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**Review of *From Mountain Man to Millionaire: The "Bold and Dashing Life" of Robert Campbell*, by William R. Nester.**

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*From Mountain Man to Millionaire: The "Bold and Dashing Life" of Robert Campbell.* By William R. Nester. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999. Illustrations, bibliography, index. xi+270 pp. \$29.95.

Robert Campbell's story has finally been told. Although at least three theses and one dissertation covering some aspect or period of his life (1804-1879) do exist, William Nester has now rendered an excellent full-dress biography of this Rocky Mountain entrepreneur, St. Louis businessman, and Indian commissioner. Relying heavily on dairies, letters, and journals in St. Louis archives, including the Campbell House Museum, the Missouri Historical Society, and the Mercantile Library, as

well as on the appropriate secondary literature, Nester paints a vivid portrait of Campbell's "bold and dashing life" as a natural, courageous leader who displayed exemplary character and shared his considerable wealth with others.

The life of this Missouri millionaire ties into the Plains in a number of ways. He led trapping brigades onto the Plains of present-day Montana and Wyoming in the late 1820s and crossed the Plains in fur caravans—taking supplies to the annual rendezvous and returning with the year's fur catch—in the early 1830s. He and William Sublette formed a partnership to procure and transport goods and materials to and from the mountains in 1832. In 1833 they engaged in fierce competition with the American Fur Company (AFC), building a dozen rival posts next to those of the behemoth, including Fort William next to Fort Union near the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers. They even convinced the AFC to divide the country between them, with Sublette and Campbell controlling the Rocky Mountain trade and the AFC the Missouri River enterprise. Grasping the demise of the beaver trade and the increase in the buffalo robe trade, Sublette and Campbell built Fort Laramie in eastern Wyoming in 1834 before selling it the following year.

Sublette and Campbell returned to St. Louis and used their fur trade finances and contacts to open a store where they continued to supply fur companies, forts like Laramie and Kearny, explorers such as Frémont, gold rushers and other overlanders, opposition groups to the AFC, and Indian annuities. Campbell twice served as Indian commissioner to the Plains tribes at Ft. Laramie in 1851 and 1870. After the demise of the AFC in 1865, he turned his attention to trying to eliminate corruption among the Indian agents on the upper Missouri and called for the abolition of the inadequate treaty system. He continued to invest in steamships, railroads, banks, and real estate, and in addition owned St. Louis's Southern Hotel.

Above all, Campbell was an astute businessman who never really enjoyed the romance and solitude of living in the mountains. He and Sublette amassed considerable capital for their St. Louis business ventures. Campbell's story, therefore, provides a look at fur trade rivalries on the northern Great Plains and the economic development of half a continent, as well as a closer inspection of the forces that projected St. Louis as the crossroads of trade, empire, and the western movement. *From Mountain Man to Millionaire* is a welcome addition to the Missouri Biography Series.

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