

# Dream West (Charles Fremont 1842-1890) by David Nevin (1983)

Charles Fremont's first expedition [1842] he learned how to use a sextant to chart exactly where they were. They went up the Platte River to the Rockies. The leader was sick and Fremont took command. The second expedition in '43-44 he mapped out the Oregon Trail with enough info people could follow it. He also determined NV basin does not drain to the ocean (except the Colorado & Columbia Rivers) and returned via UT. The third in '45-46 he went through NV took control of CA. The fourth in '48-49 he followed a southern route through NM & AZ to CA. And the fifth he led a private party (others were army) in '53-54 trying to find a railroad route from CO to CA.

1843 he proved the mythical Buenaventura River (draining NV to the Pacific) didn't exist. Kit Carson was his guide and friend on most of his expeditions. Carson Pass in CA was named after him and Fremont Peak in CO after Charles. Nature won't tolerate a vacuum (the lack of leadership in CA in '46 was that way). A US ship (commanded by Robert Stockton) sailed into Monterey Bay to help Fremont take control of CA weeks before the British were about to. Stockton appointed Fremont first (unofficial) Governor of CA, but army general Kearny wanted it and railroaded him into a court-martial for insubordination. In '46 he coined the term "Golden Gate" for the harbor entrance of SF bay. He later bought a house there, but the army took it over to build a presidio and never paid him for it.

His leadership & tenacity got his men through some rough spots, but a bad guide got 1/3 of his group killed in the winter of '48. His men were afraid they would become cannibals like the Donner party two years before. Fremont himself almost died, but his sheer will saved him. When he left CA in '46, he paid \$3000 to buy a hacienda overlooking the Pacific in Monterey. But when he returned in '49 it didn't have a clean title so his agent bought him 44,000-acres of wilderness land in the sierras (near Mariposa, CA). At first, he was furious, but since gold was found at Sutter's Mill, he had miner's pan his creeks. He moved his family out there and became friends with Bret Harte. He became a millionaire, but he invested his profits into a bigger operation until his creditors took control of the gold mine.

The public liked Fremont and 1850 became the first CA senator, and in 1856 the new Republican Party elected him as their candidate for US president (but lost the election). 1857 the courts ruled on the Dred Scott decision that Scott has no right to sue because slaves were not citizens (I guess all men are not created equal). Slavery was one issue the founding fathers did not address. In '61 Lincoln promoted him to major general in charge of the west, but they were not supporting him. He actually had him removed from command twice. Fremont promoted Grant in the field (Grant later became president). Lincoln wanted to mend the nation, but as long as there were slaves it could not. In '63 Lincoln issued the emancipation proclamation and the war was finally over in '65.

He was still making money so he put that into a railroad company that he wanted to extend to CA. But that needed even more money until the day they called his loan and everything he had as collateral. He was destitute and learned to never get involved with money men if you can help it. They rented a row house on Stanton Island, NY. They already lost a son early in their marriage and now their other son's health demanded he move to AZ, but they didn't have \$1000 for his trip. She started writing articles for the newspaper and earned it in two weeks.

1869 the transcontinental railroad was completed using Fremont's surveys. '78-81 He was governor of Arizona, but her health required her to live at sea level. They returned to NY & Washington DC, but his health required them to move to a milder climate so a friend paid their way back to CA.

Fremont was a big risk taker; sometimes beyond reason, but had to tenacity to pull it off most of the times. His wife was his biggest supporter and she had a talent for writing. He dictated and she put his reports into words that made the reader feel they were there. They were both better because of the other. She felt a part of his life except when he was working on the railroads. Fremont was arrogant & impulsive; he felt if you question everything, you do nothing (the way to do things is to do them). There's nothing you can't do if you set your heart & mind to it. Fremont thought God created a second Garden of Eden when He made CA. Even as late as the 1840's doctors still wanted to drain blood from sick patients remove sickness, but people were realizing this was fatal.

Failure has no friends; it opens the doors to enemies. Everyone faces the fire sooner or later and they are not the same after. Some look at the stars and feel small; others do the same and feel part of something big. The wilderness made him feel he could do big things. The day a man finds power more alluring than women he must realize it is also as dangerous as desirable. When banks lend out more money than normal it will make the economy red hot and bust. When the value of money fluctuates it is fatal for the little man. Certain crossroads in life lead to destruction or reinforce our moral character (choose wisely).

#### Quotes:

"The cautious seldom make mistakes." (Confucius)

"Few men shape events, while most men are shaped by them." (DN)

"Love is as strong as iron and fragile as glass." "We define ourselves by what we do." (DN)

"Men rise or fall in direct relationship to the quality of their wives." (DN)

"History is crammed with men whom circumstances tap once and never revisited." (DN)

Every leader possesses just so much power and he must spend it sparingly.