of the opposition of the Fulton-Livingston monopoly. ""The era of the steamboat had arrived at last..." (p.153), despite the achievements of the Fulton boats Aetna, Vesuvius, and the second New Orleans. The anti-Fulton bias of the book is apparent, and there is little understanding of the economics of costs and profits of the lower river system.

Shreve's "persistence" in defying the Fulton-Livingston monopoly led to the opening of the lower Mississippi. Having moved to Louisville, Shreve was named superintendent of western improvements from 1827 until 1841. Three chapters deal with his development of an effective steam snagboat for clearing the major western rivers, particularly the removal of the Red River "raft." After retirement he lived on a plantation near St. Louis until his death in 1851.

While Shreve played a major, and vital, role in the development of steam transportation on the western waters, he was not, as McCall asserts, the "father of the Mississippi Steamboat" (p.250). That evolved over decades to its culmination in the floating palaces of the 1850s, and cannot be attributed to the work of any single individual.

The book includes a bibliography, index, and twelve pages of photographs and illustrations.

John Kent Folmar
Department of History and Urban Affairs
California University of Pennsylvania
California, Pennsylvania


A bonanza for any research historian is usually the discovery of a documentary source — a diary or a bunch of letters in an old trunk — which might inject new meaning into some past event. The diary of Bernard J. Reid, found only a few years ago, is such a find. Overland to California with the Pioneer Line: The Gold Rush Diary of Bernard J. Reid, the story of Reid’s journey to California, provides a rich and personal account of one of America’s unforgettable sagas — the gold rush of 1849.

Reid’s diary, edited by Mary McDougall Gordon, is the story of the Pioneer Line, the first commercial wagon train to make the long trek
from Independence, Missouri, to Sacramento City, California. The Pioneer Line was a profit-making enterprise. Its success lay in its ability to transport men seeking fortune to the goldfields faster than anyone else. Passengers, with unbridled enthusiasm and optimism, came from all parts of the Union to share in the overland experience. Theirs was to be a dream come true. Instead, their days were spent in pain, loneliness, and tragedy. The diary is also a chronicle of hardships, broken hopes, and failures. Death stalked the trail. Of the approximately 170 men who had started in mid-May, only eight pioneers, including Reid, made it to the Pioneer Line destination of San Francisco. The journey had taken 160 days.

The diary adds to our understanding of those pioneers who braved the unbelievable trip across the wastelands of America. Strong fraternal bonds developed among men who shared a common fear of the unknown. Though their origins and backgrounds were unlike, the Pioneer Line passengers clung together to keep their spirits alive. Survival was the name of the game. A social unity was formed — one in which self-government was sometimes exercised, much to the displeasure of the company’s representatives. For, in addition to the commonplace disasters which plagued any wagon train, poor planning on this particular trip by those in charge added to delay, misery, and fatalities. Despite the overwhelming odds against them, however, the passengers never forgot their institutional heritage.

Reid writes well. A man of learning, he is able to communicate his feeling and those of others better than the average forty-niner. The reader catches more than just a glimpse of the country through which the Pioneer Line wagons rolled. As an adventurer on a scientific mission, Reid vividly describes the topography, foliage, and natural phenomena. Often he appears more interested in relating his perceptions of nature’s wonders than he is in pondering what calamities the next day might bring. Emotion and bitterness do not distort his impressions; he remains cool, seemingly passive and undisturbed by the crushing events of the day. He writes with detachment, whether he is telling how he cared for a man dying of scurvy or portraying the scenic beauty of the Sierra Nevada. Never does defeatism intrude upon the storytelling. Reid personifies the daring attributes and robust faith of all those who, once reaching the Great Divide, refused to look back to the tidy civilization they once knew.

Mary McDougall Gordon has done a fine scholarly job in presenting Reid’s recollections to an audience that never tires of reading about one of history’s most thrilling episodes. She has edited the diary with ample setting. One of the more useful aids is a series of maps that
clearly indicate the exact route the Pioneer Line followed. If there is any criticism of this excellent book, it is that the diary is crowded by excessive editorial commentary and supporting material — an introduction, editor’s afterword, biographical information on the men mentioned in the text, graves recorded, notes, bibliography, and index. One wonders whether some of this material could have been consolidated, shortened, or eliminated. The diary seems strong enough to stand without so much editorial support.

Aside from this, Overland to California with the Pioneer Line stands out as a remarkable addition to a growing list of documentary sources on the American West.

Robert D. Ilisevich  
Department of History  
Alliance College  
Cambridge Springs, Pennsylvania

Skibo. By Joseph Frazier Wall.


The name of Andrew Carnegie is still impressive, as is evidenced by the fact that this history of an otherwise rather undistinguished Scottish castle (though by a well-known author) is published by a very prestigious press.

Skibo (a name perhaps derived from Schytherbolle — fairy place — the name it bore when first recorded in 1225) has a long history. Excavations show the area was occupied early by Picts, and perhaps almost a millennium ago by Norsemen, who may have called it ski-bo, place of ships. They may have had a castle there upon whose ruins Gilbert de Moravia may have had the castle Schytherbolle built as his home about seven and a half centuries ago.

In 1222 Gilbert was named bishop of Caithness, and he erected a cathedral at Dornoch, on the ruins of an old Culdee church. Following his death in 1245 he was canonized by Rome, and for three hundred more years Skibo Castle continued as the residence of the bishops until it was deeded to John Gray, whose family occupied it for two more centuries. Following this time it changed hands rather frequently except for the Dempster family’s ninety-one years, often because its owners were in financial difficulties. Charles Sutherland-Walker razed and rebuilt Skibo in 1872 and went bankrupt. Its relative obscurity is