

FIRST DRAFT

The West began to change significantly 200 years ago

In early 1822, William Henry Ashley — entrepreneur, mine owner and politician — joined forces with bullet maker and occasional fur trader Andrew Henry to place advertisements in St. Louis, Mo., newspapers.

The ads said the pair were seeking 100 “Enterprising Young Men ... to ascend the river Missouri to its source, there to be employed for one, two or three years.”

The men were to be employed gathering furs — primarily beaver. It was the beginning of what would become the Rocky Mountain Fur Co.

Among those who answered the call were individuals who became among the most famous mountain men in history, men like Jim Bridger, Jedediah Smith, Kit Carson and Jim Beckwourth.

They were credited with developing key routes in the West, such as South Pass in Wyoming, which would be critical to emigrants headed to Oregon, and a pathway into the Salt Lake Valley.

And in 1825, Ashley and his intrepid crew became the first people to make a documented boat trip down the Green River, from Wyoming to the Uintah River, using bull boats made of buffalo hide and willow frames.

It was not an easy trip. There were many rapids, including the Gates of Lodore in Brown’s Park, Colorado. On several occasions, they had to halt to repair their crude, 10-foot by 7-foot boats.

“In the course of our passage through the several ranges of mountains, we performed sixteen portages, the most of which were attended with the utmost difficulty and labor,” Ashley wrote later.

Ashley’s Hundred, as they came to be called, weren’t the only fur traders in the Rocky Mountains in the early 1820s. Also in 1822, John Jacob Astor created the Western Division of his American Fur Co., headquartered in St. Louis. That led to a decadeslong feud between the two fur companies.

Other trappers and traders preceded Ashley’s Hundred and the American Fur Co. on the Missouri River and its tributaries.

As early as 1806, John Colter, who had been a member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, is believed to have led a small group of trappers into the Yellowstone Valley.

The next year, he led a group of men headed by Manuel Lisa, a New Orleans-born Spaniard who had become an American citizen, to the Big Horn River.

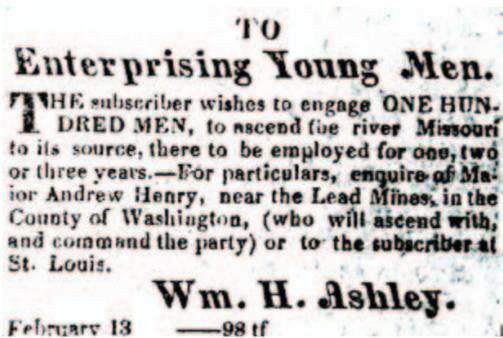
There, Lisa established the first trading post in the Upper Missouri Basin.

Two years later, Lisa formed the Missouri Fur Co. He continued to trap and trade on the Missouri and its tributaries for a decade.

Meanwhile, traders such as Robert Stuart from Astor’s Pacific Fur Co., based on the Columbia River, and Peter



CURRIER AND IVES DRAWING AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
An early drawing shows fur trappers meeting with Native Americans in the Rocky Mountains.



Advertisement in the Missouri Gazette newspaper, Feb. 13, 1822, seeking 100 men to ascend the Missouri River.

Skene Ogden, also based on the Columbia but with the Hudson’s Bay Co., began to make incursions east into the Northern Rockies.

Those efforts continued haphazardly for years, but the magnitude of their enterprises was limited, and there was little penetration to the Interior West — to the mountains of what would become Colorado, Utah and southwestern Wyoming.

Ashley’s men and the Western Division of Astor’s American Fur Co. changed that. Additionally, Ashley established the first Green River Rendezvous, an event that would become an annual bacchanalia and would attract hundreds of trappers, traders and travelers, and often several thousand Native Americans.

However, the expansion of the fur trade wasn’t the only thing that occurred around 1822 that helped change the face of what we now know as the American West.

In September of 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain and immediately welcomed traders from the United States, whose business had been prohibited under Spanish rule.

That same year, Missourian William Becknell made the first successful merchant trip from Missouri to Santa Fe, New Mexico.

In 1822, he led a second, larger trading expedition to Santa Fe, and the Santa Fe Trail was on its way to becoming one of the most important trading routes into the Southwest.

Historical records differ on who was the first Euro-American to visit the Great Salt Lake. Some credit Jim Bridger, while working for William Ashley. Others say it was members of the Hudson’s Bay Co. But many believe Provost was the first non-Indian at the lake.

It is known that in the summer of 1824, the trading party led by Provost was attacked by Shoshone Indians on what was later named the Provo

River. Eight members of the party were killed, apparently in retaliation for some other trappers having stolen Shoshone horses.

Provost and the remainder of his men retreated over the Wasatch Mountains to the Green River near its confluence with the White River from Colorado, where they spent the winter.

The next year, they met William Ashley and his men as they prepared for their famous boat trip down the Green.

Later, Provost would join Ashley’s competitor, the American Fur Co. And he would become an important guide for both John Fremont and John Audubon, thus leaving his mark on the West in a number of ways and in various locations.

None of them is more significant today than the city of Provo, Utah.

Thousands of miles to the east, in the small farming town of Palmyra, New York, a much different event occurred, not in 1822 but 1823, that would significantly affect the West’s development.

That was the year that Joseph Smith said the Angel Moroni visited him at his parents’ farm and directed him to find a series of golden plates that then became the basis of the “Book of Mormon.”

A few years later, Smith founded what became the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

In 1846, Smith’s successor, Brigham Young, led the Saints into the Salt Lake Valley and established the Mormon Church as one of the most important organizations in the development of Utah and the West in general.

It would take decades of fur commerce, westward emigration, military expeditions, a war with Mexico and diplomatic negotiations with Great Britain for the West to become the American West as it was known later.

But it’s clear that 1822 was a pivotal year in that development.

Sources: “Ashley, William H., 1825 Rocky Mountain Papers,” at www.mtmn.org; “Across the Wide Missouri,” by Bernard DeVoto; “Etienne Provost, Mountain Man and Utah Pioneer,” by Leroy R. Hafen, *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Volume 36, Number 2, 1968; “Angel Moroni,” at www.churchofjesuschrist.org.

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BASE jumper dies in accident

GRAND COUNTY, Utah — Utah officials say a 51-year-old man died in a BASE jumping accident in a remote part of Grand County.

Grand County Chief Deputy Sheriff Darrel Meham said the man crashed about noon Friday while attempting a 1,100-foot jump.

BASE jumping stands for building, antenna, span and earth, and participants of the extreme sport launch their descent from tall objects using wingsuits or parachutes. Meham said the man was with a group of other BASE jumpers who hiked approximately six miles to the jump point. Search and rescue crews found the man, who was pronounced dead at the scene.

— The Associated Press

The Daily Sentinel (ISSN 1445-8962)
Printed editions published Wednesday thru Sunday, electronic editions published every morning at 734 S. Seventh Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501. Periodical Postage paid at Grand Junction, CO.
Carrier home delivery prices: 13 weeks - \$65.00, 26 weeks - \$130.00, 52 weeks - \$260.00.
Weekend delivery packages: Wednesday thru Sunday - \$244.40, Friday thru Sunday - \$197.60, Saturday & Sunday - \$163.80, Sunday only - \$163.80.
Weekend “print only” delivery includes the following date in 2022: 11/24/2022. If you are an e-edition subscriber for 11/24/2022, you will not receive a printed paper.
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