and a river, the Long, that flowed indefinitely west. The imaginary river remained a geographical curiosity until 1753 when Dumont, a French officer who had spent twenty-five years in Louisiana, published in Paris two volumes of his *Mémoires Historiques sur la Louisiane*. . . . Dumont suggested the possibility of a river such as the Long when he included in his narrative an account of Moncacht-Apé, the Yazoo Indian who had traveled to the North Pacific Ocean via the Mississippi, Missouri, and Columbia Rivers. Dumont at first admitted, but later denied, that his was a condensed version of the same journey described by Le Page du Pratz in his *Histoire de la Louisiane* . . . (3 vols., Paris, 1758).⁵ In effect, the journey of Moncacht-Apé, as reported by Dumont and Le Page du Pratz, was the first record of an overland trip to the West. This report renewed the idea of a transcontinental passage which had earlier been shattered by La Salle's discovery that the Mississippi flowed into the Gulf of Mexico rather than into the Pacific Ocean.

Quest for a passage to the Pacific was not confined to the French of the lower Mississippi Valley. North of that territory, the trapper-explorers of the British fur companies were in search of another route, the Northwest Passage. Unfortunately their explorations, impelled by the struggle for control of the fur industry, were concentrated on locating the quickest route to the greatest number of beaver. However, the North West Company, attempting to break the monopoly of the Hudson's Bay Company, commissioned Sir Alexander Mackenzie to explore the regions north and west of the territory controlled by its powerful rival. Mackenzie's record of his explorations were published in his *Voyages from Montreal on the river St. Laurence, through the Continent of North America, to the*

⁵ Prior to 1753 Le Page du Pratz had published an abridged version of Moncacht-Apé's journey in a series of articles for *Journal Economique*. For a study of the controversy see Andrew McFarland Davis, "The Journey of Moncacht-Apé," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, New Series, Vol. II (1882-1883), pp. 321-348.

frozen and Pacific Oceans; in the years 1789 and 1793 (London, 1801).

In 1789 Mackenzie descended the river, which now bears his name, until he sighted the icebergs and whales of the Arctic Ocean. Four years later, on his second journey, he became the first white man to cross the North American continent. On July 22, 1793 he noted this accomplishment in his journal:

I now mixed up some vermilion in melted grease, and inscribed in large characters on the South-East face of the rock on which we had slept last night, this brief memorial—"Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada, by land, the twenty-second of July, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-three."⁶ To Mackenzie this famous journey not only nullified the myth of a Northwest Passage; it also proposed a definite plan for British trade imperialism:

The discovery of a passage by sea, North-East or North-West from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, has for many years excited the attention of governments, and encouraged enterprising spirit of individuals. The non-existence, however, of any such practical passage being at length determined, the practicability of a passage through the continents of Asia and America becomes an object of consideration. The Russians, who first discovered that, along the coasts of Asia no useful or regular navigation existed, opened an interior communication by rivers, &c. and through that long and wide-extended continent, to the strait that separates Asia from America, over which they passed to the adjacent islands and continent of the latter. Our situation, at length, is in some degree similar to theirs: the non-existence of a practicable passage by sea, and the existence of one through the continent, are clearly proved; and it requires only the countenance and support of the British Government, to increase in a very ample proportion this national advantage, and secure the trade of that country to its subjects.⁷

To supplement his plan for transcontinental commerce Mackenzie included in his *Voyages* a valuable essay on the development of the fur trade by the North West Company. Even though this constituted the first printed account of that industry in Western Canada, Mackenzie's narrative of Canadian exploration, and of the history of the fur trade in general, was perhaps no more significant than Daniel Williams Harmon's *A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interior of North America* . . . (Andover, 1820).

⁶ Alexander Mackenzie, *Voyages from Montreal on the river St. Laurence* . . . (London, 1801), p. 349.

⁷ Mackenzie, pp. 407-408.

Harmon, who had spent nineteen years as an explorer for the North West Company in the present provinces of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia, kept this account of his travels, adventures, and occasionally moral reflections, "partly for his own amusement, and partly to gratify his friends, who he thought, would be pleased to be informed, with some particularity, on his return, how his time had been employed, during his absence."⁸ Harmon's personal impressions of the life of an explorer, therefore, were far more vivid than those recorded in the often dull, official business documents kept by many of his colleagues.

Unfortunately, the integrity of Harmon's account had been clouded by the pious efforts of the book's editor, Rev. Daniel Haskel, who stated:

The following work was furnished to my hand fully written out; and though I have written it wholly over, I should have been much better able to satisfy myself, with respect to its style, if I could as fully have possessed the materials, in the form of notes and sketches, or by verbal recitals.⁹

However, Haskel's labors for a literary, as well as a moral narrative, did not alter the original character of simplicity and authenticity intended by Harmon. Comparison of the Haskel text with Iowa's manuscript copy of Harmon's journal discloses that two hundred thirty-two pages of the manuscript parallel two hundred forty-nine pages of the first printed edition.¹⁰ This manuscript copy of Harmon's diary is believed to be the one Harmon sent to his family in the spring of 1816. The last entry, dated April 15, 1816, concludes: My desire to return to my native Country in hopes of seeing my aged mother and expiring Brothers ere they meet their dissolutions never was

⁸ Daniel Williams Harmon, *A Journal of Voyages and Travels* . . . (Andover, 1820), p. v.

⁹ Harmon, pp. x-xi.

¹⁰ W. Kaye Lamb, ed., *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country; the Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon, 1800-1816* (Toronto, 1957), p. xxiii. This new version of Harmon's Journal was edited from a photostat of an original manuscript copy presented to The University of Iowa Library in 1955 by Mr. Philip D. Sang. Complementing the manuscript copy, the Library also has two first editions (different issues) of the original Haskel text; several later editions; the original engraved copper-plates of the portrait and map used in the Haskel edition; the original manuscript and an autographed copy of *A Grand Portage* (Indianapolis, 1951), Walter O'Meara's fictionalized account of Harmon's romance; and several letters from Lamb, O'Meara and others regarding the authenticity of the Library's manuscript copy.

so great as at the present moment, and yet I cannot think of doing it this Season as it is thought absolutely necessary that I shall pass the ensuing summer at this place. However a few Days hence I shall write my Friends below—and knowing as I do that there is little except disappointments & Death certain in this World of *Disappointments* and sorrow, I therefore am resolved to forward them, by my Friend Mr. John Stuart, a copy of this Journal, in order that they (in case I never have the inexpressible pleasure and gratification of seeing them myself) may have the satisfaction as I presume it will prove to be to them of knowing how their long absent Relation has been employed, both as to *Body & Mind*, while in this Savage Country.¹¹

To counteract his “world of disappointments and sorrows,” Harmon frequently exchanged letters with neighboring fur traders, noting their activities in his journal. Thus we have recorded the achievements of many influential men, such as David Thompson, Simon Fraser, Roderick McKenzie, and John Stuart.

One such passage from the manuscript copy of Harmon’s journal anticipated, perhaps, the most important of all North American exploratory adventures:

November 24, Saturday [1804] A Man arrived from *Montagne a la Basse*, with a letter from Mr. Chaboillez which informs me that two Captains Clarke & Lewis & one hundred & eighty Soldiers had arrived at the *Mandelle* [i.e. Mandan] Village on the Missouri [sic] River—who invite Mr. Chaboillez to go & pay them a visit (which is only a distance of five or Six Days march from where he is). It is said that on their arrival there they hoisted the American Flag and told the Natives that they were not come among them to traffic, but merely to see the Country, and that as soon as the navigation was open they should continue their route across the Rocky Mountains & then down to the Pacific Ocean. They also made the Natives a few trifling presents, as well as repaired their Guns & Axes &c gratis. Mr Chaboillez writes that they behave remarkably honourably towards his people who are there to traffic with the Natives.¹²

It appears that the invitation extended to Mr. Chaboillez was accepted; for Sergeant Patrick Gass, a member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition wintering at the Mandan Village (near the present site of Bismarck, North Dakota), made the following entry in his *A Journal of the Voyages and Travels of A Corps of Discovery . . .* (London, 1808):

Sunday 16th [December, 1804] Three of the traders from the N. W. Com-

¹¹ From the manuscript copy of Harmon’s *Journal* [p. 244].

¹² From the manuscript copy of Harmon’s *Journal* [pp. 105-106].

pany came to our fort, and brought a letter to our commanding officers. They remained with us all night. The object of the visits we received from the N. W. Company, was to ascertain our motives for visiting that country, and to gain information with respect to the change of government.¹³

Gass's journal, which preceded by seven years any official account of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, was the earliest first-hand description of the vast territory acquired by President Jefferson in his Purchase of 1803. The official publication, hampered by misfortunes and postponed by the violent death of Lewis in 1809, was delayed until 1814, when only one thousand four hundred seventeen copies of an intended edition of two thousand were published.¹⁴

While the two famous Captains were spending the winter of 1805 at the mouth of the Columbia River, Lieutenant Zebulon Montgomery Pike was in northern Minnesota trying to locate the source of the Mississippi River; but, unsuccessful in his attempt, he returned to St. Louis in April of 1806. Three months later Pike was sent by General James Wilkinson on another expedition, ostensibly to explore the headwaters of the Arkansas and Red Rivers. After Pike had ascended the Arkansas River to its source, he turned southward to trace the course of the Red. Instead, he mistakenly followed the Rio Grande into Spanish territory where he was captured by a company of dragoons who "escorted" him to Santa Fe, and then to Chihuahua. During his captivity Pike was forced to surrender his mathematical, astronomical, and geographical calculations pertaining to New Spain; he also was advised to refrain from maintaining any further record of his observations. However, on his return trip to the United States, Pike took many notes which were hidden in the barrels of the guns. From his salvaged notes Pike published a journal entitled *An Account of Expeditions to the Sources of the Mississippi, and through the Western Parts of Louisiana . . .* (Philadelphia, 1810).¹⁵

¹³ Patrick Gass, *A Journal of the Voyages and Travels of a Corps of Discovery . . .* (London, 1808), p. 92.

¹⁴ The two most notable reprints of the official account are Elliott Coues, ed., *History of the Expedition under the Command of Lewis and Clark . . .* (4 vols., New York, 1893); and Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806* (8 vols., New York, 1904-05). In addition, one of the most significant books relating to the expedition is Donald Jackson, ed., *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854* (Urbana, 1962).

¹⁵ For later editions of Pike's journal see Elliott Coues, ed., *The Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike . . .* (3 vols., New York, 1895) and Donald Jack-

Even though Pike's expedition was the first to enter the Southwest and return, its success was overshadowed by his association with and defense of General James Wilkinson, who was linked with Aaron Burr in the latter's plot to liberate Mexico and to make Louisiana an independent republic. Pike's involvement in the Wilkinson-Burr conspiracy, however, has never been proved or disproved; but his reputation has been blighted by that intrigue.

In addition to initiating government interest in the southwestern portion of the United States, Pike's journal was noted for another famous, though negative, contribution concerning that territory. Describing the country he had traversed, Pike commented that "these vast plains of the western hemisphere may become in time equally celebrated as the sandy deserts [sic] of Africa"¹⁶ Pike's legendary desert was further expanded by Stephen H. Long, who was sent in 1820 to explore the upper regions of the Platte, Arkansas, Red, and Canadian Rivers. His assessment of the plains area was included in Edwin James's *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains* . . . (3 vols., London, 1823).¹⁷ In his description Long stated:

In regard to this extensive section of the country, I do not hesitate in giving the opinion, that it is almost wholly unfit for cultivation, and of course uninhabitable by a people depending upon agriculture for their subsistence. Although tracts of fertile land considerably extensive are occasionally to be met with, yet the scarcity of wood and water, almost uniformly prevalent, will prove an insuperable obstacle in the way of settling the country. This objection rests not only against the section immediately under consideration, but applies with equal propriety to a much larger portion of the country. Agreeably to the best intelligence that can be had, concerning the country both northward and southward of the section, and especially to the inferences deducible from the account given by Lewis and Clarke [sic] of the country situated between the Missouri and the Rocky Mountains above the River Platte, the vast region commencing near the sources of the Sabine, Trinity, Brases, and Colorado, and extending northwardly to the forty-ninth degree of north latitude, by

son, ed., *The Journals of Zebulon Montgomery Pike* . . . (2 vols., Norman, Okla., 1966).

¹⁶ Zebulon Pike, *An Account of Expeditions to the Sources of the Mississippi* . . . (Philadelphia, 1810), Appendix to Part II, p. 8.

¹⁷ James, a practicing physician, was the botanist and geologist attached to the expedition. His detailed narrative, considered the official account, was written from the notes of others in the party. This first English edition omits some scientific data found in the first American edition published at Philadelphia in 1823.

which the United States' territory is limited in that direction, is throughout of a similar character. The whole of this region seems peculiarly adapted as a range for buffaloes; wild goats, and other wild game; incalculable multitudes of which find ample pasturage and subsistence upon it.¹⁸

Thus was firmly implanted the myth of a Great American Desert—a myth that remained popular until the Civil War—of a desert that stretched from the Canadian border to northern Texas, and from the Mississippi River to the Front Ranges of the Rocky Mountains.¹⁹

In a sense, Long's journey marked the close of one era of exploration as it previewed the beginning of another. Following his expedition, the West was no longer an unexplored territory; and, by comprising a scientific team of botanists, geologists, zoologists, and cartographers, who were prepared to record accurately their investigation of the Plains region, Long's expedition anticipated the Great Surveys of 1860-1900.

DESIDERATA

The accounts just mentioned constitute a basic collection of important narratives relating to early exploration of the trans-Mississippi West. To strengthen these holdings, the Library invites the help of its Friends in acquiring the following rare volumes:

Brackenridge, Henry M. *Views of Louisiana; together with a Journal of a Voyage up the Missouri River, in 1811*. Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear and Eichbaum, 1814.

Charlevoix, Pierre Francois Xavier de. *Histoire et description generale de la Nouvelle France, avec le Journal Historique d'un Voyage fait par ordre du Roi dans l'Amerique Septentrionale*. Par le P. De Charlevoix, de la Compagnie de Jesus. Paris: chez Pierre-Francois Giffart, rue Saint Jacques à Sainte Theres, 1744. 3 vols.

Dablon, Claudius. *Relation de ce qui s'est passé de plus remarquable aux Missions de Pères de la Compagnie de Jésus, en la Nouvelle France les années 1670 et 1671. Envoyée au R. P. Jean Pinelle Provincial de la province de France*. Par le R. P. Claude Dablon, Recteur de College de Quebec, et Superieur des Missions de la Compagnie de Jésus à la Nouvelle France. Paris: Martin Cramoisy, 1672.

Hearne, Samuel A. *A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay,*

¹⁸ Stephen H. Long, "A General Description of the Country Traversed by the Exploring Expedition," in *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains . . .*, by Edwin James (London, 1823), Vol. III, pp. 236-237.

¹⁹ For a study of the desert regions, see Eugene W. Hollon, *The Great American Desert, Then and Now* (New York, 1966).

to the Northern Ocean. Undertaken by order of the Hudson's Passage, &c, in the years 1769, 1770, 1771, & 1772. London: Printed for A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1795.

Hennepin, Louis. *Description de la Louisiane, nouvellement decouverte au Sud'Oüest de la Nouvelle France, par ordre du roy. Avec la Carte du Pays: Les Moeurs & la Manière de vivre des Sauvages. Dedie'e a Sa Majeste'.* Par le R. P. Louis Hennepin, Missionnaire Recollect & Notaire Apostolique. A. Paris: Chez la Veuve Sébastien Huré, 1683.

Le Clercq, Chrestien. *Premier Etablissement de la Foy dans la Nouvelle France, contenant la Publication de l'Evangile, l'Histoire des Colonies Françaises, & les fameuses découvertes depuis le Fleuve de Saint Laurent, la Louïsiane & le fleuve Colbert jusqu'au Golphe Mexique, achevés sous la condiute de feu Monsieur de la Salle. Par Ordre du Roy. Avec les victoires remportées en Canada par les armes de Sa Majesté sur les Anglois & les Iroquois en 1690. Dédié à Monsieur le Compte de Frontenac, Gouverneur & Lieutenant General de la Nouvelle France.* Par le Pere Chrestien Le Clercq, Missionnaire Recollect de la Province de Saint Antoine de Pade en Arthois, Gardien des Recollets de Lens. A Paris: Chez Amable Auroy rue Saint Jacques, attenant la Fontaine S. Severin à l'Image Saint Jérôme, 1691. 2 vols.

Lewis, Meriwether. *Message of the President of the United States, communicating Discoveries made in Exploring the Missouri, Red River, and Washita, by Captains Lewis and Clark, Doctor Sibley, and Mr. Dunbar; with a Statistical Account of the Countries adjacent.* Read in Congress February 19, 1806. City of Washington: A. & G. Way, Printers, 1806.

Lewis, Meriwether and William Clark. *History of the Expedition under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark, to the Sources of the Missouri, thence across the Rocky Mountains and down the River Columbia to the Pacific Ocean. Performed during the years 1804-5-6. By order of the Government of the United States.* Prepared for press by Paul Allen, Esquire. Philadelphia: Bradford and Inskeep, 1814. 2 vols.

Marquette, Jacques. *Voyage et Découverte de Quelques Pays et Nations de l'Amerique Septentrionale.* Par le P. Marquette et Sr. Joliet. A Paris: Chez Estienne Michallet, 1681.

Thévenot, [Melchisedec] *Recueil de Voyages de Mr Thévenot. Dedie' av Roy.* A Paris: Chez Estienne Michallet rue S. Jacques à l'Image S. Paul, 1681.



Manuscript of Daniel Harmon's *Journal*, together with copies of the first and later editions.

A
JOURNAL
Of the LAST
VOYAGE

Perform'd by
Monfr. de la Sale,
TO THE
GULPH of MEXICO,
To find out the
Mouth of the *Mississipi* River;

CONTAINING,
An Account of the Settlements he endeavour'd to
make on the Coast of the aforesaid Bay, his
unfortunate Death, and the Travels of his
Companions for the Space of Eight Hundred
Leagues across that Inland Country of *America*.
now call'd *Louisiana*, (and given by the King of
France to M. *Crozat*,) till they came into *Canada*.

Written in French by Monsieur JOUTEL,
A Commander in that Expedition;
And Translated from the Edition just publish'd at Paris.

With an exact Map of that vast Country, and a Copy of the
Letters Patents granted by the K. of *France* to M. *Crozat*.

L O N D O N, Printed for A. Bell at the *Cross-Keys* and
Bible in *Cornhill*, B. Lintott at the *Cross Keys* in *Fleet-street*,
and J. Baker in *Pater-Noster-Row*, 1714.

Title page of the first English edition, 1714, of Henri Joutel's journal of LaSalle's last expedition.

