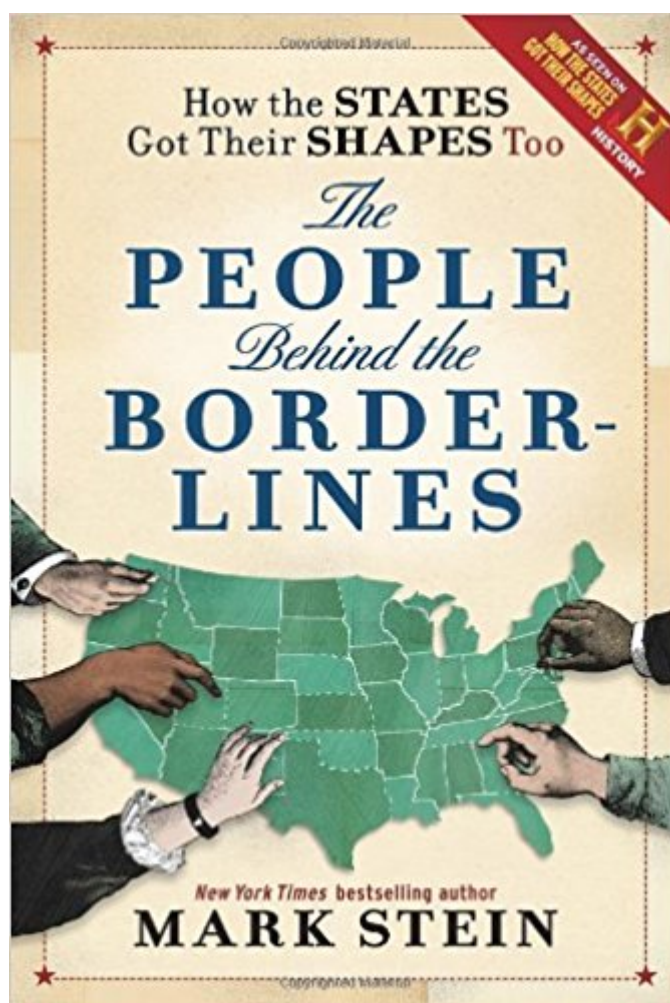


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# How The States Got Their Shapes Too: The People Behind The Borderlines



## Synopsis

Was Roger Williams too pure for the Puritans, and what does that have to do with Rhode Island? Why did Augustine Herman take ten years to complete the map that established Delaware? How did Rocky Mountain rogues help create the state of Colorado? All this and more is explained in Mark Stein's new book. *How the States Got Their Shapes Too* follows *How the States Got Their Shapes* looks at American history through the lens of its borders, but, while *How the States Got Their Shapes* told us why, this book tells us who. This personal element in the boundary stories reveals how we today are like those who came before us, and how we differ, and most significantly: how their collective stories reveal not only an historical arc but, as importantly, the often overlooked human dimension in that arc that leads to the nation we are today. The people featured in *How the States Got Their Shapes Too* lived from the colonial era right up to the present. They include African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, women, and of course, white men. Some are famous, such as Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, and Daniel Webster. Some are not, such as Bernard Berry, Clarina Nichols, and Robert Steele. And some are names many of us know but don't really know exactly what they did, such as Ethan Allen (who never made furniture, though he burned a good deal of it). In addition, *How the States Got Their Shapes Too* tells of individuals involved in the Almost States of America, places we sought to include but ultimately did not: Canada, the rest of Mexico (we did get half), Cuba, and, still an issue, Puerto Rico. Each chapter is largely driven by voices from the time, in the form of excerpts from congressional debates, newspapers, magazines, personal letters, and diaries. Told in Mark Stein's humorous voice, *How the States Got Their Shapes Too* is a historical journey unlike any other you've taken. The strangers you meet here had more on their minds than simple state lines, and this book makes for a great new way of seeing and understanding the United States. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Library Journal Stein, Mark. *How the States Got Their Shapes Too: The People Behind the Borderlines*. Smithsonian. Jun. 2011. c.360p. illus. maps. index. ISBN 9781588343147. \$24.95. HIST In an evocative sequel to his popular *How the States Got Their Shapes*, Stein presents a plentitude of varied and compelling biographical sketches associated with the setting of our national boundaries. The personalities, both the notable (e.g., Thomas Jefferson, Daniel Webster, Ethan Allen, Charles Mason, and Jeremiah Dixon) and the more obscure (Zebulon Butler, Clara Nichols, John Meares) and their agendas are central to the book. Readers are reminded that under President James K. Polk, U.S. boundaries grew exponentially to include Texas and all lands between the Rockies and the Pacific, producing a colossal headache for Congress and a dilemma largely solved by such outsize local personalities as Sam Houston and Brigham Young. The author also treats lands we attempted to annex but lost: Canada, the remainder of Mexico, Cuba, and the persistent issue of Puerto Rico. Readers will be inspired by Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton's dogged campaign to win statehood for the District of Columbia. VERDICT Stein's major and minor vignettes are well chosen from a wide array of primary and secondary sources. The book offers a perfect blend of optimism, tongue-in-cheek humor, and universal appeal. A winning effort. —John Carver Edwards, Univ. of Georgia Libs., Cleveland Booklist Stein's *How the States Got Their Shapes* (2008) described why the American states look the way they do — how their borders landed where they did. This equally informative follow-up puts the spotlight on the people responsible for shaping those borders. People like Roger Williams, the Puritan minister who was expelled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for advocating against the Church of England and established the township of Providence at the tip of the bay, and Anne Hutchinson, also banished, who secured the rights to a small island called Aquidneck by the Indians and Rhode Island by the British. Or — and this is a curious one — Robert Jenkins, the sea captain whose severed ear played a key role in establishing the boundary between Florida and Georgia. Stein, a playwright and screenwriter, writes history the way it should be written, as an entertaining story and not merely a tedious list of names, dates, and

places. This is a very interesting follow-up to the earlier book, but it works equally well as a stand-alone. • David PittKirkus ReviewsA fun sequel offers more recondite tidbits of American history. With 50 states, there are plenty of details about border controversies for this mildly titillating follow-up to screenwriter Stein's *How the States Got Their Shapes* (2008), which in turn inspired the History Channel's eponymous documentary. The personalities behind the disputes take center stage: Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, who were actually a pair of highly accomplished English surveyors of the Royal Society possibly hired by Benjamin Franklin to establish impartially the disputed 300-mile Pennsylvania-Maryland-Delaware boundary. "Asking Mason and Dixon to survey a boundary in America," writes the author, "was akin to asking Mozart to play at a prom. Thanks to Ethan Allen (not a furniture maker) and his motley posse of Green Mountain Boys, the homesteads making up the future Vermont were saved from rapacious New Yorkers. It is largely due to the zeal (or wealth) of John Hardeman Walker who "put the boot heel on Missouri in order to keep his land from sinking into Arkansas. Under the presidency of James K. Polk, America's borders increased greatly, incorporating Texas, the Oregon Territory and everything in between the Rockies and the Pacific, creating a massive befuddlement for lawmakers; bright lights such as Sam Houston, Brigham Young and John Sutter would all wield profound influence on the shape of the states affiliated with their names. Stein includes contributions by important women, including proto-feminist Clarina Nichols, who moved her family to Kansas for the purpose of creating an anti-slavery majority in 1854, and Representative Eleanor Holmes Norton, who attempted tirelessly to win statehood for the District of Columbia. Overall, the author provides plenty of good stuff for tournament quizzes and Jeopardy questions. Bright, readable and accessible for all ages. From the Hardcover edition.

MARK STEIN is a playwright and screenwriter. His plays have been performed off-Broadway and at theaters throughout the country. His films include *Housesitter* with Steve Martin and Goldie Hawn. Stein has also taught writing and drama at American University and Catholic University. His previous book, *How the States Got Their Shapes*, a New York Times bestseller, was the basis for The History Channel's documentary of the same name. From the Hardcover edition.

Fascinating book. Though pretty tough to read on a kindle. The references to other chapters make it tough to bounce back and forth from one section to another. It built appropriately on the groundwork

laid in the first book, and was genuinely enlightening and engaging. Great author - good sense of humor and wit. I learned a lot about my home and places I've visited. To make the history of a state as apparently boring as Kansas or Minnesota interesting takes a special touch.

I learned things about California history that never got mentioned much in grade school, both by reading about John Sutter and William Seward.

Well written

Good read, pointed out the little things not talked about in history class.

I saw the documentaries on television. I could not believe all I saw, much less remember it. These books are fast becoming my family's dinner night discussions. Who knew?!?!??

I LOVED the first book, watched the History Channel special and the History Channel show... however I just couldn't get into this one. The first one moved along at a good pace, this one drudges on during the boring legal battles and the quotes are just as dull. Where the first one was interesting to just about anyone, this one is geared to those who like US History and/or Geography. I found it worthwhile to read but wouldn't recommend it beyond my fellow history buffs.

I've been wanting a book like this for years. Other reviewers focused on inaccuracies. There are some, but no more than I generally see in books of this type. Let's face it - editors simply aren't as thorough as they were 30 years ago. I do agree that the arrangement or the states in alphabetical order made for some confusion and repetition. But that probably will be helpful when using it as a reference rather than when reading it cover to cover

very helpful..... thx..... l8r fredy

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