



PROJECT MUSE®

---

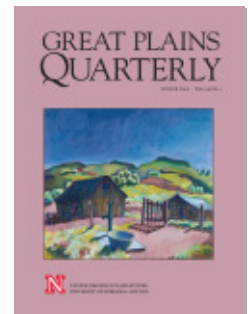
*Men in Eden: William Drummond Stewart and Same-Sex Desire in the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade* by William Benemann (review)

Justin M. Carroll

Great Plains Quarterly, Volume 34, Number 1, Winter 2014, p. 95 (Review)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/gpq.2014.0012>



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/536890>

## Book Reviews

***Men in Eden: William Drummond Stewart and Same-Sex Desire in the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade.***

By William Benemann. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012. ix + 343 pp. Photographs, illustrations, notes, index. \$29.95 paper.

In the introduction to his wonderfully written and extensively researched *Men in Eden*, historian William Benemann describes feeling haunted by Sir William Drummond Stewart (1795–1871), a dashing Scottish soldier, explorer, and adventurer. As he worked through Stewart’s archives and associated materials, Benemann sensed that the Scotsman “was lurking just around the corner—not to contradict [him] if [he] revealed that he was homosexual but to correct [him] if . . . [he] got his story wrong.” It turns out historians have been troubled by the ghost of Stewart for over half a century, especially as they struggled to explain, ignore, or simply cover up his sexual identity.

Starting with the publication of Bernard DeVoto’s *Across the Wide Missouri* in 1947 and continued by Mae Porter and Odessa Davenport’s *Scotsman in Buckskin* in 1963, historians have largely constructed a heterosexual version of Sir William Drummond Stewart. These historians relied upon the creation of fictitious marriages, or overlooked problematic primary sources, or simply explained away Stewart’s “confirmed bachelorhood” through the dull, constraining realities of nineteenth-century marriage. Often these historians failed to ap-

preciate his sexuality, not out of malice but rather from the belief that it was “quite literally unthinkable that a vigorous, dashing figure in American history could be a homosexual.” Yet the Rocky Mountains, a place of freedom, a place distanced from societal censure, and a place defined by masculine companionship, offered Stewart and men like him space in which to explore and participate in same-sex relationships.

When compared to famous mountain men like Jim Bridger, Kit Carson, or John C. Frémont, Sir William Drummond Stewart appears marginal both historically and historiographically, despite popularity during his own time and place. Far from being lost to obscurity and silenced sexually, however, the Scottish adventurer is coaxed back to life by Benemann’s skillful narrative; and by revealing Stewart’s desires, friendships, controversies, loves, and regrets, the author shows how his subject offers historians “a window into the many ways of being gay in early nineteenth-century America.” Moreover, scholars of the American fur trade, the American West, or the Great Plains will also find *Men in Eden* particularly relevant and important, as it asks them to reconsider the nature of western expansion and its various connections to sexual freedom and the men and women who pursued it.

JUSTIN M. CARROLL  
Department of History  
Indiana University East