

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

Annalies Corbin

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*The Life and Times of the Steamboat Red Cloud* examines the career of a single Missouri River steamboat and its connection to the 19th-century expansion of the upper Missouri West. Annalies Corbin offers new insights into this region's history by focusing on the river steamer *Red Cloud* and its owner I. G. Baker & Company. This work illustrates the potential and importance of exploring alternative perspectives to enhance the understanding of our history. The book begins with a brief introductory chapter that clearly presents the text's premise and objectives. Corbin argues that alone, *Red Cloud* is a typical undistinguished steamboat, but when viewed from a maritime perspective within a larger historical context, it represents a key link between commercialization and expansion in the Fort Benton, Montana region.

Two historical chapters follow the introduction. The first places *Red Cloud's* story in the broader historical context of westward expansion. Annalies Corbin views *Red Cloud* as symbolic of John O'Sullivan's "manifest destiny," which fueled 19th-century westward expansion. Inland waterways were instrumental in these early westward migrations and continuing westward progress required conquering the Missouri and other large western rivers. The link between inland waterways and America's "manifest destiny" is expounded through discussions of the importance of steam navigation to the survival of Missouri River frontier settlements. When railroads replaced the riverboats as the driving force of America's transcontinental expansion, both steamboats and the settlements they serviced declined. To Corbin, this decline

of the steamboat's importance to the country's growth mirrors *Red Cloud's* loss. Both events struck a blow to the river communities dependent on them.

The second historical chapter examines, from a regional perspective, steamboat development on the Missouri and the early growth of Fort Benton. The chapter begins with a brief but informative recap of Missouri River transportation from the bullboat to the steamboat. Pointing out that the western fur trade was the impetus for steamboats coming to the Missouri and that river trading outposts became stopping points for these steamers, Corbin focuses on just one of these outposts, Fort Benton. The chapter provides a sweeping history of the settlement from its establishment by the American Fur Trading Company in 1847, through the mid-1870s. Fort Benton's growth is followed from its establishment as a mere trading outpost to its development into an important settlement on the overland route connecting the Missouri and Columbia rivers, the Mullen Road. The Pierre Chouteau Jr. Company's (formerly the American Fur Trading Company) efforts to increase Fort Benton's regional importance are also covered here. According to Corbin, these efforts included promoting Fort Benton as the endpoint of Missouri steam navigation through the building and running of steamers to the settlement. The chapter concludes with a look at the economic boom that accompanied the 1850s Montana gold rush and the depression that followed when mining waned, river levels dropped, and the transcontinental railroad arrived.

Having set the stage in the previous three chapters, Corbin begins the text's central topic with a look at I. G. Baker & Company's history. The firm is examined from its conception in the mid-1860s as I. G. Baker & Brother, through the economic slump of the late 1860s, and into the commercial resurgence of the 1870s. Beginning with the operations, alliances, and partnerships that helped I. G. Baker & Brother grow, Corbin follows the firm's search for new markets and opportunities throughout the 1870s. The 1873 establishment of the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police (NWMP) to patrol Canada's western lands provided the firm opportunities

to use political connections and shrewd business practices (along with a little bit of luck) to secure exclusive supply and transportation contracts with the NWMP. As Corbin shows, these contracts began a long relationship between the two organizations and facilitated I. G. Baker & Company's expansion into other commercial endeavors.

By the mid-1870s the company began operating steamboats to cope with its increased supply and transportation needs, initially collaborating with a Fort Benton competitor. The venture's success and additional NWMP contracts prompted I. G. Baker & Company to establish its own steamboat firm. The Baker Line commenced operations in 1877 and purchased the river steamer *Red Cloud*. The Baker Line's formation and the acquisition of *Red Cloud* initiate Corbin's discussion of the steamer's Missouri River career. Within the next four chapters she looks at *Red Cloud*'s operations from its first voyage to Fort Benton to its last completed voyage in early 1882. This analysis illustrates the important role *Red Cloud* played in I. G. Baker & Company's expansion and its link to Fort Benton's growth.

The text's final chapter begins with *Red Cloud*'s wrecking. *Red Cloud* struck a snag and sank en route to Fort Benton in July 1882. Both the steamer and its cargo were a total loss. The wreck apparently was a harbinger of bad times for Fort Benton. Corbin shows that less than two years after the steamer's sinking, the Fort Benton economy declined. Bypassed by the Northern Pacific and Canadian Pacific railroads, steamboat

traffic dwindled and merchants left. I. G. Baker & Company remained in Fort Benton until 1891, closing its doors only after losing most of its NWMP contracts to Canadian firms with rail line access. Corbin does not end *Red Cloud*'s story with Fort Benton's decline. Instead, she closes her text with a final discussion of a 1920 salvage attempt of the steamer and the *Red Cloud* wreck site's subsequent inundation under the Fort Peck Dam Reservoir.

*The Life and Times of the Steamboat Red Cloud* is a book that appeals not only to the enthusiast, the scholar, and the student, but to the general reader as well. Written in a clear and concise manner, it tells *Red Cloud*'s story in a logical and easy-to-follow progression, without drowning the reader in statistics. Corbin makes good use of illustrations, period photographs, and historical documents to enhance the text. The detailed notes and bibliography provided at the end of the text are an important resource for students and researchers. The inclusion, as appendices, of two historical documents which Corbin cites or uses in the main text, is an added benefit of this book. *The Life and Times of the Steamboat Red Cloud* is one of Corbin's best works, and readers interested in the history of the American and Canadian West should have this book in their libraries.

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The life and times of the steamboat Red Cloud or how merchants, mounties, and the Missouri transformed the West. College Station: Texas A&M University Press. Google Scholar. Corbin, A., & Rodgers, B. A. (2004). Leviathan of the plains: History, excavation, and architecture of the steamboat Montana. Report. Jefferson City: Missouri State Historic Preservation Office. Google Scholar. Corbin, A., & Rodgers, B. A. (2008). The steamboat Montana and the opening of the West: History, excavation and architecture. Gainesville: University of Florida Press. CrossRef Google Scholar. Crick, M. (1989). Represent Interesting photo of a steamboat landing on the Mississippi River in Memphis, Tennessee circa 1906. I'm assuming there's cotton in the sacks. Hours are spent cleaning each picture using professional software. This includes removing dust, scratches and optimizing the exposure for printing while enhancing the original details. DETAILS - Most prints are standard photo sizes (8x10, 11x14, 16x20, 20x24, 24x30, 24x36) including a quarter inch border for matting and framing. - For framing ideas - White sand amidst rock and shells is like a garden full of interesting life - creatures whose daily round is entirely timed by the movement of the tides. Intertidal Realm is published as a limited edition Giclée print. J Kass. EN. The Life and Times of the Steamboat Red Cloud, or, How Merchants, Mounties, and the Missouri Transformed the West - Annaliese Corbin [Greg Nelson, 2017]. skipper3362. 5 1. Pearl Harbor: Final Judgement: The Shocking True Story of the Military Intelligence Failure at Pearl Harbor and the Fourteen Men Responsible for the Disaster - Henry C. Clausen, Bruce Lee [Tom Parks, 2019]. skipper3362. 5 4.