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Fall 2007

Review of *The Life and Times of the Steamboat Red Cloud, or, How Merchants, Mounties, and the Missouri Transformed the West* By Annalies Corbin

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Robison, Ken, "Review of *The Life and Times of the Steamboat Red Cloud, or, How Merchants, Mounties, and the Missouri Transformed the West* By Annalies Corbin" (2007). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1447.

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The Life and Times of the Steamboat Red Cloud, or, How Merchants, Mounties, and the Missouri Transformed the West. By Annalies Corbin. Foreword by William E. Lass. Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 2006. xvii + 145 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

From St. Louis to Fort Benton, the Missouri River served as a natural highway into the vast North American West. *The Life and Times of the Steamboat Red Cloud* extends our understanding of the upper Missouri during the decisive period of settlement and trade in the steamboat era from 1859 to the arrival of railroads in the mid-1880s. This important book views the development of the American and Canadian Rockies from a maritime perspective.

Journalist-historian Joel Overholser earlier emphasized the importance of the Canadian trade to Fort Benton. Corbin develops that theme through the great St. Louis-Fort Benton trading company, I. G. Baker & Company, and its flagship steamer *Red Cloud*. Mining North-West Mounted Police records at the National Archives of Canada, Corbin documents and develops the earlier theories. As the Canadian West opened in the mid-1870s, I. G. Baker & Company gained approval for a bonded line for the shipment of goods from England and eastern Canada to the Northwest Territories as a way to avoid international trade tariffs. Bonded goods, North-West Mounted Police recruits, and Canadian government payrolls were all carried on Baker Line boats to Fort Benton and then freighted over the Whoop-Up Trail into western Canada.

Corbin advances our understanding of the complex relationships within I. G. Baker & Company and the strategies the company employed in competing with other major trading and overland freighting companies on the upper Missouri such as T. C. Power & Brother. These companies "ferociously" pursued contracts against each other and, in the case of I. G. Baker, even between the Fort Benton and St. Louis branches of the same company.

Using the steamboat *Red Cloud* as a symbol as well as the source of the Baker company's success, Corbin tells the story of that "palatial" steamer as it emerged as one of the fastest and most popular mountain packets carrying both passengers and freight during the economic boom of the late 1870s. From its acquisition by the Baker Line in 1877, the *Red Cloud* made twenty-one trips to the upper Missouri over the next five years. Using cargo manifests and passenger accounts, Corbin paints a vivid portrait of the *Red Cloud*'s role in making Fort Benton "the freighting mecca on the Great Plains." The snagging and loss of the stern-wheeled, wooden-hulled packet with a full cargo near Fort Peck in July 1882 portended the displacement of steamboats by transcontinental railroads within a few years.

The Life and Times of the Steamboat Red Cloud skillfully adds to our understanding of the role of a flagship steamboat and the strategies of an aggressive trading company in the development and settlement of the American and Canadian West. This book is the most important contribution to upper Missouri maritime history since William Lass's *A History of Steamboat Navigation on the Upper Missouri* forty years ago. It is an important addition to Missouri River history, maritime history, and nautical archaeology.

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