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Official Arizona State Historian

**Marshall Trimble's**

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# ARIZONA ADVENTURE



**Action-Packed  
True Tales  
of Early Arizona!**

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**The Arizona Trilogy — Volume 1**

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### DEDICATION

To my son, Roger Frederick Trimble,  
born April 18, 1979

No honor or event could ever match the total joy  
and happiness you have given.

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# Ewing Young:

## The Southwest's Premier Mountain Man

Mountain men . . . They've been called a peculiar product of the American frontier, a reckless breed of adventurers to whom danger was a daily commonplace; explorers who took tribute of the wilderness and wandered the outerwest with all the freedom of the lonely wind.

These fur trappers and traders, during their brief but exciting heyday between the 1820s and 1840s, explored the vast reaches of terra incognita, including the Colorado Basin and Gila River watershed, establishing routes that would eventually become highways for cities and commerce.

The demand for beaver pelts provided the inspiration that made these restless adventurers brave the unknown wilderness in a quest for crafty, fur-bearing critters that provided a world market with hats and other apparel. They alternately traded, lived among and fought with native tribes inhabiting the regions, had deadly encounters with savage grizzly bears who attacked without provocation and faced thirst and starvation in desolate deserts and sometimes left their bleached and forgotten bones in obscure places.

By the time the exuberant cry "Manifest Destiny" caught the imagination of impetuous, but less adventuresome Americans, an advance guard of mountain men had explored every nook and cranny of the far western mountains, rivers and valleys.

Roughhewn mountain men such as Kit Carson and Tom Fitzpatrick skillfully guided U.S. soldiers across the rugged unknown terrain during the War with Mexico in the 1840s to capture New Mexico and California. Had these armies relied upon their own limited knowledge of the country, the results might have been costly, altering the course of "Manifest Destiny" and history. Agents representing the aggressive British Empire had aspired to seize California during the interim between the declaration of war between the U. S. and Mexico and the arrival of American troops on the Pacific Coast.

Others, like Jim Bridger and Joe Walker, led wagon trains of immigrants to California and Oregon after their trapping days were over. In the 1860s, the ubiquitous Walker would lead a party of gold prospectors up the Hassayampa River finding rich placer strikes in the Bradshaw Mountains.

By and large, the history of the fur trade in the Southwest regions has been left out of the mainstream of American history. Trappers like Walker, Bridger, Fitzpatrick and especially Carson have become American legends and folk heroes, their fame coming primarily from exploits in the northern Rockies and Sierra Nevada. Contrary to popular myth, the Mexican borderlands had a great impact on industry. During the early 1830s, the heyday of

the business, a third of the total furs shipped east came from the Southwest. And when discussing the Southwest fur trade, an obscure individual stands out above the rest. His name was Ewing Young.

He was a tall, strapping carpenter from Tennessee. Like many restive souls of his time, Ewing Young wested to the Missouri frontier and, after an unsuccessful attempt at farming, he formed a partnership with a trader named William Becknell, who would become known as the "Father of the Santa Fe Trail."

In 1822, they led the first wagons west across the plains of New Mexico. Santa Fe at the time was a remote adobe village lined with dirt streets, nestled against the towering Sangre de Cristo Mountains. During more than two centuries of Spanish rule, trade restrictions against foreigners had prevented commerce between the enterprising Americans and the citizens of New Mexico. Following the Mexican Revolution in 1821, Americans like Becknell, who had been out on the Plains trading with Indians, were invited to sell their wares in New Mexico. Thus began the long and mutually profitable Santa Fe Trade.

Like others of his genre, Ewing Young had no aspirations of leading the course of empire, but saw, instead, a business opportunity in the raw, untamed land. Before he quit the region in 1831, he was a central figure in the fur trade in the Southwest. He led one of the first American expeditions into what was to become Arizona, was the first to trap the Salt and Verde Rivers and was the first American to explore the Gila River to its mouth.

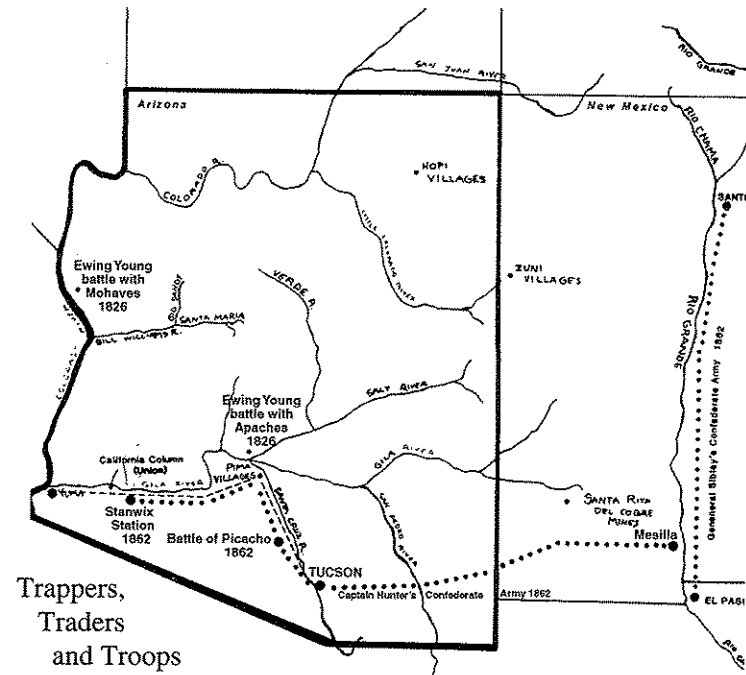
Ewing Young is one of the most elusive figures in Southwest history. This quiet Tennessean, who played such an important role in the fur trade, might have gone unknown had it not been for a few letters, documents and journals written by his contemporaries. No photographs or composite drawings exist, and he kept no journal. The uncharted region that some 40 years later was to be called Arizona, was then a part of the Republic of Mexico and only Mexican citizens could trap legally. Therefore, Young's entrepreneuring was shrouded in mystery and remains so today. While many Americans gave up their citizenship to obtain the licenses, Young remained staunchly proud of his and refused to compromise.

Ewing Young began his great adventure on the morning of May 25, 1822, at Boonslick, a rude frontier town near Franklin, Missouri. There, several wagons laden with trade goods, he embarked on an historic journey to Santa Fe in the Mexican Republic.

"Mexico." There was magic in the word, conjuring up visions of breathtaking scenery, romantic pueblos and beautiful, dark-eyed women. And, there was a spectacular profit to be made in the trade. Interest was sparked the previous year when Becknell returned to Franklin and dumped several rawhide bags full of Mexican silver on the street. Keep in mind, at

this time the U. S. had not located any of those fabulous gold and silver mines in the Far West.

The thousand-mile journey to Santa Fe was fraught with danger. Most of the travelers were merchants, ill-prepared for the vicissitudes of the trail. One stretch required crossing 60 miles of desert void of watering holes. Rattlesnakes were a constant menace, as were the warlike Plains tribes along the way. Certain necessities, such as water, wood and native range grasses,



were vital. Further west, the wood gave way to ever-present buffalo chips, which were used as fuel for cooking.

After completing the journey, which took about ten weeks, the heavy wagons rumbled into the pueblo of Santa Fe to be greeted enthusiastically by the Mexicans with cries of "Los Carros" or "Los Americanos." Since the arrival in late June or early July coincided with the welcome arrival of the summer rains, a myth grew among the simple natives that the Americans were responsible for the rain as well as providing much-needed trade goods.

The picturesque village, located on the slopes of the steep, dark Sangre de Cristo Mountains, was in a delicate enclave of scenic beauty, picture perfect, as if the setting had been placed in position by an artist.

The dusty plaza that marked the "End of the Trail" was the traditional gathering place in the Hispanic Southwest. On the north side stood the ancient Palace of the Governors, a rectangular, flat-roofed adobe structure

with a ramada in front and a courtyard in the rear. The rest of the square plaza was lined with characteristic low, adobe buildings consisting of *tiendas* (shops), *cantinas* (saloons) and private dwellings. Bright red strings of chili peppers hung from the cedar *vigas* (beams) to dry in the warm sun. In the evening, the air was filled with the rich, aromatic smell of scented smoke from the pinon wood of the cooking fires.

After going through Mexican customs, the traders sold their goods to eager consumers, packed the Mexican silver coin in wet rawhide bags, then hung them over hot coals to dry. The packs were then slung across pack mules and made ready for the long journey to Missouri.

A few enterprising Americans chose to remain in New Mexico, went into business, married and eventually integrated into the culture. Others saw a lucrative profit in trapping, a business that did not require much capital to start, and headed into the vast wilderness north and west of Santa Fe.

For the next nine years, Ewing Young maintained a base of operations in both New Mexico and St. Louis. He operated a trading post in the slumbering Mexican community of Taos, establishing that region as one of the great staging areas for trappers in the Far West, and himself as a central figure in American trapping, and the fur trade as an important adjunct of the Santa Fe Trade. In Taos, Young also took a common-law wife, who bore him a son.

From Taos, Young's trappers blazed trails into the Colorado Basin and the Gila watershed, traversing vast regions never before "en by white men, opening important avenues to California. It is worth noting that Young was the first American to cross both of today's transcontinental routes across Arizona.

Young continued to import from St. Louis essential items ranging from razors and looking-glasses to bright-colored silks and cooking utensils. With profits earned from these, he purchased horses, mules and mule stock (jackasses and jennies) and drove them to the States. There was a "horse famine" on the American frontier at the time, and Young found an eager market for his livestock. Contrary to popular belief, the sturdy, dependable Mexican mules imported to Missouri marked the beginning of the great mule business for which that state was noted on the American frontier.

Following this first venture over the Santa Fe Trail, Young spent the Fall of 1822 trapping beaver around the headwaters of the Pecos River in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

The next year he headed west, away from well-established trapping grounds. "I want to get outside of where trappers have ever been," he told a friend. That year he trapped the headwaters of the Colorado River on the rugged western slope of the Rockies, returning with his pack mules loaded with thousands of dollars worth of prime beaver pelts.

A pelt weighed at least 1 1/2 lbs. and sold for an average of four to six dollars each. These "hairy banknotes" were shipped east, some going to American hatters, who removed the fur from the skin and felted it into beaver hats. Other pelts were sent to European fur auctions. The fur business was comparable to giant industries of our time. The only thing that saved the beaver's hide for posterity was the advent of the silk hat in the early 1800s.

The streams of Arizona were an ideal location for finding beaver. In the high country, abundant stands of quaking aspens were a gourmet's delight for the wily, paddle-tailed critters. Further downstream, cottonwood and willows lined the banks of rivers and streams. During this pristine period, prior to giant irrigation projects, tree-cutting and overgrazing, the verdant land was a veritable paradise. With the exception of the hot summer months when the pelts were too thin, beaver could be trapped year around.

Trapping the Arizona wilderness had its grim side. Hostile natives were a constant menace. One trapper recorded only sixteen out of 160 trappers survived a single year in the Gila watershed.

The Southwest never held the annual rendezvous, as was common further north. This trade fair was a peculiar American institution whereby merchants hauled their goods by wagon, at considerable profit margin, to the mountains each summer. There, in some pre-designated setting, trappers sold their furs and purchased what they needed for the next year, and spent the rest on fun and frolic. This barbaric, medieval fair has provided the background for much of the lore and legends of the mountain men. For upwards of a week, they haggled, traded, quarreled, gambled, wenched, drank and fought before returning to the wilderness once more to face another year's toil, danger and hardship.

Although the Southwest had no rendezvous, trappers still found plenty of opportunity for devilment at fortified trading posts such as Bent's Fort along the Arkansas River. At Taos, Ewing Young's post was a permanent "rendezvous" for trappers to trade and indulge themselves. Nearby, some enterprising Americans built a whiskey mill which turned out a concoction called "Taos Lightning," guaranteed to peel the hide off a Gila Monster. Taos, because of its proximity to the American border and remoteness—it was some 70 rugged miles north of Sante Fe—became the center of foreign-born residents of New Mexico. These Americans, engaged in smuggling trade goods, could operate freely in the isolated village because there was no customs house and Mexican officials were seldom seen.

In the Spring of 1826, Young sent his partner, William Wolfskill, and a small party of trappers into the Gila watershed, while he went to the states on a trading expedition. Wolfskill's party met with disastrous results. Coyotero Apaches ambushed the group and forced them to return to Taos empty-handed.

About that same time, another party was trapping along the San Francisco, Gila and San Pedro rivers. This band included James Ohio Pattie, whose now-famous *Narrative* provides a written account of the first American expeditions into Arizona. Although Pattie's thrilling adventure story reads something like a Western pulp novel, many of the incidents, times and places have been authenticated by other sources. Pattie's group struck paydirt, taking a large number of pelts. After a band of Apaches raided their horse herd, the trappers cached the furs, being careful to conceal all the evidence, and went after more pack animals. In Santa Fe, Pattie re-outfitted and returned to the Gila, only to find that Apaches had found their cache. Once again, a party of American trappers saw an entire season of hard, dangerous work in the Arizona wilderness go for naught!

During the fall season of 1826, Young was among several Americans licensed to trap the Gila River country. The expedition headed down the Rio Grande River to Socorro, then turned west into the Mogollon Mountains to the legendary Santa Rita del Cobre mines, near today's Silver City. The mine was operated by an American who allowed the trappers use of the facility as a convenient haven before launching off into the Gila wilderness.

Before settling down to trap the Gila watershed, Young's first order of business was to even the score with the Apaches who had routed his expedition the previous spring.

Young was, by this time, a hard-bitten bourgeois ("Captain of Trappers") committed to the trapper's code that the only way white men could go about their work without fear of attack was to take direct and decisive action. The first lesson one learned on the frontier was to never show weakness to the warrior tribes. He led his party of 16 trappers into the lair of the fierce Coyoteros, routing them and inflicting heavy casualties.

Meantime, James Ohio Pattie was back in the Gila county again, this time with a party of French trappers, led by Michel Robidoux. They arrived at a large Indian village at the junction of the Salt and Gila rivers (on the west end of the Salt River Valley).

Pattie maintained it was a "Papago" village, but later-day anthropologists have suggested the Indians were actually Apache or Yavapai. The natives invited the trappers to spend the night in the village, and all but Pattie and a companion accepted the generous offer. Our suspicious hero found a secluded spot a safe distance from the village and made camp. Some time during the night, they were awakened by the sound of bloodletting from the village. The Indians had waited until Robidoux's men were asleep, then launched a bloody massacre. When the dust had settled, all the trappers were dead except Robidoux. He sneaked off into the darkness and joined Pattie, perhaps somewhere around the center of today's Phoenix. The three survivors remained hidden until the next day. That evening they moved through

the darkness until they encountered what they took to be an Indian camp. As they crept closer, they heard a couple of men talking in English. Fortunately, the three had stumbled into the camp of Ewing Young. Once again, Captain Young sought vengeance against those who would murder trappers. He led some 30 trappers up a dry arroyo on the outskirts of the village, then had two men act as decoys to lure the warriors into an ambush. The ruse worked perfectly as about 200 warriors took off in pursuit of the two white men. When the Indians were some 20 yards from the arroyo, Young and his men rose and fired their high-caliber rifles killing, according to Pattie, 110 warriors. The rest of the people headed for the nearby hills, except for an elderly, blind and deaf man the trappers left unharmed. Then they set fire to the village and began the unpleasant task of burying the mutilated bodies of the French trappers. The next day, the village headman called for a parley with the resolute Captain Young and his 33 buckskin-clad mountain men, and in the ensuing discussion, agreed to stop molesting trappers.

From there, Young led his men up the Salt, past today's Scottsdale, to the junction of the Verde, then worked his way up the Verde and back again down the Salt and Gila, trapping sometimes as many as 30 beavers a night, all the way to today's Yuma. This was the first American expedition to follow that river to its mouth and the first American encounter with the Yuma Indians. The meeting seems to have been friendly. Pattie described them as "the stoutest men with the finest forms I ever saw, well proportioned—as straight as an arrow" and "as naked as Adam and Eve in their birthday suits."

Young then led the party up the Colorado River where they had another encounter with natives, this time Mohaves, and it wasn't so cordial. A belligerent headman demanded a horse, and when refused, speared the animal, causing an angry trapper to shoot him dead in his tracks.

The Mohaves backed off and disappeared into the brush, but Young knew their habits and when the natives launched a pre-dawn attack, the trappers were ready. The Mohave weapons were no match for the trapper's guns and 16 warriors were killed in the melee. The fierce Mohaves bided their time, quietly stalking the trappers until the right moment. One evening several days later, they showered Young's camp with poison arrows, killing two and wounding two more. Pattie claimed his blanket alone was pierced by sixteen arrows.

Swearing trapper vengeance, Young pursued the war party and killed several. The bodies of the slain warriors were hung from the limbs of a cottonwood tree as a stern warning to others.

As an added precaution, Young divided his expedition into two groups—one to trap, the other to stand guard. The persistent Mohaves attacked again, this time killing three trappers on the Bill Williams River. When Young found the men, their bodies had been hacked to pieces and were being roasted



over a campfire.

Young decided it was time to leave the Colorado River and head to Taos. The 1,000-mile expedition had been profitable, taking some \$20,000 in pelts, but he had lost a third of his men to hostile Indians.

Young's penchant for wandering had taken him over some of the wildest country in America on this, one of the Southwest's greatest overland expeditions. In spite of the trials and tribulations of the wilderness, Young's troubles weren't over. There had been a changing of the guard in Santa Fe and the friendly governor, Antonio Narbona, had been replaced by an "ambitious and turbulent demagogue" named Manuel Armijo.

Once the bureaucratic confusion following the Mexican revolution subsided, the old Spanish policy of strict rules concerning commerce with outsiders was reinstated. Also, there was the natural suspicion of Norte Americanos, and for good reason. Since the opening of the Santa Fe Trade, Americans had gone to great lengths to avoid paying customs. It was estimated that hundreds of thousands of dollars in contraband furs were being smuggled out of New Mexico each year.

In 1824, Mexico passed a law allowing only Mexican citizens a license or "guia" to trap. However, by some quirk in the law, beaver pelts brought into Mexico were heavily taxed while those taken out were not. Obviously, this only encouraged evasion. Some Americans got around the law by becoming Mexican citizens or secured a proxy permit through one of the locals. Others simply ignored the law because to apply for a license meant exposing oneself to the import tax.

In Taos, American trappers found a friend in the local priest, Father Antonio Jose Martinez. Martinez, for a small fee, arranged things like baptisms and marriages so citizenship could be obtained more easily.

Many Americans entering Mexico from the States had avoided customs by hiding their merchandise in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, then smuggling the goods in after dark. Trappers returning from the wilderness to Santa Fe were doing the same with beaver pelts.

Enforcement of the new law began while Young was still trapping in Arizona. Unsuspecting, he returned to Santa Fe in the spring of 1827 to find his license was void and the season's catch, worth \$20,000, was impounded.

One rambunctious member of Young's party, Milton Sublette, grabbed his furs and ran inside a friendly house occupied by trappers. By the time authorities were able to force their way in, Sublette and his furs had disappeared. The story of Sublette's daring escapade spread and was told and retold around trappers' campfires for years afterwards.

An angry Governor Armijo held Young personally responsible for Sublette's brash action and charges were pressed. He was released from custody a few days later when Armijo could not locate a copy of the Law of

1824. Young's fortune in furs was not returned, however.

Young's 1827-28 expedition into the Gila country was again routed by Apaches. Somewhere near the junction of the Salt and Verde rivers, Apaches ambushed the party, killing 18 of Young's 24 trappers. Despite these occupational trepidations, Young resolved to equip another expedition the following year. This 1828-29 expedition is remembered for the presence of Young's best known protege, a diminutive, bright young man named Christopher "Kit" Carson.

The Mexican authorities had been keeping a careful watch on Young since the 1827 smuggling incident, so he headed north out of Taos some 50 miles towards U.S. Territories, then doubled back across the Jemez Mountains to the pueblo of Zuni. From there he went into the White Mountains to the headwaters of the Salt River. With a vengeance, Young sought out the Apaches that had routed his expedition the previous year, whipped them soundly, then trapped his way up the Verde to its headwaters in Chino Valley. On the western slope of Bill Williams Mountain, near today's Ashfork, he divided his party, sending one group laden with furs, back to Taos. Young took 17 men, including Carson, and headed west to California. He had heard much talk about California from other trappers and he wanted a first-hand look. In early 1830, after a near disastrous journey across the trackless wastes of the Mohave Desert, the expedition reached the Mission San Gabriel.

Ewing Young liked what he saw in California. Beaver were plentiful in the San Joaquin Valley and horses and mules superior to those in New Mexico ran by the thousands in the Central Valley. Young trapped his way into northern California. To avoid carrying the pelts over the dangerous overland trip to New Mexico, he sold them to a Yankee sea captain. At San Jose he purchased a large herd of horses and mules to drive to the States. On their way back, the trappers stopped in Los Angeles where they indulged in a glorious drunken spree. The mannerly *Californios* were not exactly overjoyed with the increasing number of incorrigible, hairy-faced, buckskin-clad *Americanos* in their midst. But the winsome young women of Los Angeles, dressed in traditional short skirts, loosefitting, low-cut blouses, displaying firm un-corseted bosoms, captured the heart of many a lonely American trapper, at least temporarily. The Americans were shocked upon first meeting these liberated Hispanic ladies in the Southwest, but they quickly adjusted. The small-waisted, olive-skinned beauties whirled around the dance floor with great abandon at frequent fandangos. In between dances, they puffed uninhibitedly on *cigarillos*, just like the men. One observer with Young noted admiringly that the ladies put on "a prodigal display of their charms" for one and all.

The Hispanic men, especially the *caballeros* (gentlemen horsemen)

were even more dazzling in appearance with their traditional low-crowned, flat-brimmed sombreros, banded with oil cloths or tinsel cords, tight-fitting *chaquetas*, or jackets decorated with elaborate needlework and fancy conchos, and bright-colored sashes wrapped around tight silver-studded *calgoneras*, or pantaloons. The outer part of the legs were slit up to the knees and decorated with colorful gussets. Embossed leather *botas* or leggings were worn to protect their ankles. Their spurs were characterized by huge five-inch rowels. A serape *saltillero* (fancy blanket) usually hung across the pommel of the saddle and was thrown over the shoulders during inclement weather. The rider stuck his head through a slit in the middle of the blanket and the garment hung loosely from the neck. Their elegant style matched the fine-bred horses they rode with considerable pride.

The California militia kept a watchful eye on the trappers and perhaps harbored some scheme to place them in custody. Those plans ended abruptly when two of the trappers, an Irishman and an Englishman, exchanged unpleasantries over some frivolous matter and the Irishman nonchalantly stepped down off his mule and shot the Englishman dead. The authorities wisely decided that if the crazy Americanos would shoot each other without provocation, what would they do if somebody outside the group were the antagonist?

Young's party returned to Arizona, trapped up the Gila River, then cached their furs at the friendly Santa Rita Cobre Mine. Young and Carson rode on to Santa Fe where the bourgeois secured a license "to trade with Indians on the Gila." They returned to Santa Rita, picked up some 2,000 pounds in beaver pelts and sold them in Santa Fe. The authorities were, no doubt, surprised at the trappers' uncanny good fortune to have gathered so many pelts in such a short time—*quien sabe?*

The expedition earned a small fortune for Young, and the word quickly spread about wondrous opportunities in California.

Increasing troubles with Comanches along the Santa Fe Trail, Apaches and Mohaves in Arizona, inspired Young to move his base of operations to California. In the Fall of 1831, he left New Mexico for good.

It has been said that Young's decision to move his operations to the Pacific Coast might have been principally because of mounting problems with authorities in New Mexico who considered him a troublemaker. And there is little doubt those officials were glad to see him leave.

Whichever, Ewing Young's (or "Joaquin Yong" as he was referred to on Mexican records) great Arizona adventure was over. He eventually settled in the Oregon Territory, where he became one of that region's outstanding citizens. Young died prematurely in 1841, years before the "Course of Empire" changed the complexion of the entire Far West region.

As for rugged Arizona, continuing trouble with hostile tribes encour-

aged trappers to seek safer pastures in California, circumventing the area entirely by using the Old Spanish Trail from Santa Fe across Utah to California.

These trappers and their contemporaries were the embodiment of free spirit and independence. They were rebels against the restraints of society and chose to live their lives in the vast unknown where death could come at any moment in a variety of ways. Many returned to society, only partially, to serve as guides for the immigrant trains that came West in the 1840s and 1850s. Today's super-highways cross deserts and mountains over their trails. It seems ironic that men who sought sanctuary in the West would, in the final analysis, be the ones to lead the society they despised into their final refuge.