

ON THE ROAD TO BETHLEHEM

By O. J. PRUITT

In 1804, Sergeant Gass swam the horses across the Missouri river twelve miles below Council Bluffs. He found an Indian trail along the bank and buffalo trails leading into the hills six miles distant. The trail along the bank became a part of the route over which the Mormon Battalion marched in the longest march in history.

Little was written of this area for years until the advent of trappers and hunters. The only means of traffic on the river was by keel boats propelled by oars and cordelled.

Manuel Lisa was the first to start a trading post. This was at Florence, Nebraska, in 1811. Lisa was soon followed by Peter Sarpy, who established a second post. A third post opposite that of Trader's Point was begun in 1816 by the elder Chouteau and Sublet. Francis Guitar got off a boat at Trader's Point, came to Miller's Hollow, and started his post in 1824. He had been a cook on one of the boats owned by Chouteau.

In the days of pirogues and cordelling, Bethlehem was a camping place where pirogues were tied up for the night. With the coming of steamboats, river towns sprang up thick and fast, each vying for recognition and for a share of patronage of travelers.

At one time, up the river from Bethlehem, was California City, later to become Pacific City. It was four miles inland and now is the ghost city two miles north of Pacific Junction, which is an important Burlington railway station. Platteville was next, then Hamilton's, Trader's Point and Ray's Landing. Trader's Point was destroyed by the meander of the river in the early sixties. The only traces existing up to and until 1917 were the standing walls of the rock school house one-half mile

east. It was this school that was taught by the father of the late E. H. Sylvester. He kept a diary and from it the writer learned the names of people who lived one hundred years ago.

Hamilton sold his place to a man named Pinkney Robinson, who was a notorious character. He is said to have been leader of the vigilantes and, at the same time, in cahoots with a horse-thieving band. This band ran horses from Kansas and Missouri. They hid the horses in the cottonwoods and after some camouflaging sold them to Mormons, California gold rushers and Oregon trailers.

In a bend of the road east of Danger Hill in Mills county stands "Hangman's Tree" where two men were strung up. Pinkney Robinson was accused of the nefarious job. Robinson left the place he had bought from Hamilton and after leaving was never heard from again. Some reported that he had gone to Colorado. There was controversy over the destruction of the hangman's tree when the highway commission wished to straighten the road over Danger Hill. The road has not been changed. The tree is still standing.

TALES OF FRANCIS GUITAR

The writer remembers Francis Guitar as a spinner of Indian yarns. In his declining days he sat around in Bayliss park and spun some dandies. His audience was mostly made up of youths. The stories heard sounded a little exaggerated and it was my opinion that the hyperbole slant was to personalize his bravery. In after years, I learned that they were truths.

In the battle of the Sioux and Pawnee, which took place about seventy miles west of Omaha, Guitar furnished the Pawnee with powder and ball. He also directed the fight which ran for three days. Guitar was wounded in the fight and, after the wound was dressed, continued in command.

One of the local stories Guitar told was of standing in his doorway of the Miller Hollow post (Main and Broadway) and shooting a buffalo on the site of the present Chieftain hotel. Indians were chasing the bull south along the bluffs when it swerved east to cross Indian creek and Guitar swung the Kentucky rifle into action. His last store was located on South Main street opposite the Park building. His daughter, Mrs. Freeman, resides at 223 on South Twenty-first street and is ninety-two years old.

Platteville died a natural death for lack of patronage and the houses were moved to old Pacific City. Ray's Landing became obsolete when the river meandered and Lake Manawa was made. Ray's Landing was where the boats from St. Louis delivered supplies for Council Bluffs. It was from the bluffs above the training grounds of the Mormon battalion that Father DeSmet and four hundred Indians watched for the coming of the *Meranda* which sank. All was lost except a plow, a pair of boots, a handsaw and a quantity of liquor. It was late in April, 1838.

THE SCOURGE OF YELLOW FEVER

Now, to go back to the time of Lisa and Sarpy. Sublet and Jackson seem to have backed Lisa in his venture into the Indian trade. When Lisa died in 1822, Jackson took charge. Joseph LaBarge was an apprentice at Lisa's. LaBarge quit and took up piloting of steamboats as a vocation. He probably knew the traits of the "Big Muddy" better than any man living in his day. He made his last trip on a government snag boat in 1833.

LaBarge had as passengers some noted persons including the following: Father DeSmet, Father Verreydt, Maxmillian, Catlin, army officers galore, Audubon, artist Carl Bodner and artist Kurtz and noted Indian chiefs, Sacajawea and her husband Chabineau, Captain Clark as governor of the territory, and many more.

When the yellow fever broke out on one trip up, Father

Verreydt died and was interred near the Boyer river. The improvised casket was hewn from a huge cottonwood log. The slab lid was sealed with tar. On the down trip, with \$70,000 worth of gold dust aboard and some very anxious passengers in a hurry to get to St. Louis, LaBarge stopped the boat and disinterred the body and took it to St. Louis. The passengers protested, thinking it would bring on another siege of yellow fever.

LaBarge's brother perished with the blowing up of the steamer *Salido*. The boilers were being fired with oak barrel staves and bacon to raise the steam to round a bend. The river was very high and swift at the place in Missouri. The entire crew and forty German immigrants perished. The bell of the boat was blown one-half mile inland. Today that bell is in a church tower in Savannah, Missouri.

At the Union Pacific is a steamboat whistle. It is on the roundhouse and was taken from a sunken steamer near the Walter Hough farm near Crescent, Iowa.

A graduate archeologist from Iowa University dug from the Platteville township Indian village site a likeness of York, Captain Clark's valet. It is the work of a Pawnee squaw. Dr. W. H. Over of Vermillion, S. D., picked up a stone pipe from the same site. Jack DeWitt, a *Nonpareil* reporter, excavated many Indians' graves in the vicinity. The writer opened a burial mound one mile east. That event is a story in itself.

The prominence of the river town of Bethlehem came when the Mormons operated a ferry at the place. The west landing was just below the mouth of the Platte river. The overland trail led up the river to a crossing at Grand Island. Here it was joined with trails from Independence, Atchison and St. Joseph.

KIDNAPPING OF A PAWNEE GIRL

Now we come to a story wholly accredited to one George Wells, a radio technician when living in Council

Bluffs. It is a brief history of the old Chouteau fort at the site of the now extinct Buckingham lake. This place is fourteen miles south of the old Bethlehem site.

A sixteen-year-old boy was hired as interpreter for the men, twenty-one in number, stationed at the Chouteau fort at Buckingham lake. He had been raised near the Osage in Missouri and was said to hate all Indians. The fort hardly had been settled before the boy, named George Kern, kidnapped an Indian girl and brought her to the fort. Rules of the fort forbade any Indians from crossing the deadline one hundred yards distant from the fort without identification.

Kern held the girl captive over night. With the coming of daylight twenty Pawnee Indians, armed with bows and arrows, approached the deadline and demanded the return of the squaw. Kern, with a knife at her throat, defied the Indians. Kern told them in their own language, "Come and get her with her cut throat."

After a long parley among the Indians, they left, going back into the Waubansie hills. Some writers declare the kidnapping was for immoral purpose of men of the fort. Wells stated that Kern wanted to see how many Indians he could kill should they attack. The Indians had heard the roar of the brass cannons of the fort and feared it meant certain death, and wanted no part of such a fight.

About noon that next day, Kern released the squaw. He was rebuked by the commander of the post. The commander said they were there to trade, not to pick a fight. Kern made no reply and sulked by going out and walking around outside the fort. He was warned not to go out of sight for a few days or until the affair was forgotten.

Two days later, Kern, with his Kentucky rifle, strolled out into the great bottoms about two miles from camp. He was trying to get near enough to get a shot at a buffalo. As he sneaked through the grass, he heard the

zing of an arrow which hit him in the leg. The pain was so great that he fell down and lay quiet for awhile. Then, thinking the arrow might be poisoned, he made a small incision with his hunting knife and withdrew the arrow. He then bound it up with a huge chew of tobacco. Ever and anon he arose and looked for an approaching Indian. He sat and waited.

Presently an Indian came, slowly parting the tall slough grass, hoping the arrow had hit a vital spot. The Indian would then take the scalp and the gun and count a coup. He was the lover of the outraged squaw and had come for revenge. Alas he was doomed. At fifty yards Kern put a bullet squarely between the eyes and the Indian fell dead. Soon after this event, the Pawnee band crossed the river and encamped along the Platte river.

CHANGES IN TOWNS AND FORTS

The Buckingham fort was never a success. Only a few Otoes traded there. Later, Chouteau moved to one-half mile south of Fort Atkinson which was established in 1818-19 and was destroyed by fire set by the Pawnee in 1827. Just before the burning, the army had been moved back to Bellville and joined by a troop of dragoons.

Opposite the Lisa trading post, Bad Heart and his band of over two hundred Indians (Cherokee, Sioux) had a village on what is today the Charles Beno lower farm. Here is evidence of the embankment mentioned by DeSmet near the Grand Battier.

Bad Heart, under pretense of being friendly with the Lisa fort and promising all the up river Indian trade to Lisa, sent it to the Hamilton post twenty miles by river below. When the river meandered in 1832, Bad Heart and his entire band traveled up the Boyer river, thence south to the head of the Missouri Platte, and then down it to opposite Atchison, where he signed a treaty granting all the Platte purchase to the government. In this

purchase was sent the Pottawattamie, Ottawas, and Chippewas. The last of the Pottawattamie were removed from the territory in 1848 and sent to Oklahoma and Kansas, where they now reside. Mr. Allis, a missionary to the Pawnee, who died a few years ago, remembered when the Indians were marched by his place to Council Bluffs to be placed aboard a steamer to transport them to their new home.

Today, after one hundred twenty-five years, there remains no vestige of any of the river towns mentioned. The site of old Bethlehem is in dispute. Old timers even dispute there were ever any of the river towns herein mentioned. Be that as it may, the 1857 map must be true. DeSmet was never known to relate an untruth. General Atkinson was known for his veracity.

Today a visitor to the territory can see the old DeLil burying ground and the Hog ranch built of fir logs taken from the Iowa building at the TransMississippi Exhibition held in Omaha in 1898-9. Trains of the Burlington roar up the valley and cross the river at Plattsmouth. Planes are continually flying overhead. The rich bottom lands produce great crops of wheat, corn and oats. To supplant all this, drillers for oil sank a hole 2,500 feet in 1950 on the Tierschafer farm and got plenty of aqua pure.

Along the bluffs are the old Wall home and the grave of Allis and an Indian mound where twenty-four skeletons were removed under the supervision of Coroner Raynor of Glenwood. The mound is on the Jurgens farm within two stone throws of the Allis grave. Nearby is a huge depression from which the dirt for the mound was taken.

And if one looks carefully an arrow point of flint can be picked up, or a potsherd, or pipe, or bead. The chances are good in the Pony creek, or any of the washed gullies. The best bet is the site of the Indian village shown on the

Lewis and Clark map. It is in a canyon in the extreme northeast corner of Plattville Township.

REFERENCES: Pottawattamie County History, Mills County History, a map dated 1857, Sylvester's Diary, George Wells, Travels of DeSmet, Lewis and Clark, General Atkinson, Archeology by Jack DeWitt, interviews of old residents by the writer or legendary, Captain Kearney, and Babbitts "Early History of Council Bluffs."

HOOVER HAILED AS WORLD LEADER

Iowa-born Herbert Hoover, former President of the United States and now the elder statesman, received a new honor July 13, last. The American Alumni Council named Mr. Hoover "the American alumnus of the year" at its 35th annual conference at the Harvard Business School.

Mr. Hoover is a graduate of Stanford University, class of 1895. The presentation—an "award of merit" in the form of a decorated volume — was made by Chesley Worthington of Brown University, retiring president of the council. Mrs. Richard Brigham of Needham, a granddaughter of Mr. Hoover, accepted the award in Mr. Hoover's absence. In the volume it was stated:

"The world honors many a man for a single important achievement by which he serves the times in which he lives," the citation stated. . .

"Your life has been a succession of achievements, noble achievements, for each one of which you have deserved the gratitude of your countrymen. As engineer, as humanitarian, as statesman, and, in these recent years, as elder counselor of state, you have discharged great responsibilities with faith and courage and with devotion to the ideals which have made this nation great.

"We honor you as a private citizen whose high example is recorded on important pages in the annals of our time; a man of scholarly mind who searches for truth and makes use of it; a man of action who dares to do the things which are wise; a man of faith who understands the spiritual reserves which nurture the lives of men; a man who respects dignity in the simplest setting but who can be humble when he stands in a high place.

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