



MEN ON BOATS: Dramaturgical History

The Mission

In 1862, the government passed the Homestead Act, promising 160 acres of land to anyone who dared explore and claim the newly accrued land of the American West. The notion of Manifest Destiny (the belief that the expansion of the Americas was justifiable and inevitable by Euro-centric doctrine) exploded when The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 nearly doubled the size of the country. Many frontierspeople hitched up their covered wagons in the 1830s, and set out to find a new life--westward ho! By the mid 1860s much of Colorado, Utah, and Arizona were still uncharted by the government, as the majestically craggy landscape of the Southwest made for difficult Conestoga wagon exploration. Thus, Major John Wesley Powell, in the midst of Reconstruction from the Civil War, with an extremely small commission from the government, set out by boat to map the untamed land of the Grand Canyon!

The Journey

The 10 explorers began their treacherous adventure in three cumbersome 21-foot oak boats, weighing 4800 pounds each, when fully loaded with cargo. The fourth and lead boat, the *Emma Dean*, named after Powell's wife, was a 16-foot pine boat, meant to map ahead of the others. In the blazing heat of summer, they launched in Wyoming. An odyssey that lasted three grueling months, the pioneers navigated the Green River until the confluence with the mighty Colorado River; they then boated the raging waters of the Grand Canyon until they exhaustedly, naked and starving, found Lake Mead. These rivers have been subdued by man-made dams over time, but when the 10 men on boats ran the 900 miles of ferocious rapids, they were deadly.





The Real Men on Boats and Company

John W. Powell

The leader of the infamous expedition, was a college professor; the second Director of the U.S. Geological Survey; and, a Major in the Civil War, where he lost his right arm in the battle of Shiloh. His journal from the 1869 expedition and subsequent 1871-1872 journey (which was abandoned halfway through the mission), rests in the Smithsonian Institution.

William Dunn

Dunn was a skilled hunter and trapper from Colorado. In the summer of 1868, Dunn met Powell in Denver. The Major invited Dunn to join the wild ride as the lead hunter; they then gathered a crew and set off the next spring.

Jack Sumner

Was an experienced boatsman, a Civil War Corporal, and a sharpshooter. Sumner and Powell happened to cross paths while boating on the Colorado River in 1867; Powell quickly trusted Sumner and his outdoorsman skills, and thus made him the deputy of the upcoming Grand Canyon Expedition.

Billy Hawkins

He was a bull-headed bull-driver in his early life, enlisted in the Union Army at 15 years old. After the Civil War, Hawkins found his way to Denver; there, under the guidance of Jack Sumner, he became a mountaineer and cook at Sumner's Trading Post. Powell said Hawkins was "possessed by the imp of humor."

Andrew Hall

Andy was a jovial boy who joined a westbound wagon train in 1862 and never looked back. By happenstance, in 1868, Powell saw Andy Hall on the Green River in Wyoming, paddling a handmade boat--he was roped into the Expedition that very day! "He is always ready for work or play and is a good hand at either!"

George Bradley

He was so tough that he was referred to as the "Badger." In his early life, he enlisted into the Union Army TWICE because he had been wounded in Fredericksburg and refused to take a Veteran's Pension. Jack Sumner, a fellow Powell expedition explorer, said of George Bradley, "A great difficulty or peril changed the petulant spirit into a brave and generous soul."

Walter "Old Shady" Powell

Captain Walter "Old Shady" Powell was a prisoner of war, taken by the Confederacy. After escaping through the prison hospital, sick and starving, he was never the

same; from then on, Major John Wesley Powell took his little brother under his wing. Old Shady, who joined the Expedition crew, had a beautiful bass voice, and was often asked by the crew to sing around the campfire.

Frank Goodman

Yorkshire-born Frank Goodman heard grand tales of the American West ever since he was a boy. Determined to see the red rock deserts and the white-water whirlpools for himself, he traveled across the Atlantic and over to Wyoming in the mid-1860s. The wealthy adventureman met Powell only days before the expedition, and knew that this Expedition was his American Dream!

O.G. Howland

As Powell readied himself to recruit his team, he already had several adventuremen up his one-armed sleeve; but, he knew he needed a few scholars to hop on board to balance out the crew. The enigmatic Oramel "O.G." Howland was recruited by Powell right before the Expedition began. A printer by trade, O.G. was the Vice President of the Denver Typographers Union and a contributing writer for the Rocky Mountain News.

Seneca Howland

Civil War soldier, Seneca Howland, fought on the final day of battle in Gettysburg as a member of Vermont's 16th Regiment. After the war, he was going to follow in his father's footsteps and become a farmer, until the winds of adventure swept him off to Denver with his brother, O.G. Seneca joined the expedition as a battle-hardened oarsman, but quickly became the group's soft-spoken, good-natured peacekeeper.

Chief Tsauwiat

In 1869, Chief Tsauwiat was the head of the Uintah-Ouray Reservation in Northern Utah, and a great leader at that. After having been forcibly relocated in 1865, the Northern Ute people resourcefully found a way to make their new land abundant with crops, while maintaining their highly skilled art of dexterous buckskin tanning and pottery making. Tsauwiat and his community kindly welcomed the exhausted men on boats after they had walked 25 miles through the blazing desert in July, feeding and tending to them.

Mr. Asa

He and his sons had gone to the Colorado River on August 30th on the lookout for flotsam jettisoned from the nationally reported Powell Expedition tragedy... but, instead found the heroes of our story! He and his family nursed the starving men back to health, telling them that the newspapers had circulated that the men were dead. Little is known about the mysterious Mr. Asa--the man who first saw the survivors of the expedition by the shores of Lake Mead.

Memorializing the Men

On August 28th, 1869, just two days before the end of the expedition, three men abandoned the mission. Believing it would be faster and safer to hike out of the Grand Canyon, rather than continue to run the horrendous waterfalls they were met with, William Dunn and the Brothers Howland left. The men named this Separation Canyon, by Separation Rapids, in honor of the profound event. Tragically, those men didn't survive. A plaque, set into the wall of the Canyon, can only be seen by those running the river--honoring the devastating decision made on that fateful day.



Powell Point, in Grand Canyon National Park, is an overlook on the South Rim. At the end of a short trail, a memorial to the six courageous men on boats who completed the journey reminds us of the arduous trip.



Seneca and Oramel Howland



Jack Sumner

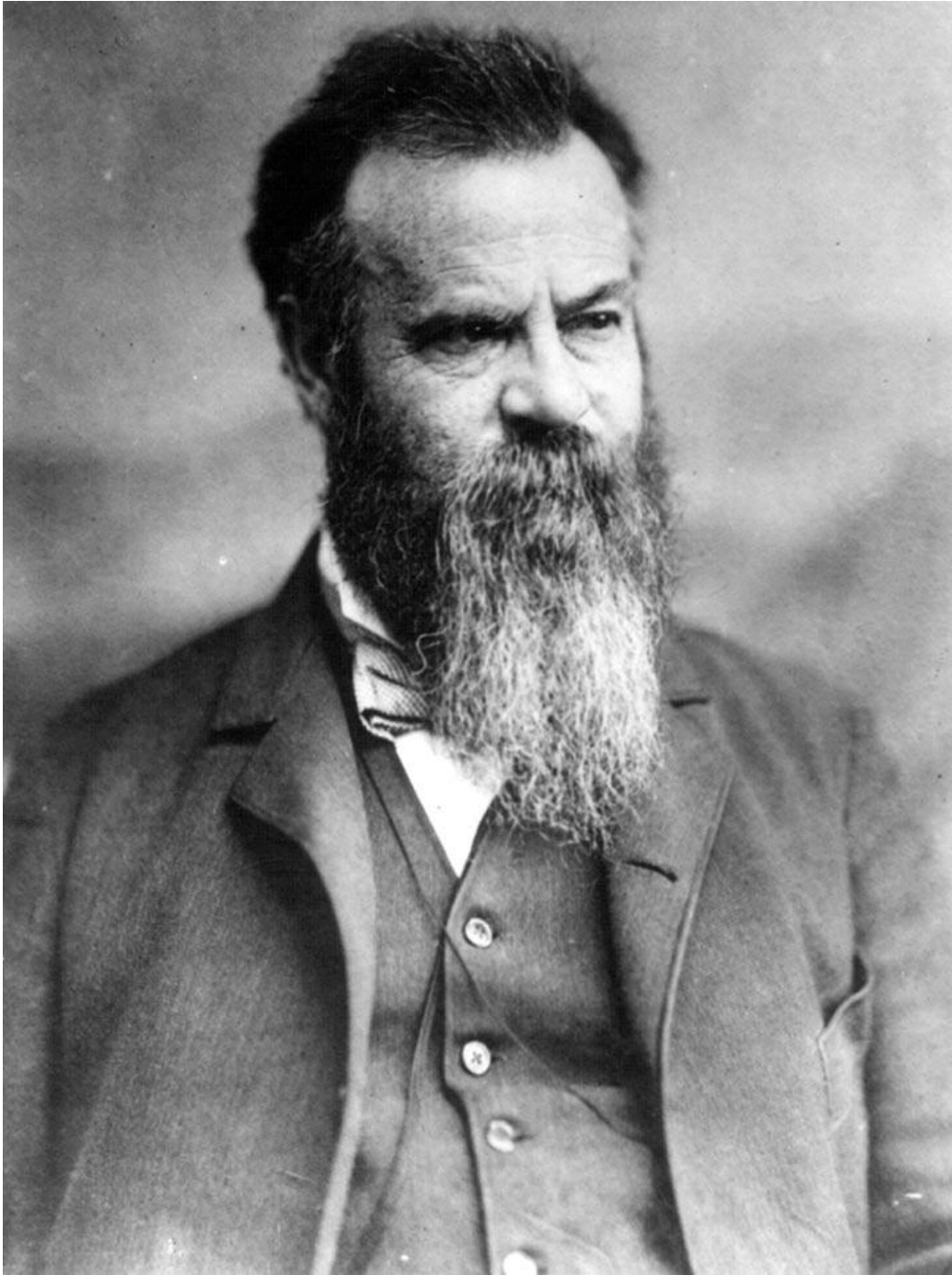


William Hawkins



Wm. Wesley Hawkins

John Wesley Powell



The Boats

The No Name, The Kitty Clyde's Sister, the Maid of the Canyon, and The Emma Dean, were the four boats on the mission. Only two of the four boats made it to Lake Mead, one having been destroyed in Disaster Falls, and the other left behind in case the three who abandoned changed their minds.

“When Powell and his crew set off with three 21-foot round-bottomed rowboats and a 16-foot lightweight rowboat, outfitted with three watertight compartments in each boat to carry food, instruments and supplies, they faced a wild and naturally flowing river with no dams or reservoirs. It was a journey of exploration and adventure, and safety precautions were minimal.

Powell's boats were sleek and deeply-hulled Whitehall craft, designed to move quickly through harbors and lakes. One or two boat operators faced upstream while paddling, with a man in the stern steering via an oar or rudder. By the turn of the century, Colorado River navigators had abandoned this design in favor of shallower hulls and downstream-facing paddlers.

Since the Whitehalls did not navigate well through shallow, rocky rapids, the crew had to portage all four of the boats through most of the whitewater reaches. At the more severe rapids, they had to remove and carry all the supplies and equipment from the boats. The boats were either laboriously carried or “lined” down as far as the ropes would take them, then dropped for the men below to catch them.

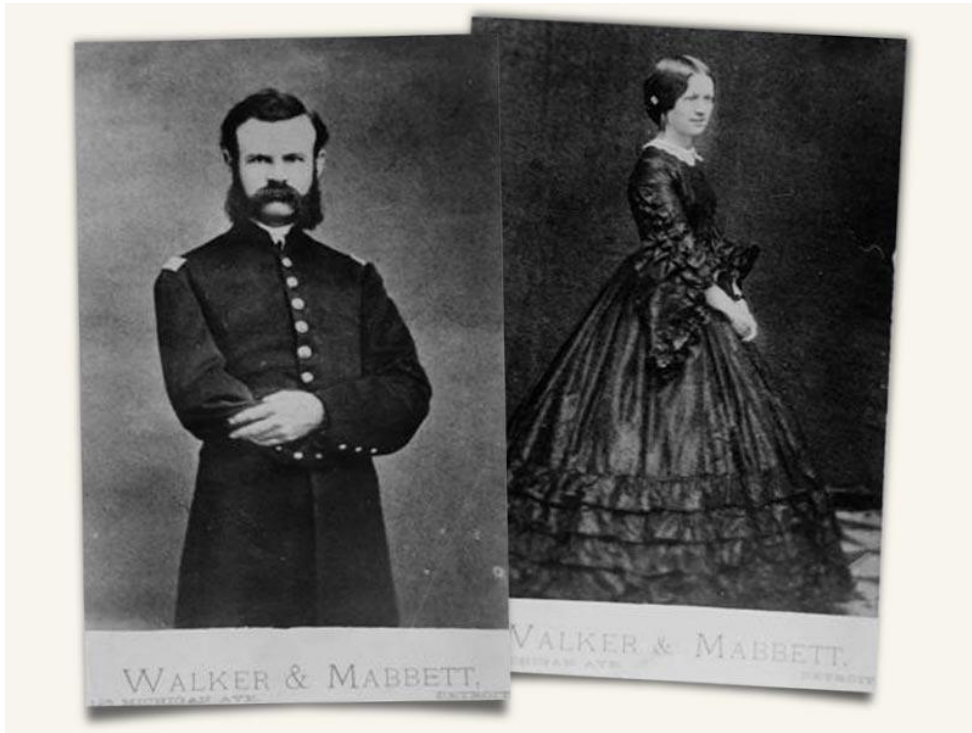
On June 9, 1869, the team reached “the wildest rapid yet seen,” which they named Disaster Falls. Three of the four boats were pulled onto the shore to be portaged but the fourth, aptly named No Name, was too far out in the current and had picked up water in the rapid above. The boat hit rocks, but the crew managed to swim to a small island as the boat struck more rocks and was destroyed. The team lost all the supplies on that boat but managed to recover a small amount of the equipment used for elevation measurements...and a jug of whiskey.”

https://www.usgs.gov/center-news/powell-expedition-rafting-along-colorado-and-green-rivers-then-and-now?qt-news_science_products=1#qt-news_science_products

An image of the 1871 expedition, where Powell rode on a chair strapped to the lead boat



John Wesley Powell and Emma Dean Powell



A recreation of the Emma Dean



Ute History

Collated from:

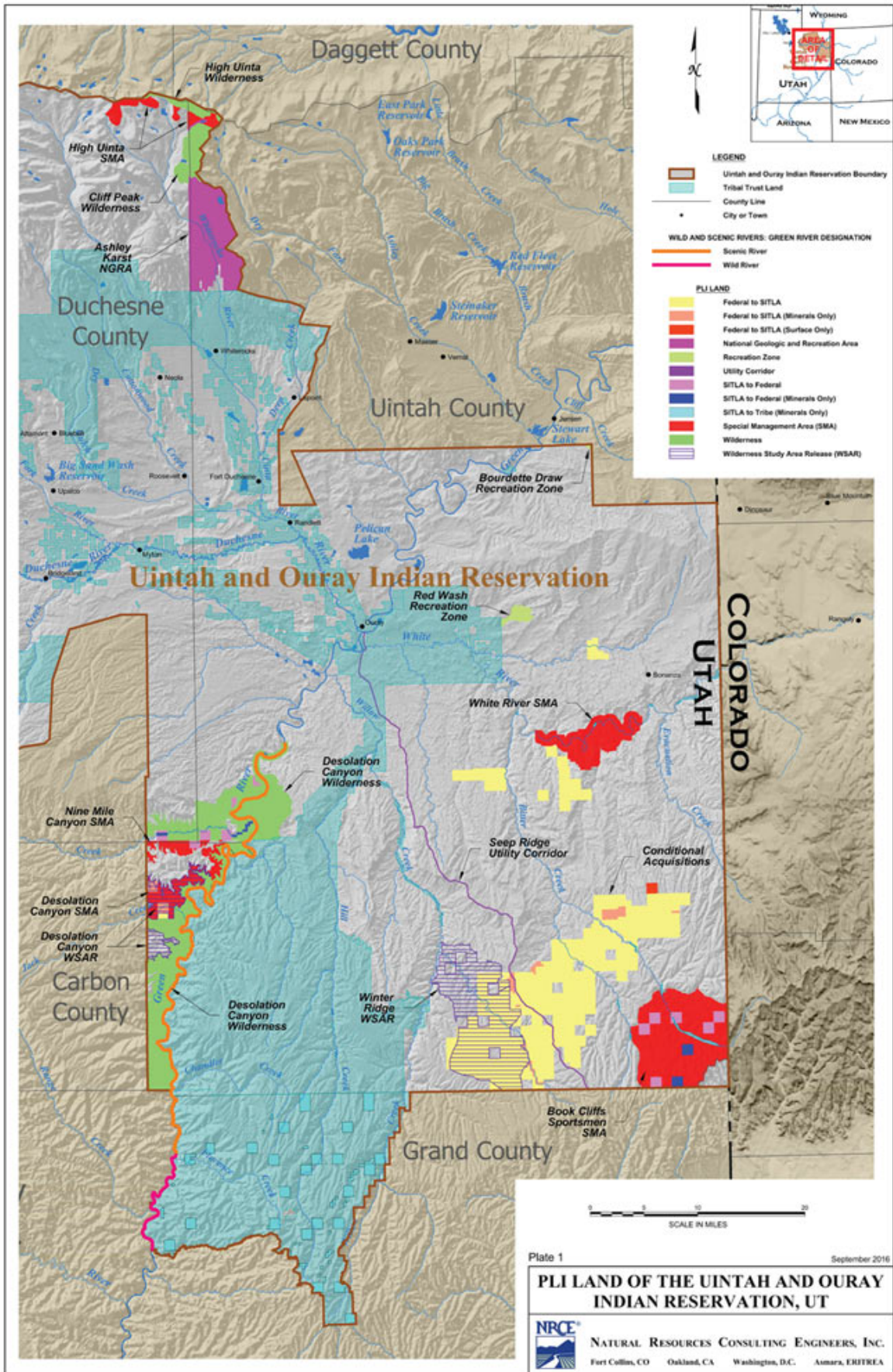
<https://indian.utah.gov/ute-indian-tribe-of-the-uintah-ouray-reservation/>

The Ute Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray reservation is located in Northeastern Utah (Fort Duchesne) about 150 miles east of Salt Lake City, Utah. After conflicts with the Mormons, the Utes signed the Treaty of Spanish Fork in 1865 and were forced to move to the dry Uintah Basin. Currently, the reservation is the second largest Indian Reservation in the U.S. and covers over 4.5 million acres. They have a membership of 2,070, and over half of the members live on the reservation.

Three bands of Utes make up the Northern Ute tribe: the Whiteriver, Uncompahgre, and Uintah. The Uintah Band was first to call the Uintah Basin their home. Later, the Whiteriver and Uncompahgre bands were removed from Colorado to the Uintah Valley Reservation, creating the Uintah and Ouray Reservation.

According to Ute tradition they were brought here by the god Sinauf. Anthropologists say that the Utes migrated to the northern Colorado Plateau between one and two thousand years ago. They are part of the Southern Numic speakers of the Numic language family. They are talented artists, specifically creating religious and ceremonial beadwork and leatherwork.

Merely Underground sits on Pueblos and Núu-agma-təvə-pə (Ute) land. To find out more about what land you are on, please visit www.native-land.ca.



The Playwright

Jaclyn Backhaus is a playwright, educator, and co-founder of Fresh Ground Pepper theatre festival. Her work includes *Men On Boats*, *India Pale Ale*, *You Across From Me*, *Folk Wandering*, and *You On the Moors Now*. She was the 2016 Tow Foundation Playwright-in-Residence at Clubbed Thumb, and she is the recipient of the Jody Falco and Jeffrey Steinman Commission for Emerging Playwrights from Playwrights Horizons. She has also received the Ars Nova commission for *Bull's Hollow*. Backhaus holds a BFA in Drama from NYU Tisch. She grew up in Phoenix, Arizona, but currently lives in Queens, New York. She is of Punjabi, German, and botanical descent.



Compiled by Liz Gray