“William H. Ashley’s Newly Discovered 1826 Fur Trade Journal.”

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William H. Ashley's Newly Discovered 1826 Fur Trade Journal

by Dr. Jay H. Buckley

Fur trade historians have longed for more documentation to answer questions relating to the fur trade in 1826. That year marked William Ashley's last foray (and Robert Campbell's inaugural venture) into the Rockies. Fortunately, a missing piece of that puzzle has now been found in the form of an 1826 diary and rendezvous business record that provides some answers while simultaneously raising a few additional questions. The full diary, reproduced with transcription, follows this article.

Provenance and authorship

A collection of Robert Campbell materials surfaced in 1999. A gentleman named Karl Deibel from California contacted the Campbell House Museum, the beautifully restored Victorian house located at 1508 Locust Street in St. Louis, where Robert and his wife Virginia lived during the mid-nineteenth century. Deibel had grown up in St. Louis in the 1930s and 1940s and began a life-long hobby of stamp collecting. During this period, his mother Miriam Deibel worked as a secretary for lawyer Arthur Shepley in the law offices of Shepley, Kroeger, Fisse and Shepley. This firm had contracted to conduct the legal affairs of the Hazlett Campbell estate beginning in 1938. Hazlett was Robert and Virginia's last surviving son. In preparing the estate, the firm's employees evaluated and discarded numerous Campbell letters and writings they deemed "worthless." Karl Deibel's mother Miriam collected some of these discarded documents from the trash in order to give the stamps to her son. Ironically, many of those letters were so old they bore no postage stamps, only hand-stamped postmarks. Nevertheless, Karl Deibel safeguarded these letters for more than 50 years before donating them to the Campbell House in 1999.

In 2005, Karl Deibel contacted the Campbell House Museum staff again and informed them that while examining the estate of his mother's sister Edwina Smith, he found a large envelope marked "Campbell Diary" with the return address of Shepley, Kroeger, Fisse and Shepley, and containing an 1826 diary of unknown authorship that chronicled a journey to the Rocky Mountains. It is unknown how Mr. Deibel's aunt acquired the diary. It is presumed she got it from her sister and it came from the same group of papers the law firm had discarded as "worthless." This 1826 journal was definitely part of the Campbell family collection and was stored at Campbell's house until 1938 when it was removed with all the other papers. Regrettably, a number of other historically significant Campbell papers and records were no doubt lost at this time. Fortunately, Edwina Smith donated this small notebook to the museum.

Entries for April 7 - 8, 1826, are accompanied by a map sketching Ashley's trail up the Kansas River and crossing the Republican Fork. Notations indicate Kansas Indian villages, "Hills," and "Camps" the party's campsites. Ashley's direction of travel was westerly, thus the right side of the page is north.

CAMPBELL HOUSE MUSEUM, ST. LOUIS, MO
The 1826 notebook is relatively small, measuring six inches tall by four inches wide. It comprises 116 unnumbered individual pages including the inside covers. Page numbers, assigned solely for the purposes of this article, begin after the inside front cover with page 1. Ten blank pages occur between pages 27 and 28; twelve blank pages occur between pages 65 and 66. The blank pages are not reproduced in this volume and so were not assigned page numbers. Pages in the latter portion of the book are oriented upside-down. Clerks were known to turn a ledger book over in this way to start a new accounting, thus notations in this section likely reflect rendezvous purchases that occurred some months later.

The book is inscribed in both ink and pencil. Some of the pages contain writings and numeric figures. In a steady hand. Several pages are faded and barely legible. Others bear field sketches of campsites and other geographical features. The notebook comprises herefore unknown business records outlining the 1826 voyage, account records from the 1826 rendezvous, and a narrative section sandwiched between. The entire book pertains to the William Ashley-Jedediah Smith Company for whom Campbell clerked.

The narrative portion (pages 11-65) begins Monday, March 27, and continues through Friday, June 2, 1826. The first entry chronicles the exodus of the party leaving the mouth of the Kansas River near modern-day Kansas City. Interspersed between the narrative pages are sketches the author made of river systems, campsites, topography and other points of interest. The narrative ends when all of the parties have arrived at today's Devil's Gate, near Independence Rock in central Wyoming. Bivouacked in preparation to cross South Pass, their destination is the rendezvous at Cache Valley, Utah. The remainder of the diary records purchases made prior, in preparation for the overland journey (pages 1-10), and an accounting of goods sold later, at the 1826 rendezvous (pages 67-91).

Curiously, this journal attributed to Campbell - since it was in Campbell's collection and packaged as an envelope labeled "Campbell's Diary" - seems to have been written by Campbell's employer, William H. Ashley. An analysis of the handwriting by Sean Lynch, who specializes in the forensic examination of documents and comparable handwriting, revealed conclusive evidence the diary was in Ashley's hand. Lynch examined three pages from the 1826 diary, and compared them to known Ashley and Campbell handwriting samples. After conducting his forensic document examination, Lynch concluded beyond doubt that the 1826 diary was written by William Ashley and not Robert Campbell. The diary excerpts show significant handwriting similarities and no significant handwriting differences between the handwriting attributed to Ashley. [Similarities included] letter and word construction, slope, alignment, relative height of letters, spacing of letters and general writing habits.

Moreover, Lynch found "differences and no significant similarities between the handwriting attributed to R. Campbell" and the 1826 diary pages. There was, in Lynch's expert opinion, no handwriting evidence to support the preposition that the author of the handwriting attributed to R. Campbell is the author of the handwriting [in the 1826 diary].

The possibility remains that it may also represent a composite company ledger with additional notations by Campbell or another unknown author. In addition to the handwriting analysis, an earlier confirmed Ashley diary with similar qualities supports Ashley as the author of the 1826 journal. In 1825, Ashley kept a diary from March 25 to June 27 (about the same season as the 1826 journal), this one commencing on the North Platte near Independence Rock and chronicling his journey across the pass, down the Green River, explorations of some tributaries, and activity at the Henry's Fork Rendezvous. Interestingly, Ashley's 1825 diary contains an inscription inside the front cover that reads: "Diary of William Sublette obtained from Mr. Thomas Biddy June 18th 1833." For many years this was thought to be Sublette's diary but it was, in fact, Ashley's.

The blank book that became Ashley's 1826 journal was likely bought to record company purchases of animals and supplies at St. Louis and Franklin. As will be seen, Ashley was making preparations to come to the aid of Smith and Campbell, who had become stranded, as well as acquiring merchandise to sell at the upcoming summer rendezvous. The narrative portion of Ashley's diary begins at the confluence of the Kansas and Missouri rivers and ends near Independence Rock, connecting this record geographically with the record he wrote the previous year. In his 1825 diary, Ashley drew maps of the course of the Green River, and his 1826 diary likewise contains numerous drawings of river courses, landmarks and campsites locations. Moreover, the 1825 and 1826 records are similar in that they include a field diary narrative, rendezvous inventories and business records. All available evidence, combined with the overwhelming handwriting analysis, points to William H. Ashley as the author of this 1826 journal.

Inconsistencies in the diary do raise unanswered questions. In the individual dates within his journal, Ashley's 1825 journal shows the day of the week and the number (Thursday the 27th), whereas the 1826 journal consistently shows the month and the day without noting any days of the week (March 27th). Moreover, in at least two places in the business record segments (purchasing supplies before the journey and at the 1826 rendezvous), Ashley's name is listed among many others in the record-keeping. It is unclear why Ashley would insert his name among the others, perhaps a clerk (e.g., Campbell) or someone else added to the company ledger. The most curious to Ashley's claim as sole author is the provenance. The journal was found in Campbell's estate documents in an envelope labeled (perhaps mislabeled) as "Campbell's Diary." Possibly Ashley gave it to Campbell to assure that Smith, Jackson & Sublette (JJS&S) had an accurate record of the rendezvous accounts and could fulfill its obligations. Or, since Ashley had no living children, after Ashley died in 1838, Campbell may have acquired Ashley's 1826 diary and Sublette may have acquired Ashley's 1825 diary as mementos. Because the 1826 diary paralleled Campbell's first journey to the Rockies, it would have had sentimental value and been kept in the family estate. Further, Campbell's 1870 "Narrative" states he was with Smith in the Pawnee Villages at the time the 1826 journal would have begun. Campbell and Smith subsequently met Ashley near Grand Island, Nebraska, making it unlikely that Campbell wrote the 1826 diary.

Whether the 1826 journal was written entirely by Ashley, or perhaps contains additions by Campbell or another unknown author, it is one of the most exciting recent discoveries of documents pertaining to the 1820s for trade. Historian Dale Morgan's assertion that there is "no detailed narrative of Ashley's journey" in the spring of 1826 can now be corrected. Harrison Dale's account of the 1826 Ashley-Smith journey can be updated, as can Richard M. Clokey's account of Ashley's 1826 journey. This 1826 journal represents Ashley's last journey to the Rockies, and Campbell's initiation into the fur trade. It is significant because it chronicles a portion of the 1825-26 expeditions led...
by William H. Ashley, Jedediah Smith and Robert Campbell en route to the 1826 Willow/Cache Valley Rendezvous.

The journal represents one of the first east-to-west diaries recording formative events in the expansion of the West, and describing a section of the route of the great fur trade road - from the confluence of the Kansas and Missouri rivers to South Pass - known fifteen years later by a more famous moniker: the Oregon Trail.

Ashley's 1826 route and the Cache Valley Rendezvous

William H. Ashley had implemented a system that relied upon trappers who lived in the mountains year-round to trap beaver rather than acquiring pelts strictly through trade with Indians. A year after Jedediah Smith rediscovered the South Pass across the Rockies in 1824 (returning Astorian Robert Stuart had found it a dozen years earlier), Ashley held a small rendezvous on Henry's Fork of the Green River on July 1, 1825. Ashley collected 8,829 pounds of beaver fur, worth around $50,000, at the 1825 Henry's Fork Rendezvous, which provided him with the capital to reinvest the following year. He also formed a new partnership with Jedediah Smith, who took the place of the retiring James Henry. Shortly upon his return to St. Louis, Ashley hired Campbell as a field clerk.

On October 26, 1825, just days before Smith and Campbell headed for the Rockies, Ashley married Eliza Christy, his second wife (Ashley's first wife, Mary Abbe, had died in 1821). According to trapper Jim Beckworth, the general wanted to stay in St. Louis, feeling "some reluctance to tear himself away from the delights of Hymen." The quiet lifestyle that Ashley must have anticipated would be shattered by "imperative necessity" in less than six months.

Campbell left St. Louis on November 1, 1825, with Smith and a 60-man crew, along with 160 horses and pack mules and an outfit worth $20,000. Their party included Jim Beckworth, Louis Vasquez, Moses "Black" Harris, Hirom Scott, Albert Boone, and others. Following the Missouri River, they crossed the Kansas near its mouth, bought provisions at the Curtis & Eley post, and traveled along the north bank of the Kansas. On New Year's Day, 1826, the group arrived at Fort Riley, where the Smoky Hill and Republican rivers join to form the Kansas.

Campbell and Smith wintered together on the Republican River at the Pawnee village. When they arrived, the Indians were away on a buffalo hunt. Chief Isakatapp and his people returned home to find an uninvited house guest who had emptied the larder. Wisely, Smith and Campbell repaid Isakatapp for the food they had consumed, impressing him so much that he invited the two of them to live in his lodge as his guests. Over the next few months, Campbell formed lasting friendships with both Smith and Chief Isakatapp. Nevertheless, a harsh winter and lack of sufficient preparation and supplies compelled Smith to send someone back to Franklin and St. Louis to alert Ashley of their difficulties and to purchase more mules and provisions.

Campbell stayed at the Pawnee Villages with Smith, who apparently selected men to return to St. Louis and contact Ashley. Upon starting upriver on his resupply mission, Ashley would use the blank record book to chronicle his expenses, serve as a personal diary of his overland journey, and keep an account of rendezvous transactions. Ashley's party left St. Louis headed west on March 8 and arrived in Franklin, Missouri, a week later, where it acquired more horses and mules at this eastern terminus of the Santa Fe Trail.

After acquiring the mules and supplies, Ashley recorded the first journal entry of his westward journey: "Left the Kansas River 12 miles from its mouth." This was likely written on Monday, March 27, though it is not dated. The journal's author included further description of the men in the party and their leader, the author's identity would be more clear.

In any case, Ashley's party of 26 men quickly set its sights on the junction of the Kansas and Blue rivers - the first rest stop on its outbound journey. The men moved west along the Kansas River and, after several days of travel, arrived at the Kaw (Kansa) village at 3 p.m. on April 2. Since Ashley approximated mileage in this record, known locations such as this village and river junctions are useful landmarks when trying to retrace the route. After trading with the Kaws and supplying himself "with corn & dry meat from the Indians," the party proceeded up the Blue and Little Blue rivers toward the Pawnee Village near the Republican River.

The journey up the Blue to the Republican River in southern Nebraska was uneventful except that it was marked by extremely cold and stormy weather. One of the curious parts of Ashley's diary is the inclusion of two temperature readings, one recorded on April 9 as "2 A.Z." Since thermometers of the time used the Fahrenheit scale, perhaps this meant "Above Zero" or "At Zenith," (noon), indicating an unseasonably cold day with a high of only two degrees Fahrenheit. In the early afternoon of April 11, Ashley's party arrived at the Pawnee Village along the south bank of the Republican River. Near present-day Red Cloud, Nebraska, this site is about 50 miles south of the Platte River and fifty miles northwest of today's Concordia, Kansas. Ashley had expected to find Smith and his men here, where they had wintered, but the party had moved north and encamped at Grand Island on the Platte.

After camping that night, Ashley's group traveled north for two more days before arriving at the Platte River "about Fifty miles below the forks" of the North and South Platte. At this point in the book, between the April 14 and April 24 entries, three pages appear to have been torn out, suggesting entries could be missing, although the text seems to flow without interruption (three instances of missing pages are noted in the transcript; no interruption in the text.
is evident. The ten-day gap may reflect the time Ashley spent waiting for scouts to find the Smith/Campbell party.

Ashley waited for a little over a week east of the forks and about ninety miles west of Grand Island. Then he proceeded downriver to the east and "brought up the party of Mr. Smith" on April 24. In Campbell's decades-old recollection of this reunion, he wrote: "We followed up the Republican Fork from the Pawnee village to the Platte. We suffered great privations until joined by General Ashley from St. Louis. He overtook us at Grand Island on the Platte about the first of April with supplies."26

Once they joined forces on the Platte River, Ashley sent Smith and Harris ahead to arrange where the rendezvous would be held. It is likely that, as Smith's clerk, Campbell assumed leadership of Smith's group when Smith left. At this point, Ashley started keeping more detailed journal entries, usually accompanied by drawings or sketches of the river systems and country-side, indicating that his journaling may have been part of a larger effort to map out the most feasible route from Kansas City to Independence Rock, from whence supply caravans such as theirs could proceed on to rendezvous in the central Rockies.27

Spring comes neither easily nor early to the central high plains and the ensemble faced blinding snowstorms. On April 26 they killed a buffalo, noteworthy as the only good news recorded for the day. Their good humor was short-lived, however, since the next day brought a "dreadful storm" that required a full day of recovery. Ashley's and Campbell's "two parties camped together" on April 30, indicating that the camps generally traveled separately and usually camped apart.28

On May 1, another "dreadful storm" stopped Ashley cold at the forks of the Platte River near present-day North Platte, Nebraska. For three days he encamped in order "to dry goods & make some arrangements of packs." The party "killed two Buffalows" and continued its western journey along the North Platte River. Ashley noted the high quality of forage available for the livestock.
After killing two bison cows on Sunday, May 7, the party traveled west along the North Platte. Inexplicably, there is a gap in the journal from May 9-13, one of the few significant instances in this narrative in which more than a day or two passes without comment or description.28

Beginning May 14 and extending to the end of the narrative on June 2, the journal takes on its highest level of detail. One of the reasons for this greater focus may have been the company's failed 1825 trek. Ashley's first supply train had traveled up the Platte River's South Fork to Cache la Pondre (near Fort Collins, Colorado) and thence north into Wyoming and west to the Green River. Now, Ashley's second supply train was blazing a new route along the North Platte River.30

Ashley highlighted points of reference like sand hills and river confluences along the route, estimated distances, and also noted resources such as game animals, wood, water and forage for livestock. Location of landmarks through written description and roughly-drawn field maps would be sufficient for his journal to be useful later to himself or others in the company.

On May 15, Ashley encountered what would become a famous landmark along the Oregon Trail, noting "a curious shaped Rock," probably Chimney Rock or Courthouse Rock. Ashley's party was traveling 10 to 15 miles a day and the pace took its toll on men and beasts. A May 17 entry recounted: "We remain at this camp to make ropes & recruit the sick & weary." Another May 17 entry, likely written on May 19 in an effort to catch up, explained that "One of my men, Mr. Davis shot himself and detained the party at this camp until the 19th." This may signal unspoken difficulties in the days leading up to May 17 and may provide insight into the gap of the previous week.31

Near present-day Torrington, Wyoming, on May 20, Ashley recorded the "great appearance of war parties of Indians." These war parties, probably evidenced by signs rather than sightings, were likely Lakota, Cheyenne, or Arapaho who frequented the area. Yet the entry marks one of the few mentions of Indians in the journal.

Ashley's and Campbell's parties continued traveling along the North Platte. On May 23, Ashley's group took an ill-advised detour, traveling "over very rough mountains," that he acknowledged was a mistake, lamenting "I should have traveled NW after crossing the first mountain yesterday which would probably taken me a good west & south." The good news was that Ashley, via the detour, found a great place to camp near the confluence of the Lannie and North Platte rivers. The prime location had plenty of water and forage, and was near wooded river bottoms as well as pine trees. Eight years later in 1834, Robert Campbell and his partner William Sublette would use this geographical knowledge to construct Fort William (Laramie) near that spot.32

The last two weeks of entrins chronicle Ashley's travels "near the river west over a beautiful country." This use of positive descriptors signaled a change in mood of the party, a genuine appreciation for the landscape, and the anticipation the men felt as they approached their destination in the Rocky Mountains. After passing Casper Mountain, they followed the North Platte as it curved to the southwest, before striking the "fork called Sweetwater" and continuing on to Independence Rock. Ashley concluded the narrative portion of his diary on Friday, June 2, 1826, with the reminder: "all these mountains should be left to the left for the best route."33

The 1826 narrative of the westbound journey ends before the men cross South Pass. The remainder of the diary is filled with ledger notes from the 1826 rendezvous at Cache Valley. The business records resemble Ashley's 1825 rendezvous inventory and Campbell will annote Ashley's counting methods in his own 1832 rendezvous ledgers. Ashley's ledger notations list horses and mules, trading goods and accounts paid and received. Included are ferry expenses, blacksmith's bills, "cash paid man" and purchases of saddles, tobacco, etc. These ledgers also show the infamous "Rocky Mountain Markup" on goods, including, for example, selling four dollar blankets for seven to nine dollars (depending on quality), which would presumably cover overhead, transportation costs, and a notable profit.34

Campbell spent several weeks helping Ashley and Smith exchange goods for furs at the 1826 rendezvous, and he recorded the sale of Ashley's fur interests to Smith, Jackson & Sublette in the "Articles of Agreement between William Ashley and Jedidiah Smith, David B. Jackson and William L. Sublette," on July 18, 1826 [see John C. Jackson's article, page 87 in this volume]. The new firm would retain Campbell as clerk, and desiring him to learn the trapping portion of the trade, would send him out with men like Jim Bridges, Daniel Potts and James Glymaa to trap the Bear River, the Jackson Hole and Yellowstone Region, and other streams of eastern Utah, southeast Idaho and northwest Wyoming. The next year, Campbell's successful training earned him a coveted spot as a brigade leader escorting a contingent of trappers into Flathead (Salish) country. Within a few years, he and William Sublette would partner to supply the rendezvous, thus assuring Campbell's role and influence in the Rocky Mountain fur trade.35

By the end of September 1826, Ashley had arrived back in St. Louis, where he arranged the sale of his furs and returned home to Eliza Christy. Newspaper editor Charles Kemble of the Missouri Herald and St. Louis Advertiser published an extensive write-up on November 8:

The recent expedition of General Ashley to the country west of the Rocky Mountains ... has proved, that overland expeditions in large bodies may be made to that remote region without the necessity of transporting provisions for man or beast ... His return march to St. Louis occupied about seventy days, each male and horse [around 100] carrying two hundred pounds of beaver fur ... Wagons and carriages could go with ease as far as General Ashley went, crossing the Rocky Mountains at the sources of the North fork of the Platte, and descending the valley of the Buenaventura [Green River] towards the Pacific Ocean.36

Ashley entered public life with the same drive he had applied to the fur trade, and his political career resembled a similar roller coaster ride. Having served as Missouri's Lieutenant Governor from 1820-24, Ashley lost the 1824 gubernatorial election. Despite personal, political and economic setbacks, Ashley's involvement in the Rocky Mountain fur trade brought him significant fame and fortune. After retreating from the mountains, Ashley ensured he remained the sole rendezvous supplier and marketing agent for S&J, a financially astute measure that served him well. In 1831 opportunity smiled upon him again when he was asked to complete the term of Congressman Spencer D. Pettit, who had been killed in a duel. Ashley married for a third time, to Elizabeth Moss Wilcox, in 1832 (his second wife Eliza Christy had died in 1830).

In 1832 and 1834 Missourians elected Ashley to continue representing their interests in Congress. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1831-37. Ashley advocated policies favorable to Western development, but ran afoul of Jackson's Democratic Party by supporting measures counter to Jacksonian principles. Ashley favored the Whig platform of a federal system of national roads and improved waterways, a high protective tariff and the controversial re-chartering of the Second Bank of the United States (Ashley was a director of
the St. Louis branch). No doubt his failure to toe the party line cost Ashley his second bid to become Missouri’s governor in 1836 when Democrats voted for Lilburn Boggs by a wide margin. Ashley died of pneumonia a few years later near Boonville, Missouri, on March 26, 1838, and his body was interred in an Indian mound near his home on the Lamine River in Cooper County overlooking the Missouri River.

Ashley’s 1826 journal, with its narrative, field notes and maps, represents one of the first written records of the Oregon Trail route through Kansas, Nebraska and Wyoming. Thereafter, this route became the standard one to and from the annual fur trade rendezvous. The trail that Ashley, Smith and Campbell traversed from east to west was retraced from west to east in February 1827 when William Sublette and Moses “Black” Harris hurried to St. Louis to meet Ashley before March 1, 1827 — the deadline Ashley had given them at the 1826 rendezvous as the last day he would honor the contract of SJ&S to purchase goods for that summer’s rendezvous. Sublette and Harris took a few shortcuts to save time, arriving in St. Louis three days too late. Unbeknownst, Ashley honored their agreement anyway and sold them supplies. Sublette, Harris and their caravan left St. Louis in late March loaded with merchandise for the 1827 Bear Lake Rendezvous. They hitched up a 4-pound artillery piece on a carriage drawn by two mules, the first wheeled vehicle to cross South Pass, helping to prove that wagons could safely travel the great fur trade road from Kansas City across the Rocky Mountains. Sublette’s route through Kansas followed portions of the route blazed by Smith and Campbell in November 1825 and chronicled in Ashley’s 1826 journal. But, instead of being named for the earlier trio, this shorter cutoff became known as “Sublette’s Trace,” the well-used path of the mountain men thereafter and the future route of the Oregon Trail.

Dale Morgan, in passages that eerily parallel the discovery of Ashley’s 1826 journal, wrote:

The events that started Ashley off to the Rockies in March, 1826, make up a tale that has waited long to be told. It is a stroke of fortune that we are thus able to piece out the story, for Ashley never said much about this expedition than that he had ‘marched parties of men the whole way from St. Louis to the vicinity of the Grand lake ... in 78 days.”

Perhaps Ashley wrote little elsewhere about his 1826 mission because he had already recorded what he wished to remember in the small book he had carried with him. It is hoped that this newly-discovered document will spark additional research into the early Rocky Mountain fur trade. Identifying the men listed in the journal, for example, would tell more about who was on this expedition. Comparing details in how Ashley constructed the ledger contained in the 1826 diary with those in his 1825 records may also shed new light on business transactions at the eastern section of the trail.

Ashley’s 1826 journal chronicled his last trip into the Rockies. It represents one of the few written accounts of the inner workings of the Rocky Mountain fur trade near the time of its inception. It unveils Ashley’s (and, to a lesser extent, Smith and Campbell’s) role in helping to blaze the trail that formed the eastern section of the exissant trails, highlights the trio’s ability to befriend and lead men, and provides insight into the business side of the fur trade. Further, the book identifies the location of the future Fort Laramie, and suggests the excellent training Ashley provided his partner Smith and his clerk Campbell. In a single journey, Campbell proved himself as a leader and demonstrated his ability to trade with Indians and mountain men. This may have convinced Smith, Jackson and Sublette to advance Campbell from Ashley’s field clerk in late 1825 to a trapping brigade leader for SJ&S by the fall of 1826.

By 1832, Campbell and Sublette would form a partnership to supply the Missouri Fur Company’s rendezvous, and would construct forts along the upper Missouri to directly challenge the hegemony of the American Fur Company monopoly controlled by John Jacob Astor, Joshua Pilcher and the powerful Cheyenne chief. Sublette and Campbell’s Fort William on the Laramie, which they sold a few years later, became a significant stop on the overland trails. Now, thanks to the discovery of William Ashley’s 1826 journal, an admiring public knows more intimately the origins of Robert Campbell’s initiative into the fur business and the culmination of Ashley’s remarkable fur trade career.

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NOTES


2. I am grateful to Brigham Young University students Aaron Coburn, Beul Hinton and Joseph H. Le Bel for their research assistance. My mentor and friend Fred K. Gowan provided helpful insights, as did Al McFarland, a researcher and Northern Ireland-based collateral descendant of Robert Campbell, Thomas Gunther, and three anonymous peer reviewers. I am also indebted to Jim Hurley, the board of editorial advisers, and the staff of the RMFTJ for publishing it.

3. Hohn, personal communication. Hattiet Kylle Campbell was the daughter of James Hohn, who had been born to Robert and Virginia Campbell. It was Mr. Harry Knope's widow who donated the
12. Clibey, William H. Ashley, 158.
14. Morgan, West of William Ashley, 142.
17. Chief Shantashil, whose brother Shantashilhah, was head of the Shantashilh group, was chief of the Grand Pioneers. All three were sons of Chief Shantashil, who had met with Zebulon Pike in 1806. See Jay R. Buckley, "Pike as a Forgotten and Misunderstood Explorer," in Zebulon Pike, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West, edited by Matthew L. Harris and Jay H. Buckley (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 33. The site of the Shantashilh Pioneers village is in Westcris County near present-day Red Cloud, Nebraska, and is designated 3W47A1 by archaeologists. The site in the Republican River Valley was occupied seven times between 1870 and 1820.
18. "A third of the party's route had died that winter. Morgan, West of William Ashley, 143.
19. Beckworth indicated that hiscable ropes were tangled with the job, and later a court case was overturned. See Beckworth and Fayel, Ashley's diary contains names that look like "Vasquez," "Boone" and "Badger," which could be Louis Vasques, Albert Boone and Jim Beckworth. This suggests that, according to the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade, 1820-1830, edited by Lettty R. Hoffman, 10 vols. (Spokane, WA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1915-1918), 107.
20. Missouri Republican, 1826, March 4, 1826, "Ashley's journal," 1-3; Missouri Republican, 1826, March 11, 1826; Missouri Advocate and Citizen, February 9, 1826.
22. The Missouri Advocate and St. Louis Enterprise, March 11, 1826; also see Fayel, Campbell's Narrative, 23.
23. The Blue Earth Village of the Fox - a tribe that speaks the Kansa language - was at the junction of the Blue and Kansas rivers, approximately two miles east of present-day Manhattan, Kansas.
26. Fayel, "Campbell's Narrative", located the village about 30 miles south of Grand Island, Nebraska.
29. A "lost" Jedediah Smith map was apparently available to impresario George Gibbs, who inscribed Smith and Campbell's 1825-26 route into the Kansas-Republican-Platte rivers using a printed Fremont map with Smith's route copied on it. A detail of the Gibbs map is on pages 5-7 of this article. Barry, The Beginning of the West, 131, 137; Morgan and Wiman, Jedediah Smith and His Maps of the American West, 56-57.
34. "Articles of Agreement," Smith begins a journal at the conclusion of the 1825 rendezvous by traveling to California, George R. Brooks, ed., The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith (1997; reprint, Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 35. For biographies of these three partners, see Morgan, Jedediah Smith; Violan L. Talbot, David E. Jackson; and the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade (Jackson, WY: Jackson Hole Museum and Teton County Historical Society, 1996).
Ashley's 1826 Journal and Transcript

Introduction by Andrew W. Hahn
Executive Director
Campbell House Museum, Saint Louis, Missouri

Scholars know the basic outline of Robert Campbell's life in the Rocky Mountain fur trade, but few have probed the extent of his career. Campbell left us his well-known "Narrative" many years later, but his life in the trade was viewed as decidedly less romantic than the likes of William Ashley, Jedediah Smith and Campbell's own partner, William Sublette. The story of this journal sheds light on Campbell's formative years and on one of the most pivotal events of the early fur trade - the epic journey of William Ashley's company to the 1826 rendezvous.

Since the 1940s the Campbell House Museum in St. Louis has preserved the townhouse of Robert Campbell and his significant fur trade related archive. Amazingly, this journal was donated to our archive from a local family just a few years ago. This is the first scholarly article to decipher and explore the content of the journal, not the least important aspect being its authorship. The journal not only tells part of the story of the 1826 rendezvous but illustrates it through sketched maps. It also raises some intriguing questions. What other documents of the fur trade are still to be discovered?

When the journal was given to Campbell House Museum, it was inside this envelope, marked "Campbell Diary." ALL IMAGES THIS ARTICLE COURTESY OF CAMPBELL HOUSE MUSEUM, ST. LOUIS, MO

Expenses of Sundries

Cash paid Vasques 40:00
do: Vasques P&B. 36:00
Ashleys expenses to Franklin 36:00
paid Browns order for home 27:50
paid Robyard Manuel 5:00
Cash paid for M. Dutty $225 each
L. Boldue
L. Pobstau
J. Pepin
J.B. Depatie

[Inscribed upside-down]
amt Brot over
paid Saddlers bill at Franklin
Bakers bill for Bread and meat
Blacksmiths bill
Saddles
[Spoons] several bills
Keg tobacco
Saw 150 drawing
Knife [illegible]

Showing horse & mending saddle 17/2
Cash paid men
Boot for mule
* hors
expense at Ferry 6
* 18th
* 19
* 20
9.12.1/2
pack saddl[e]

Antoin
2 L Shirts
Batten
[Cappoet]
56
2
56
56
5
296
36
280
20
318

M   H   M
Vaques  6   8   5   1
[Evans]  6   5
[Virgil]  6   5
Pompan  7   7   6   15
[Henman]  6
McCoy  6   9   9   16
Calhoun  6   7
Boone  5   7
[Persoon]  7   0

   69
   131
   7
   2

As
[Smith]  4
[Campbell]  1
[Bigg]  1

140
[Rough map, possibly the Kansas River, with Vermillion River marked at upper right. Campsites are noted with "C." Grashopper Creek (French: Sautefile) is marked as "sotrel."]

Sunday acts to cash

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Luke LaRave</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;cash do&quot;</td>
<td>6:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pombau</td>
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<td>Cash at St. Louis</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Adams</td>
<td>20:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berga</td>
<td>10:00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Battion
Cash at St. Louis 8:00
Franklin .50
Left Kanza River 12 miles from its mouth

March 22th: traveled 25 miles fine rich bottom

March 29 – Travel thirty miles mostly over rolling prairies, camped on small creek where food for horses was bad

March 30th at the distance of six miles from our camp and after passing a small creek well wooded between the next small creek & a creek called the troot the food is fine, –

21st. Traveled 15 miles prairie bottom principally, camped on large creek

April 1st. Prairie bottom and some hilly country camped on large creek Vermillion Food indifferent

April 2nd arrived at 3 o'clock at Kanza village general – came to this place from the mouth of the Kanza WSW about 100 miles distant,

On the 4th April after supplying my self with corn & dry meat from the Indians we proceeded up blue River the N fork and camp after travelling about 10 miles up the River NW

Apl 5th traveled WNW 20 miles over high prairies & camped on small creek affording good range

Apl 6th traveled 20 miles over high prairie land and camped on small creek about one mile from the Republican fork of the Kanza our course today was WNW

Apl 7th
crossed the Republican fork distance one mile thence up the same until you cross the first & second creek thence NW to the bottom of the Kansas and continue WNW up or parallel with the river about 6 miles the River there makes a great bend to the north cross it and proceeded up the South side.

8th th travelled west the day,) day was stormy & cold, Rain & snow. Thermometer 15 A2.

[Map showing the route taken up the Kansas River, crossing the Republican Fork and multiple small creeks, and continuing west. Kansas Indian village marked at bottom. Campsites and hills marked at top.]

Route to the mountains by Kansas River – cross the Kansas about 12 miles from its mouth thence along the Indian along the north side of the River to the Indian Villages about 150 miles from the mouth of the Kansas river these Indians live on a fork of the Kansas call blue River from the Village ascend blue River about 15 or 20 miles, thence WNW a cross a high Rolling prairie about 40 miles (crossing many small creeks running northwardly all of which afford good grass) you then come to the Republican fork of the Kansas, thence on the bottom of that river near the Hills, or high country about 8 miles WNW where the river makes a bend to the north there cross it and arrive at on the distance of 20 miles after crossing the Kansas river.
Several large creeks all affording good range – at about thirty miles you come to a large creek deep & muddy by WSW proceed up the principal fork of this Creek about five miles to where it forks & changes direction by NW&SE proceed up it past a large Salt Lake thence NW to the River

9th Apr
Traveled about 15 miles camped on large creek near the River – Snowed all day course W Temp 2 AZ

10th proceeded about 3 miles came to a large creek which I ascended several miles, thence across the same & traveled NW to strike the river cold clear day – passed a large salt lick & much old sign of buffalo

11th at 2 ock arrived at Republican village

12th traveled [NNW] 20 miles & encamped on the headwaters of Blue River

13th lost some horses in the forenoon left camp at 2 ock traveled five miles & camp on north branch of the Blue course NW

14th traveled SSW 12 miles & stuck the River Platte about fifty miles below the forks – Went & brought up the Party of M Smith opposite the Encampment on the 26th

25th Thence to a large creek on the N Side about 12 miles camped in the forks

26th traveled 15 miles up the west fork of the creek along the Bluffs.

[Three pages torn out.]
killed a Buffalo

27th traveled west near the creek & camp on the head of another Creek distant 8 miles a dreadful storm

28th moved up the creek 12 miles to recruit from the effects of the storm

29 traveled 15 miles west and camped on the Platts

30 the two parties camped together just above where last bluffs come to the river made 8 miles

May 1st traveled 6 miles & camped opposite the forks of the Platt dreadful storm

2 & 3 remained at same Encampment

to dry goods & make some arrangements at the Platts

4 traveled 15 miles up the Platt no timber - killed 2 Buffalo
5th traveled six miles & Encamped near the bluffs where the grass was good

6th traveled 7 miles to a large creek where the grass was fine

7th traveled 6 miles crossed the bluffs in two places a short distance road across very good killed 2 cows

8th traveled 7 miles crossed bluff 1/4 in muddy extending to the River –
14. 2 miles yellow Clay Bluffs extend to the River for 1 mile. Passage across them good for pack Horses. Then across a wide bottom 5 miles. Low sand Hills again push in near to the River 2 miles wide camped in low ground just beyond them.

[Sketch of river, campsites, foliage, dates of campsites.]

15. Traveled along Bottom 4 miles then crossed a narrow range of Sand Hills extending to the River Hill having the appearance of a city across the... camped after making abt 15 miles in an extensive bottom opposite a curious shaped Rock.

[Sketch of region river traveled]
Traveled up the bottom – (illegible) hills on the south side and a Regular Range of hills covered with pine in this (illegible) general course of the River – West

16th camped after making 15 miles on the Bank of the River in a bend –
17th traveled 4 miles crossed a creek

& Encamped on the Bank of the River at the first timber since leaving the forks – the hills on the south side as mentioned in the last three days travel disappear we remain at this camp to make ropes & recruit the sick & weary

(Sketch of river traveled)

17th One of my men J. Davis shot himself and detained the party at this camp until the 19th

When we proceeded up the bottom a Creek the bank of which are well timbered Enters on the S side. The north fork is also well timberd and is NW&SE high

ground on the north Side advance near the River made 14 miles & Encamped in a well wooded bottom, high mountains on the W & NW

(Sketch of river traveled on the 19th)
20th 2 miles a thick grove of small cotton wood high sand hills on the N side High mountains in different direction westerly appears
traveled 15 miles & Encamped opposite to High Bluff on both Sides of the river

at the Edge of the bottom which is about 1 mile on the N side
great appearance of war parties of Indian

21st traveled 12 miles High hills approach the character of mountains advance near the River cov'd with pine at six miles a handsome fork contributes its water on the South Side the river becomes more crooked & the bottoms well wooded - camped in a fine bottom after crossing bluff 1 mile
22d traveled WNW across High Hills at 11 o'clock struck the River where Rugged mountains could with pine advance to the water's edge thence ascended a small creek by NNE & change direction to NW then W crossed the range of mountains & traveled WSW to a bend of the river where we found good grass

(Sketch of river/terrain traveled)

traveled WNW 5 miles over very rough mountains, the river is crooked bending to the S Large mountain (by?) SW thence - ascended the river 3 miles to a large fork Entering on the south well wooded by NE & SW Thence North along the immediate hills of the N fork 2 miles & Encamped

(Sketch of river intersection traveled)

I should have traveled WNW after crossing the first mountain yesterday which would probably taken me a good west & south

This River in about 15 miles - several miles above this
24th Ascended a small creek NE 1 1/2 miles thence up the [mismeasured] of the same N 3 miles thence over high even hills WNW to the River at the mouth of a small creek which enters on the north side by N & S—thence WNW over a

Beautiful high country leaving the River a few miles to the south thence West 3 miles & encamped on the bank of the River in a grove of timber

25th traveled 4 miles only in consequence of rain, crossed a creek at 2 miles by N5
26th
at ½ mile crossed creek by N&S traveled W along the side of the hills on high ground, leaving the River 3 or 4 miles which appears to enter between mountains - at 7 miles struck the river where a small fork enters on the south side & the river by NW&SE at 12 miles camped at the mouth of a creek or Ravine.

27th NW & by N 3 miles over high ground the River bounded by rough Hills & bends to the north - thence NW crossing a Rough Mountain 1½ miles wide - thence near the river west over a beautiful country about 8 miles & Encamped.
28th
West 3 miles dry creek by NNE Broken Sandy
- Regular chain mountains by SE/W
- on the S. Side High Breaks on the north Sand
- Hills make to the River, a Creek about 20 feet
- wide enters on the South River Bottom well

Timbered - camped after making 18 miles

[Sketch of river traveled]

[Two pages torn out.]

29th
West leaving the River 1 mile to the South
at 3 miles struck a bend of the river bottoms
continue to be well wooded, the Regular chain
of mountains on the south [ending] to the
south & a mountain the summit of which has a
[illegible] approach] to west
30th
WSW crossing a high hill at 2 miles River by W along the river bank bounded by mountains on each side - thence SW across a plane in the direction of two high spurs of a mountain 3 miles - thence across Broken ground SW 3 miles

31st
delayed for 2 men left behind SSW 1 mile here the River passes South through a range of mountains we crossed low but uneven mountains west, thence South parallel with this River - & at 2 miles River - by SW & NE passing immediately between High mountains

ascended a Ravine 3 miles West thence across a mountain south & descended a Ravine East
1st June – ascended the side of a mountain west 1/2 miles having a lofty mountain on the south through which the River passes – thence west 6 miles over rolling land to the fork called Sweetwater a short distance above its mouth and along the same 5 miles & encamped where it passes through a spur of a mountain.

2nd crossed the range of mountains & struck the River in traveling 5 miles thence along the River to when it passes through another spur of a mountain. Then encamped all day mountains should be left to the left for the best rout.
Boldeus 1 Manuel 1 Manuel 1 Manuel 1
Bolden 1 Luke 1 Dofan 2 1
Blissel 1 17 Depaste 2 1 Boldou 1
Depaste 1 15
Pombar 1 32
Begorius 1
Papin 1
Rivera 2 1
Battox 2
Antoine 1 1
Adams 1 1
Adams 1 1
Addams 1
Addams 1
Lajokos 2
Lukel 2
Binosel 1 1
Pombar 1 1

66 Horses
6
3

1
1
35 Ashley
41 packs
30 min

2.50 traps 7 1550
1000 Sugar 1000
1200 Tobacco 1200
800 Coffee 800
1000 Powder 1000
1500 Lead 1500
300 Beads 300
6 gross knives 25 150
100 vermilion 100
800 Bladders 800
20 piece of cloth 230 50
50 axes 1.50
20 hoes 40
alls & Buttons 150
Kettles 300
800 Flour 800

15/100 4/30/66
66
150 150
300 6 99
665 930 104
900 930 5
23 Robyrd — 2 —  
24 Luke — 1 1  
25 Pagnin — 2 —  

5.1  
30.13  
35.14  
14  
49  
2  
51  

Pack Horses A 35: 15

15 traps x  
6 sugar x  
5 coffee x  
5 flour x  
6 powder x  
8 lead x  
6 blankets x  
6 cloth x  
10 rum x  
2 brandy x  
2 knives x  
2 infinities x  
1 axes x  
2 botties x  
75  
2 pigeons x  
4 guns

1 Berger — 2X — P  
2 River — 2 — R  
3 Manuel — 1 — 1  
4 Vasques — 3 —  
5 Pombau — 1 —  
6 Poten — 1 — 1  
7 Leprot — 1 — 1  
8 Ronie — 1 — 1  
9 Johnson — 1 — 1  
10 Antoine — 2 — 1  
11 Brown — 1 — 1  
Self  
12 Ashley — 1 — 2  
13 Batit — 1 — 1  
14 Adams — 1 — 1  
15 Adams — 1 — 1  
16 Bougnoy — 1 — 1  
17 Boldieu — 1 — 1  
18 Dufay — 2 —  
19 Beosarth — 1 — 1  
20 Lagie — 2 —  
21 Binnell — 1 — 1  
22 Dufin — 1 — 1
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sorrel Mule Vasques</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Black Mule / Brown</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Sorrel Mule / Berger</td>
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<td>Notes:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vasques Mess</td>
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<td>James &amp; David Adams</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roblyard —</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Laquis — 2 Bales</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bougroux —</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manuel pack X</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Luke Isad X</td>
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<td>Name</td>
<td>Items</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuel</td>
<td>Salt Sugar &amp; Pepper</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2 traps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Adams</td>
<td>1 box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Roasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Tin pans</td>
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<td>Luke</td>
<td>18 traps</td>
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<tr>
<th>Baubien</th>
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<td>1 Do 48</td>
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<td>140 lbs tobacco</td>
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<td>Trunk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bale Cappos &amp; shirts &amp; saw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 guns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 bales -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 [I] powder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Quantity</td>
</tr>
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<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 dzo</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 corn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/2 I. meal</td>
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</tr>
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<td>15 horses</td>
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<td>[illegible]</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 dito</td>
<td>[illegible]</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 tobacco</td>
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</tr>
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<td>6 powder</td>
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<td>2 knives</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 sugar</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 coffee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>SS</td>
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This image at approximately actual size shows the journal's front cover, composed of cardboard covered with green paper. The book measures 4 inches wide by 6 inches tall.