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## Review of *Stephen Long and American Frontier Exploration* By Roger L. Nichols and Patrick L. Halley

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*Stephen Long and American Frontier Exploration.* By Roger L. Nichols and Patrick L. Halley. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995. Preface, introduction, illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. 280 pp. \$14.95 paper.

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark are names most associated with early nineteenth-century frontier exploration, but they were not the only significant explorers of that era. Another was Major Stephen H. Long, the subject of Roger L. Nichols's and Patrick L. Halley's recent book. It provides an intriguing account of the life and times of Stephen Long, the most important government-sponsored explorer of the 1810s and 1820s, whose work has mostly been misjudged and underestimated.

Stephen Long and his exploring teams made three major and several minor expeditions along the rivers of the West, through the Great Plains and eastern parts of the Rocky Mountains, and to the Great Lakes. His teams included artists, cartographers, engineers, ethnologists, botanists, and enlisted men to protect the expeditions. *Stephen Long and American Frontier Exploration* provides the reader with snapshots of the everyday life of frontier explorers, their scientific tasks, the problems they faced, and the hostile environments they confronted. Because Long and his exploring teams lacked sufficient supplies and

detailed knowledge of the West, they faced enormous obstacles that slowed their expeditions down and prevented Long from doing some of the tasks he had promised Secretary of War John C. Calhoun to accomplish. This is why certain historians have condemned Long's explorations as failures.

But were they? Nichols and Halley argue that Long set the expeditions' goals too high, especially those of the 1819-1820 expedition. Encumbered by their technology and equipment, they found it impossible to travel as fast and as far as had been planned. Although in 1819 they used the steamer *Western Engineer* for travelling along the rivers, they still could not keep to the promised schedule. Small food supplies and a lack of wild game also required them to spend precious time hunting, and occasionally shortages pushed them to the brink of starvation. This naturally reduced the time required for travelling and scientific testing. Moreover, the loss of samples and drawings either in accidents or to thievery by enlisted men further decreased the scientific value of the enterprise.

Nichols and Halley do not agree with those earlier scholars who described Long's expeditions as failures. On the contrary, they argue that Long's significance should be valued by what he and his companions actually accomplished rather than by his unachieved goals. After all, members of Long's expeditions gathered not only military data but numerous plant, animal, and mineral specimens that contributed to the scientific knowledge of the time. They also painted several scenes of the West and its peoples, and Long himself made several maps of the Great Plains. Together they produced a multi-volume set of journals and travel narratives that added significantly to the knowledge of the West.

Long also described the Great Plains as the "Great American Desert." His reference was to his perceived impression of the Plains as mostly unfit for farming. This view, opposed to the arguments made previously by Lewis and Clark, is probably a major reason why Long and his reports were criticized and then for-

gotten: they did not fit late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century expansionist federal policies.

*Stephen Long and American Frontier Exploration* is an excellent narrative of early nineteenth-century expeditions. It is enjoyable reading, and its information is particularly valuable for those interested in early westward expansion. The volume is also of importance to scholars studying other members of Long's expeditions, including Titian Peale, since it gives the historical context in which their work was done.

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