

"A Fortune Awaits Enterprise Here": The Best Mining Expedition to the Grand Canyon in 1891

by Robert Sorgenfrei

Robert Brewster Stanton, the engineer who in 1889 and 1890 conducted a railroad survey down the Colorado River and Grand Canyon in later years became the first Colorado River historian. In an unpublished manuscript on the history of Colorado River exploration,(1) Stanton speculated on why expeditions that followed his went down the Colorado River. As far as Stanton was concerned, all important discoveries had either been made by John Wesley Powell or himself. Therefore, it followed that the spirit of adventure was the primary motivation for these subsequent expeditions. While Stanton's conclusion may have been simplistic and not a little self-serving, there is some truth to it.

The Best Expedition was the fifth to venture down the Colorado River, after the John Wesley Powell and Stanton Expeditions. It was named after its leader, James S. Best, a Denver real estate promoter, but was officially called The Colorado Grand Canon Mining and Improvement Company Expedition. As the name suggests, the objective was the mining of mineral resources in the Grand Canyon. Although the Best Expedition was well planned and financed, it appears in most histories as little more than a footnote, or as a minor epilogue to the Stanton Survey of 1889-90. Except for some initial press reports, very little has been written about it.

One of the last surviving members of the expedition, James Andrew McCormick, who served as expedition photographer, put together a forty-four-page typewritten manuscript, accompanied by twenty black-and-white photographs before he died in 1945. McCormick wrote that the expedition was never reported in detail, and he wanted to finally set the record straight. It is clear from reading the manuscript that McCormick considered his experiences on the Colorado River a very significant event in his life. It is also clear that, like Robert Stanton before him, he was captivated by and drawn to the canyon country of the Colorado River.(2)

In order to fully understand how the Best Expedition originated, it is necessary to begin with the events that occurred on the Stanton Survey, which preceded it. The Stanton Survey's primary purpose was to determine whether it was feasible to construct a railroad along the Colorado River to the Pacific Ocean. This would shorten transcontinental routes by hundreds of miles, eliminate steep grades across mountain ranges, and would be virtually snow-free. In 1889, the Denver Colorado Canyon and Pacific Railroad Company was formed to undertake the survey. Unfortunately, the leader of the survey, Frank M. Brown, had little appreciation of the inherent danger in boating down the Colorado River. He purchased thin-hulled crafts unsuitable for the river and neglected to buy life jackets. The survey was aborted in the Grand Canyon after several members of the crew, including Brown, drowned. Stanton took over leadership and resumed the survey with better boats and life jackets, starting down the river from Green River, Utah, in late November 1889.

Along the way, in Glen Canyon, Stanton met and hired Harry McDonald, a miner who had been working placer deposits along the Colorado. While McDonald turned out to be a very capable member of the survey party, he had what Stanton characterized as "gold fever."(3) McDonald was convinced there was great potential in the Glen Canyon gold placers, first discovered in 1883. He was also interested in prospecting further downriver in the Grand Canyon. Stanton was also interested in mining, but his chief objective was to complete the railroad survey. Unlike McDonald, Stanton was able to keep his primary goal in perspective.

After a brief stop at Lees Ferry, where they spent Christmas, the party entered the Grand Canyon on December 28, 1889. Several weeks later, on January 22, 1890, near the entrance to Granite Gorge, they had a surprise encounter with Felix Lantier, a prospector. Around a campfire that night, Lantier fired imaginations with tales of the rich claims he had located. One claim, he noted, was 150 feet wide and contained gold, silver, and copper. He also told of other rich deposits further downriver.(4)

The party left Lantier, entrusting him with mail and photographic negatives which he promised to take to the post office in Flagstaff. They continued to the mouth of Bright Angel Creek. There, while still in their boats, several members of the party briefly viewed through glasses what appeared to be a rich vein of native silver. Stanton ordered the boats to continue on down the river without stopping and noted in his diary for February 5, 1890: "We passed yesterday afternoon the great vein that Jack Sumner and Powell have said so much about. It is about 3/4 mile above Bright Angel on the right side. I did not stop and test it for reasons best known to myself, but located it for future use. From the general appearance, I think it is a very rich mineral section."(5)

The party stopped for the night, another half-mile downriver, on the opposite side from the mouth of Bright Angel Creek. By moving on at Bright Angel Creek, Stanton may have prevented some of the men from quitting the party in order to start prospecting. However, the sight of what appeared to be a rich mineral area touched off Harry McDonald's gold fever. Soon he started to complain that he was shouldering too much of the work. By the time the party reached Crystal Creek, he wanted to quit. Stanton noted in his diary that the passing of some rich veins was the primary reason McDonald wanted to quit.(6) Indeed, McDonald was quite open about the reason he wanted out; he told other members of the party that he planned to start prospecting as soon as he could obtain livestock and supplies. Faced with McDonald's determination to strike out alone, Stanton wrote him a check settling his wages. McDonald then made his way to Kanab, Utah, where he purchased a burro and prospecting gear. From Kanab he went along the north rim of the Grand Canyon, descending at Chuar Creek, where he found what he thought were promising copper deposits. He did not go back to the purported rich deposit at Bright Angel Creek. Rather, he took some of his ore samples and headed to Denver. In the fall of 1890, McDonald met James S. Best, a Denver real estate promoter. Together, they succeeded in attracting a group of investors willing to finance an expedition to the Grand Canyon which would lay the groundwork for eventual mining in the Grand Canyon.

The Colorado Grand Canon Mining and Improvement Company was formed during the winter of 1890-91. The certificate of incorporation was filed with the state of Colorado on May 9, 1891. The main office was in Denver, with a branch in New York. The Denver office address was the same as the real estate firm McKnight and Best. James Best and Amor McKnight were two of the principal investors. The certificate of incorporation was signed by seven men, a Board of Directors, made up of Denver investors and former members of the Stanton Survey.(7)

The capital stock was \$500,000, divided into 500,000 equal shares. How much stock each of the investors owned is not known. \$500,000 may have seemed impressive on paper, but meant little. Many mining companies in the nineteenth century had still more stock, but few dollars in real assets.

The certificate of incorporation detailed the objectives of the company:

The objects for which said corporation is formed are to acquire by purchase or otherwise, mines, and mining properties, and to work, tunnel and develop the same, and to provide and erect the necessary buildings, machinery, and appliances therefor; also to construct, own, and operate a toll road or toll roads in the Territories of Arizona and Utah, running into and out of the Grand Canon of the Colorado River; and to establish, acquire, own, and operate a ferry across the Colorado River in said Territories, or either of them, and the necessary docks, landing places, boats and appliances therefor, and to charge and collect tolls from the public using said toll roads or ferry; and to erect, acquire and operate hotels in said canon and along said roads, and when desirable, sell the same; and to acquire, maintain and operate irrigating canals and ditches and pipe lines for

conveying water from said River and its tributaries for irrigation, domestic, mining, and manufacturing purposes, or any other use or purposes for itself, or for sale or hire to others; and to acquire, improve, and sell real estate; and to locate, lay out, plat, acquire and hold town sites and town site properties; and to carry on a general mercantile business; and in general explore said canon, and develop its resources, and to engage therein in any business or enterprise that may seem best desirable to its Board of Directors.(8)

This was a very ambitious set of corporate goals and objectives. However, it must be remembered that after Stanton came back from the survey, he was widely quoted in the press as saying it was feasible to build a railway along the Colorado River, and many believed that eventually this would be done. If, in fact, a railroad was to be built, it would open the region up to exactly the type of development envisioned in the certificate of incorporation. The Colorado Grand Canon Mining and Improvement Company was hoping to get in on the ground floor of something big. However, before the railroad was built, there was a purported vein of silver waiting to be mined at the mouth of Bright Angel Creek. The company wanted to dispatch an expedition down the river to claim that silver vein. McCormick believed in the broad objectives of the certificate, and felt it was narrow-minded and shortsighted to focus on simply claiming the purported vein of silver. He pointed out that if claiming the vein of silver had been the sole objective of the expedition, a group of men could have been dispatched overland to locate it, record the claim, and report back to Denver. Here, McCormick may have been a little naive. He was the youngest member of the company, not one of the inner circle, and not privy to the priorities set by the Board of Directors.

The primary motivation behind the expedition, borne out by subsequent events, was to get to that purported vein of silver. The fact that the expedition went by boat rather than overland, reflects the background and biases of some of the expedition members, a number of whom were former members of the Stanton Survey. These were experienced river men who thought an approach along the Colorado would make accessible for prospecting more areas such as side canyons. There was also a spirit of adventure Robert Stanton felt was the primary motivation for those who followed him down the river. Finally, it may have been that it was more fun going by boat downriver rather than descending with pack animals on hot, dusty trails.

Shortly after incorporation, the Colorado Grand Canon Mining and Improvement Company issued a prospectus designed to attract investors. It was a typical mining company prospectus of the time. It waxed eloquent on the great potential for an investor to strike it rich. It told of riches for the taking, and implied there was little risk investing in such a sure thing. A paragraph in the prospectus alluded to the mineral riches of the Colorado River:

The Company has not been organized on the basis of guesswork. Last year expert employees were out, not merely "prospecting" but to ascertain the truth of reports which were in circulation. Their observations more than confirmed statements made. Samples of flake, grain, and flour gold were found in such quantities as to indicate surprising riches of placer deposits in the territory alluded to. The precious metal simply awaits owners. Unmistakable proofs of the presence of silver and copper ores in surpassing quantities and richness cropped out on all sides. Alluvial deposits glittering with the yellow metal, as well as gold-bearing quartz, greeted the eyes of the seekers. Silver and copper lodes cropped out here and there, while abundance of "blossom" or "float" rock was discovered, indicating the proximity of rich deposits or formations. There is no doubt that a fortune awaits enterprise here. This company is organized to make effort to secure that fortune.(9)

One of the first acts of the Board of Directors was to name nine men to undertake an expedition down the Colorado River in order to implement the objectives of the company. The men, with the exception of the expedition chief, were well chosen. Three members of the board, Harry McDonald, James Best, and A. J. Gregory, would go. Members of the Stanton Survey were John Hislop, William H. Edwards, and Elmer Kane. Also named were Luther H. Jewell, a rancher, miner, and Denver private detective, and John Harvey Jacobs, who was described as a journeyman plasterer by trade. James A. McCormick, at twenty-three, was the youngest member of the expedition and would serve as photographer. In the end, eight men actually embarked on the expedition. Board member A. J. Gregory, a rancher and miner from Glenwood Springs, Colorado, was to join the expedition at Lees Ferry, Arizona. (10)

Though Harry McDonald seemed like the logical choice to lead, instead James Best was named Chief in Charge. McDonald became head boatman. McDonald did not appear on the certificate of incorporation as one of the Board of Directors. His name did appear as a board member in the prospectus issued later. This is probably because McDonald lacked the capital to be a principal stockholder. McCormick confirmed this by stating that McDonald was given stock as partial payment for going on the expedition.(11) The board probably realized that McDonald's services would be essential since he was an experienced boatman and a prospector with detailed knowledge of the Grand Canyon.

The selection of James Best has some parallels with the selection of Frank Brown as head of the aborted Brown-Stanton Survey of 1889. Frank Brown, like James Best, was in real estate. Both were principal investors in their respective companies and were chosen to lead on the basis of their capital investments. Neither had prior experience on the Colorado and each had unrealistic expectations.

The expedition left Denver on the evening of July 6, 1891, for Green River, Utah, arriving there on the morning of July 8. The boats arrived on July 10 and were immersed in the river to soak up moisture after the long, dry trip. They were almost identical in design to the Stanton Survey boats. McDonald had even gone back east to make sure design specifications were carried out. Each boat weighed 800 pounds, had thick, wooden hulls designed to withstand impact with rocks, and watertight compartments to protect enough food and supplies for sixty days. A single boat could carry 2,100 pounds and cost about a thousand dollars apiece.(12) Each was to have three navigators: two oarsmen and a man handling a twelve-foot steering oar at the stern. McCormick, the photographer, and Best, the Chief in Charge, would essentially be passengers. McDonald and Hislop, the most experienced boatmen, would handle the steering oars.

On July 15, 1891, the crew set out down the Green River. After about five miles, they encountered a set of rapids known today as The Auger. After going through the rapids, it grew apparent that the boats were overloaded. They had barely cleared a reef and were far too heavy for the even greater rapids awaiting below in Cataract Canyon. Twenty-five miles later, at a ranch called Box-B, they unloaded some of the supplies and arranged for ranchers to haul them by wagon to Dandy Crossing (later called Hite, after Cass Hite, one of the early Glen Canyon prospectors who lived there at the time of the expedition) in Glen Canyon on the Colorado. This crossing lay beyond the dangerous rapids of Cataract Canyon and was accessible by wagon road. After the boats were partially unloaded, they became more buoyant and easier to handle.

The expedition now passed through scenic and fascinating country with many "bottoms" (open areas below canyon walls along the river ranging in size from several acres to several hundred). There were also many side canyons with prehistoric buildings and granaries. McCormick took special interest in these sites and speculated as to their origins. What is now called "pot hunting" was then considered a profitable side venture for the expedition. The prospectus published by the Colorado Grand Canon Mining and Improvement Company stated "valuable relics" would "yield rich reward and in themselves proves bonanzas to explorers."(13) The June 13, 1891 issue of The Coconino Sun, a Flagstaff, Arizona, newspaper, reported that the company planned to haul out 3,000 pounds of these artifacts. How they were to do this on boats already loaded to capacity was not explained.

However, there was little time for pot hunting. According to McCormick, "speed was proving to be a prime factor." He lamented that intensive exploration of

the countryside was not possible.(14) The expedition made excellent time and on July 20, 1891, five days after leaving Green River, Utah, reached the confluence of the Green and Colorado rivers (or Grand, as it was commonly known at the time). Cataract Canyon begins below the confluence, and a few miles later the first rapids start. In July, the Colorado River was in flood stage due to snowmelt runoff. These rapids presented formidable challenges for even the most experienced river runners. The first rapids gave the expedition little difficulty. By noon on the first day in Cataract Canyon, they had run eleven rapids and were getting more confident.

The men stopped for lunch at the head of rapid number 12 in Cataract Canyon. They soon learned that high runoff had turned rapids 12, 13, and 14 into a nearly continuous single rapid. At this point the crew disagreed on what to do next. McDonald and Hislop, the two most experienced boatmen, wanted to stop and camp where they were. They wanted to spend the rest of the day studying the channels in the rapids carefully. After watching driftwood logs, they would formulate a plan. However, James Best wanted to continue. After all, the expedition had gone through the first eleven rapids with no problems and had been making good time. Oblivious to the danger, he saw no reason to delay, and as Chief, he overruled his most experienced expedition members, insisting they proceed. McCormick stated that arguments for and against consumed a great deal of time. Indeed, it was not until 3:15 in the afternoon that they were ready to get underway.

McCormick blames Best for what followed. He attributes Best's haste to his obsession with getting to the purported vein of silver on Bright Angel Creek. Best ignored the advice of his two most experienced men, sacrificing prudence and caution to speed. Best, in boat number one, immediately ran into difficulty and was unable to get into a channel through the rapids. The boat was thrown up onto rocks near the shore. The crew was able to dislodge it undamaged. Meanwhile, boat number two started through the rapids unaware of the other's difficulty. When they finally saw the first crew in trouble, they swung over to the right, heading into a reef. The bow hit the reef, and became wedged momentarily until the current swung it free through a narrow opening between the reef and a rock described by McCormick "as big as a cottage." This put the boat below the reef and out of the current. The men were able to make for shore and land. McCormick believed that they had been extremely fortunate and doubted that in a thousand attempts they could ever have repeated what they did safely.(15)

Provision had been made for the oarsmen to consult in case of trouble, but when Best saw the second crew was now below him and safe, he ordered his boat back into the main channel of the rapid without consultation. Just as his boat appeared to be almost through the rapids they were caught by a crosscurrent and driven into the same big rock the other boat had barely missed. The current pinned them to the big rock causing water to pour in. McDonald was lifted out of the boat and was able to get onto the big rock. The water turned the boat over, and Best was caught under the boat for a minute or two before getting free. With McDonald's help, he was then able to get up onto the rock.(16) The other two crew members, oarsmen Kane and Jewell, were swept out and carried downriver. All this was observed by the crew of the second boat, which soon lost sight of Kane and Jewell. They got a grappling hook out of their boat and after a great deal of effort, cast a line out to the rock where boat number one was caught. Best and McDonald used the line to get ashore.

Spirits were very low as the men sat on the shore staring at the wrecked boat. It was assumed that two of their members had been drowned and lost. They had actually been swept downriver about a mile, caught in a current that bumped them along the bottom of the river, occasionally sending them to the surface for air. Eventually they were carried into an eddy out of the main current, and were able to get to shore. The cork life jackets probably saved Kane and Jewell from drowning. Even with them, though, they felt that their survival was one chance in a million.(17)

Since they had a line from shore to the boat, they decided to send two men back out to the rock where they would rig a "jenny," a block carriage with a crossbar on which a pulley could be hung. With this device they hoped to exert sufficient force on the pulley from the shore in order to gradually lift the boat away from the rock until it was free of the current holding it in place. However, no amount of force could overcome the power of the flow pinning the boat to the rock. The line pulled out the bow rivets, severely damaging the boat. The only other recourse they could think of was blasting the rock. The blasting powder was in the bow of damaged boat and not accessible. Earlier, some of the powder had been off-loaded and sent to Dandy Crossing. Hislop volunteered for the job since he was familiar with the area. He left on July 25 and returned on the thirty-first to find that the rope line to the boat was almost cut through and it was unsafe to attempt to get back out to it. The line was cut and all hope of salvaging the boat and its supplies abandoned.(18) An inscription pecked into a rock at the site aptly described the situation: "Camp #7, Hell To Pay, No. 1 Sunk & Down."(19)

There was hell to pay. Aside from losing one-half of its fleet, the expedition had been living on food stored in the remaining boat. That food was almost gone and now they had lost the rest of their supply. The expedition would have to reach Dandy Crossing as soon as possible to resupply. Another problem was that eight men weighed too much to ride in the remaining vessel. It was decided that three men would ride in the boat while the others walked along shore.

There was to be one more near mishap in the rapids of Cataract Canyon. McCormick failed to write about it, but William H. Edwards did and his notes found their way into Stanton's manuscript. Rapids 21, 22, and 23 form to combine an almost continuous rapid known today as "The Big Drop." This series of rapids ranks with Lava Falls in the Grand Canyon for difficulty, especially in high water. Three men, Edwards, Hislop, and Jacobs, were manning the boat when they encountered the rapids. The other five men had walked on ahead. It was impossible to run lines to the boat. Edwards described what followed:

The rapid was caused by the wash from two side canyons making a dam with a fall of twenty to twenty-five feet in fifty yards. At the head of the rapid, two rocky points run out into the river, and at the foot, we could see heavy waves dashing up twenty feet, or more, caused by the fall of the rapid and the return current of two big eddies. We decided as we had no help for a portage, we would have to take the chances of running it. Seeing that everything was securely fastened in the boat, we pulled out into the current and headed for the channel, we two oarsmen pulling for all we were worth to get steerage way. We passed through the first part of the rapid in good shape but when we struck the breakers, the boat acted like a bucking bronco and rolling from side to side, stood first on one end and then the other while wave after wave broke over us filling the boat with water. All at once a big wave seeming to contain all the water in the river, struck us and we thought our end had surely come. It washed Jacobs, who was pulling the bow oars, overboard, so that he hung by his knees over the gunwale of the boat. I was dashed to the bottom of the boat, and Hislop with his steering oar, went over backward. When I saw him start and go I managed to get hold of one of his legs and held on; in this position we passed through the heaviest of the rapid. In the meantime, Jacobs had managed to get into the boat, and was a second time washed out, but this time catching hold of the boat with his hands. When we passed the large waves, Jacob and Hislop climbed back into the boat, and by hard work, we got the waterlogged craft ashore, before we were carried over another fall. We baled the boat out and started over again, and, in a short time, met the other men who were coming back to see what had become of us. After lunch we made a portage of the boat, beds and provisions around what looked to us to be the heaviest rapid in this canon and the only one of the seventy we portaged.(20)

Before reaching Dandy Crossing, the expedition's food supply got perilously low, with only oatmeal left to eat. While walking along the shore they found a

dozen jars of cranberry preserves buried in the sand. The labels on the jars indicated that they had been put up in 1876. Stanton's manuscript states that this was a welcome treat, enjoyed by all. However, McCormick wrote that the preserves made the men ill.(21)

Aside from lack of food, there were other hardships. It was extremely hot in the canyon. One expedition member described rocks being "as hot as cook stoves, and the sand hotter."(22) Some men had lost all but the clothes on their backs. Cass Hite described them as destitute when they finally reached Dandy Crossing on August 4, 1891.(23) There they learned that there were no boats nearby that they could purchase, but that one could be had further downriver at Good Hope Bar. On August 6, they headed downriver. Now they were in Glen Canyon and out of the dangerous rapids. At Good Hope Bar, they did obtain a flat-bottomed vessel for the remainder of the trip to Lees Ferry.

Along the way in Glen Canyon, they found seven promising placers, which they located so as to record the claims at a later date. Here again McCormick faults Best for not carrying out the broader objectives of the Colorado Grand Canon Mining and Improvement Company. According to McCormick, the necessary assessment and recording of the claims could have been done in ten or twelve days. Best merely promised that men would be sent later to do the work. Further downriver, at the mouth of the San Juan, more "flour gold" was found in gravel bars. But as McCormick put it, the expedition had developed "a silver complex." Best ordered that they press on.(24)

On August 14, the expedition arrived at Lees Ferry, Arizona. This marked the end of the river part of the expedition of the Colorado Grand Canon Mining and Improvement Company. Best and McDonald secured horses in Kanab and rode to Salina, Utah, where they could contact the Board of Directors. They were summoned by the board to return to Denver for a conference. The remainder of the expedition stayed at Lees Ferry, awaiting further instructions. It was an extended stay; Best and McDonald did not return until October. At that time, Edwards, Jacobs, and Jewell were sent back to Denver. The idea of approaching Bright Angel Creek by boat was abandoned. Instead, the remainder of the expedition set out for Bright Angel Creek via the North Rim by horseback on October 15, arriving at there on October 22. Upon arrival at the mouth of Bright Angel Creek, it was discovered that the purported vein of silver, which had attained near legendary status, was only mica and schist. The one objective that James Best had put before all others in the end amounted to nothing. It must have been an embarrassing situation to witness when the truth was discovered there at the mouth of Bright Angel Creek. A year earlier, if Robert Stanton had stopped to examine this vein, a group of investors would have saved some money, not to mention some face.(25)

The Colorado Grand Canon Mining and Improvement Company's expedition had proved a dismal failure. McCormick thought it sensible to go back to Glen Canyon and record the placer claims they had located so that the expedition would have something to show for its efforts. However, the party could not agree on this, and they broke up. Best, Kane, and McDonald remained in the Grand Canyon deciding to secure some copper claims, probably in the area where McDonald had prospected the year before. McCormick and Hislop had had enough and returned to Denver six months after the adventure began.(26) There seems to have been a conspiracy of silence at the time about the expeditions prospecting failures. Little about the aftermath of the expedition shows up in newspapers. McCormick and Hislop did write an article about their adventures in the November 22, 1891, issue of the Salt Lake City Herald. In it, they described the spectacular scenery they had seen and of the great hunting on the Kaibab Plateau. There was no mention of prospecting or mining. They might not have found mineral wealth, but it had been a wonderful adventure that they would remember for the rest of their lives.(27)

Subsequent events concerning the Colorado Grand Canon Mining and Improvement Company are sketchy. The company was still active the following year. The May 21, 1892, issue of Engineering and Mining Journal reported that during its annual meeting board members had elected Franklin Morey as president, C. L. Lightburn, vice-president, Henry B. Illius, secretary, and Alexander H. Garfield, treasurer. Three other board members held no office. Absent among them were James Best and Harry McDonald. The article reported that the company was preparing to do considerable work that season on its placers and mines. Ore, running 50 to 60 percent copper and 20 to 60 ounces of silver per ton, had been taken out.(28) Aside from this report, little is known about the company, except that as late as 1893 it, or members of it, recorded claims in and around the Grand Canyon.(29)

According to McCormick, the company eventually went into receivership, but gave no details as to when this occurred. It most likely happened following the repeal of the Silver Purchase Act in 1893, which severely depressed silver prices, shut down many mines, and dried up investment capital for mining throughout the West. At that time, there remained only one asset of value: negatives of more than three hundred photographs taken on the expedition. McCormick was to develop them. However, as he had other work to do, he managed to get only about forty developed before the company went into receivership. The photographs then became the property of the receiver, who for unknown reasons refused to allow any more negatives to be developed. This despite the pleas and warnings of McCormick and other photographers that the negatives were in danger of being ruined due to the camphor content in the celluloid. Ten years later, when efforts were finally made to develop them, it was impossible to create a printable image. To McCormick, this constituted "a capital crime."(30) Many of those lost photographs were of scenes of now-flooded Glen Canyon that would be of great historic interest.

When McCormick wrote his manuscript on the Best Expedition at the end of his life, no photographs of the expedition itself were included. He had to use photographs taken on subsequent Colorado River trips to illustrate the text. However, the few photographs developed did survive. Colorado River historian Otis "Dock" Marston somehow obtained them, and they are part of his collection at the Huntington Library. A selection of them is featured at the end of this article.

Aside from the photographs, there is one last physical reminder of the Best Expedition. When part members abandoned the river part of their trip, they left the boat behind at Lees Ferry. By 1896, the boat's planks had shrunk in the dry desert air so much that a hand could fit between them. Eventually it was placed in the apple orchard there. The airtight zinc compartments were removed and were last seen as washtubs. As Stanton observed, "Rather an ignoble ending for so well planned but ill-advised an expedition."(31)

NOTES

(1.) Stanton, Robert Brewster, "The River and the Canyon: The Colorado River of the West, and the Exploration, Navigation and Survey of Its Canyons from the Standpoint of an Engineer." (Unpublished manuscript, Robert Brewster Stanton Collection, New York Public Library, Rare Books & Manuscripts Division, 1920.) This voluminous manuscript was begun by Stanton in 1906, with the bulk of it completed by 1909. He added entries as late as 1920. It is a treasure trove of information on Colorado River exploration. Stanton summarized the Best Expedition on pp. 739-43, in a chapter entitled "Those That Followed." Hereafter cited as "The River and the Canyon."

(2.) McCormick, J. A., "The Colorado Grand Canon Mining and Improvement Company Expedition of 1891." (Unpublished manuscript housed at the Russell L. & Lyn Wood Mining History Archive, Arthur Lakes Library, Colorado School of Mines, Golden, Colo.) Hereafter cited as "The Colorado Expedition."

(3.) Stanton, Robert Brewster, "The River and the Canyon," p. 739.

(4.) Smith, Dwight, and C. Gregory Crampton, *The Colorado River Survey: Robert B. Stanton and the Denver, Colorado Canyon & Pacific Railroad* (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1987), p. 155.

(5.) Smith and Crampton. *The Colorado River Survey*, p. 173.

(6.) *Ibid.*, pp. 183-85.

(7.) Colorado Grand Canon Mining and Improvement Company, Certificate of Incorporation (Denver, 1891). The original document is housed at the Colorado

State Archives, Denver, Colorado.

(8.) Ibid., pp. 1-2

(9.) The Colorado Grand Canon Mining and Improvement Company, Prospectus (Denver, Colo., 1891), p. 5. Original document housed at the Western History Collection, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colo.

(10.) The Rocky Mountain News (Denver, Colo.) carried articles about the expedition and its members on July 2 and 6, 1891, on pages 5 and 3, respectively.

(11.) McCormick, "The Colorado Expedition," p. 4.

(12.) The Rocky Mountain News (Denver, Colo.), July 6, 1891, p. 3.

(13.) Colorado Grand Canon Mining and Improvement Company, Prospectus, p. 5.

(14.) McCormick, "The Colorado Expedition," p. 9.

(15.) Ibid., p. 19.

(16.) Stanton, "The River and the Canyon," p. 741.

(17.) The Denver Republican carried an article about the boat wreck in the August 24, 1891, issue. The article quoted extensively from a letter written by one of the expeditions members. Company officers in Denver wished to keep the news of the accident out the papers, but somehow the letter was leaked. The author of the letter was not revealed.

(18.) McCormick, "The Colorado Expedition," pp. 18-21.

(19.) Belknap, Bill, and Buzz Belknap, Belknap's Revised Waterproof Canyon-lands River Guide (Evergreen, Colo.: Westwater Books, 1996), p. 63. According to Belknap, this inscription is still visible between rapids 15 and 16 in Cataract Canyon.

(20.) Stanton, "The River and the Canyon," pp. 742--43. McCormick failed to mention this in his manuscript, but William H. Edwards later relayed details of this mishap to Stanton.

(21.) Ibid., p. 742.

(22.) The Denver Republican, August 24, 1891, p. 1.

(23.) Ibid.

(24.) McCormick, The Colorado Expedition," p. 24.

(25.) The mouth of Bright Angel Creek would continue to be thought of as an area of fabulous mineral wealth for years after the Best Expedition. The April 11, 1899, issue of The Denver Investor ran a report about copper deposits that would keep a one-hundred-ton smelter busy for a generation. For an excellent account of the legends that have come out of this area, see Billingsley, George H., Earle E. Spamer, and Dove Menkes, Quest for the Pillar of Gold: The Mines & Miners of the Grand Canyon (Grand Canyon, Ariz.: Grand Canyon Association, 1997), pp. 86-87.

(26.) McCormick, "The Colorado Expedition," pp. 31-32.

(27.) Crampton, C. Gregory, Land of Living Rock: The Grand Canyon and the High Plateaus (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), pp. 189-91, 246.

(28.) Engineering and Mining Journal. Vol. LIII, no. 21 (May 21, 1892):551.

(29.) Ibid., p. 246.

(30.) McCormick, "The Colorado Expedition," p. 32.

(31.) Stanton, "The River and the Canyon," p. 743.

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