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Book Review: "Shadow on the Tetons: David E. Jackson and the Claiming of the American West" by John C. Jackson

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With this, his first book, John C. Jackson has filled a void in the history of the American fur trade. The accomplishments of David E. Jackson have largely been overlooked by most historians even though a beautiful valley in northwestern Wyoming bears his name. Examining the experiences of one individual, the author demonstrates that the fur trade between 1822 and 1830 was a business venture rather than the aimless adventuring of trappers.

David Edward Jackson was raised in Virginia in a family whose members ranged from Congressional Representative, George Jackson, to Civil War General Stonewall Jackson. He grew up listening to family discussions concerning the future of the nation and watching the world changing before him. After he left Virginia at age 33 and headed to the Rocky Mountains, he would play a significant role changing the landscape. David Jackson made the acquaintance of Andrew Henry during the Panic of 1819 when Jackson's western investments were nearly worthless. These economic difficulties, coupled with the lure of Henry's mountain adventures, enticed Jackson to team up with Henry and his partner William Ashley in a joint venture in the fur trade. Ashley handled the business end in Missouri, while Henry supervised upstream activities. David Jackson was recruited for his experience in handling men.

The lure of federal land in Missouri, the lucrative business of the fur trade, and the opportunity to buy mules and horses in California and sell them at a profit in the south are all interwoven in this biography. But this book is primarily an account of the intricate business dealings of David Jackson. He spent eight years supervising field operations and planning trapping strategies for the trading firms of Smith, Jackson and Sublette. After leaving the mountains Jackson returned to Missouri to settle his late brother's financial estate. Next he was off to try his hand in the compelling

Santa Fe trade and Taos trade.

Interwoven into the fur trade economy involving American and British trappers is the story of an individual's dissatisfaction with home life and his need to secure financial stability for the family he left behind. For all of his travels across the continent and all of the business ventures, David Jackson did not turn as great a profit as he had hoped.

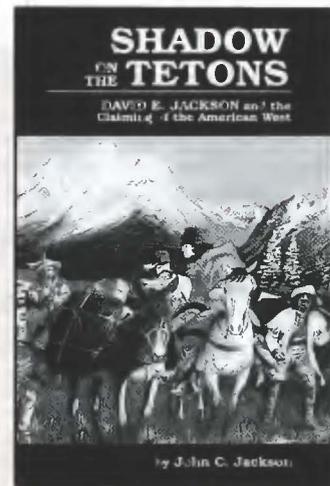
John C. Jackson completes the work begun by David Jackson's great-grandson, Carl D.W. Hays. According to the author, Hays "devoted his life to collecting every scrap of information on his forbearer and pressed his research into areas where less committed scholars had not ventured" (p. xi). Carl Hays passed away in 1979 leaving his research unfinished.

Jackson's research includes new evidence from the archives of the Hudson's Bay Company. The fact that David Jackson left little written evidence about his business dealings or his life in the Rocky Mountains makes this documentation quite valuable. Many of author Jackson's previous articles focus on Canadian aspects of the fur trade. In this book he utilizes that research to provide a balanced picture of the fur trade when boundaries of the American West were still in dispute.

This book is well written and well documented. It should be of value to anyone with an interest in the American fur trade.

TAMSEN HERT
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