



STEPHEN WATTS KEARNY

Appointed from civil life First Lieutenant in the United States Army, March 12, 1812, and rose to the rank of Brigadier and Brevet Major General; was Governor of California from March to June 1847, and later military governor of Vera Cruz and Mexico City.

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THE MARCH OF THE DRAGOONS

COLONEL KEARNY'S EXPEDITION IMPRESSED INDIANS
WITH THE POWER OF THE WHITES

By SENATOR J. G. LUCAS

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The United States dragoons who in 1835 marched up the Des Moines river valley and across Iowa, starting from the old Fort Des Moines in Lee county, near the present town of Montrose, for the purpose of making a treaty with Wabasha, an important Sioux Indian chief whose village was located near the present city of Winona, in Minnesota, left a permanent impressjon on the history of the valley, as did their commanders later upon the records of the nation.

The expedition consisted of three companies of the First Regiment of Dragoons, B, H, and I, and was under the direct command of Col. Stephen W. Kearny. The company commanders were Capt. Nathan Boone, Capt. E. V. Sumner, and Lieut. Albert M. Lea. The fact that Lieutenant Lea was placed in the command of his company and thus played an important part in this notable chapter of Des Moines valley history making, was due to one of those unavoidable incidents of life which constantly occur. His superior, Capt. Jesse B. Browne, was taken ill at the fort just before the date on which the expedition was to leave, and rather than delay, Colonel Kearny reached the conclusion that Lieutenant Lea should assume the captain's responsibilities.

Largely as a result of the expedition Boone county, the city of Boone and Boone river¹ were named after Captain Boone, and Boone county's first white settler came a few years later, because, as a member of the expedition, he had been favorably impressed by the richness of the soil and a belief in the future development of the valley. This first Boone county settler was Chas. W. Gaston, who was a member of Lieutenant Lea's command. He located west of the present city of Madrid, near the banks of the Des Moines river, in January, 1846. Another direct result of the expedition was an inspection made by Colonel Kearny of the territory at the junction of the Des Moines and Raccoon rivers as the site for a fort. Just what the result of this inspection was is unknown, but in any event the inspection was the first chapter in the history of what is now the capital of the State of Iowa. Mr. Gaston, the first settler in Boone county, rose to positions of local prominence and as administrator of an estate laid out the present city of Madrid.

Notwithstanding the fact that to Captain Boone went the distinctions mentioned above, Colonel Kearny's career was the most notable of all. He was a native of New Jersey, born in 1794, and at the age of eighteen was a lieutenant in the war of 1812. He remained in the army, and was sent west. In 1820 he as a captain was commissioned to conduct a surveying party from Camp Missouri, later Council Bluffs, Iowa, to Camp Cold Water, later the site of Fort Snelling, Minn. In 1833 he was made lieutenant-colonel of the First Regiment of United States dragoons, a branch of service just instituted, and stationed at St. Louis. Later, with three companies of his regiment, he was sent to old Fort Des Moines in Lee county, Iowa, and while there led the expedition described in this article. In 1836, a year after the expedition, he was promoted to colonel of the regiment and his headquarters moved to Fort Leavenworth. June 30, 1846, he was pro-

¹A difference of opinion prevails about the naming of Boone river. "The History of the People of Iowa," by Cyrenus Cole, declares the river was named after Col. Nathan Boone. The traditional understanding in at least some of the counties through which Boone river flows is that the river was named after the colonel's father, Daniel Boone.

moted to the position of brigadier-general of the Armies of the West and ordered with his troops to New Mexico where he took possession of that territory in the name of the United States. From New Mexico he was ordered to California where his success won for him a major-generalship. He was governor of California from March to June, 1847. Then he was assigned to military duty in Mexico and became military and civil governor of both Vera Cruz and Mexico City. At the conclusion of the Mexican war he returned to St. Louis and died there October 31, 1848.

SON OF THE KENTUCKY PIONEER

Capt. Nathan Boone was the youngest son of Col. Daniel Boone, the noted Kentucky pioneer and Indian fighter. Captain Boone entered the army young in life and from 1833 to 1848 served under Colonel Kearny. He was the surveyor of the forty-mile-wide strip of land known as the Neutral Strip in northern Iowa, purchased by the government from the Sioux, and Sac and Fox tribes in 1830. The purpose of the government's purchase was to settle boundary lines and thus prevent friction between the tribes mentioned. This Neutral Strip extended east from the right fork of the Des Moines river.

Promotion came to Captain Boone in 1850. He was then appointed Lieutenant-Colonel of the Second United States Regiment of dragoons and served until 1853. He was then 70 years of age and resigned to retire to his farm near Springfield, Missouri, where he died in 1863, aged eighty-one.

Lieut. Albert M. Lea was both a soldier and a civil engineer professionally. Albert Lea, Minn., is named after him, and the expedition from old Fort Des Moines in 1835 was one of two expeditions across the state in which he participated. He kept a diary of the expedition this article covers and afterwards wrote a small book describing Iowa and his experiences. The diary was given as a present to C. W. Gaston, Boone county's

first white settler and a member of his company, and was retained by Mr. Gaston all his life. At his death it passed into the possession of a daughter and from her to a Boone County Historical Society. This diary was published in the *Journal of Iowa History and Politics* in July, 1909.

Lieutenant Lea was a native of Tennessee, and when the Civil war broke out he resigned his commission and took sides with the south. After the war he moved to Texas and for several years was engineer of the city of Galveston.

Captain Sumner remained in the army and distinguished himself during the Civil war, being promoted to Colonel. He commanded the Second army corps in the battles of Fair Oaks, White Oak Swamps, and second battle of Bull Run, South Mountain, Antietam and Fredericksburg. He was wounded in this last engagement and after a convalescing period was sent north. He died in Syracuse, N. Y. in 1863.

Captain Browne, while not a member of the expedition, figured prominently in Iowa history. Whether the illness which prevented his presence with the expedition up the Des Moines river valley resulted in the belief that he should retire from army life, or he preferred a career as a civilian, is unknown. In any event the following year, in 1836, when old Fort Des Moines was abandoned, he resigned his commission and located at the promising little city of Keokuk. When the Iowa Territory was organized in 1838 he became a member of the Territorial Council, and when that body assembled at Burlington November 12, 1838, was chosen its president. Also, when the state was admitted into the union in 1846, he was elected a member of the lower house of the legislature and became speaker.

In 1835 old Fort Des Moines, in the extreme southeastern corner of the state, was on the fringe of Iowa civilization, and the territory traversed by the dragoons on this trip was entirely unsettled by whites except by a

few trappers and an occasional white renegade. It is noticeable that Lieutenant Lea's day-by-day diary makes no mention whatever of meeting white men on the entire trip except while at Wabasha's village in Minnesota. He did, however, frequently refer to small bands of Indians which the expedition contacted.

The route of the expedition followed the divide between the Des Moines and Skunk rivers, taking advantage of the terrain. The three companies represented a body of 300 men, and in addition a small group of Indians numbering six to eight, who went along as guides, scouts and hunters, with a pioneer character named Francis Labashar as interpreter. They of course carried in wagons and on pack animals all the accoutrements necessary for an extensive military expedition, and a large quantity of such necessary foods as flour, salt, etc. Each company organization included cooks and kitchen equipment as a fundamental military requirement. They expected to find an abundance of game along the way, and from Lieutenant Lea's diary these expectations were fully realized. However, the diary discloses that on the return trip they ran out of flour, salt, and pork.

Anyone who lived in Iowa before tiling and other improvements will have no trouble in realizing that such an expedition as this would find the going difficult at times. Lieutenant Lea's diary shows that some days they made but four miles; on others, they made twenty-six.

The expedition left old Fort Des Moines on June 7, 1835. The distance to Wabasha's village was approximately 400 miles, and they made the journey in forty-five days, arriving July 8. The first week it rained incessantly, and the force made no great progress. On June 14 they passed Keokuk's village on the Des Moines river "a few miles to our left," and came up through the corner of what is now Jasper county about the site of the present city of Colfax. On June 21 they camped in what is now northern Boone county near what is locally known as Mineral Ridge, close to the edge of the timber extending out from the Des Moines river. On the twenty-third

they reached the vicinity of the mouth of Boone river, in what is now Hamilton county, and from there took a northeasterly course to Wabasha's village.

TREATY WITH WABASHA

On July 8 they established a camp on the prairie adjacent to their destination and remained there until July 21. They changed their camp every day or two to obtain changes in pastures and possibly for sanitary reasons, but always near the Indian village. On July 9 about thirty Sioux Indians came out to visit them; then for several days but a very few made their appearance. However, on July 18 the situation changed. On that date Lieutenant Lea recorded the observation, "Expect to hold a treaty with them tomorrow." His judgment was justified the next day when Wabasha himself accompanied by his chief men entered the dragoons' camp, and with the usual deliberateness which characterized an Indian conference, concluded the treaty.

The command did not delay much after that. The following day they traveled only a half a mile, but got everything ready to move on the twenty-first. The next day they marched twenty-five miles.

The dragoons were not much impressed with the Sioux. Lea said "They are mostly a dirty, thieving race, living in the most abominable filth." In comparing them with the Sac and Fox, he declared the latter "cleanly and decent in appearance."

The expedition took a different course on the return trip. They marched a westerly way, but got off their route. On July 29 they found themselves north of a lake and could see no possible route around it. It is generally agreed now that the lake was Lake Unasska in Brown county, Minn. The following day they ran across a body of Indians, and from them learned that they had been following the St. Peter river, thinking it was the Iowa. Thus they discovered they were no nearer their home destination than they were at Wabasha's village over on the Mississippi.

After getting their geography straightened out, they found their way around the lake and traveled south and west until after crossing the west fork of the Des Moines river near the southeast corner of Palo Alto county, thence marching south on the west side of the Des Moines river.

They reached the juncture of the Raccoon and Des Moines rivers where the city of Des Moines is now located on August 8. On the next day Colonel Kearny made investigation of the availability of the locality for a fort.² The colonel was anxious to complete his task as quickly as possible, because rations were getting scarce. For several days the troops had been on half-rations so far as flour and meat were concerned.

So, on the morning of August 10 the troops effected a crossing over the Raccoon river and the same day marched fifteen miles. The last pork available was served the men on the evening of the tenth. On the fifteenth they came to Appanoose or Iowa town on the right bank of the Des Moines, and on the 16th crossed the Des Moines river and visited Keokuk's town. The Indians at both villages were "apparently living in comfort and neatness, and growing in wealth."

On August 19 they reached Fort Des Moines, happy and contented to be back to their quarters again. The expedition had required almost three months and was made without the the loss of life or serious discomfort. There had been no serious sickness among the men and on the whole the expedition provided a pleasant adventure.

One important result of the expedition was that of extending a knowledge of what is now the state of Iowa—"Beautiful Land." Just what the treaty with Wabasha really amounted to is unknown. The treaty, like hundreds of others, probably now rests in the archives of our national government. In all probability it was simply

²Colonel Kearny reported adversely to location of a military post at the Raccoon fork, saying: "With the views of the department as to the object to be obtained by the establishment of a military post at the Raccoon I am not acquainted, but I can imagine nothing to make it necessary or advisable."

a part of the over-all strategy to preserve peace along the frontier. Possibly one of the objectives of the whole expedition was in a general sense to impress the Indians with the power of the Great White Father. The presence of 300 or more troops, well equipped and disciplined, marching in order through Indian land must have had that effect. On the way they passed through much of the territory owned by the Sac and Fox tribes and into the domain of the Sioux, crossing the neutral territory en route. On the way they met a number of bands of Indians, and probably long before they had reached their destination news of their march had spread widely and aroused much speculation.

The fact that food—particularly meat—was scarce on the last leg of the expedition leads to the supposition that game was more plentiful in the northern portion of the state. In the north central section of the state they saw for the first time a herd of buffalo, and the soldiers joined in a buffalo hunt. They also killed a large number of deer and at least one elk. Lieutenant Lea's diary tells of the capture of one buffalo calf, but does not say what was done with it. Supposedly it, too, went into the expedition's larder.

The march of the dragoons across Iowa in 1835 was just one of the incidents affecting the future of the various tribes of red men who called the prairies of the central west their home. The Sac and Fox tribe originally held sway over most of Iowa and the northern half of Missouri. Their occupation of this territory, according to Quaife's "Chicago and the Old Northwest," dated from 1734, when the Sac and Fox tribes withdrew from Wisconsin after some trouble with the French, and the tribes, already kinsmen, henceforth confederated although for many years having a sort of tribal individuality. They ranged up and down the rivers of Missouri and Iowa, and claimed as their own the territory north of the Missouri river up to the northern part of Iowa.

TRIBAL HISTORY NON-EXISTANT

No history of Indian tribes exists, even within the era of the white people. Such writings now extant are by white men, some of them cultured and some uneducated, but few, if any, of them representing the thought and feeling of the Indian mind and heart, and with few exceptions these records are neither adequate nor accurate, and almost unanimously unsympathetic. They largely represent the white man's angle and necessities without great regard for the Indians' view or necessities.

Thus the Sac and Foxes, like all the other Indians, experienced and resented the constantly inching encroachments of the whites upon their territories. Notwithstanding their resentment they were compelled to give way. The Milton Lott tragedy and the Spirit Lake massacre, with which the Des Moines river valley people are most intimately familiar, and which were probably perpetrated by some of the worst elements of the Indian nations, were nevertheless fundamentally outbursts against encroachments upon rights the Indians firmly believed their own. They were entirely unable to cope with the restless spirit of the white pioneer.

These encroachments never ceased and in 1824, three years after Missouri became a state, the confederated tribe ceded their rights to the territory lying between the Missouri river and the north Missouri boundary, the result of which was to confine them to the "hunting grounds" which is now Iowa.

In 1825 at a council held at Prairie du Chien, attended by representatives of the Sac and the Foxes, Sioux, Chipewewa and Iowa tribes, these hunting grounds were further circumscribed by a boundary agreement which limited them on the north to the source of the upper Iowa river, thence across the Red Cedar to the upper fork of the Des Moines and Big Sioux river, and down that river to the Missouri. All claim on land east of the Mississippi was relinquished by this tribe at that council, also. This rather vague boundary led to friction with the Sioux on

the north of this line and in 1830 the forty miles neutral strip surveyed by Captain Boone, as previously mentioned, was purchased from the tribes by the government. Simultaneously, the Sac and Foxes were led to cede to the United States all the territory west of the highlands dividing the waters which fall into the Des Moines and Missouri rivers. Thus their title to western Iowa was extinguished, and their territory was confined to the ridge between the two rivers mentioned above and the Mississippi river, further limited in 1832 by the Black Hawk purchase, with the Missouri state line on the south and the neutral ground on the north as other boundaries.

The constant pressure upon the territory occupied by the Indians provided a problem for the federal government which could not be met. The various forts which were established up and down the Des Moines river valley and elsewhere in the state were originally as much for the purpose of restraining whites from molesting the Indians, as they were to provide protection for the whites. The utmost vigilance on the part of the Indian commissioners and the soldiers could not keep away the white adventurers.

About the time of the Black Hawk purchase those in authority at Washington arrived at the conclusion that the region west of the Missouri river was uninhabitable for white men, but inasmuch as it abounded with game it was almost providentially designed to be the permanent home for the red men. One of the last official acts of President Monroe was to urge congress to make provisions taking advantage of this benign situation. Congress received the recommendations sympathetically, and for at least fifteen years following, the views expressed by President Monroe seemed to actuate the government in its deliberations with the Indians.

NATIONAL POLICY VACILLATING

Of the Iowa Indians the Sac and Foxes were the first to experience the results of this national policy. In October, 1842, only around ten years after they had been

assured of central Iowa as a hunting ground "so long as grass grows and waters run," the leaders of the tribe once more bowed their heads to the will of the White Father's government, ceded away their title to all their remaining lands in Iowa, and agreed to move beyond the Missouri. The agreement was made at Agency, near the present city of Ottumwa.

The treaty was to become effective October 11, 1845. By that date Chief Keokuk and a majority of his hunters and warriors had bidden good-bye to the land they unquestionably loved, and had moved westward on their new journey to their new home near Ottawa, Kansas, where they built a new village. They never got over their love for Iowa. Two years later Keokuk died at the age of sixty-seven.

However, not all the Indians obeyed the terms of the treaty. Bands of them, refusing to go, fled northward up the Des Moines river valley hunting and fishing. These groups were later located by soldiers and escorted across the "Big Muddy."

Years later a grim but interesting memento of one of these instances was found on one of the timbered bluffs overlooking the Des Moines river in what is now Cass township, Boone county. It vividly recalls the tragedy which was then occurring in the lives of these early occupants of our state.

The find was a flat piece of stone, about sixteen inches square, on the surface of which were chiseled these words:

Dec. 10, 1845
Found 200 Indians Hid On and
Around This Mound
They Cried, "No Go! No Go!"
But We Took Them
to Ft. D.
LT. R. S. GRANGER

The stone was given by its finder to the late C. L. Lucas, father of the writer, and just previous to his death was, along with his entire historical collection, pre-

sented to the Madrid high school where it is being carefully preserved. Lieutenant Granger, the record discloses, was at that time attached to the Second Fort Des Moines. Little doubt exists that the stone is a rather sinister evidence of the firm hand exercised by the government in enforcing the terms of the Agency treaty.

In 1846 the government arranged with the Winnebagoes to exchange their land along the Turkey and Upper Iowa rivers in the "Neutral Strip," for land on the St. Peters river in what is now Minnesota. In 1848 the Winnebagoes disappeared, the Pottawatomies were moved to Kansas, also, and in July, 1851, the government acquired the title to northern Iowa territory from the Sioux. Thus in less than twenty years after the Black Hawk purchase every legal right of the Indians to Iowa land had been extinguished.

However, some of the Sac and Fox Indians, extremely dissatisfied with their new home in Kansas, drifted back to Iowa. A bad situation developed which finally led to the use of accumulated annuities due these Indians from the government in the purchase of a part of the present Indian holdings in Tama county, along the traditionally-loved Iowa river. This occurred during the governorship of John W. Grimes in 1856. Legislative action was taken the same year, permitting the presence of the Indians "so long as they shall keep the peace."

ADVICE TO GOVERNOR LUCAS

We also have a letter from Burlington, dated the 21st, which gives us little legislative news, but it appears from the drift of the letter that Governor Lucas is about to leave the ranks of his former friends, and cast himself into the arms of the Whigs—this we can hardly credit . . . ! He comes out too late—the old General (Harrison) will not re-appoint him, and he had better make up his mind to quit with as good a grace as possible—for out he will go—there's no mistake.—*Iowa Sun*, Dec. 26, 1840.

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