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Beehive Archive

Welcome to the Beehive Archive—your weekly bite-sized look at some of the most pivotal—and peculiar—events in Utah history. With all of the history and none of the dust, the Beehive Archive is a fun way to catch up on Utah’s past. Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council, provided to local papers as a weekly feature article focusing on Utah history topics drawn from our award-winning radio series, which can be heard each week on [KCPW](#) and [Utah Public Radio](#).

John Charles Frémont: Ad Man for Manifest Destiny

Explorer John Charles Fremont’s belief in “Manifest Destiny” paved the way for Western migration.

By the early 1840s, US leaders in favor of Western expansion lobbied for better surveys of the territory and reliable maps. The US government responded by mounting scientific expeditions to gather information about the Far West. One of the expedition leaders was John Charles Fremont, a trained topographer who certainly had expertise for the job. But it was Fremont’s devout belief in the idea of “Manifest Destiny” that drove him personally to promote American settlement and acquisition of Western lands.

In the space of a dozen years, Fremont led five expeditions into the West, three of which took him to Utah. During 1843-1844, his circuit of the West brought him down the Bear River through Cache Valley to the Great Salt Lake. He wrote glowingly of the valleys, touting them as ideal locations for future settlement. He paddled a leaky rubber boat on the Great Salt Lake and mapped the western edge of the Great Basin on his way to the coast. Fremont's 1845 exploration brought him again to the Salt Lake Valley, this time via the Provo and Jordan Rivers, before heading west on the route later known as the Hastings Cutoff. He was back in 1853 to find a route for the transcontinental railroad.

Fremont’s detailed reports and excellent maps helped pave the way for mass migration. His reports read like adventure stories, thanks to the editing skills of his wife Jessie. They were also widely distributed thanks to Jessie’s father, the powerful Senator from Missouri, Thomas Hart Benton, who had his eye on the commercial potential of servicing western-bound migrants. Fremont’s accounts of the West caught the imagination of a land-hungry public. They found their way into travel guides and were even noted by the Royal Geographical Society in London.

Fremont's scientific achievements in exploring the West cannot be overstated. But it was his efforts to publicize and stir enthusiasm for the country that influenced so many Americans to migrate.

Beehive Archive is a production of the Utah Humanities Council. Sources consulted in the creation of the Beehive Archive and past episodes may be found at www.utahhumanities.org/BeehiveArchive.htm. Megan van Frank © Utah Humanities Council 2014.

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