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Review of The Chouteaus; First Family of the Fur Trade By Stan Hoig

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The Chouteaus: First Family of the Fur Trade.
By Stan Hoig. Albuquerque: University of
New Mexico Press, 2008. xi + 337 pp. Figures,
appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.

The importance of Saint Louis French merchants in the fur trade and the expansion of the American West during the first half of the nineteenth century is little known in spite of articles and monographs from the 1930s to the 1980s by historians such as John Francis McDermott, William E. Foley, and C. David Rice. A small number of articles by different

authors have appeared in journals and anthologies. Shirley Christian published *Before Lewis and Clark: The Story of the Chouteaus, the French Dynasty That Ruled America's Frontier* in 2004, a work addressed to the general public.

Stan Hoig, known for his work on the Plains Indians and the Cherokees, now adds a major contribution to the history of the members of the Chouteau family who, with other French merchants, dominated the fur trade and in many ways traced the path for the American expansion into the West.

After a general introduction to the Chouteau family's origins in chapter 1, Hoig goes on to describe the activities of the step brothers, Auguste and Pierre Sr., as they dealt with the Osages in western Missouri, Kansas, and northeast Oklahoma, as well as their support of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Chapters 4 through 12 follow Pierre Sr.'s sons, Auguste Pierre (A.P.) and Paul Liguist, who pursued the trade with the Osages and other Plains Indians despite the constant conflicts between Osages and encroaching Cherokees on the one hand, and, on the other, between eastern tribes pushed westward by expanding European settlements and Plains Indian tribes (Osage, Kansa, Kiowa, Comanche, Plains Apache, and others). Their roles as Indian Agents and mediators between tribes and the U.S. government are closely examined. Several stepbrothers of Auguste Pierre contributed to the white migration to Oregon, Utah, and California. "Kansas trading posts operated by François, Cyprien, and Frederick Chouteau served as outfitting posts for caravans and exploring parties setting out on their long, difficult migration westward." Chapters 13 through 17 survey Pierre Jr.'s ruthless expansion and control of the fur trade in the upper Missouri Valley. Chapter 18 reviews various historians' views of the "qualities of character and societal performances" of the Chouteau family as well as its importance in the American westward movement. An addendum provides an interesting but cursory account of the women in the Chouteau clan.

Several useful indexes present a basic Chouteau genealogy and lists of the trading posts and Indian treaties connected to the Chouteau family. Four maps of Chouteau trading posts are also included.

While this work relies heavily on a synthesis of the research by preceding historians, it adds more than a fair amount of new material that both confirms and reveals new aspects of the Chouteau family. Rare minor errors occur: *coureurs de bois* were not mere "message carriers" but carried on unlicensed trade with the Indians; Charles Gratiot, a "French refugee," was actually born in French-speaking Switzerland.

Stan Hoig's well-documented research and clear narrative style—in spite of the complexity of the subject, given the size of the Chouteau family—contribute to making this work a valuable one for scholars, students, and the general public interested in the Great Plains and Missouri Valley fur trade.

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