

THE FORGOTTEN DODGE

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Few family names appear more regularly in the early history of Iowa than that of Dodge: Henry Dodge, famous Indian fighter and first governor of the Wisconsin Territory; his son, Augustus Caesar Dodge, Register of the first U. S. Land Office in Iowa Territory, Territorial Delegate to Congress, and first U. S. Senator of the new State of Iowa; and Grenville Dodge, Civil War hero and mighty builder of railroads.

Entire books and many articles have been devoted to these three men and their lives, and one would expect to find little new to tell. Yet there is something — the story of Henry Lafayette Dodge, “forgotten” son of Governor Henry Dodge and older brother of Augustus Caesar Dodge.

The name of Henry L. Dodge appears with an identifying reference in many books, but by strange neglect, he has been allowed to remain virtually unknown, or at best known only as a captain of militia. (Even the biographers of his father and brother knew little about him, barely mentioning him in passing.) Born at Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, he accompanied his family to the lead mines at Dodgeville, Wisconsin when ten years old. He was a Captain of Volunteers in his father’s command during the Black Hawk War in 1832, and fought in the final battle of Bad Axe.¹

The fourteen years after the close of the Black Hawk War are obscure, but in the 1840s he appears again—this time as a practicing lawyer in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Just when he came and under what circumstances isn’t certain, but when General Stephen Watts Kearny entered the city

¹Augustus Caesar claimed that, at the battle, Henry L. saved the lives of an Indian woman and her child, “snatching them from the jaws of death in the heat of battle . . . , exposed as he was to the fire of friends and foes when he accomplished the deed.”

on Aug. 18, 1846, to claim New Mexico for the United States, Henry L. Dodge was there. On August 28, Kearny named him to serve as Santa Fe's interim treasurer.

In July of the following year Dodge enlisted for service in the Mexican War as a private. At the war's end, he was mustered out at Las Vegas. Instead of claiming bounty land which he was entitled to, he requested that he be given one hundred dollars in federal currency. The request was granted.

In the early spring of 1849, Lieutenant Colonel John Macrae Washington, civil governor and military commander of the New Mexico district, noted that raiding tribes of Indians, primarily the Navahos, had been causing more trouble than ever. "The depredations, which were but few, have become of frequent occurrence. In order, therefore, to suppress them I have felt it my duty to call in an auxiliary force of volunteers." This call for volunteers found Henry Lafayette Dodge again in Santa Fe, enlisting as the captain of a company of foot soldiers. His unit was sent to Jemez Pueblo in April, and in addition to himself included two Mexican lieutenants, four American-born sergeants, 73 Mexican privates, and one musician. The muster rolls show that during their next six months of service none of these men received pay, but "performed with loyalty and bravery."

Early in August, Colonel Washington made the following report to the war department in Washington:

From the repeated depredations committed on the settlements of New Mexico by the Navajoe Indians, and which have lately been attended by the murder of some of the inhabitants, it has become necessary to make a campaign against them. Accordingly I expect, in a few days, to set out with a sufficient force to insure the most favorable results—one of which will probably be to lay the foundation of a lasting peace.

The expedition, which left Santa Fe on Aug. 16, 1849, included Captain Henry L. Dodge's company of foot soldiers.

On August 31, at the command's thirteenth camp, trouble broke out in the midst of a council and a Navaho chief was killed. Earlier in the day a party under the command of Captain Dodge had left the camp to reconnoiter the pass of the Tuniecha mountains, and they were still out when the trouble

started. The command's journalist reported: "We all have some apprehension lest their ignorance of our present relations with the Navahos may unwittingly lead them to give the enemy an advantage over them." Dodge's party finally returned early on the morning of September 1, and the journalist continued:

The captain knew nothing of the commencement of hostilities till he arrived in camp. And, what liked to have proved a very serious affair, he and his party last night, whilst approaching the camp, were fired upon by the Mexican picket guard. Captain Dodge was so near one of these valiant fellows as to become unhorsed by his animal suddenly starting aside from the flash of the fellow's musket; and, what was still more unacceptable, a ball came whizzing by him nearer than he had ever had one before; and, to cap the climax, he afterwards learned that the shot had been made by one of his own company who happened to be on guard!

The expedition returned to Santa Fe on September 23. From a military standpoint it had been a success, but if it was meant to impress the Navahos, it hadn't. Although a treaty had been signed at the Navaho stronghold in Canyon de Chelly, it was violated within 24 hours after Colonel Washington's return to Santa Fe. The Navahos began a series of reprisals and continued raiding the frontier settlements.

Among the officers who accompanied Colonel Washington on the Navaho expedition, only Henry L. Dodge seemed worthy of mention by James S. Calhoun, Indian Agent for the Territory of New Mexico. He wrote:

I may be pardoned, I trust, for commending, in terms of decided praise, Henry Linn [*sic*] Dodge. He was at all times efficient and prompt and commanded the admiration of Governor Washington, as well as others.

Once more Henry L. Dodge drops out of sight, this time for four years. Some reports say that he went prospecting with Hezikiah Johnston, editor of the Rio Abajo News, to the headwaters of the Gila River, and made one of the earliest gold strikes in what is now western New Mexico. Apparently he also returned to Iowa for a visit, for in May, 1853, he received the following letter from George W. Manypenny, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, addressed to him in care of

George W. Jones, an old family friend at Dubuque.

You have been appointed by the President one of the Agents for the Indians in New Mexico, and I, herewith, endorse your commission.

You will take the oath of Office and execute the enclosed bond in the penal sum of Five Thousand Dollars, . . . and when executed, you will file the bond and oath of Office with the Governor of New Mexico, at Santa Fe, to whom you will report for instructions in the discharge of your official duties. . .

Your compensation will be at the rate of \$1550, per annum, to commence from the day in which you shall relieve the present incumbent.

What talents Henry Lafayette Dodge possessed coalesced with this appointment as Indian Agent to the Navahos. Although there had been two earlier agents to the tribe, Dodge, practically speaking, was the first to give the Navahos full attention. Family heritage provided strong strains of courage and good common sense, and Dodge, now 35, had some practical ideas about Indians. One of his first steps was to have the agency moved back into the Navaho country to the quadrangle of log and adobe buildings so isolated and unimpressive and so bravely named Fort Defiance. Within a short time of his arrival at Defiance, and without apparent reason, the Navahos stopped their raids. This lull became a truce, which then extended into a peace that continued almost unbroken for nearly three years. Officials in Santa Fe were aware of this truce, but didn't quite believe it.

The unorthodox behavior of the agent didn't do much to quiet the sceptics. Henry Dodge was derelict in two of the most important traditional functions of an Indian Agent: he neglected to write the usual daily or weekly reports² and even worse, he was hardly ever to be found in the agency quarters. Official visitors from Santa Fe and Washington who came looking for him were usually told that he was off on some nonsensical trip to a distant band of Navahos, or at one

²Henry L. Dodge's first report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs is dated Sept. 30, 1853; in the one and only sentence in this report, he certified that he performed the duties of Indian Agent from 1 July to 30 September, 1853. His total output for the remainder of his first year consists of one more letter of six lines which casually asks that part of his salary (\$387.50) be credited to a man named Connelly. Commissioner Manypenny sent back detailed instructions on how Dodge should record the transaction in his books.

of the pueblo villages, or even on a hunting trip with a few Indian friends. No other Navaho agent in the next 60 years traveled as far into the country or spent as much time among the tribe.

On August 31, just two months after his appointment as Agent, Dodge brought a delegation of one hundred Navahos, including the most feared chiefs and headmen of the tribe, into Santa Fe. It caused a small flurry of alarm, but the Indians came dressed for peace, in their finest buckskins and soft-hued blankets. And it was also noticed, after they went into camp the first night and during the two days and nights that followed, that not one of the delegation became drunk or was even seen to take a drink. On Sept. 1, 1853, Dodge wrote a letter to the editor of the *Santa Fe Weekly Gazette*, reporting on the council.

I arrived in this city yesterday, . . . accompanied by a deputation of Navajos, who came on a friendly visit to Gen. Merriwether. . . . Our excellent governor, who by the way is an old indian trader, well acquainted with the red man and his habits, gave them to understand very distinctly that he would expect them to comply with the conditions of the treaty made with them in 1849 by Col. Washington, and that any departure from its stipulations would bring down upon them the severest punishment.

The Governor agreed to pass over all offenses committed before the 1st of September (to-day), and they on their part promised to deliver the murder of Ramon Martin as soon as possible, dead or alive. The council broke up in a friendly manner, the indians agreeing to leave tomorrow morning for their own country. If they comply with the instructions of the Governor, and live in good faith, peace and quiet, prosperity must attend them for they have all the elements within themselves to live independent and happy.

But on the other hand if they violate the promise made to the Governor, and recommence their depredations, they are doomed to a desperate fate.

I think, Mr. Editor, you know me well enough to believe that nothing on my part will be left undone that I can accomplish to check the turbulent habits of these indians, not only for their own benefit, but for the prosperity of the territory, which depends so much upon the protection of our farmers from indian robberies.

Dodge must have been solely responsible for bringing the Indians to the capital, since Governor David Meriwether wasn't really very happy to have them there, even if they

did behave themselves. But one year later, probably to his own surprise, Meriwether reported that the people of the territory had many wrongs in the past to charge to the Navahos, but "under the judicious management of Agent Dodge, who has taken up his adobe among these Indians, we have had little cause to complain of them during the present year."

Dodge led another delegation of Navaho chiefs to Santa Fe in the spring of 1854, and the *Santa Fe Weekly Gazette* of June 17 reported:

Capt. Dodge, Indian Agent for the Navajoes, arrived in this city last Sunday afternoon, with a deputation of forty-two of the tribe. They held a "Big Talk" with His Excellency, the acting Governor, on Tuesday. . . . We will give further particulars next week.

True to his word, the editor, on June 24, continued with an article headed, "A Recent Visit of the Navajoes — An Interesting People—Who and What Are They?"

We mentioned, in our last paper, the arrival of Indian Agent Dodge, with a deputation of forty-two Navajoes. . . . As they came in, they brought with them some five hundred head of sheep, being the balance, in numbers, of those stolen a short time ago. . . . The return of the stolen property is the best evidence in the world that the Navajoes, as a tribe, are well disposed and desire to remain at peace with us; and they are certainly entitled to great credit for their conduct in this affair. . . . Until with the past year or two, the Navajoes, for the last thirty-five years, have been constantly committing depredations upon the Mexicans; and this change in their conduct can only be attributed to the action of Agent Dodge, in locating himself in the heart of their nation, which, thus far, has exercised the most beneficent influence over them. They seem to appreciate, highly, the course of their agent, in placing so much confidence in them, and we doubt not, will do more than all other causes to keep them quiet.

Dodge's purpose this time had been to appeal for agricultural tools for the Navahos. The acting Governor, William Messervy, said that there just weren't any funds to accommodate the request; but upon Dodge's insistence, he finally requisitioned enough tools in the town so that the Navahos weren't sent

home empty-handed. Messervy complained to Indian Commissioner Manypenny that Washington offered almost nothing that would induce the Indian tribes of the Territory to peace. The situation, in fact, was so bad, he added, that Governor Meriwether on occasion was forced to meet such emergencies from his own personal funds.

Henry L. Dodge wasn't in a position to be a philanthropist on his small salary of \$1,550, but he also may have juggled his quarterly installments to help the Navahos. At Fort Defiance he needed little and lived frugally; but even so, early in 1854, he applied to his father for a loan of \$1,000. Senator Dodge forwarded the money and Henry Dodge arranged to repay it within a year, the payments to be taken out of his salary beginning the following January. It would be very like Dodge to have used this money in purchasing materials for the Navahos.

A much sterner side of Dodge's nature revealed itself in October, 1854, when a Navaho, evidently without good reason, killed a soldier near Fort Defiance. Dodge and a party of soldiers tracked the murderer to the vicinity of the hogan of Armijo, the tribe's principal civil chief. Dodge and Armijo argued back and forth over whether the culprit should be turned over to the whites, or should be punished by his own tribe. Dodge won the argument, and the fugitive "was delivered to Lieut. Getty badly wounded by an arrow shot in the loins, he having made fight to the last." The wounded prisoner was taken back to Fort Defiance at once. He was identified as the murderer. Dodge reported:

Major H. L. Kendrick and myself at the urgent request of Armijo . . . and Sarcillo Largo, the war chief, and one hundred other principal men of the nation . . . had him hung until he was *dead, dead, dead*, which I hope will meet with your approbation.

Governor Meriwether forwarded Dodge's report to Commissioner Manypenny, adding his own comment:

The hanging of this Indian in this summary manner, without a legal trial, is to be regretted, but there is no jails or other means of confining such a prisoner in this Territory until next spring when our civil courts are holden, and it became necessary that an example should be made to impress other bad Indians.

The Navahos began to show an interest in raising more of their own crops, and Dodge decided to encourage them. Farm tools weren't regularly supplied to Indians of the Territory, but from Meriwether in Santa Fe and from military supplies at Fort Defiance, Dodge wheedled or "appropriated" every hoe, spade and ax that was found standing idle. In the spring of 1855, he turned them over to the Navahos. He spent the summer traveling through the Navaho country,³ visiting "all of their principal planting grounds," and reporting that the Navahos, though skirmishing with the Apaches and Utes, were still at peace with the whites. In August he asked Commissioner Manypenny for funds or equipment to provide flour mills for the tribe.

The Navijos are greatly in want of a few or at least two mills, built after the Mexican fashion, which would not cost, including the transportation of the stones from the Rio Grandy to this point, more than one hundred and fifty dollars each. This would enable them to have flour and meal instead of using the grain in its entire state.

Dodge also noticed that the Navahos were developing a talent for the blacksmithing trade, and requested tools and irons—and a blacksmith. He also asked the government to establish a school for the tribe. There is no evidence to indicate that any of his appeals were answered.

Dodge also found time to sit down and write a long letter to Commissioner Manypenny about the possibilities for lasting peace with the Navahos, and about the desirability for a new treaty. (The letter contains a postscript: "P. S. I will make monthly reports in future as requested by the department." He didn't, but he did do better.) He was successful in bringing the Navahos together for a council, and the resulting Treaty of Laguna Negra for the first time established tribal boundaries to which the Navahos would agree.

Thanks mainly to Dodge, the Navahos remained peaceful all during 1855 and 1856. The Apaches were a different story;

³It's said that Dodge traveled with his Indian wife, daughter of an important chief, and that she helped make him popular with the tribe. He also had a "regular" wife and three children back in Dodgeville.

their raids on outlying settlements had become more frequent and more violent. In November Dodge joined a small detachment of soldiers; accompanied by a few Navahos and Zunis, who were trying to pick up the trail of one of the raiding parties. Early one morning Dodge rolled out of his blankets before most of the others were up and, taking his rifle, started ahead to do some hunting.

He was never seen again. Major Kendrick, in charge of the patrol, later reported:

About noon on the 21st, the place where he had been taken, evidently by stealth, was discovered, some four or five miles from the camp where he had left us. Arnijo, a friendly Navajo chief, & Salvador, the war captain of the Zunis, at once said his captors were not Coyoteros, but Mogollons, or Gilenos. No violence appears to have been used, but after having been taken, it seemed that a conversation was had between them, after which they went off in a south eastern direction.

This discovery was made forty-eight hours after the Indians had possession of Captain Dodge. All attempts at pursuit, if they had not been otherwise injudicious, would have been useless, as well from the lapse of time as from the snow storm then coming on & which proved so heavy that our guide lost the trail where he was best acquainted with the country.

At first it was supposed that Dodge was being held for ransom by the Apaches, and Governor Meriwether sent out the following order:

Without delay send out one or more parties of Miembres Apaches or Mangas Colorado's people to communicate with the Mogollon and Gila Apaches, and try if possible to procure the release of Agent Dodge; I think these parties should not consist of more than one or two persons each; and none but trusty men should be sent. You are authorized to pay . . . to those having him in captivity a ransom if necessary to procure his release.

Three weeks later Mangas Colorado reported that he could find out nothing about Henry Dodge. His fate remained a complete mystery until late in the summer of 1857 when the editor of the *Santa Fe Weekly Gazette* received word that Dodge's body had been found by an army patrol.

Pitifully little of him remained—the coyotes had been at work. Gathering up the few remains and placing them in a sack, the soldiers returned to Fort Defiance. A few days later, Captain Dodge was buried with full military honors in the post cemetery.

The exact date of Dodge's death still isn't known, but it is known that he was killed by Mogollon Apaches.

A frontiersman of unusual ability, Henry Lafayette Dodge served the Navaho nation as devotedly as his father and brother served the American nation. He attained an influence over the Navahos that held them in check for three years, but after his death the Navahos went to war. It was a long time before the Territory of New Mexico saw peace again.

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