

William R. Nester. *From Mountain Man to Millionaire: The "Bold and Dashing Life" of Robert Campbell*. University of Missouri Press, 2011. 360 pp. ISBN 978-0-8262-1926-8, \$70.00 (cloth); ISBN, 978-0-8262-1929-9, \$29.95 (paper).

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Horatio Alger myths often seem to have more resonance during times of recession. The idea that a literary character such as Ragged Dick, a young and enterprising bootblack, can build a successful business from nothing is a powerful narrative in American history. But when historical characters experience a similar level of rapid and hard-won success, such as Andrew Carnegie, their stories validate and inform the aspirations of countless American dreamers. Robert Campbell, an Irish immigrant who made his fortune as a trapper and merchant, is one such figure. Perhaps that is why William R. Nester and the University of Missouri Press recently released a revised and expanded edition of Nester's biography, *From Mountain Man to Millionaire: The "Bold and Dashing" Life of Robert Campbell*, which was originally published in 1999. This new edition, which uses recently acquired and otherwise newly available archives at the Campbell House Museum in St. Louis, offers readers a fluid, comprehensive, and detailed narrative of Campbell's life and career.

Nester's account is nothing if not thorough. Beginning with his humble origins in Ireland, Nester chronicles Campbell's immigration to the United States and his subsequent adventures in the West. Unlike most mountain men, Campbell flourished during his association with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and his longtime partner, William Sublette. Nester recounts the trader's frequent encounters with mountain men, rival fur trading companies, and American Indians. Campbell's stay at Fort William is particularly interesting, and Nester's chapter on the subject gives valuable insight on the day-to-day life at a frontier outpost.

By 1841, after a tempestuous courtship, Campbell had married and settled down in St. Louis. He had also grown fabulously wealthy after his successful career as a mountain man and merchant. In 1846 Campbell would receive a commission in the Army during the Mexican American War, and at about the same time he was elected President of the State Bank of Missouri. Later he would play a minor role in the Plains Indian Wars as a council member during the 1851 Fort Laramie negotiations, and was one of the treaty signatories. But for all of his public trusts and other pursuits, Campbell never lost his interest in the fur and robe trade. He continued to build his fur empire along the upper Missouri while simultaneously investing in a variety of ventures closer to home, including steamboats, dry goods, and real estate.

Although Campbell was often overshadowed by some of his business partners and companions, which include Jim Bridger and Jedediah Smith, he always seemed to be in the thick of things. His participation in the Mexican American War, the slavery debate, the dispossession of the Plains Indians, the economic development of St. Louis and the trans-Mississippi West, and the Civil War provides Nester with plenty of opportunities to place his subject within the larger narrative of mid-nineteenth century American history. But even though this biography is rich in information about Campbell's life, career, and times, Nester's narrative can be plodding, antiquarian, and tangential. There is no detail too minor to escape the author's gaze, and when there is little to say about his subject Nester fills in the gap by updating readers on Campbell's friends, family, and even acquaintances.

Part of the reason why the text is so choppy is because of Nester's tendency to over-quote his sources. He frequently relies on long, uninterrupted passages from Campbell's letters and other records to carry his narrative, and very few of them are placed in block quotation form. While this makes the layout of the text more pleasing to the eye than the alternative, it also masks the author's refusal to paraphrase his primary sources. The result is a book that is much longer than necessary.

Most troubling is Nester's tendency to live vicariously through his character, especially when discussing Campbell's sexual escapades as a young man. His descriptions of the fur trader's "dalliances" with "Indian squaws" are oftentimes awkward, conjectural, and racially insensitive. At one point, Nester seems to gently nudge his readers in the rib: while "those readers who never committed excesses in their youth . . . may [not be able to] reconcile a drunken, puking Robert Campbell with the prim and dignified portrait of him painted years later," Nester suggests that "those that have experienced their share of indulgences . . . might well smile knowingly" (p. 71). Earlier in the same chapter, Nester states that one can "only smile at the possibilities" implied by Campbell's description of the ladies he met at a soiree (p. 68). These winks and nods hint at the kind of audience Nester is targeting with this book. But words can exclude as well as include, and this reviewer wonders how many people will be turned off by Nester's injudicious characterizations of women, American Indians, and others.

On the whole, Nester's exhaustive treatment of Robert Campbell elevates the mountain man turned millionaire's profile in the American West. Campbell is a worthy subject, and this book will hopefully generate more interest in not only the rich array of sources he left behind, but also the commercial development of the trans-Mississippi West.

Moreover, as a biography, this book belongs in the same company as other notable, recent case studies of “self-made” men, such as David Nasaw’s exhaustive *Andrew Carnegie*. Readers who are fascinated by how people of lesser means can rise to the top of the business world will delight in Nester’s energetic narrative. But what would a biography of Campbell look like if it were more compact, placed within a larger and more compelling historiographical context, and written to appeal to a wider audience? One could only smile at the possibilities.

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Steven Fenberg. *Unprecedented Power: Jesse Jones, Capitalism, and the Common Good*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2011. xiii+611 pp. ISBN 978-1-60344-434-7, \$35 (cloth); ISBN 978-1-62349-157-4, \$24.95 (paper).

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Steven Fenberg’s authoritative biography of Jesse Jones provides historians with a sweeping and detailed account of Jones’s private and public life, tracing his activities inside and outside of government service. Jones, an entrepreneur with an eighth-grade education, built most of Houston’s downtown during the first half of the twentieth century and became wealthy. During the Great Depression and World War II, Jones entered public life, becoming, as *Time* magazine declared, the most powerful person in the United States after Franklin D. Roosevelt. Appointed the head of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) by FDR, Jones supervised the financing and rescue of the nation’s banking system during 1933 and subsequently used the RFC’s power to channel funding to such New Deal agencies as the Public Works Administration. Fenberg argues that Jones’s private life and public work serve to “redefine Franklin Roosevelt’s presidency by contradicting common notions about the New Deal, shedding new light on World War II mobilization, and offering perspective on, and possible solutions for, some of today’s intractable problems” (1).

Fenberg brings a deep engagement to his project. A native of Houston and an independent scholar and author, Fenberg worked to help organize and archive a range of sources relating to Jones’s business activities, conducted oral histories with more than forty individuals who worked with or knew Jones, and served as executive producer and writer of a PBS documentary, “Brother, Can You Spare