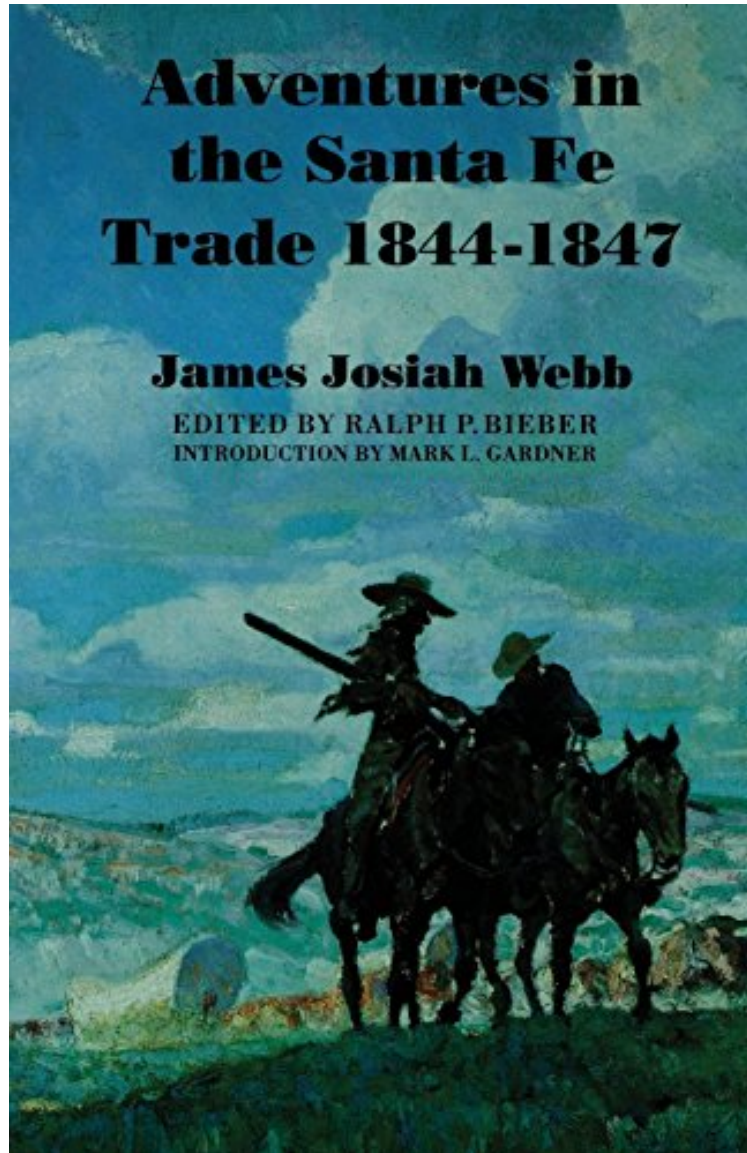


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## Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade, 1844-1847

*James Josiah Webb*

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**James Josiah Webb : Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade, 1844-1847** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade, 1844-1847:

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Santa Fe TrailBy BomojazIn January 1888, a few months shy of his 70th birthday, James Josiah Webb sat down in his Connecticut home and began writing his memoirs of his days as a Santa Fe trader, which had consumed 17 years of his life from 1844 to 1861. Unfortunately, a year later, after writing about only the first three years of that experience, Webb died. Although unfinished, this is Webb's manuscript as it lay in his desk the day he died. After settling in St. Louis from his family's home in Connecticut, Webb became interested in the trade caravans that took goods between Independence, MO, and Santa Fe (and other points in Mexico). In 1844 he made his first trading expedition; although it wasn't a huge success, he returned to St. Louis and, with a partner, planned another trip. This second venture the following year was a big success. But the war with Mexico threw a monkey wrench into things, and on his third trip the partners decided to bring their goods beyond Santa Fe to near Mexico City. They were arrested in Chihuahua, where they remained prisoners for a month, and when finally released, proceeded on to San Juan de los Lagos, where they sold their goods. His account ends with their return to St. Louis. Webb must have had a phenomenal memory because his narrative is packed with anecdotes and encounters with other traders and trail travelers that seem fresh and complete. He apparently kept all his account books and business records for all his years spent in the trade, but there is no mention of him keeping journals. His style is breezy and informal, and the book hasn't been "doctored" in any way by the editor (except for spelling and grammar corrections). The editor, Ralph Bieber, has done an excellent job (in footnotes) in identifying geographical features mentioned and expanding on various people encountered by Webb. The only criticism I have is the book is lacking an index, which would be useful. It's a fascinating first-hand account of life on the Santa Fe Trail (and Mexico). Webb's manuscript ran some 250 pages yet covered only three years; one can only imagine had he lived longer to complete his memoirs how many volumes they would comprise. If the rest were only half as interesting and informative as this volume, they would still be worth looking into.

James Josiah Webb left Independence, Missouri, in the summer of 1844 and headed down the Santa Fe Trail with goods bought in St. Louis. Although his first venture as a trader was a failure, he eventually made a fortune as a merchant in Santa Fe. Webb recorded his youthful experiences in 1888, and Ralph P. Bieber, a respected scholar and researcher on western expansion, edited and annotated his journal for publication more than forty years later. Long out of print, *Adventures in the Santa Fe Trade* is an entertaining and important source of first-hand information about the Santa Fe Trail and trade; trappers, Mexicans, and Indian tribes of the Old Southwest; and the impact of the Mexican War on southwestern trade.

It is a story of stirring adventure, of hardship and of financial losses and profits. Webb was an unusual man, as were most of the traders of his day and since, and though thirty years elapsed from the time he began to recount his adventures, the memory of them remained undimmed. Boston Transcript