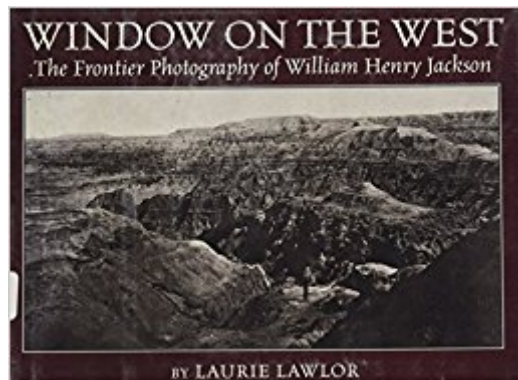




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# Window On The West: The Frontier Photography Of William Henry Jackson



## Synopsis

Presents the photographs taken by William Henry Jackson from 1869 to 1893, discussing his life and how his work captured and introduced the American West to the public.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Although this dense volume offers a sweeping view of the rapidly changing American West between 1869 and 1893, it provides few insights into Jackson and his photography. The details of life in the West that made Lawlor's recent *American Sisters: West Along the Wagon Road, 1852* so compelling are nearly absent here. In chronicling the work and career of the self-taught photographer and explorer who popularized images of the Western frontier, the author provides only sketchy biographical information. For example, Lawlor makes a vague reference to a "broken heart" that drove Jackson from his job working in a photography gallery to bullwack on the Oregon Trail; a few paragraphs later the author refers to a bride "of less than one month" whom Jackson leaves for his first Western photographic expedition, offering little more than the wife's name. Lengthy digressions on subjects as diverse as the Industrial Revolution, the history of photography and the effect of train travel on the frontier prove less interesting because they omit Jackson almost entirely. Jackson's dramatic black-and-white images capture the grandeur, scale and mystery of the West, but, except for a few anecdotal gems (including the story about a Jackson photo that inspired a poem by Longfellow), this volume will be utilized best as a research tool. Ages 10-up. (Dec.)

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Grade 5-8-Lawlor describes the artist's life and work, but also goes further, investigating the historical and social background that made his photos relevant and the crucial part they played in shaping national attitudes. The book is arranged neatly around phases of Jackson's varied career. He photographed for railroads, explored and surveyed with the Hayden Expeditions, published the first photographs of the Yellowstone Valley, and captured the rapid changes of the West in pictures of American Indians and mining towns. Lawlor gives extensive background about the land and events that shaped Jackson's West. With clear and engaging prose, she covers topics as diverse as industrialization, the Gilded Age, railroad developments, photographic techniques, racial prejudice, and the decline of the American Indian lifestyle. The text frequently diverges from Jackson's life for several pages at a time in order to provide background, but the information ultimately provides a richer appreciation of the photographer's experiences. Jackson himself is represented through descriptions of his life, excerpts from his diaries, and dozens of reproductions. Few intimate details or strong emotions related to Jackson's personal life emerge, but his fascination with the West and his dedication to his art come through consistently. The photographer's experiences touched upon many key developments in the history of the American West, and Lawlor successfully brings the era to life within the framework of this man's remarkable career. Steven Engelfried, Deschutes County Library, Bend, OR Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Interesting but not engrossing overview of Jackson's life and career. Photo selection marginal and reproduction bland. Worth it with other books at a used book price but not as a stand-alone reference.

I spotted this book at the library near the check-out desk and grabbed it-the subtitle, *The Frontier photography of William Henry Jackson*, sounded like something I could pick up and browse in between tasks (this was between Thanksgiving and Christmas). I have a grown son in California and a grown daughter who is a photographer and who travels the world pursuing new vistas for her camera. I am buying her this book as it resonates with the kind of tale she has told me of her adventures. It is described as juvenile literature, which is all well and true because the language is accessible to junior-high-aged children, but nevertheless regrettable because perhaps most adults will therefore never consider reading it. Yet the writing, the concepts, and above all the photography are so full of the beauty, the optimism, the struggles and challenges of our nation in the nineteenth century as we grew from a rural thinly populated mainly eastern seaboard land to a multiethnic,

continental, industrial society that I found it entirely engrossing. All these social and cultural threads weave through the narrative painlessly, and the glory of the photos of life and nature and the real people I have always heard (only as names in history books) at the time of the conquering of the west are reason you keep turning those pages.

I bought this book expecting quite a few Colorado photographs, there are some but not that many. The book itself is sort of a history of the development of the west as much as a history of Mr. Jackson, covers a lot of territory and not so much of it Jackson as it should be (and part of that includes the Chicago World's Fair of 1893). The pictures cover Mr. Jackson at all stages of his life, Colorado and other states, and that World's Fair. Don't pay attention to the young age rating (even the book liner note refers to that) as it is written well enough to appeal to any age. The most appealing section for me was the bit on making and using wet plate negatives then printing from them (p 23-24), I hadn't seen that information before.

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