

Jersey Gold: The Newark Overland Company's Trek to California, 1849**Margaret Casterline Bowen and Gwendolyn Joslin Hiles****University of Oklahoma Press, 2017****384 Pages****\$34.95 (hardcover)****ISBN: 9780806157146****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v4i1.114>**

In *Jersey Gold: The Newark Overland Company's Trek to California, 1849*, Margaret Casterline Bowen and Gwendolyn Joslin Hiles weave together varied motivations and outcomes experienced by predominantly New Jersey natives who ventured west during the Gold Rush. Initially intended to be a personal genealogical project, Bowen and Hiles cite travel journals, correspondence, and newspaper articles to uncover the Newark Overland Company's journey, and traces individual members' lives into the late nineteenth-century.

The Newark Overland Company hunted buffalo, encountered Pawnee and Sioux, and traded with the newly-established community of the Latter Day Saints. The bulk of the trek incorporates the journals of Charles Gray, the experiences of the prominent Dr. John Darcy, and the sketches and descriptions articulated by Charles Gillespie. Gillespie proved to be a fascinating man who sketched the frontier and provided vivid commentary on the people, landscapes, and his personal health over the course of his journey. Bowen and Hiles include several of Gillespie's sketches, including one of James Wilson Marshall, credited with discovering the initial outpost of gold. The combination of visual culture and biographical narrative provides a nice interdisciplinary approach to Gillespie's experiences on the frontier, and is a highlight of the text.

Other members of the Newark Overland Company only appear later in the work, in the years after the westward journey. The genealogical nature of the research lends itself to broader biographical narratives of the men, rather than a distinct argument on the overall journey or the

individual experiences. John Overton is one character who gained significant prominence in the late nineteenth-century, and made a fortune by monopolizing the water supply. Yet, minimal information on Overton is presented earlier in the text. Additionally, David Woodruff was mentioned only once prior to the Civil War chapter, which highlighted his service for the Confederacy. Consequently, the text reads as disjointed, devolving into a series of events that members of the Overland Company happened to participate in rather than a narrative on the joint experience of the Overland Company itself. Rather than trying to express the biographical details on so many members of the Company, an in-depth exploration of the experiences of a few men would allow greater insight and analysis into the westward journey and the post-1849 experience. Perhaps then we can understand and analyze the causes for groups splitting off from the Company, the members' economic pursuits, and political sympathies on the eve of the Civil War.

The first half of the book offers a cohesive experience of the men on the overland trail. The second half, which emphasizes the Civil War and late nineteenth-century, reads as small biographical sketches, most of which are of men that were only cursorily mentioned earlier in the text. Even for the men who readily appear in both sections, rarely are their overland experiences connected with their later lives. Did Gillespie's westward journey inform his decisions as a Captain for the Pennsylvania Seventy-Eight Infantry? Bowen and Hiles argue that the aforementioned Woodruff chose to fight for the Confederacy due to his ardent belief in states' rights and that he had no opinion on slavery, yet this particular sentiment isn't cited, and consequently it is unclear as to the source of this very complicated perspective. If anything, this discussion presented an opportunity to discuss and engage with the complex political position that New Jersey often took during the Civil War era with direct examples from the lives of two

men fighting in opposite armies. Yet, it is an opportunity Bowen and Hiles missed. By providing biographical narratives for so many men, they dilute the overall analysis of the book, the impact of the national events on the lives of these men, and ultimately the influence of these New Jersey natives on the events themselves.

Women appeared in this text primarily as wives of Overland Company members. While understandable, some of the discussion of these women appear to be speculative, much like Woodruff's Civil War experience. The only woman covered in detail is Caroline Meeker, wife of S. H. Meeker, and Bowen and Hiles depict her as a possible adulteress who only cares about extravagant wealth. Yet, this speculation isn't corroborated by any correspondence and the only citation is a passenger list of names from the *New York Times*. Speculation aside, Bowen and Hiles missed an additional opportunity to analyze what these rumors truly convey: the strains of transcontinental marriage. Conversely, the authors make minor references to a widow named Eliza Farnham, a New York native who formed an all-female company to settle in California. However, like many of the protagonists in this text, Eliza is mentioned sporadically, and entices readers to a story that never is fully resolved.

What *Jersey Gold* lacks in analysis, it offers in interesting vignettes that expose the various national events that New Jersey natives participated in over the course of the late nineteenth-century. The meticulous research undertaken by Bowen and Hiles contributes to the overall understanding of experience on the frontier, and places New Jersey in context with national narratives. The strength of the text is certainly the overland trek, and offers teachers a resource to convey personal primary source-based accounts of the overland journey. While *Jersey Gold* raises more questions than it answers, it serves as an ideal read for those with an interest in the details of overland travel, the influence of nineteenth-century travel journals on

groups such as the Newark Overland Company, and those with an interest in the intersection of genealogical research and broader historical narratives.

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