

## CHARLES LARPENTEUR.

Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri, the Personal Narrative of Charles Larpenieur, 1833-1872. Edited by Elliot Coues. 2 vols., 1898, pp. 473. Francis P. Harper, New York: 1900.

Matters of Iowa history appear only incidentally in this narrative, but the references thereto furnish an interesting contribution to the annals of Iowa.

The editing of this narrative is another monument of Dr. Coues' devotion to western history and of his marvelous industry. He was an enthusiastic believer in the superior value of contemporaneous documents for the elucidation of any portion of history. It was in this faith that he prepared new editions of Lewis and Clark's Journals up the Missouri (1804-6), and of Pike's Expedition up the Mississippi (1805-6). In the same spirit he edited this Narrative of a Fur Trader in the vast region where are now the States of South and North Dakota and Montana.

Larpenieur was a native of France, who came with his parents to the United States in 1818, when he was twelve years old. In 1831 he made a trip from St. Louis up the Mississippi, intending to go to Prairie du Chien, but stopped at the Half Breed Tract, on the Lower Rapids. He says:

At this time there were two stores at Keokuk, then known as The Point, called also Foot of the Rapids and Puck-e-she-tuck. One belonged to Moses Stillwell, whose daughter Margaret was the first white child born at The Point, November 22, 1829; the other to Col. George Davenport, who was murdered at Rock Island, July 4, 1845. I came up to the place on a small steamer, the Red Rover, Capt. Throckmorton, as fine a gentleman as I ever knew. On the way up I became acquainted with Maurice Blondeau, interpreter for the Sac and Fox Indians. He took a fancy to me, and nothing would do but I must go with him to his farm, seven miles up the Rapids, and remain there until the boat got over the Rapids, which it was supposed would take a long time, as the river was very low. I consented, got a calash, a sort of one horse vehicle, and we started. The improvements consisted of a comfortable log cabin, and Blondeau was well fixed for the country at the time. He took me into the village and introduced me to the leading men, of whom many were drunk, and toward evening he got so drunk himself that he asked me if I did not want to "smell powder," but I declined, not knowing why he used the expression. After the spree

the old gentleman was very kind, took me all over the Half Breed Reservation—as fine country as I ever saw—and remarked that he would give me all the land I wanted if I should happen to make a match with his niece, Louise Dauphin; but, thinking myself too young, I declined all overtures, though I came very near accepting the offer, for Louise was one of the handsomest girls I ever saw; it cost me many long sighs to leave her, and more afterward. After two months' residence at the Rapids I returned to St. Louis, with full determination to see more of the wild Indians.

In 1833 Larpenteur accepted a situation with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Starting from Lexington, Missouri, he was nearly five months in the saddle making the trip over the Plains to the mouth of the Yellowstone. The Narrative affords an insight into the adventures and rough life of the Fur Traders, with accounts of Indian manners and customs. His squaw died of small pox, August 4, 1837. Later, he had an Indian family with an Assiniboine woman. In 1838, he descended the Missouri River in a canoe, leaving Fort Union March 22d. At that time there was no settlement on the river above Independence, Missouri. Just below that place he took a steamer to St. Louis. Great was his joy, after paddling for a month through all sorts of dangers, to be seated at a table, going down stream at the rate of twenty miles an hour.

In 1851, he settled upon a claim on the Little Sioux River in what is now Harrison county, near the line of Monona county, Iowa. That was the year of the great flood, of which a vivid account is given (pp. 292-5). It was the year of the highest water since known in the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. The same year another old Indian-trader, Theophile Bruguiere, was the first settler at the mouth of the Big Sioux (Sioux City). Larpenteur had forty acres well broken and fenced, and good crops. As settlers came in fast, he rented his farm and kept a tavern. His buildings were all whitewashed and with trellises made a picturesque scene. Notwithstanding the increase of the settlements, the Omahaws frequently came to hunt in their old grounds, and he kept a few trinkets for their trade. The

following incident of that period belongs to the history of Western Iowa:

About midwinter (1853-4) a party of Sioux, who had gone to war on the Omahaws, had killed four of them, and stolen some ponies, passed my place on their return. The day being extremely cold, they concluded to camp on the river-bank near my house. While camped there, some of the young men went hunting and killed a deer in the timber below my field. They brought in a part of it, and one of them told my woman where he had hung the balance in a tree, a short distance from the house, saying that they did not want it, and if she chose to go after it, she was welcome to do so. Early next morning the party left; the weather moderated toward noon, and she remarked that she had a mind to go after that meat. I told her to do as she pleased, and she concluded to go. Wrapping up warm in her blanket, and taking her daughter along, she started in quest of the meat. As I was building a bridge at the time, I was alone at home, my men being all out getting out timber. She had been gone but a little while when a party of six Omahaws came in. From their daubed appearance I soon found that they were in pursuit of the Sioux, and became alarmed about my woman; for, although they knew her well, and that she was an Assiniboine, and therefore belonged among the deadly enemies of the Sioux, yet they looked upon her as a Sioux, as she spoke their language. I did the best I could to induce them to stay long enough to give my woman time to return, but they appeared in a great hurry, and soon started. Just as they were stepping off the entry I saw her coming, about three hundred yards from the house. When she saw them approaching she exclaimed to her daughter, "My daughter, we are lost!" She knew who they were, their customs, and rightly judged that her time had come. On meeting her they shook hands; but the next thing was the report of a gun, and she fell dead, shot through the heart. One among them wanted to shoot her daughter, but was told, "We have killed her mother—that is sufficient." This deed was done as quick as lightning; then they ran off as fast as their legs would carry them. The alarm was given, but to no purpose. My wife never said a word, having been instantly killed. She was also struck across the face with some blunt weapon. Her daughter was about eighteen years of age.

Larpenteur married again, April 12, 1855. The lady was the widow of Lucius Bingham, *nee* Rebecca White, of Chester, Vermont. In 1859, Larpenteur engaged again in the fur trade. In 1866, he served as interpreter to a Treaty Commission for the Assiniboines, of which Gen. S. R. Curtis, of Iowa, was a member. He afterwards returned to his home in Harrison county, which he had named Fontainebleau from the famous town in France near his birthplace,

forty-five miles from Paris. "Broken in health, broken in fortune, broken-hearted, the conclusion of Larpenteur's Autobiography is in sad terms, though set off with his usual show of stoicism." He died November 15, 1872.

The editor in note on page 4 confounds the name of Col. George Davenport with that of his son, George L. Davenport, who was born on Rock Island in 1817, died February 28, 1885. A sketch of the latter's life, with portrait, was given in Third Number of THE ANNALS, First Series.

W. S.

---

## A SOUTHERN BIRD IN CENTRAL IOWA.

BY CARL FRITZ HENNING.

Last week a Brown Pelican (*Pelicanus fuscus*) was captured by the Fritcher brothers, on the Des Moines river, about nine miles northwest of Boone, Iowa. The young men, Vetter and John Fritcher, were taking a ramble along the river that passes within a short distance of their father, S. V. Fritcher's home, when they were suddenly surprised at seeing a large and stately bird—a Brown Pelican—swimming in the bayou. Realizing that the bird was a stranger in these parts, the boys took a snap shot at the pelican with their No. 22 rifle. It flew into a large elm that had at one time been a monarch of the forest, but the elements had broken and splintered the tree and thrown it into the upper branches of another, the branches of the fallen one towering about fifteen feet beyond. This point of vantage gave the bird a good "lookout" position; but wisely concluding the place was untenable while the boys were around, it flew down the river, where it was shortly afterward shot by the young hunters.

The Brown Pelicans are Atlantic coast birds, a tropical and subtropical species, inhabiting exclusively the salt water seas, bays and estuaries, its occurrence inland being purely fortuitous. They occur plentifully in the Bahamas and the

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.