

Book Review

Yellowstone denied: The life of Gustavus Cheyney Doane

By Kim Allen Scott

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KIM ALLEN SCOTT'S *Yellowstone denied: The life of Gustavus Cheyney Doane* is a gem: an engaging, informative account of a man who has largely escaped popular notice and was devastated because of it. Doane, best known for his participation in the Washburn-Langford-Doane expedition into Yellowstone in 1870, was a career U.S. Cavalryman consumed by a single-minded pursuit of fame in the waning days of American exploration. Coupled with an uncanny knack for being in the wrong place at the wrong time and an unbecoming sense of entitlement, Doane's thirst for recognition had profound negative effects on both his professional and personal lives.

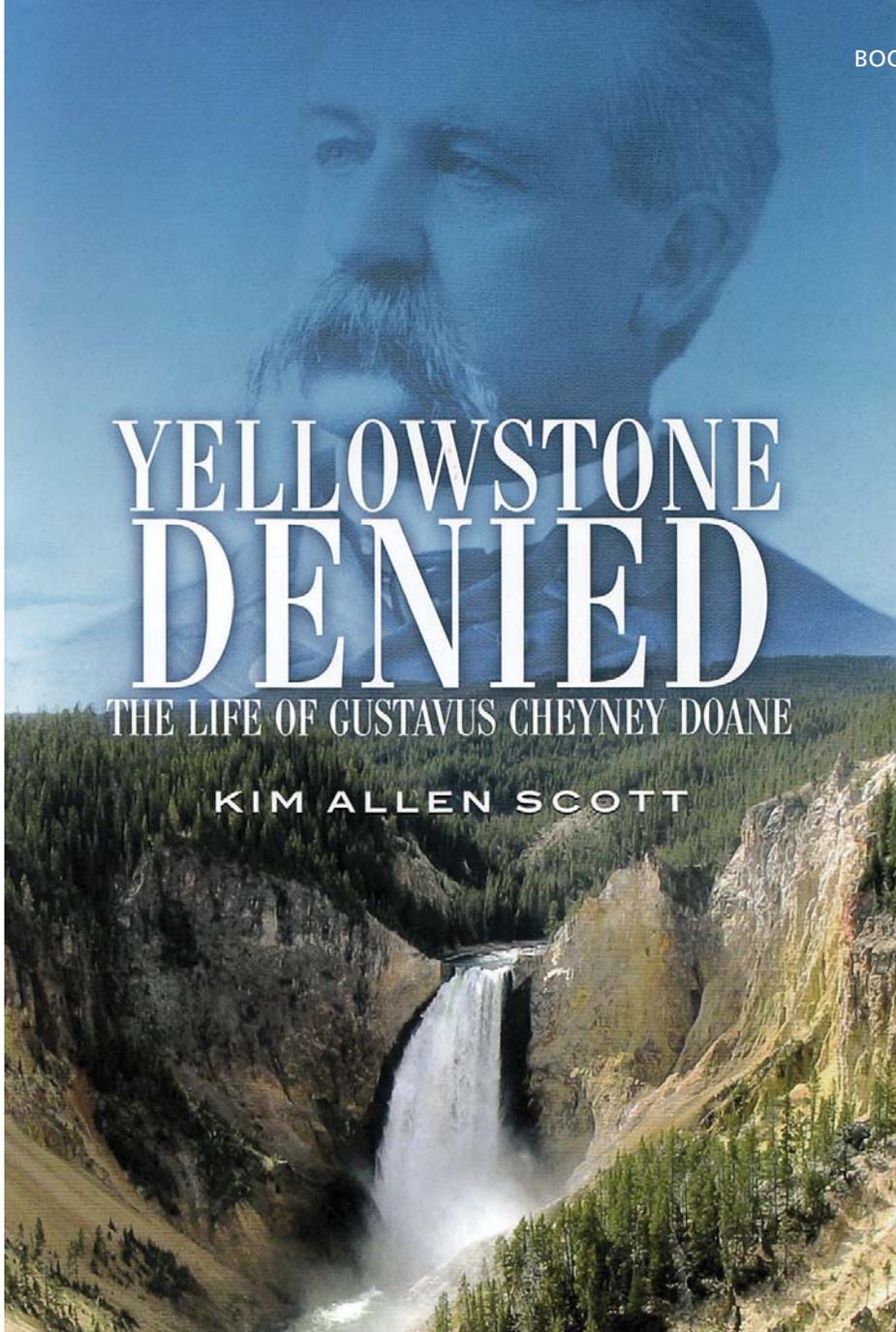
A string of failures

Scott describes Doane's career as "star-crossed" (p. 263), clearly an apt term. After a largely obscure Civil War career—in which his carefully cultivated connections

ultimately got him placed with a brigade whose primary activities seemed to be mutiny and plunder—his biography is a litany of missed opportunities. In business he was an unsuccessful carpetbagger and inventor; his attempts to persuade the army to purchase and produce his innovative tent design failed largely because of bad timing and unreliable partnerships. His effort to play a significant role in the U.S. Army's Nez Perce campaign was foiled by natural disaster in the form of a ruinous hailstorm. He was appointed the nominal leader of an Arctic expedition, only to have it end in failure and its sponsor exposed as a crook and embezzler. On that expedition, Doane displayed the same Ahab-like determination that had earlier contributed to the equally miserable failure of an ill-advised midwinter reconnaissance down the Snake River. Doane spent the last days of his military career tramping around Arizona as part of the army's Apache campaign.

Successes

Doane did enjoy two great successes in life: a well-written and well-received report on the Yellowstone expedition of 1870, and his marriage to Mary Lee Hunter, his second wife. Doane was tapped to serve as army escort on the Washburn expedition because of his polished writing skills and his loyalty to Major E. M. Baker, perpetrator of a Piegan Indian massacre in which Doane participated. While acting as the Washburn party's scribe, in an irony worthy of Greek tragedy Doane battled a thumb infection that made the act of holding a pencil excruciatingly painful. "In the middle of the opportunity of his life, his thumb threatened to rob him of the ability to record his experiences" (p. 76). Doane's perseverance paid off, however; as Scott attests, "The accolades that Doane received on his [Yellowstone] report marked the high-water point of his life" (p. 83). The success of his report awakened in Doane a desire to forever be remembered



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in connection with Yellowstone National Park, and he devoted substantial amounts of time and resources to achieving that goal. Most of all, he coveted, but was never granted, the park's superintendency. Throughout these efforts, he was supported by Mary, in whom he found lasting companionship and loyalty.

Yellowstone finally realized

This book, largely informed by archival documents, could have been dry, but is

not. Scott has written a hugely engaging account with a little something for everyone interested in Yellowstone history, military history, or American frontier history. *Yellowstone denied* is also an excellent book for those who understand the pull that Yellowstone country can exert on the soul. Perhaps this is why, even with full knowledge that Doane never became superintendent of Yellowstone and that he was an unpleasant person, readers may find themselves rooting for him to succeed in his quest, or at least to achieve the widely recognized association with the park that he so desperately craved.

If the book has a shortcoming, it is that the author sometimes gets a bit ahead of his narrative, characterizing Doane as self-aggrandizing and hungry for glory before fully allowing him, through his letters and other documents, to reveal those traits himself. This leaves the reader, early on, to wonder if the author is not being a bit harsh, although in time it becomes clear that Scott is right about Doane. Doane's papers and actions are themselves lively, revealing, and transparent enough to reveal his true character without the author's assistance. However, this is a minor quibble with a very good book a very long time in the making. Scott's epilogue recounts how, long after Doane's 1892 death from influenza, even the writing of his biography was stalled and thwarted because of personalities. In the 1930s, Mary Doane provided her husband's papers to then-Montana State College professor Merrill Burlingame, for purposes of writing Doane's biography. By 1944, Burlingame had rather obstinately refused to produce a manuscript that satisfied his publisher and given up on the project. He subsequently declined to allow any other prospective biographers to access Doane's materials, and then parceled the documents out to different repositories over a number of decades. Burlingame eventually donated the remainder of Doane's papers to Montana State University in the early 1990s, and other remnants have arrived at the university in piecemeal fashion since then. One is left wondering what Doane would have thought of this book, or if he would have simply sighed in relief and satisfaction that his story was finally told at all, his name linked, in its title, forever with that of Yellowstone.