

Adventures of a Mountain Man:

The Narrative of Zenas Leonard

Written by Himself

Introduction by Milo Milton Quaife



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Zenas Leonard

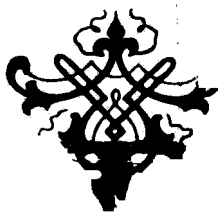
formerly titled

Narrative of the Adventures of Zenas Leonard

Written by Himself

EDITED BY

MILO MILTON QUAlFE



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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Introduction

[This Introduction has been condensed from the "Historical Introduction" by Milo Milton Quaife in the Lakeside Classics edition of *Narrative of the Adventures of Zenas Leonard*.]

In the spring of 1831 a young Pennsylvanian, Zenas Leonard, embarked from St. Louis in a company of seventy men who had formed an expedition for the purpose of trapping furs and trading with the Indians in the Rocky Mountains. After four years of wandering which took him to the then strange land of Spanish California, he returned to his parental home in Clearfield, Pennsylvania, in the autumn of 1835, where he was greeted by his relatives as one returned from the dead. So great was the interest aroused in the recital of the wonders he had experienced that he finally became tired of repeating his story to succeeding groups of auditors, and to save himself the trouble of doing so, he wrote it out for publication in the local paper. For some reason it was published only in part at the time, but two or three years later the enterprising editor of the *Clearfield Republican* procured the manuscript, and in addition to printing it in his paper, issued it in book form in 1839.

The printing was crudely done (apparently the type used in the newspaper was utilized also for the book), but the narrative thus preserved is one of great human interest and of decided historical value. It was long

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unknown to historians of the West and copies of the original edition have become so rare as to command a price, in the auction market, of many hundreds of dollars. In 1904 a reprint edition of 520 copies was brought out at Cleveland, under the editorship of Dr. W. F. Wagner. The present issue constitutes the third printing (aside from the contemporary newspaper publication) of Leonard's narrative.

The activities which form the subject of Leonard's narrative are such as to make it one of the fundamental sources for the exploration of the American West. His fur-trading years belonged to a period of intense activity in the exploitation of the trade of the Far West. Fortunately these very years found an able contemporary historian in the person of Washington Irving, whose book, *The Rocky Mountains, or Scenes, Incidents, and Adventures in the Far West . . .* was published at Philadelphia in 1837. The remainder of the title indicates that the work was "digested" from the journal of Captain B. L. E. Bonneville, and "illustrated" from other sources. Subsequently the title was changed to *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville . . .*, thereby advertising more prominently the principal source of Irving's information. In recent years the old title has been forgotten, and the book is commonly known by the newer one as the *Adventures of Captain Bonneville*.

Until the summer of 1833 Leonard was a free trapper. He then entered the employ of Captain Bonneville, and continued therein until the end of his narrative at St. Louis in the summer of 1835. It follows that Irving's history, chiefly "digested" from Captain Bonneville's journal, is the history of the larger enterprise with which the experiences of Leonard's last two

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years in the fur-trade were identified. It might be presumed from this circumstance that Leonard's recital would agree, in the main, with Irving's presentation. In fact, however, the divergence between the two is very material. Leonard was attached to Captain Walker's party, which Irving would have us believe Bonneville dispatched to explore Great Salt Lake. Apparently the great lake loomed large in Bonneville's mind, for on Irving's maps (the material for which must have been derived from Captain Bonneville) it appears as "Lake Bonneville." Instead of exploring it, Captain Walker departed via Humboldt River for California, consuming in this journey a large portion of the years 1833-34. Although one would suppose, from reading Leonard's narrative, that the relations between Bonneville and Walker were entirely amicable to the end, one gains a very different impression from Irving. In his recital, "digested," of course, from Bonneville's journal, Walker is presented as disloyal, incompetent, and senselessly cruel.

None of these things does one gather from Leonard's recital, of whose publication in the local newspaper he was evidently ignorant. Irving, indeed, expressly speaks of the "scanty" details available to him concerning Walker's California expedition; to the enlargement of these scanty details, approximately one-half of Leonard's entire volume is devoted.

Without pretending to determine the issue as between Captain Bonneville and Captain Walker which Irving's narrative sets up, we content ourselves with pointing out that Leonard's recital affords an important rebuttal of Irving's presentation. Captain Bonneville's own journals, which Irving used, have

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disappeared, apparently, forever. There seems no reason for questioning, however, the good faith of Irving's relation of their contents. If the resulting narrative is unfair or inaccurate, the responsibility rests squarely upon Captain Bonneville.

We are compelled, therefore, to take notice of his own situation and perplexities. Bonneville was a native of France who had been brought to America in childhood and, having graduated from West Point in 1815, had devoted his further career to the army. In 1830 he obtained leave of absence for eight months from his station at Fort Gibson (Oklahoma), and going to New York interested certain business men in financing a fur-trade expedition, which he proposed to lead into the western country. He then obtained a two-year leave of absence from the army and in the spring of 1832 departed from Fort Osage, Missouri, for the Rocky Mountains, where he remained until the summer of 1835, engaged more in trading than in exploring. Since he had obtained leave of absence for the purpose of exploration, and since he long overstayed his leave, he returned to find he had been dropped from the army list over a year before. He was restored in the spring of 1836 by the personal act of President Jackson, who was persuaded that his services merited a different reward than the one which had been accorded them. It would seem from Irving's narrative that the chief effort at exploration which Bonneville made was the sending of Captain Walker to explore Great Salt Lake. Since Walker failed to do this, his anger and disapproval were great, and this state of mind Irving's narrative amply reflects. Yet Captain Walker had found the way to California, and had

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accumulated geographical information far more important, one would think, than any which would have resulted from a mere exploration of Great Salt Lake. Captain Bonneville was curiously blind to the significance of this material, and all unwittingly he left to John C. Frémont the opportunity to snatch, in the succeeding decade, the fame and fortune which he thus blindly cast aside.

As for Leonard, information derived from Dr. Wagner, and from the history of Cass County, Missouri, discloses that after a sojourn of several months at his parental home in Clearfield, during which time he prepared his narrative, he returned in 1836 to western Missouri. Here he established a store (reputed to be the first) on the site of present-day Sibley. He also operated a boat between St. Louis and western Missouri, carrying merchandise up-river and furs and other products of the Indian trade down stream. He married Isabel Harrelson, and three children were born to them. He died at Sibley in 1858, having achieved a position of prominence in his community.

Leonard returned to civilization possessed of but a modest competence as the reward of his years of wilderness exposure to privation and death—\$1,100, according to information procured by Dr. Wagner. This scanty material return, however, comprised but the smaller part of his reward. The major portion consisted in the satisfaction derived from his experiences and exploits. "We felt," he writes of his party, on reaching the Pacific, "as if all our previous hardships and privations would be adequately compensated if we would be spared to return in safety to the homes of our kindred and have it to say that we had stood upon the

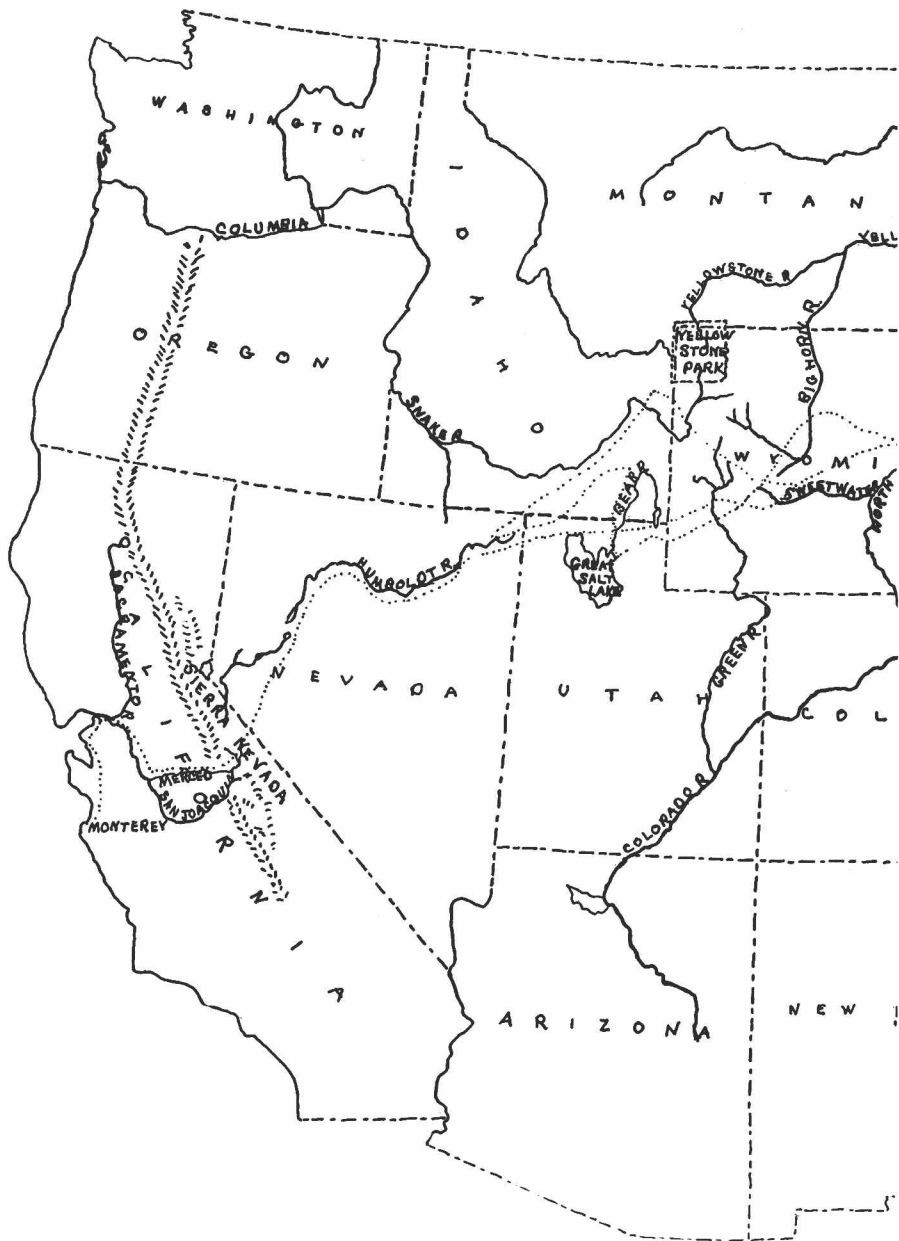
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extreme end of the great west." Love of adventure for its own sake, and a patriotic pride in advancing the onward march of the American people were prominent among the motives which animated him and his trapper companions.

The present reprint—verbatim, save for the correction of a few awkward misprints or grammatical errors for which the author's original editor is clearly responsible—has been made direct from a copy of the original edition owned by the Newberry Library. Acknowledgment is due this great institution for courteous permission to photostat its volume for use in reprinting.

M. M. QUAlFE

October 1, 1934.



MAP OF LEON

..... Outward route of Leonard



ARD COUNTRY

from Fort Osage to Monterey

Preface

THE title of the following work sufficiently explains itself; however, before presenting it to the public, in its present form, the publisher deems it necessary to accompany it with a few remarks explanatory of the motives which induced the author to commit his adventures to paper:

MR. ZENAS LEONARD (the author) is a native of Clearfield county, Pa., where his parents and other relatives still reside; and it may not be improper here to remark, that they are well known as among the most respectable inhabitants of the county.

After receiving the advantages of a common English education, and being possessed of strong mental faculties and a vigorous constitution, MR. LEONARD left his parental roof in the spring of 1830, and after spending the succeeding year in a mercantile house in Pittsburg, Pa., ventured to embark in an expedition across the Rocky Mountains, in the capacity of Clerk to the company. The last letter received by his parents, left him at the extreme white settlement, where they were busily occupied in making preparations for

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the expedition to the mountains—from whence he promised to write at short intervals; but one misfortune after another happening the company, he was deprived of all sources of communication—so that no tidings were received of him until he unexpectedly returned to the scenes of his childhood, to the house of his father, in the fall of 1835—after an absence of 5 years and 6 months!

In the interval, and at various times, rumors and answers to letters written by his friends to different individuals on the route up the Missouri, were received, which represented the major part of the company he was with, as having perished, and that he was not among the number who survived. The grief of his parents from that time until his joyous return, can only be imagined. They had long mourned him as lost forever, and all hope of again meeting him this side the grave ceased to exist. The Scriptural phrase, that “*the dead’s alive, and the lost is found,*” in a temporal point of view, was never more beautifully illustrated; nor was ever grief and mourning changed to inexpressible joy and gladness more unexpectedly and triumphantly.

After again mingling with his former comrades and old acquaintances, so great was the curiosity manifested by them to hear him

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relate his adventures, that he was continually beset by crowds of anxious inquirers wherever he happened to be. But few were satisfied with a partial account, and finding that it would consume too much of the time he purposed spending among his former friends, ere he should again embark for the west, to repeat the whole story on every occasion, he finally yielded to the importunities of his friends to adopt Franklin's notion of "saying grace over the whole barrel of beef at once, in order to save time," and he prepared a narrative of his travels for publication in the newspapers of the county, that all might have an equal opportunity to read it. It was for this purpose, and under these circumstances, that he wrote it out—but from various causes it was never published entire, until we procured the manuscript last winter and gave it to the public through the columns of a public newspaper during the past season. The great interest the public took in it, was satisfactorily illustrated by the increase and demand for the paper in which it was published. A number of persons sent in their names as subscribers from all the adjoining counties, besides others more distant—many of whom we were unable to accommodate. From this evidence, as well as the repeated solicitations from every quarter, we have been induced to

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re-print it, and now offer it to the public in a more convenient form.

Our author kept a minute journal of every incident that occurred, but unfortunately, a part of his narrative was stolen from him by hostile Indians; still, however, he was enabled to replace the most important events, by having access to the journal kept by the commander of the expedition. His character for candour and truth, among his acquaintances, we have never heard suspected; and, indeed, among the many who heard the narrative from his own lips, we have yet to hear the first one say they disbelieve it. At all events, in its perusal, the reader will encounter no *improbabilities*, much less *impossibilities*:—hence it is but reasonable to suppose that in traversing such a wilderness as lays west of the Rocky Mountains, such hardships, privations and dangers as those described by MR. LEONARD, must necessarily be encountered.

He remained at home but a short time, when he returned to the west, and now resides in Jackson county, Mo., where he is surrounded with competence—being at present engaged as a merchant and trader with the different companies employed in the fur trade of the mountains.

THE PUBLISHER.

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