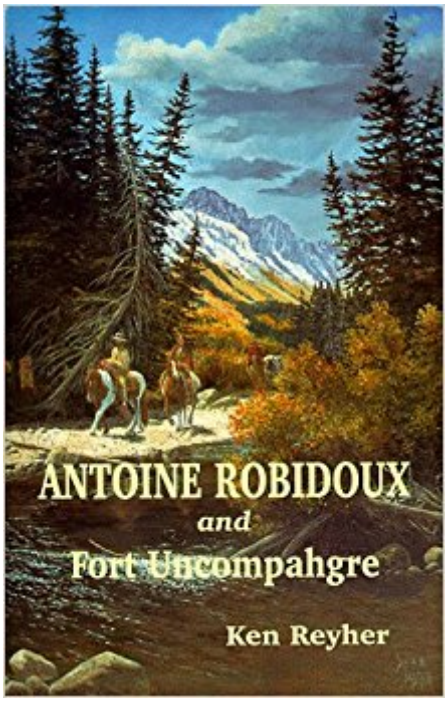
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Antoine Robidoux And Fort Uncompahgre



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Synopsis

Antoine Robidoux, equally at home in the mountains or the Santa Fe governor's home, built a vast fur trading empire that covered modern day western Colorado and eastern Utah. In his book, Ken Reyher tracks the life of a young adventurer who heads West to eventually build a trading empire that successfully challenged even the powerful Hudson Bay Company. As quickly as he rose, his world came crashing down, and one of the great chapters of the early west came to an end.

Book Information

Paperback: 88 pages

Publisher: Western Reflections Publishing Co.; 1 edition (September 21, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1890437131

ISBN-13: 978-1890437138

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.2 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 2 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,968,203 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #35 inÃ Â Books > History > Americas > Canada > Exploration #227 inÃ Â Books > History > Americas > Canada > Pre-Confederation #1243 inÃ Â Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > United States > American Revolution

Customer Reviews

Ken Reyher's family came to Colorado in the years that followed the Civil War. He grew up listening to stories from his grandfather Bill Reyher who, as a boy, had worked cattle with veterans of the Texas longhorn trails. Grandfather Henry Weimer, a former cavalryman, shared in the story telling. After a seven-year tour in the military, Reyher returned to Colorado where he taught high school history for twenty years, operated a flying service and engaged in farming. Stories about the early days of the state continue to play a role in his life. His articles about the old west have appeared in several magazines, and he writes regularly for two western Colorado newspapers, for one of which he is the history editor. This is his first book.

(From Preface) For Antoine Robidoux, Saint Louis had become too confining, too settled and too predictable. What had been a collection of log huts in his father's day had grown into a center of commerce and an open gate pointing toward the vast western frontier. That gate proved irresistible

and in 1824 young Antoine headed his horse down the 800 mile trail towards Santa Fe and the newly independent nation of Mexico. He rode alongside American wagons loaded with trade goods and watched in the Santa Fe plaza as those goods were exchanged for Mexican silver. From Santa Fe he rode northwest into an unexplored wilderness. There he found streams teeming with beaver and mountain valleys inhabited by friendly bands of Ute Indians as eager for American trade goods as were the citizens of Santa Fe. More importantly he found a region still free from the tentacles of the powerful American fur companies headquartered back in St. Louis. Antoine returned to Santa Fe. Young, handsome, and gifted with both social graces and the Spanish language, he quickly became integrated into Santa Fe society, was granted Mexican citizenship and was elected to the city council. He courted and married the governor's daughter and obtained a trading license that gave him control over a territory covering what would one day become western Colorado and eastern Utah. In the years that followed he built three trading posts and an empire that successfully challenged even the powerful British Hudson Bay Company. Then, almost as quickly, Antoine's world came crashing down and one of the great chapters of the early west came to an end.

"At home in either the latest fashions of the day or the greasy buckskins of a mountain trapper...within four years of first entering Santa Fe he had become a Mexican citizen, married the governor's daughter and been granted the right to control trade in what would someday become western Colorado and eastern Utah." "...the original which was a collection of log buildings with dirt roofs surrounded by a flimsy perimeter fence of wooded pickets." With these descriptions of Antoine Robidoux and Fort Uncompahgre historian and author Ken Reyher sets the stage for a remarkable journey in the history of the pioneer fur trapper Antoine Roibidoux. This is a remarkable book. While the literature is replete with stories of miners and settlers of western Colorado there is scant information on the life and times of a fur trapper that inhabited the area before the moners, ranchers, and settlers. Reyher has corrected this oversight in a historically factual manner that is a delight to read. Robidoux was a most remarkable man. He was a charmer, visionary astute businessman, politician, and accomplished mountain man. He is described as a paradox in that he could mingle with the high society,French or Mexican, of Santa Fe but was equally at home in a pair of greasy buckskings leading a trapping party or playing cards with Ute Indians. He was the first white man to expand trade routes north from Santa Fe, ultimately establishing three commercial trading posts in what is now western Colorado and eastern Utah. Fort Uncompahgre was the first such post established, in 1828. Reyher not only has written an excellent history of Robidoux and his forts be he includes a section on the present day Fort Uncompahgre. The city of Delta, CO, has

reconstructed the fort into a living history museum open to the public. This is the only one of Robidoux's three forts to receive such treatment. It is quite a feat considering the exact location of the fort is unknown. It is generally believed by historians that the original fort was located some two miles below the confluence of what is now the Uncompahgre and Gunnison rivers. Even late 20th century excavation work has failed to conslusively locate the site. Many of the artifacts located in such searches could have belonged to mountain men, fur trappers, and indians and discarded at camp sites. Any one could have been part of the original Fort. The book is a must read for those interested in the history of the opening of trade routes in present day western Colorado and eastern Utah and the development of such trade by those true pioneers, mountain men and trappers. The descriptions of daily life in the early 1800's and the impact of the declinging beaver trade are historically factual and, combined withe the fascinating history of Robidoux and his trading posts, make the book required reading and a welcome, and necessary, addition to any well stocked library.

Ken Reyher handles a difficult subject in that fur traders, like Robidoux, predate the settlement of the West and Colorado by many decades. The material is incomplete at best, but Reyher has pieced together an excellent account of this man's life and Fort Uncompahgre. In addition, the area where Robidoux traded was quite remote and far removed from settlements like Santa Fe. Reyher adds logic to Robidoux's decisions and also recounts the economics of the fur trade business and its decline. This well written book is illustrated.

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