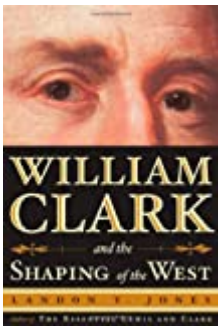
H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Landon Y. Jones. *William Clark and the Shaping of the West.* New York: Hill & Wang, 2004. xi + 377 pp. $15.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8090-9726-5; $25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8090-3041-5.

Reviewed by Ralph Allen (Jr., S&R Research, Nine Mile Falls, WA)

Published on H-HistGeog (July, 2006)

Rectitude and the Contentment of Situation

During the bicentennial commemoration of Lewis and Clark's Voyage of Discovery, a massive outpouring of scholarly and popular literature, CDs, videos, site restoration, and route enhancement for visitors enabled an eager nation to join in celebration of the events which, when stitched together, created a magnificent historical quilt of interest.

Landon Y. Jones, a remarkable storyteller and nationally recognized scholar, chose to illuminate William Clark's life and importance to the young nation's territorial expansion. His book vividly chronicles not only William Clark's life, but also weaves the significance of the Clark family history into the development of his character and its subsequent impact upon the nation's development.

This is significant scholarship; for many, Clark's role as Meriwether Lewis' partner in leadership in the Voyage of Discovery across the continent, forms an important, but minor connecting link to the westward movement. Jones, however, describes, explains, and proves the significance of Clark's life of service to his country, which is clearly more expansive than the historic trek of 1804-06. Well documented, indexed and referenced, the importance of Clark's ability to navigate the "contentment of situation" (p. 290) is reinforced with exquisite detail throughout the book.

Introducing the volume are three extremely cleanly drawn maps by Jeffrey L. Ward. These maps set a geographic background for major sectors of the book. The placement at the beginning permits easy access during the reading. This placement enhances the reader's ability to visualize the scale at which Clark's life is played out upon during certain stages of action.

Ten chapters constitute Jones's 334-page biographical work. It is an entertaining, dramatic, engaging and educational journey initially describing the condition of the "First West" (chapter 2) from 1722-1772. Here, the interplay between physical, economic and cultural borders sets the footprint for Clark's family migration and settlement into the Ohio Valley from the Virginia heartland. Jones leads the reader across the physical divides as explorers and settlers sought land to develop and raise families on.

George Rogers Clark, William's older brother by roughly seventeen years, his ascendancy to the rank of General, and his hardened attitude toward the native inhabitants must have infused his younger brother's vision of Native Americans and reinforced the traditional Virginia outlook regarding slaves and slave-holding as a way of life. Combined with extant Enlightenment points of view, available opportunities and the ever-present Jeffersonian influence, William Clark's unique personality and ability to differentiate as well as learn from experience made him a truly extraordinary individual.

Clark's career rise through the military, assisted by family frontier experience, his older brother's leadership and his own attention to detail are described in chapter 3, "Lieutenant Billy Clark." Here Jones tells of William's efforts to home-school himself through studies ranging from Aristotle to Astronomy, world history and local woodland crafts. By the age of twenty-two, Clark entered the service of his country and remained so attended for the rest of his life (p. 65). Indeed, as Jones describes Clark's military education, "At the age of twenty-three, Clark was now in charge of supplying one-quarter of the United State Army on the move through hostile territory" (p. 75). Such quartermaster skills would serve him well over his federal career.

Additionally, during this early period of his military career, Clark gained firsthand knowledge of not only the processes being administered to Native Americans by both the British and Americans (British desires for trade, American for land control) but also how to best maximize land control with people whose perceptions of private ownership were completely different from those of the growing American population. By the age of twenty-five, William Clark was committed to his federal, military career path (p. 86).

The eight-year period from 1795 to 1803, leading to the Voyage of Discovery, constitutes chapter 4, "Soldier and Citizen: 1795-1803." Here, Clark's perennial ties with his family emerge and his character regarding personal debts and responsibilities mature as he attempts to reconcile his older brother George's debts and debtors as well as other family matters. His journaling became habitual and his attention to and grasp of both human condition and physical landscape detail expanded rapidly. At age 29 he became, after his father's death in 1799, one of Kentucky's landed gentry with over 3,318 acres of land, a home, gristmill and 23 slaves (p. 106).

As William was facing a seemingly endless series of familial and financial challenges, opportunity presented itself in the form of a letter from Meriwether Lewis on July 17, 1803, asking if he would be interested in exploring the interior of the continent with him as an equal (p. 113). Cheerfully, Jones notes, Clark accepted Lewis's invitation.

Chapter 5, " 'Ocian in view! O! the joy!': 1803-1806," is a short, succinct, exposition of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. While scholarly careers have been made dealing with this short period in Clark's life, Jones provides yeoman service to brevity of detail. The importance of the journey is underscored with descriptions of Clark's leadership abilities, his knowledge of medicine, and his interpersonal charisma with both his party members and the fifty-some different Indian cultures the party encountered during its course. In this chapter the "stuff" that Clark has learned is put to the test and his success as an adaptive, innovative decision-maker is projected.

Throughout chapter 6, "This Wild Country: 1806-1809," Clark's life remains busy: he is appointed brigadier general of the territorial militia for the Louisiana Territory and principal U.S. Indian agent in St. Louis, becomes engaged to and marries Julia Hancock, and begins to feel the effects of poor administrative decisions made in Washington, D.C. His skills honed in exploration of the territory are put to test. His personal attributes as a member of the landed gentry are described in short order as having been "compelled to use the whip" (p. 164). Clark's Virginia slave-holder-based heritage continued to maintain sway in the face of increased democratic changes in the western air.

Jones interjects excellently timed tidbits of reality to help readers appreciate nineteenth-century experiences of time and space. On page 169, for example, he writes of the timeliness, or lack thereof, of written guidance for treaty-making with the various tribes in the trans-Mississippi region: "[i]t still took forty-two days for a letter to reach St. Louis from Washington." These interjections provide readers with a different sense of decision-making; interpretation of orders becomes more fluid and the range of possibilities for event outcomes is magnified considerably.

Administrative stress began to take its toll on both Lewis and Clark. The differences between field and administrative command are accentuated in Jones' writing. In the late summer of 1809 Lewis decided to go to Washington to raise needed capital as a result of decisions made to not honor payments made by Lewis beyond contracted amounts. This news had deadly impact on Lewis's creditors who began to circle ever closer to

him. Once again, land became the selling target for debts incurred; like the Indians, he was using land as capital for debt reduction (p. 176). Along the way to Washington, tragedy struck Lewis. Here, Jones supports the conventionally accepted theory that Lewis committed suicide. Clark learned of it after the fact and was devastated.

Over the next five years, as shown in chapter 5, "Life without Lewis: 1809-1813," Clark engaged in the publishing of the Journals of the Voyage of Discovery, with Nicholas Biddle. He completed a magnificent map measuring some eight square feet which provided much-needed detail to the previously blank cartography of the Louisiana Purchase and the Voyage of Discovery. His genuine cartographic expertise demonstrated to all concerned that no easy route across the continent was to be found. During these interactions with Biddle, the vexing question of Clark's official rank was discussed. Clark described his role as "equal in every point of view" but for Thomas Jefferson, Clark was a "loyal and successful second in command" (p. 200).

The War of 1812 fell upon the country, and the parallel wars with and among Indian populations exacerbated white populations' fears and concerns regarding federal support. In the West, the major issues for the white settlements involved land and trade security. With administrative changes originating from Louisiana's statehood and Missouri's designation as a second-class territorial government, the opportunities for rival politics to play out blossomed. In this military-oriented setting, Clark demonstrated his command abilities with not only the regular army and militias, but also with the Indian populations.

He was given responsibility for all Indian Office affairs as well as the territorial administration, in addition to the direct command of both territorial militias and the regular army of the United States (pp. 212-213). Jones aptly writes, "At the age of forty-two, William Clark had become the most powerful American in the West" (p. 213).

Chapter 8, "Territorial Governor: 1813-1820," opens with the good news/bad news report of the publication of the two-volume history of the Lewis and Clark expedition. While published at long last, the set was not well received, "probably," as Jones explains, "because of the seven-year delay since the expedition as well as the distraction of the war with Britain" (p. 216).

With concern for the safety of residents in the territory being fueled by British-led or encouraged Indian attacks on American interests and activities, Clark found himself between the proverbial rock and hard place. Local citizens sought revenge for what were perceived as assaults without federal response while President Monroe ordered Clark to convene the "first great treaty council ever held west of the Mississippi" (p. 226). By the end of 1815 treaties had been sealed between the United States and the various tribes on the Upper Mississippi and the Great Plains (p. 233). In consequence to the ending of the War of 1812, migration across the Mississippi exploded, creating more administrative problems for Clark as invading whites encroached upon tribal ground.

Jones ably describes the shifting ground upon which Clark struggled to maintain balance. Clark, recognizing the opportunity for personal gain as the white citizenry grew, developed partnerships for business ventures. He dealt with conflicting constituencies (his Creole-based, Virginia-landed personal history and the newly emerging capitalist, mercantile groups), Washington, D.C. politics, land-hungry settlers, and the Indians under his authority. Much of the chapter is given over to descriptions of the relocation of tribes across the Mississippi. The subject of how the land was acquired from western tribes to generate land for eastern relocatees is masterfully explained and interpreted.

Clark's familial history and ties with "old" Virginia and Kentucky value systems created political difficulties for him in the pre-industrial Missourian political setting. Nonetheless, Clark's abilities to negotiate sustained him as an administrator and he "all but single-handedly extinguished most of the Indian titles in two future states–Missouri and Arkansas–for a total of 51 million acres" (p. 248).

The chapter culminates with Missouri's entry into the United States as a slave state and Clark's sound defeat as gubernatorial candidate as well as the with death of his wife Julia. Jones explains the probable reasons for the shift in public attitude as perhaps more of a "referendum on the old territorial elite" (p. 254) and closes noting that "At the age of fifty, Clark was a widower with five children and uncertain prospectsâ¦. As he had been so many times before, William Clark was ready to proceed on" (p. 255).

Chapter 9, " 'The Red-Headed Chief': 1820-1829" recounts Clark's ability to adapt strengths to situation. This remarkable capacity, rectitude and the contentment of situation, which guided him throughout his lifelong career, re-emerged in his role as Superintendent of Indian Affairs. The Superintendent's post was to protect the

treaty rights of Native Americans.

Here, it seemed, Clark could concentrate on less conflicting sets of problems. Yet, even here, the role of Superintendent was conflicted from within. What were the territorial limits of the position? Was the line drawn at the Missouri borders? Who managed the Native Americans west of Missouri? With these questions being raised, other interests were rapidly developing, notably the emerging fur trade and the demolition of the government factory system as trading/government presence operatives in 1821.

Who could administer these many conflicting interests as a federal officer? Congress answered n 1821 by creating the position of United States Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis and staffing it with William Clark (p. 265). Clark's ability to accommodate what Jones refers to as "the contradictions and hypocrisies of the federal government's Indian policy" (p.285) is understandable in the context of his role as a federal employee; his personal feelings towards Indians evidently tended towards humanitarian treatment during the process of removal from their land.

"Resistance and Removal: 1829-1838" labels the final chapter in this saga. Beginning with the introduction of the Indian Removal Bill of 1830, Clark's role as Superintendent was once again embroiled in the acquisition of more land for all the Indians east of the Mississippi while simultaneously keeping peace between and among the tribes as well as the settlers. Jones devotes a large amount of thought to the influence of alcohol and spirit trading on the settlement of the West, the practice of fur trading, and Clark's family fortunes, including the death of Harriet, his second wife, on Christmas Day of 1831.

In 1836 Clark concluded his final treaty (with the Sauks and Foxes) which, as Jones succinctly states, designates Clark as "a primary architect of a form of what is now called ethnic cleansing. He personally signed thirty-seven separate treaties with Indian nations, more that anyone in American history" (pp. 325-326). Pages 326 and 327 are possibly the most revealing of the character of both the man and the nation of the time. Jones concludes that Clark's complex character embodied both the cruelties of the times and his particular strengths (p. 327). Clark's death is reported two pages later as occurring on September 1, 1838.

Jones's work is a significant contribution to the study of our national history. He is to be complimented for his ability to stimulate interest and maintain momentum for the reader. The complexities of place and person make William Clark a unique figure in our early western movement. Jones weaves the vast quilt with a storyteller's grasp of both language and fact. It is a compelling book and one which surrounds readers with imagery and reality while making them think again about their country's role in changing the face of the earth.

Citation: Ralph Allen. Review of Jones, Landon Y., *William Clark and the Shaping of the West.* H-HistGeog, H-Net Reviews. July, 2006.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12043