



Men on Boats

Dramaturgical Research

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Assistants to the Director

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01- The Production

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Dunn's Cliff Photographed July 11th, 1955

The Production:

Synopsis

Men on Boats tells the true-ish story of John Wesley Powell, his crew, and their journey down the Green River and Colorado River into the Grand Canyon. The tale was taken straight from the real journal entries of Powell and re-adapted by Jaclyn Backhaus into the three act adventure story we know now. Throughout the play we witness the Emma Dean, The Kitty Clyde's Sister, The No-Name, and The Maid of the Canyon endeavour crashes, swells, whirlpools, waterfalls. The strength of the crew is constantly being tested through decreasing rations and a struggle for power. The production overall is a true testament to the perseverance of these explorers. Through celebration of camaraderie and a little bit of whiskey... WE TRULY BEGIN!

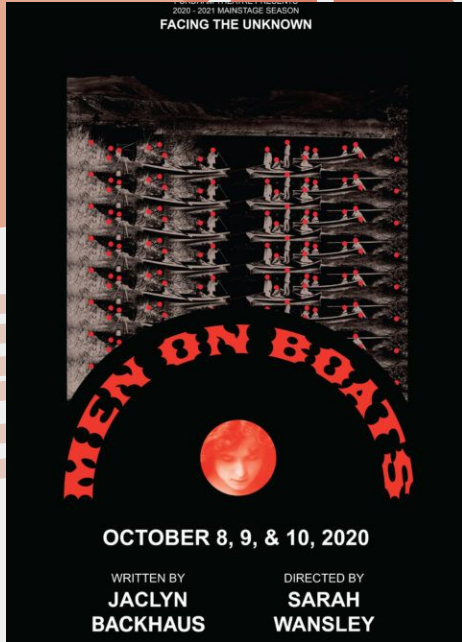


The Production: Playwright

Jaclyn Backhaus is an Indian-American playwright, screenwriter, and educator born in Phoenix, Arizona. She now resides in Ridgewood, Queens and leads quite a successful life with her husband, Andrew Scoville. Backhaus attended NYU Tisch school of Drama and earned her BFA in 2008. Her works include but are not limited to *Men on Boats*, *India Pale Ale*, *You Across From Me*, *Folk Wandering*, *You on the Moors Now*, and *Wives*. Backhaus Has done a fair share of work at Manhattan Theater Club, Lincoln Center, and Playwrights Horizons and more. She is a recipient of the 2018 Horton Foote Prize for Promising New American Play and is a cofounder of Fresh Ground Pepper, an arts company devoted to creators and the creative process.



The Production: *History*



- *Men on Boats* first premiered as part of Clubbed Thumb's Summerworks Theater Festival from June 19th–29th in 2015.
- Clubbed Thumbs revived the show the next year in collaboration with Playwrights Horizons with the same cast and directed once more by Will Davis.
- The show has since been produced at a multitude of theaters and colleges. To name a few...
 - Speakeasy Stage Company (2017)
 - Main Street Theater (2018)
 - ACT Strand Theater (2018)
 - Fordham University (2020)
 - Sam Houston University (2021)
 - Marymount Manhattan College (2022)
- Awards Include:
Outer Critics Circle Awards– John Gassner Award (2017)



The Production: Land Acknowledgment

We gather as Marymount Manhattan College whose 71st Street campus rests on the traditional land of the Lenape Peoples past and present. We honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations. We also acknowledge the lands of those Indigenous People you will meet in the play, members of the Ute Tribe who were the first known people to inhabit Colorado. By recognizing the claims of the Lenape and Ute to their lands, we accept our responsibility to learn about the continuing traditions of these communities and also commit ourselves to being better stewards of the lands we inhabit.

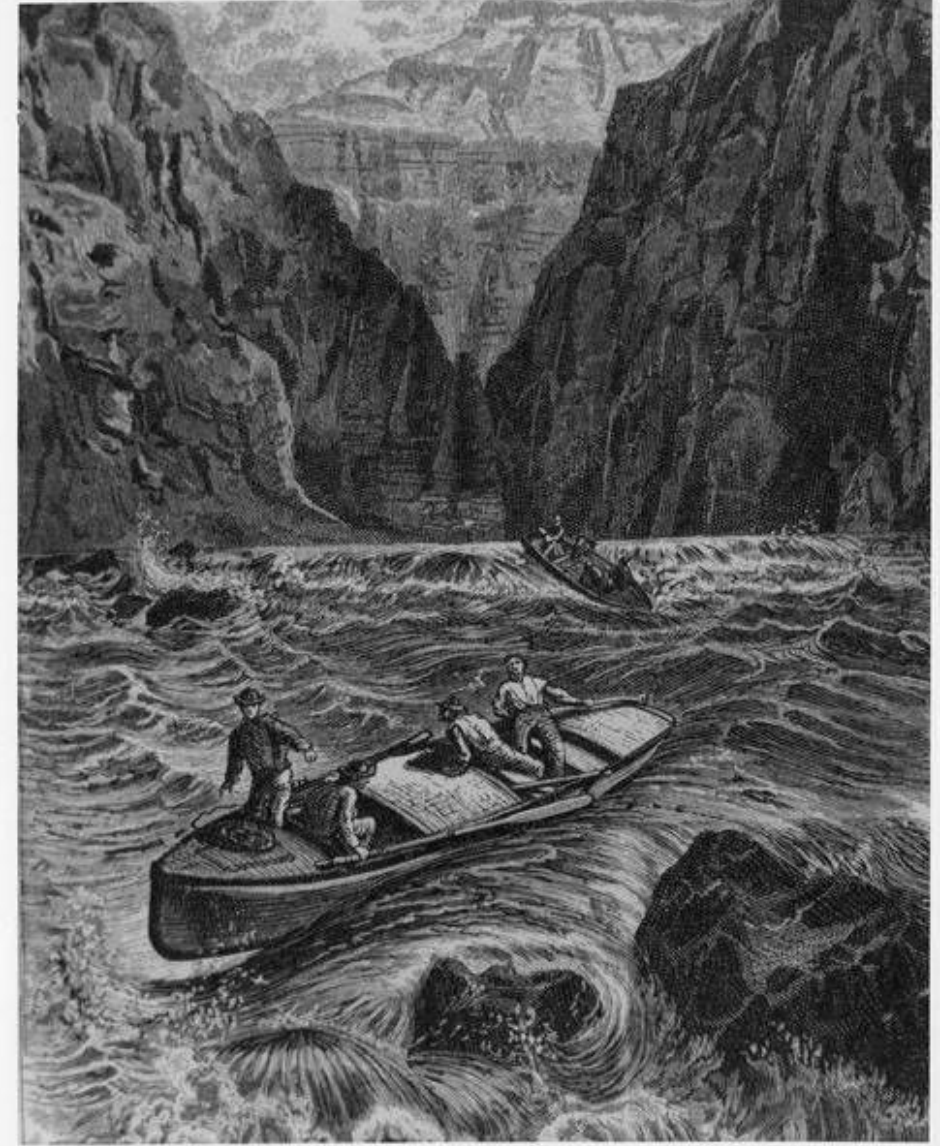


"When we talk about land, land is part of who we are. It's a mixture of our blood, our past, our current, and our future. We carry our ancestors in us, and they're around us. As you all do."

– Mary Lyons (Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe)

02- Themes

- Legacy
- Adventure
- Manifest Destiny
- Gender + Representation



Running a Rapid, Line Drawing of John Wesley Powell and his men from 1875-1895, Artist Unknown.

Themes:

Legacy

The Men on Boats are very focused on the legacy they lead and the history they create. We see this specifically through the actions of Powell and Dunn when naming Knife's Point (1.2) and Dunn's Cliff (1.8). Mr. Asa also emphasizes the idea of "their story" in the final scene of the show when talking to the remaining members of Powell's crew.



Adventure

You can't have a story of exploration without adventure! We clearly see the thrill of adventure throughout each of the boat scenes in the show. We also see the negative effects of the expedition as the men struggle to survive and complete their mission.

Themes:

Manifest Destiny



American Progress by John Gast, c. 1873

This photo was used in the 1800's to showcase the idea of Manifest Destiny. The woman, featured in the center of the painting, represents America expanding westward.

- **Manifest destiny** was a widely held belief in the 19th-century United States that American settlers were entitled to conquer and control North America.
- Contemporary historians have widely condemned manifest destiny as an ideology used to *justify* dispossession and **genocide** against Native Americans.
- The rapid expansion of the United States intensified the issue of **slavery** as new states were added to the Union, leading to the outbreak of the Civil War.

Themes:

Breaking Gender Barriers

- Jaclyn Backhaus originally heard of the story of John Wesley Powell and his crew as a child in Arizona and immediately knew that she wanted to adapt it for the stage.
- She was excited by the adventure of the story but realized she **couldn't see herself as apart of the show** since she was a woman. So she changed that.
- **Casting Note** – “The characters in *Men On Boats* were historically cisgender white males. The cast should be made up entirely of people who are not. I'm talking about racially diverse actors who are female-identifying, trans-identifying, gender-fluid, and/or non-gender-conforming.”
- She states, “... the fact that the performers were women did have an effect on the theatrical experience overall because it served as a reminder **that theatre tells a story, it doesn't re-enact it.**”

University of Buffalo 2017

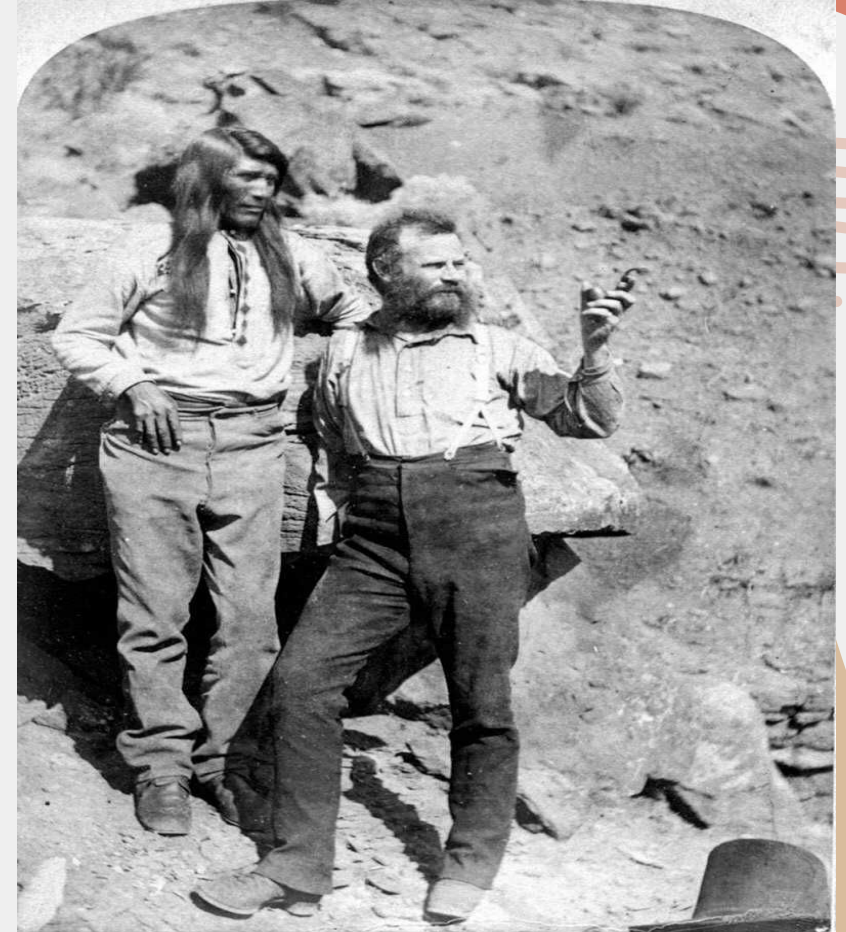


Speakeasy Stage Company 2017



03-History

- American Politics
- Mormonism
- The Expedition
- Tribes Along the Expedition
- Ute Tribe
- Additional Native American History



History:

American Politics and Historical Events



- -Era of expedition→ May 24th 1869 – August 29th 1869
- -Andrew Johnson→ 17th President of the United States of America (1865-1869)-democrat
- -Ulysses S. Grant→ 18th President of the United States of America (1869-1877)- republican
- -Pre-expedition (1863-1868) → Emancipation Proclamation, Reconstruction after the Civil War, Indian Wars continue (The Indian Wars were **a protracted series of conflicts between Native American Indians and white settlers over land and natural resources in the West.**), and the 14th amendment of the constitution (granted citizenship + equal civil + legal rights to African Americans who had been emancipated after civil War.), and the can opener is invented! (1858)
- - **Economy**→ A laissez-faire approach by government and poorly regulated banking led to volatility. In the 1800's, the economy was small and largely agricultural based.

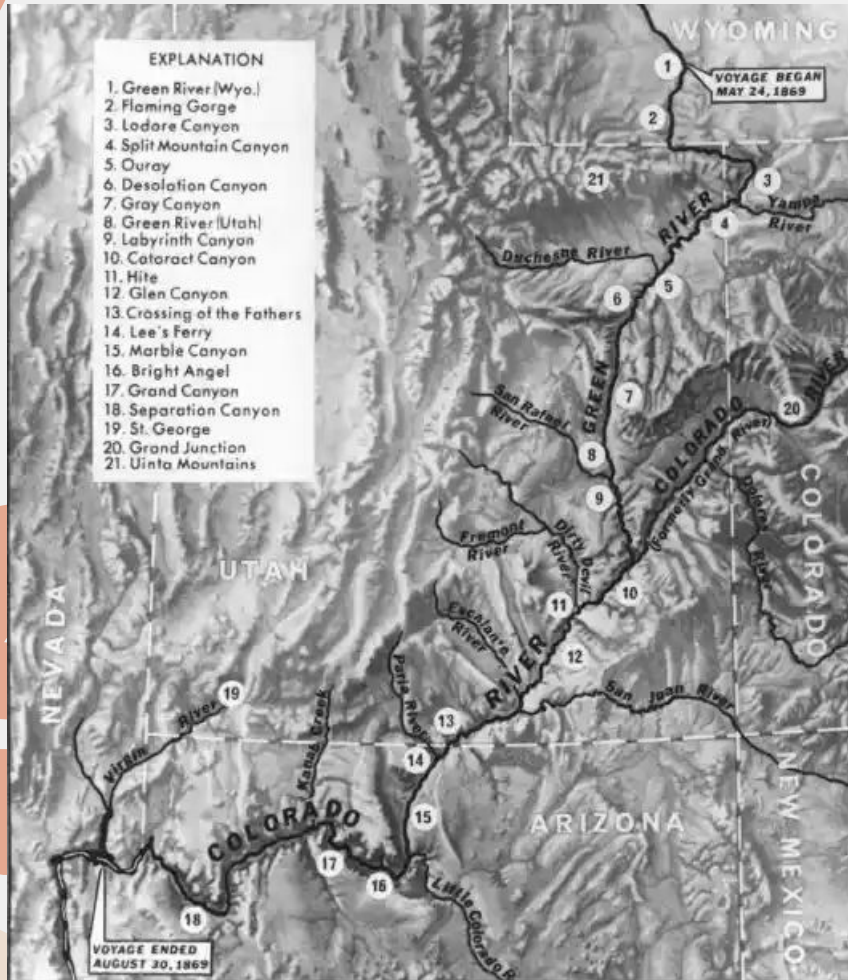
History:

Mormonism of the time period



- The Mormons are a **religious group founded in the early 1800s** by a man named Joseph Smith. Another name for Mormons is the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints**, and they identify as a **Christian religion**. The Mormon religion has over 15 million members throughout the world.
- By the mid-1840s, Mormonism had established itself as a dynamic and distinctive new religious tradition. By 1845, it had nearly **40,000 believers**; by 1870, **120,000**.
- These settlers first arrived in **Salt Lake Valley** in the 1890s from Idaho establishing a community (named Grovont by the U.S. Post Office) known today as **"Mormon Row."**
- The Mormons were **persecuted** for several reasons: They **didn't keep slaves**, which was seen as a threat to the surrounding slave-owning culture at a time when the abolition of slavery was a big issue.
- The **Mormon Trail** extends from Nauvoo, Illinois, which was the principal settlement of the Latter Day Saints from 1839 to 1846, to Salt Lake City, Utah, which was settled by Brigham Young and his followers beginning in 1847.

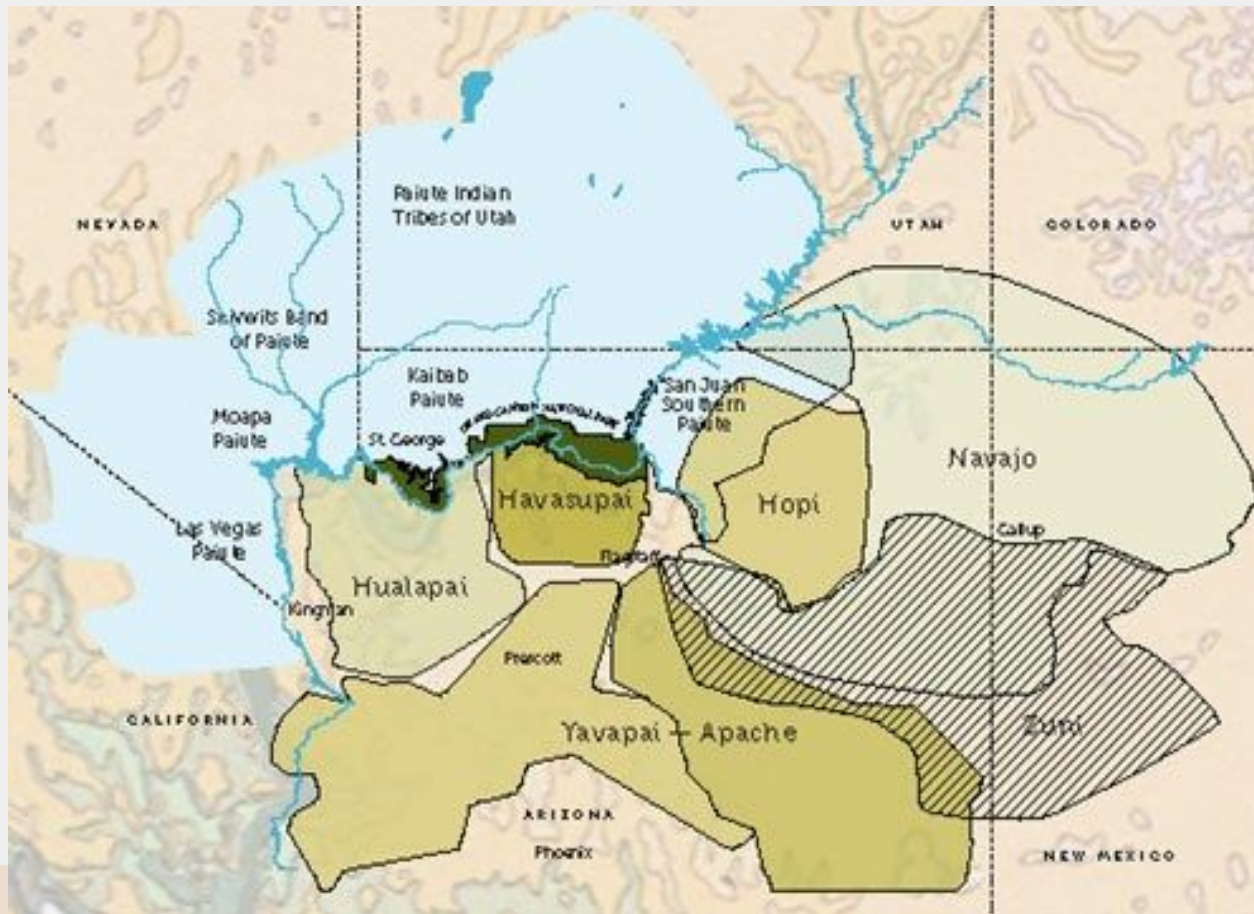
History: The Expedition



May 24th, 1869–August 29th, 1869

History: Tribes along river

Tribes along the Great Basin included: Western Shoshone, the Goshute, the Ute, the Paiute, and the Washoe



The Ute Tribe

- The Ute people are the **oldest residents of Colorado**, inhabiting 225,000 square miles of the mountains and vast areas of Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Eastern Nevada, Northern New Mexico and Arizona.
- As the Utes traveled the vast area of the **Great Basin**, large bands would breakup into smaller family units that were much more mobile. Camps could be broken down faster making travel from one location to another a more efficient process.
- Ute **men hunted** deer, elk, buffalo, and small game. Ute **women gathered** roots, pine nuts, seeds and fruits. Members of the tribe also used to enjoy eating grasshoppers and other insects.
- The Ute call themselves **Nuche** meaning “mountain people.” The word “Ute” is apparently a corruption of the Spanish word Yutas, which is possibly derived from the term Guaputu.
- The language of the Utes is **Shoshonean**, a dialect of that Uto-Aztec language.
- The Utes were among the first North American tribes to acquire **horses** from the Spanish. In the late 1600s they became a major conduit for the dispersal of horses to tribes east and west of the Rockies. Embracing the horse’s strength and speed, Utes forged a new way of life that made them powerful and prosperous. They remain proud of their “first contact” with horses today.
- Two ceremonies have dominated Ute social and religious life: the **Bear Dance and the Sun Dance**. The former is indigenous to the Ute and originally was held in the spring to coincide with the emergence of the bear from hibernation. The dance was held in a large brush enclosure or dance plaza and lasted about ten days.
- Currently, the Utes have a **tribal membership of 2,970** and over half of its membership lives on the Reservation. Cattle raising and mining of oil and natural gas are big business on the reservation.

Chief Severo and family, c. 1899



History:

Discrimination Leading up to the Expedition

Listed below are a few events that lead to the mass discrimination and removal of Native American people in the 19th century...

- **Louisiana Purchase (1804):** This agreement allowed the US to gain 828,000 square miles from France. The newly gained territory spanned from the Mississippi River, to the Rocky Mountains, and from the Gulf of Mexico, to the Canadian border– doubling the land owned in America. Although the purchase seems beneficial, it put native tribes at risk and brought forth the Indian Removal Act.
- **Indian Removal Act (1830):** Enacted by President Jackson, The Indian Removal Act allowed the government to divide land west of the Mississippi and give it to native tribes in exchange for the land they'd lost. The government would pick up the cost of relocating the Indians and helping them resettle. Many tribes resisted, insisting they keep their birthlands, rightfully so.
- **Trail of Tears (1838):** In the 1830's 125,000 indigenous people lived across millions of acres of land in Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina and Florida. But by the end of the decade, these native americans were found working for white people, growing cotton and being forced to relocate. They were required to walk hundreds of miles to a specially designated "Indian territory" across the Mississippi River. This journey was known as the Trail of Tears.
- **Indian Appropriations Act (1851):** This was a law passed by congress that created the first official american Indian Reservation System. This was the United States attempt to control native tribes further, by sectioning off tribes and restricting them from leaving without permission. Culture and traditions were lost and starvation ran rampant due to limited hunting and farming resources. In addition to this, the tribes that lived on the reservations were forced to assimilate into christianity and were restricted from wearing traditional native clothing.

The Indigenous People we encounter in the play, The Bishop and Tsauwiat, were members of the Ute Tribe. The Ute Tribe was the first civilization to ever inhabit Colorado. By 1881, the United States government had officially “removed” the Utes from nearly all of their territory.



1800s



1868

The American government established an Ute reservation contained within Colorado.



1872

The Brunot Treaty further sliced away at Ute territory,

04- Characters

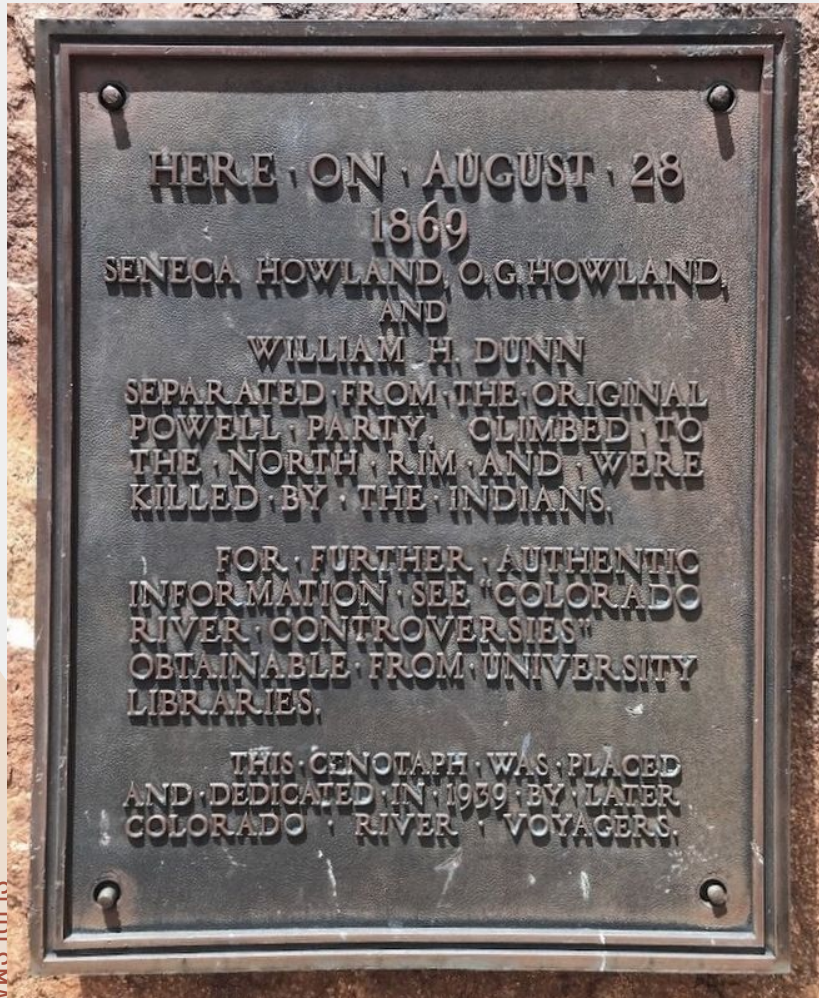


John Wesley Powell

(March 24, 1834 – September 23, 1902) Powell was an American geologist, U.S. Army soldier, explorer, professor at Illinois Wesleyan University, and major in the civil war. After 1867, Powell led a series of expeditions into the Rocky Mountains and around the Green and Colorado rivers. One of these expeditions was with his students and his wife, to collect specimens all over Colorado. Powell, William Byers, and five other men were the first white men to climb Longs Peak in 1868.



William Dunn



Went by Bill. He was a hunter and trapper. not much information about him. Where he was from and his age are not clear. He, Seneca and OG all left the group 2 days before they reached their destination because they claimed that the trip was too dangerous to continue. William Dunn carved his name at the top of the Mount Dellenbaugh after he and the Howland brothers left the Powell expedition. It is rumored that all the men were probably killed by Mormons shortly after although it has been argued as to whether they were killed by Indians or Mormons.

"A hunter, a trapper, an INNOVATOR" – Dunn

John Colton Sumner

(1840–1907) From Iowa. Nickname “Jack”. Civil war soldier, hunter and trapper. An experienced marksman and boatman, he was chosen by John Wesley Powell to lead the first boat of the expedition. He kept a daily journal of the expedition. The boat the *No Name* hit a series of rocks in a rapid and was destroyed, losing food and supplies. Sumner was able to rescue all three men. In July, a Nebraska newspaper printed a story that the entire expedition had been drowned, with Sumner the sole survivor. In May 1902, Sumner traveled back to the Grand Canyon, along the Green River. On May 24 1902, the exact date of the thirty-third anniversary of the first day of the expedition, he walked out of a saloon, down to the side of the river. Using a knife, he slowly and carefully castrated himself. He was found the next day, bloody and unconscious, and taken to St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Junction, where his wounds were successfully treated, survived and died five years later in 1907



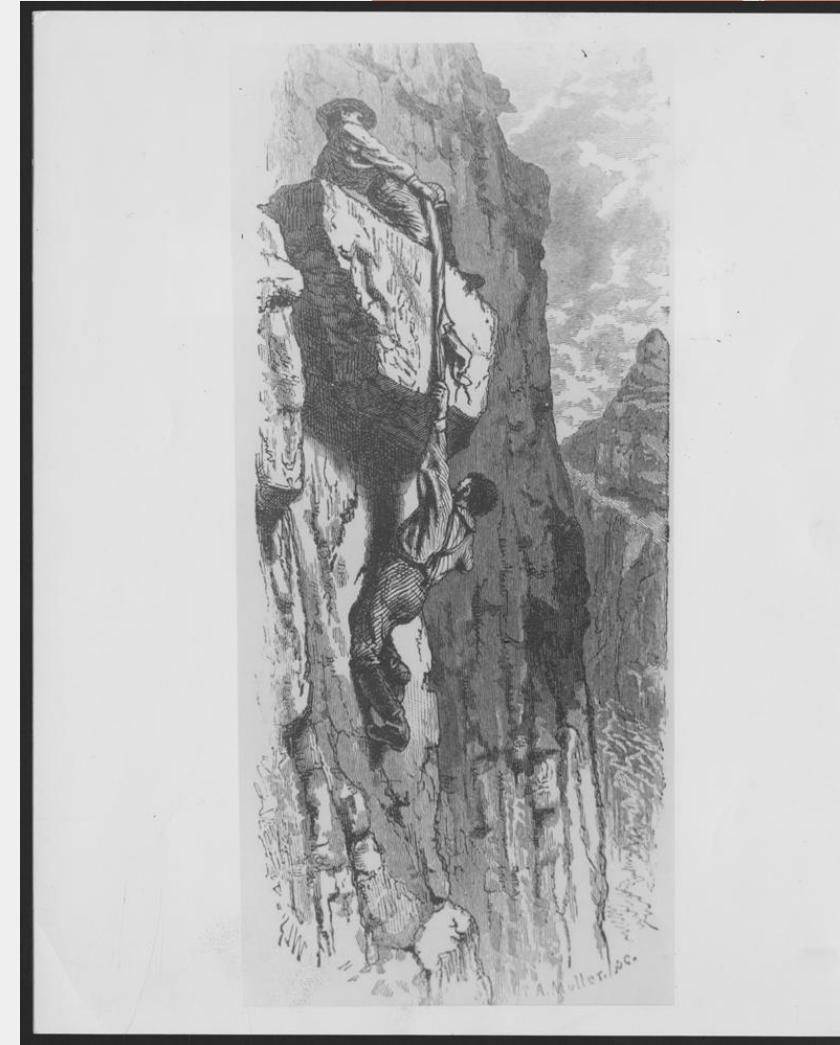
Walter Henry Powell



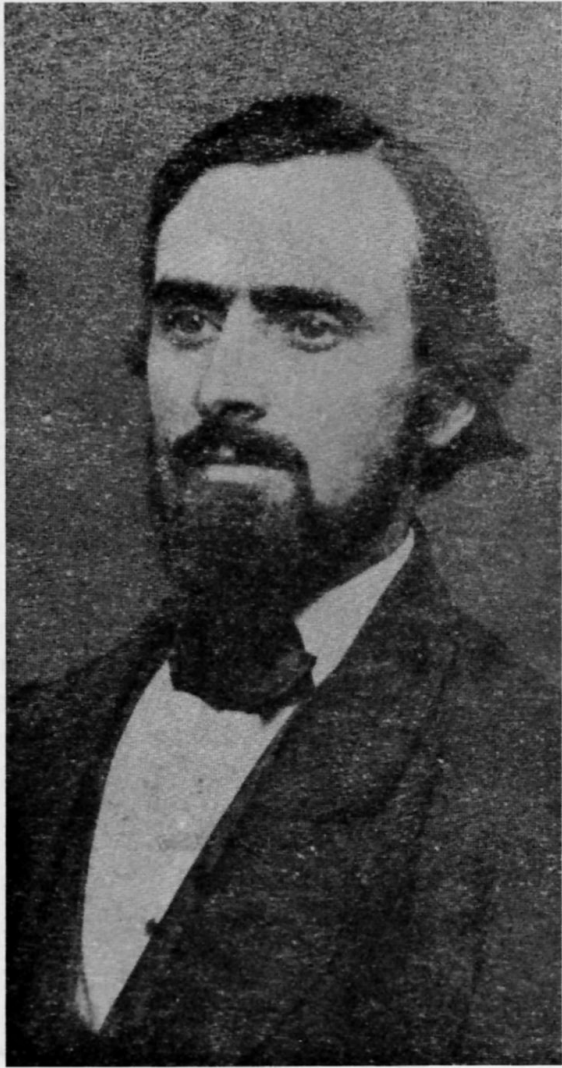
Born in Ohio in 1842 and died in 1915. He was a captain in the civil war. He was imprisoned and developed a fever. He escaped the prison hospital and was recaptured a few days later. He enjoyed singing and he would sing the song "ole shady" giving him the nickname "Old Shady". After the expedition, his mental health declined and he lived with his sister and she took care of him. After her death, he was taken to a military hospital where he died on March 10 1915.

George Young Bradley

Born October 1836 in Newbury Massachusetts. He had a successful military career before Powell requested to President Grant that he be released as a sergeant in the army to use him a chief boatman in his expedition. He was discharged May, 1869 and 10 days later they set sail. One of the most important members of Powells team. He saved Powell's life while climbing the canyon wall and he kept a journal of the journey. After the expedition, he settled in San diego where he had a fruit farm. In 1885, his health was declining and he returned to Massachusetts and stayed with his sister until he died a few weeks later.



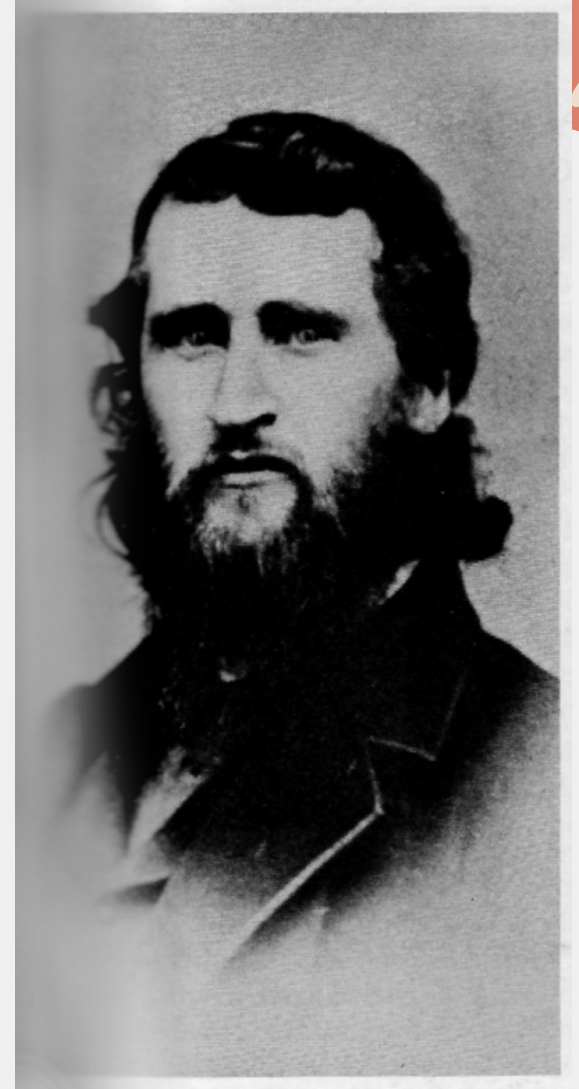
O.G. Howland



(1833–1869) O.G. was the oldest member of the expedition. A little after noon on June 7, 1869, Powell pulled his boat ashore and indicated that the other vessels do likewise. O. G. Howland either didn't see the signal or didn't start for land soon enough. Either way his boat went over the rapids, threw out all three men and was dashed to pieces on the rocks. The team lost one-third of its provisions, half of its mess-kit and three barometers. When they arrived, on August 27, at what seemed to be impassable rapids, O.G. Howland took Powell aside and tried to persuade him that it would be madness to continue on the river. Powell tried to convince Howland otherwise. The following morning the two groups separated. The Howland brothers and Dunn began climbed out of the canyon, and Powell's remaining men set out to battle the formidable rapids.

Seneca Howland

(May 9, 1843 –1869). Born in Vermont, like his brother. He was military trained and was in the Army in the Civil War. Seneca and O.G. were the last of the men to join the expedition. He joined at the urge of his older brother. Seneca was aboard the “No Name” when it turned over. He left with William Dunn and his brother and was never seen after. Powell named Howlands Butte in the Grand Canyon after the brothers.



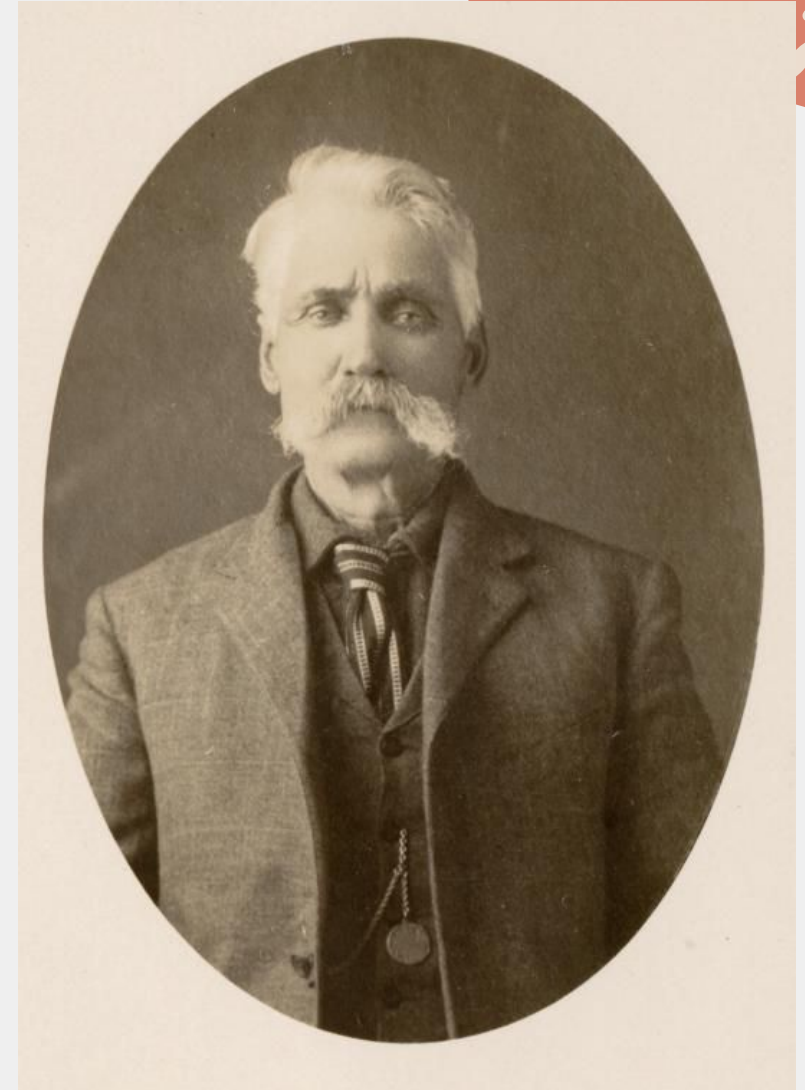
Frank Goodman



Goodman was a young Englishman searching the States for adventure. He offered to pay Powell to join the expedition. He had no skills or training that would help the men on their journey but joined regardless. He left the expedition on July 6th after rapids had claimed the "No Name" and most of their provisions. Goodman simply walked up to Major Powell and said, "I've had more excitement than a man deserves in a lifetime. I'm leaving." He then walked away toward a settlement. Goodman ended up hanging for many years with a bunch of Paiute Indians in Eastern Utah before settling in Vernal, Utah, and raised a family.

William R. Hawkins

He was born in 1841 in Missouri. He was one of the mountaineers Powell met at Sumner's outfitting shack in 1868. He went by many nicknames like Billy Rhodes and "Missouri". He had a run in with the law. He was uneasy at the approach of a sheriff and otherwise acted suspiciously. After the expedition he took up farming and ranching in Graham County, Arizona and died June 21, 1919.



Andrew Hall



Andy Hall was the youngest of the 10 men at just 18 years old. After the expedition, He became a Wells Fargo shotgun messenger who died in the line of duty. In 1882, Hall escorted a \$5,000 payroll for a local mine, two robbers opened fire on him. He was wounded in the leg, took cover behind some boulders, never getting a good look at his attackers. Hall bandaged his wound and began to follow the trail of the robbers. He limped over to them and fired his Colt revolver at the robbers. They fired back at him and shot him multiple times. One of the robbers fired one final fatal shot and he died on August 20, 1882

05-Fun!



Separation Rapid



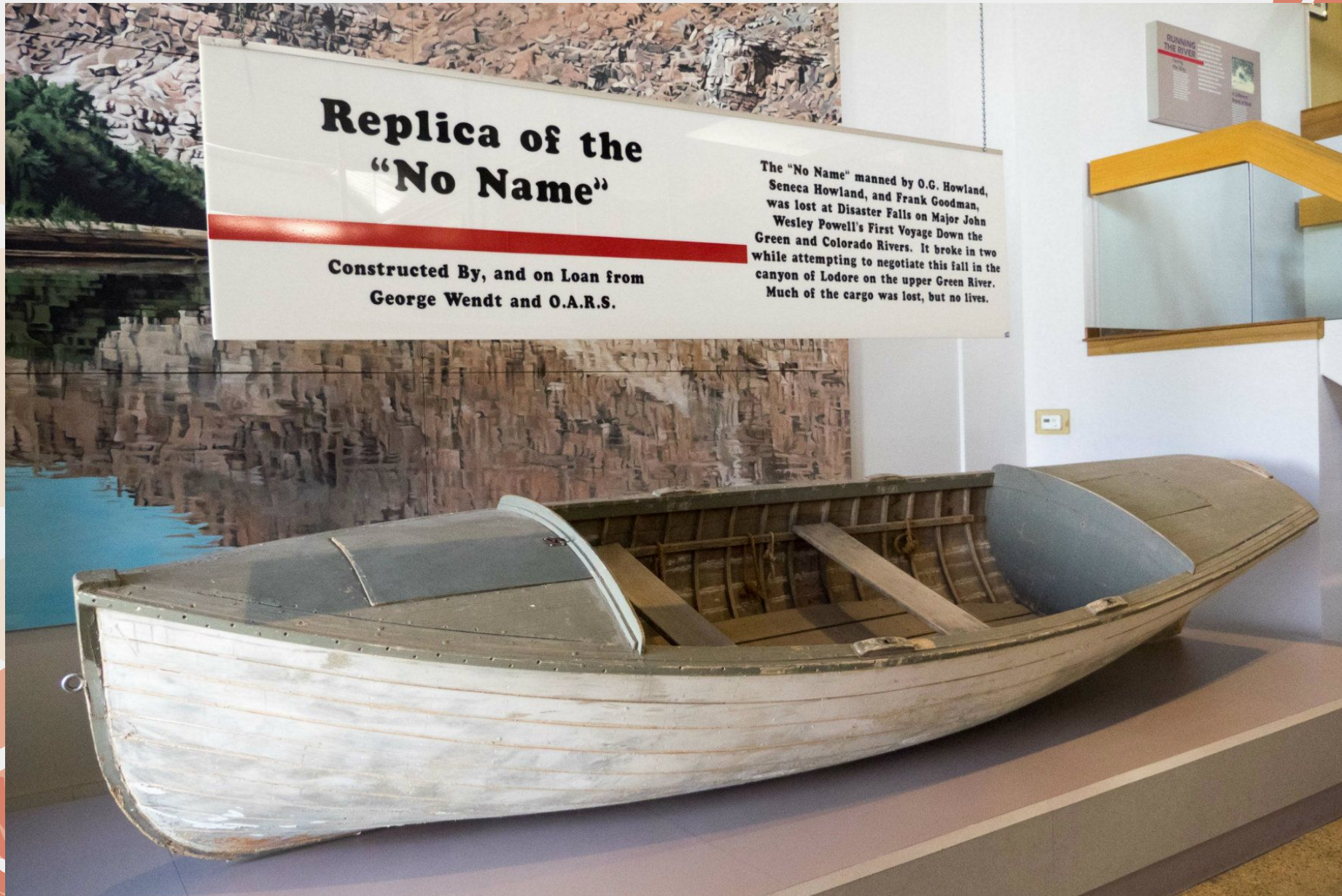
Knife's Point

Fun Facts!

- Dramatized in 1960 by Disney in a film called *Ten Who Dared* and also a graphic novel called “Major Impossible” by Nathan Hale.
- OG and Seneca were half brothers, sharing a father.
- The “No Name” split in two when it was turned over.
- When Bradley saves Powell with his pants, historically it has been rumored to be underwear instead.



What the boats looked like...





"Dittys for Old Shady"

-Long Long Ago (1833)

Tyler and the Tippecanoe (1840)

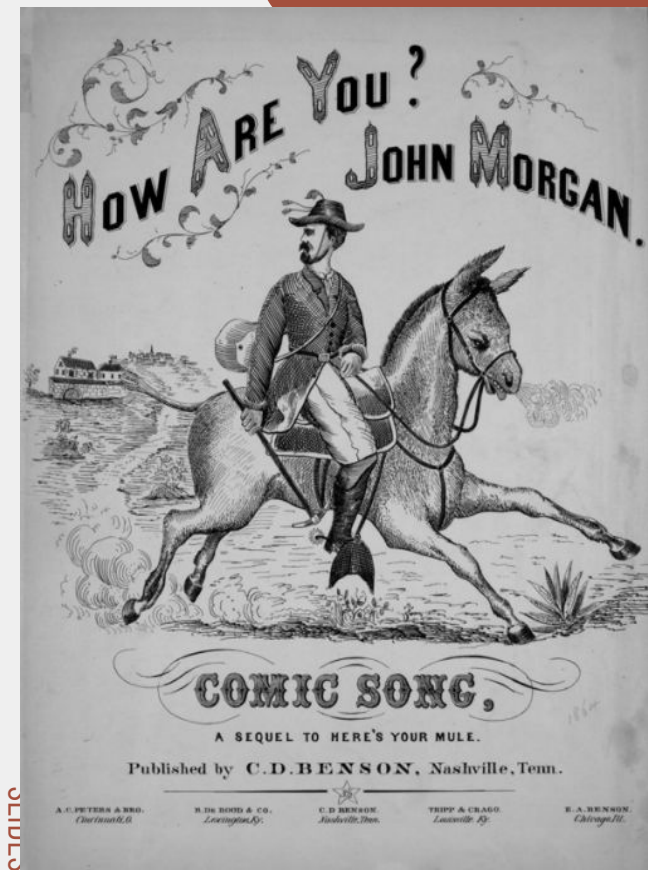
-De Boatman's Dance (1843)

-Old Dan Tucker (1843)

-Old Arm Chair (18??)

-Old Shady (1833-1867)

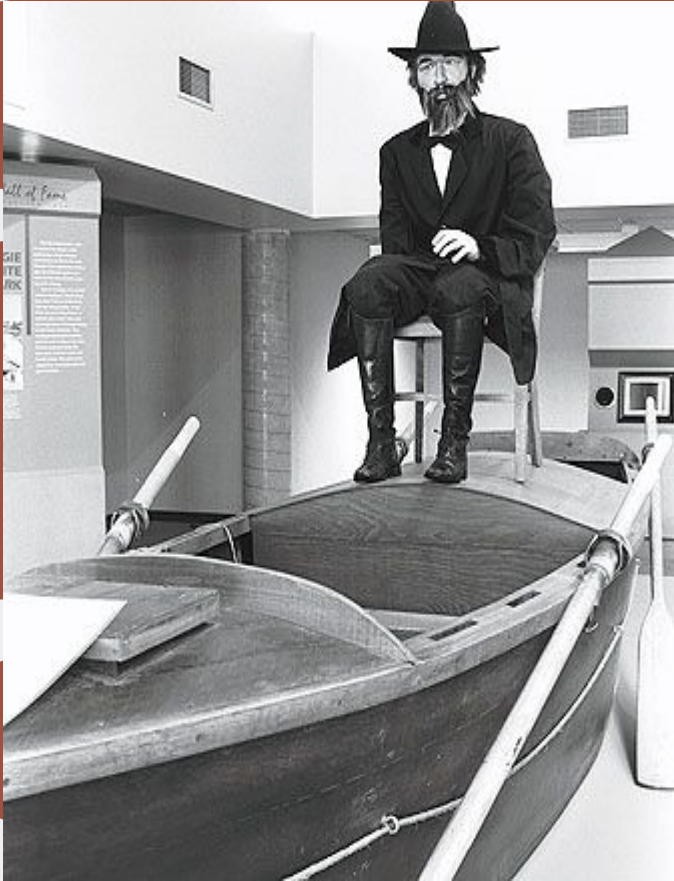
-Life on an Ocean Wave (1838)



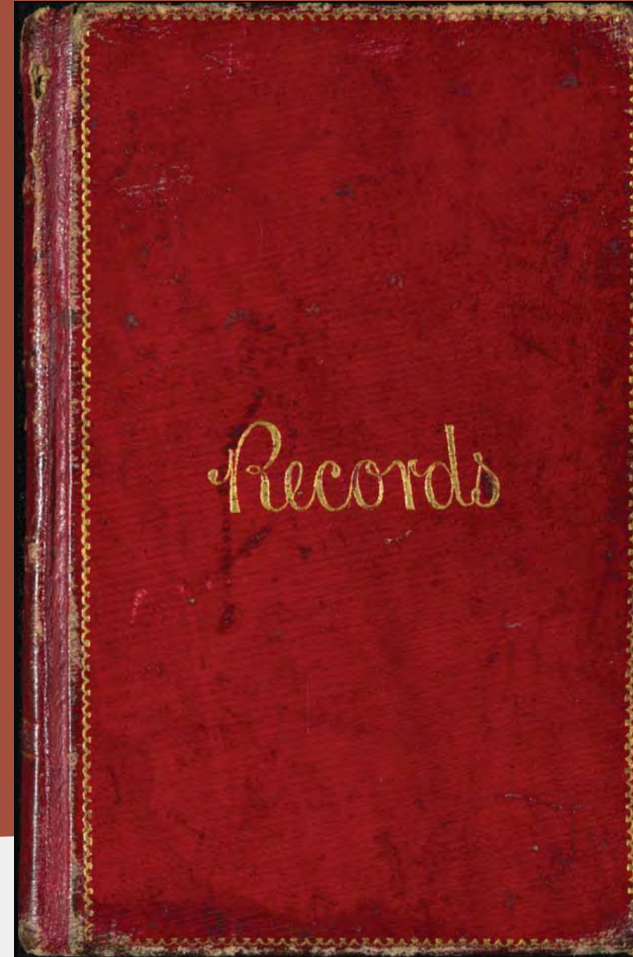
Old Shady is a singer at heart! We see him sing songs throughout the show to bring the crew together. This playlist reflects the type of songs Old Shady may have sung back in his days of the army.



Additional Artifacts



A Depiction of How Powell rode atop the Small Boat As The Expedition Navigated Rough, Uncharted Waters



John Wesley Powell's Journal
([Click for PDF](#))

Videos

In Process: Jaclyn Backhaus



Ute Tribe Bear Dance



Grand Canyon Rafting
(sourced by Clara Chahine)





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