

A detailed oil painting of Alphonso Wetmore, a man with wavy brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a dark blue high-collared coat. He is looking slightly to the right of the viewer. In the foreground, a quill pen is shown dipping into a glass inkwell on a wooden desk. The background is a soft, neutral tone.

Alphonso Wetmore

Soldier,
Adventurer,
and Writer

Mary Barile



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Introduction

In the early 1800s, Americans began to move from the eastern states into the wild, mostly unsettled lands west of the Mississippi River. These emigrants were looking for rich land and a new life on the American frontier. Many were also looking for adventure.

One of these emigrants was an army officer named Alphonso Wetmore. Despite losing his arm in the War of 1812, Alphonso remained in the army and joined an expedition to explore the lands west of St. Louis and establish forts in the new territory.

After the expedition ended, Alphonso was stationed at a fort on the frontier. He wrote and published stories about his many adventures. After leaving the army, Alphonso worked as a lawyer and newspaper publisher, wrote plays and stories, and traveled on the Santa Fe Trail to trade in Mexico. He also compiled a book called a “gazetteer” that told people in the East about Missouri and encouraged them to move west and settle in the new state.

Alphonso Wetmore joined the army because he wanted a life of adventure. He found excitement, and left many stories that tell us about his life and journeys on the frontier. 



Chapter 1

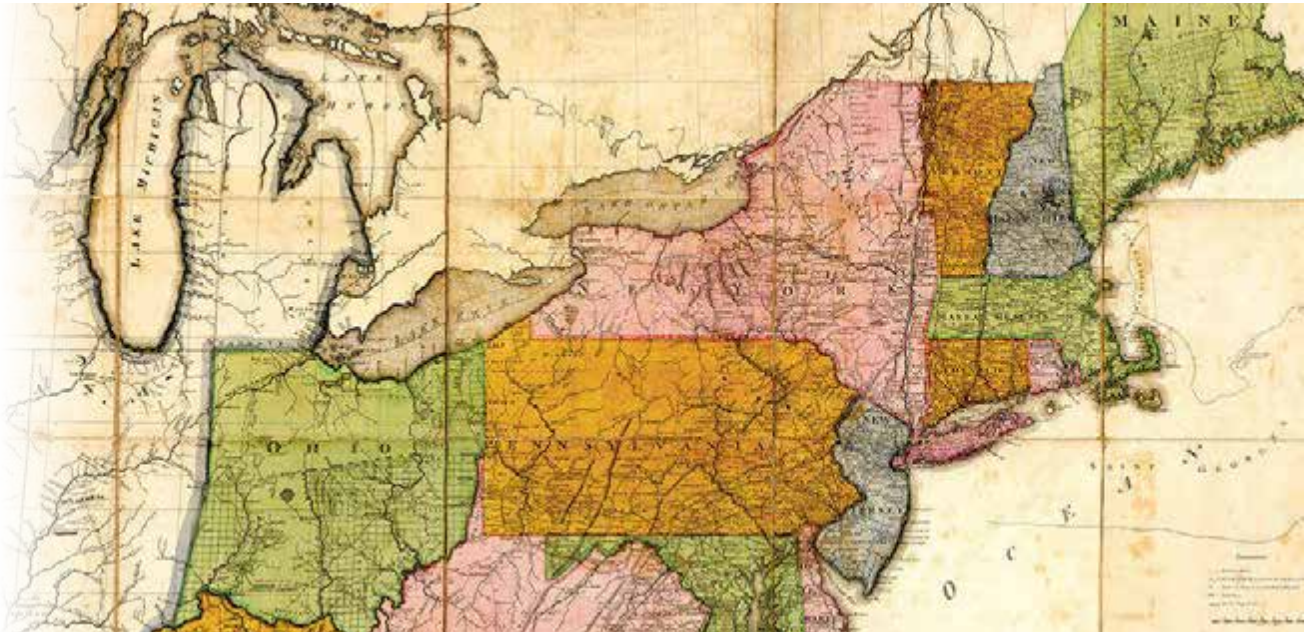
Frontier Childhood

Alphonso Wetmore was born February 17, 1793, in the rural town of Winchester, Connecticut. He came from a large family; he had nine brothers and sisters. Alphonso's name was probably a little unusual for that time, but his parents must have liked unique names. He had sisters named Lois Malinda and Artemesia and brothers named Pythagoras and Salmon.

Alphonso's parents were from New England. His father, Seth, had been a soldier during the American Revolution. In early America, only men who owned land or paid taxes were allowed to vote. Some people,

including Seth, argued that every man, rich or poor, should have the right to vote. Wealthy Connecticut landowners did not like that idea and often threatened people who wanted to expand voting rights. In 1803, when Alphonso was ten years old, Seth and his friends moved their families to New York, looking for a better life and the chance to own land and vote.

To get to their new home, the Wetmore family and some of their friends traveled along the Mohawk pike, a rough road that cut through the wilderness to western New York. The emigrants settled in the



By the early 1800s, the United States had sixteen states, extending as far west as Ohio. The areas that were newer and less settled were considered the frontier.



Chapter 4

Trader on the Santa Fe Trail

In 1821, the same year that Missouri became a state, Mexico gained independence from Spain. At that time, Mexico included what is now the southwestern United States. For many years, Spain would not allow American traders to enter Mexico, but Mexican independence changed that. The new country welcomed traders, and Missourians knew they could get to Mexico over land faster than people in other parts of the United States.

In 1821, a trader named William Becknell left Franklin, Missouri, with a shipment of merchandise and headed west to Mexico. He sold his goods in Santa Fe and returned in January 1822, carrying bags of silver coins. When he returned, people came out to hear about his travels and Becknell spilled the coins on the ground for all to see. Word of Becknell's successful trading trip spread and other traders soon followed. The Santa Fe Trail was open for business.

Soon caravans were leaving from Franklin each spring and returning from Santa Fe before winter. Alphonso was impressed with what he heard from traders when they returned from Santa Fe. Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton wanted information about the trail and asked several people, including Alphonso Wetmore, to send it to him. In 1824, Alphonso wrote a letter about the route from Missouri to Santa Fe.



Mexico produced almost half of the silver in circulation in the early 1800s, and the Mexican silver dollar, or peso, was recognized as legal currency all around the world.