

## SAMUEL RYAN CURTIS

The career of Samuel Ryan Curtis illustrates both the versatility and the westward movement of the American pioneers. His parents, Zarah and Phalley Yale Curtis, were originally from Connecticut, the father having been a soldier in the Revolution. After the war the Curtis family moved to a farm near Champlain, New York, and there, on February 3, 1807, Samuel Ryan Curtis was born. In 1809 the family again moved westward, this time to Licking County, Ohio.<sup>1</sup>

The boyhood of Samuel Curtis was doubtless spent like that of thousands of other boys who grew up on the pioneer farms of the Middle West. Mention is made in later years of two brothers and two sisters so there were at least five children in the home. With his brothers and sisters Samuel attended the public school, and the home training must have stimulated ambition for the two older boys, Hosmer Curtis and Henry B. Curtis, became prominent lawyers in Ohio. When Samuel was twenty he secured a cadetship at West Point, graduating on July 1, 1831, with the rank of brevet second lieutenant. He was assigned to duty with the Seventh Infantry and sent to Fort Gibson.

Military service in peace time, however, did not prove satisfactory and in June, 1832, Lieutenant Curtis resigned

<sup>1</sup> *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications*, Vol. I, pp. 47, 53; *Stuart's Iowa Colonels and Regiments*, p. 35. Both the place and the date of the birth of Samuel Ryan Curtis seem to be a matter of disagreement.— See also *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. VII, p. 218; *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers*, Vol. I, pp. 97, 98; *Roberts and Moorehead's Story of Lee County, Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 188. The date given is the one used in *A Biographical Congressional Directory, 1774 to 1903*.

his commission and returned to Ohio.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps his preference for civil life was augmented by the fact that he had married Miss Belinda Buckingham of Mansfield, Ohio, the previous autumn. For a time he seems to have been undecided between law and engineering. It was an age of public works, however, and his West Point training had made him proficient in engineering so it is not surprising that he soon accepted employment as a civil engineer in the construction of the National Road.<sup>3</sup> In April, 1837, Curtis became chief engineer of the Muskingum River improvement project, remaining in charge of this work until May, 1839. Like most engineering projects at the time, this was a rather futile attempt to make a comparatively shallow river navigable by means of dams and locks. It was about this time, too, that Curtis became interested in a different form of transportation. As early as 1839 he formulated and circulated a petition asking for a grant of public lands to aid in building a railroad to the Pacific Ocean. This was presented to Congress by John Quincy Adams.<sup>4</sup>

Curtis next turned his attention to the study of law, was admitted to the bar in 1841, and opened a law office at Wooster, Ohio, where he remained until the beginning of the Mexican War. Though he was engaged in civilian work during this period he did not entirely neglect to utilize his military training. In 1833 he raised and commanded a volunteer militia company known as the "Mansfield

<sup>2</sup> Powell's *List of Officers of the Army of the United States from 1779 to 1900*, p. 268.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor's *Gen. Curtis in The Iowa Historical Record*, Vol. III, p. 562.

<sup>4</sup> Curtis's *The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas* in the *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IV, p. 626; Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 248. Samuel Prentis Curtis, the author of the series of articles on the Army of the South-West, was a nephew of Samuel Ryan Curtis and served as a member of his staff.

Blues''. From 1837 to 1842 he held the rank of lieutenant colonel of a battalion of volunteers in the Ohio militia, with headquarters at Wooster and from 1843 until the outbreak of the Mexican War he was colonel of a battalion of the State militia with headquarters at Zanesville.<sup>5</sup>

When the Mexican War began in 1846 Colonel Curtis was appointed Adjutant General of Ohio, serving in this capacity from May 20th to June 24th. His special duty was mustering the Ohio volunteers into service for the Mexican War. He preferred field service, however, to office work and on June 23, 1846, he was made colonel of the Third Ohio Volunteer Infantry.<sup>6</sup> The regiment saw little active service but Colonel Curtis was made governor of Matamoros and subsequently of Camargo, Monterey, and Saltillo. Curtis was in command at Camargo at the time the battle of Buena Vista was fought and organized and commanded a detachment of some 1200 men to pursue the Mexican General Urrea, who escaped and a few days later destroyed an American wagon train. So desperate did Curtis consider the situation of the American army that he sent an officer to Washington with a requisition for 50,000 volunteers.<sup>7</sup> Curtis also served as a member of the staff of General J. E. Wool. He was honorably discharged from service on June 24, 1847, having served almost exactly one year.<sup>8</sup>

At the close of the Mexican War Curtis accepted the po-

<sup>5</sup> Curtis's *The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas* in the *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IV, p. 626.

<sup>6</sup> Heitman's *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army*, Vol. I, p. 347.

<sup>7</sup> Curtis's *The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas* in the *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IV, p. 627; Smith's *The War with Mexico*, Vol. I, p. 562.

<sup>8</sup> Heitman's *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army*, Vol. I, p. 347.

sition of chief engineer of the proposed improvement of the Des Moines River and moved his family<sup>9</sup> to Keokuk, Iowa, which remained his home during the remainder of his life. At this time many of the residents of Iowa cherished the belief that the rivers of Iowa, especially the Des Moines River, could be made navigable so that steamboats could reach the Raccoon Forks. By an act approved on August 8, 1846, Congress had generously granted to the then Territory of Iowa for the improvement of the navigation of the Des Moines River, alternate sections of the public lands, not already disposed of, in a strip five miles in width on each side of the Des Moines River. This land was to be selected by agents of Iowa and was to be sold as the work progressed.

The General Assembly of Iowa responded by adopting an act providing for the election of a Board of Public Works<sup>10</sup> to take charge of the selection and sale of the lands and the construction work. One of the duties of this board was the selection of a chief engineer, and early in December, after much deliberation, Curtis was offered the position, on the strength of his West Point training in engineering, his work on the Muskingum River, and his personal character. The board congratulated itself on having secured for this position "a gentleman of undoubted qualifications . . . who is morally, as well as scientifically, worthy of entire confidence in the line of his profession."<sup>11</sup>

Curtis began work at once and made his first report on March 20, 1848. At that time he had surveyed the Des

<sup>9</sup> The family of Mr. and Mrs. Curtis consisted of two sons — Henry Zarah and Samuel Stephen — and two daughters — Sadie and Cora.

<sup>10</sup> *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. IX, p. 77; *Laws of Iowa*, 1846-1847, Ch. 113. Litigation soon developed over the extent of this grant. It was the contention of some that it extended the whole length of the Des Moines River, by others that it went no farther than the Raccoon Forks.

<sup>11</sup> *Journal of the Senate (Iowa)*, 1848-1849, p. 343.

Moines River as far as Ottumwa, a distance of some ninety miles. This report and a second one made on November 20th outlined the work and furnished specifications for contractors. A third report was submitted on September 1, 1849.<sup>12</sup>

The project stirred the imagination of the engineer. "To him the valley of the Des Moines was the wonder land of the continent—he followed in the footsteps of Baron Lahontan." He even suggested the possibility of canal connections with the St. Peter's River and the rivers to the west. In addition to the agricultural products, Curtis called attention to the coal and gypsum along the river. Even the cliffs of colored sand stone, said Curtis in conclusion, "that have stood for ages as silent and gloomy sentinels, guarding the clear bright river that flows at their base—will be rent by the blast and broken by the workmen; and their fragments will be removed and erected into mansions". The plans for the Des Moines River improvements included a canal at the lower end of the river and a series of dams along the river as far up as Des Moines.<sup>13</sup>

The Des Moines River improvement, however, was destined to endless difficulties. The floods in the spring of 1849 inundated the country along the Des Moines, tore out the construction work already completed, and enormously increased the expense. Disagreements over the land grant developed almost immediately and it was perhaps fortunate for Colonel Curtis that the Board of Public Works at a meeting held on December 24, 1849, decided to dispense with his services and appoint his assistant, Guy Wells, as chief engineer. The reason suggested in the report for this change was economy, for the board explained that Cur-

<sup>12</sup> *Journal of the Senate (Iowa)*, 1848-1849, pp. 367, 391, 1850-1851, Appendix D, p. 86.

<sup>13</sup> Cole's *A History of the People of Iowa*, pp. 214, 215; *Journal of the Senate (Iowa)*, 1850-1851, Appendix D, pp. 114, 115, 116.

tis had received \$2500 for his first year's work and \$2000 for the second, while Wells was receiving only \$1000. There was no criticism of the work done by Curtis. Indeed the Board declared:

As to the manner in which he has discharged the important trust under his charge, with the many embarrassments which have attended the prosecution of the work, since he assumed its responsibilities; it is unnecessary to speak further than to say that it has been satisfactory to the Board. The substantial and workmanlike manner in which the work has been done, as far as it has progressed, we feel confident will compare favorably with any similar work to be found in the United States.<sup>14</sup>

From the Des Moines River project Curtis went to St. Louis where Mayor Luther M. Kennett offered him the position of city engineer. In 1850 St. Louis had a population of less than 80,000 but its engineering problems were unusually difficult and important. The city lacked a satisfactory sewer system, a lake north of the city and a pond south of it had become unsanitary, the levee and wharf space were inadequate, but worst of all the Mississippi River, cutting away at the Illinois bank opposite St. Louis, threatened to desert the city entirely.

For years engineers had worked on the baffling problem of deepening the channel of the river along the Missouri shore. Robert E. Lee had spent several years in surveying the river and making plans to direct its course but the work was still incomplete when Curtis went to St. Louis in the spring of 1850. Most of the engineers agreed that an island in the river, then called Bloody Island, was the key to the situation. The main current of the river was cutting east of this island, instead of west along the St. Louis levee. Under the direction of Colonel Curtis a dam was built east from Bloody Island to the Illinois shore and a dike south-

<sup>14</sup> *Journal of the Senate (Iowa)*, 1850-1851, Appendix D, pp. 49, 55.

ward from the lower end of the island so that the current of the river went south along the Missouri side instead of cutting across to the Illinois shore, and the St. Louis water front was saved.

An adequate sewerage system was also installed, the inundated areas north and south of the city were drained, and a wide levee and new wharves were constructed. These various projects, however, were not completed when Mayor Kennett went out of office in the spring of 1853, but the turn of the political wheel threw Curtis out of office.<sup>15</sup>

For the next few years Curtis was chiefly busy with railroad work. In the fall of 1853 he surveyed a line across Iowa for a railroad to be called the Philadelphia, Fort Wayne and Platte Valley Railroad, also known as the "Air Line" road. It was intended by the promoters that this road should be a part of a system, the American Central Railroad, which was to continue to the Pacific Coast. The scheme was not successful but the experience was doubtless valuable to Curtis in his work later on the Union Pacific. It was Curtis's idea that there should be several roads across Iowa to Council Bluffs where all should "unite in a great trunk line, running west up the broad valley of the Platte; and the emigrant route will soon become the great Pacific route, and the highway of nations."<sup>16</sup>

Though chiefly interested in railroad work at this time, Curtis maintained a law office at Keokuk, having for partners at different times J. W. Rankin and Charles Mason. That he was also interested in public affairs is indicated by his election as mayor of Keokuk in the spring of 1856. In his inaugural address Mayor Curtis recommended, among other things, that the plan of deepening the Missis-

<sup>15</sup> Scharf's *History of Saint Louis City and County*, Vol. I, p. 683, Vol. II, pp. 1019, 1054, 1055, 1059; Taylor's *Gen. Curtis in The Iowa Historical Record*, Vol. III, pp. 563-565.

<sup>16</sup> *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. X, pp. 45, 137, 138.

ssippi River at that point by blasting be abandoned and that a canal be constructed around the rapids on the Iowa shore. This would also furnish water power.<sup>17</sup>

This idea was not new to Curtis. During the time he had been engineer for the Des Moines River improvement he had also been employed by the Navigation and Hydraulic Company of the Mississippi Rapids, a local company. On November 28, 1849, about the time of his last report on the Des Moines River project, he had submitted a report to the directors of this company in which he had recommended the construction of a lock canal around the rapids. The work, however, was too great for any company dependent on the private capital available at the time, and it was not until after the Civil War that a lock canal was constructed by the United States government much like the one recommended by Curtis and even with government resources the work was not completed until 1877. In 1913 when the gates of the Keokuk Dam were closed, the waters of the Mississippi River covered this old canal.<sup>18</sup>

When the time came for the nomination of candidates for the election in the fall of 1856, Curtis was selected to represent the newly organized Republican party in the contest for Representative to Congress from the First Congressional District of Iowa. Rather to the surprise of the politicians he was elected and was reelected in 1858 and 1860. During his third campaign a joint debate was held at Ottumwa between Curtis and his Democratic opponent, Chester C. Cole. A man who attended this debate described Curtis as "tall, finely though heavily formed, with high forehead, large hazel eyes, decidedly grave face adorned

<sup>17</sup> Stuart's *Iowa Colonel's and Regiments*, p. 36; Clemens's *City of Keokuk in 1856*, pp. 4, 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Report of the Principal Engineer, to the Directors of the Navigation and Hydraulic Co. of the Mississippi Rapids*; Wilson's *The Des Moines Rapids Canal in The Palimpsest*, Vol. V, pp. 117-131.



with side whiskers; in demeanor serious, deliberate, in speech and action undemonstrative."<sup>19</sup>

The chief interest of Curtis in Congress was the promotion of the Pacific railroad, though he was an active member of the Committee on Military Affairs. On April 13, 1860, just a year before the surrender of Fort Sumter, Samuel R. Curtis submitted the report of the Select Committee on the Pacific Railroad of which he was chairman. This report strongly urged the political, military, and commercial advantages of a railroad to the Pacific Coast and recommended the central route.<sup>20</sup>

Attention, however, was soon diverted from the railroad question to the possibility of civil war. A few days after the meeting of Congress in December, 1860, a select committee of thirty-three was appointed to consider the state of the Union, and Curtis represented Iowa. This committee was unable to agree on any general plan of adjustment.<sup>21</sup>

Curtis was also a member of the "Peace Convention" held at Washington, D. C., on February 4, 1861. This was a meeting of representatives from the various States at the invitation of the General Assembly of Virginia, but the announcement was late in reaching Governor Kirkwood, so he asked the Iowa delegation in Congress to attend as the commissioners from Iowa. This convention sat for nearly a month, but the only result was a proposal for a compromise which was acceptable to none of the factions.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 284; Stiles's *Recollections and Sketches of Notable Lawyers and Public Men of Early Iowa*, pp. 130, 131.

<sup>20</sup> *Report of Committees*, 36th Congress, 1st Session, Vol. III, Document No. 428.

<sup>21</sup> *The Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 6, 22; Chadwick's *Causes of the Civil War*, p. 178.

<sup>22</sup> *The Iowa Historical Record*, Vol. II, pp. 375, 376; Rhodes's *History of the United States*, Vol. III, pp. 290, 291, 305, 306. The Iowa delegates were James Harlan, James W. Grimes, Samuel R. Curtis, and Wm. Vandever.

At the close of the session of Congress on March 4, 1861, Curtis returned to Keokuk and there the news of the firing on Fort Sumter reached him. Starting at once for Washington, Curtis found at Philadelphia the Seventh New York just about to embark for Washington. He offered his assistance and as a volunteer aide of Colonel Lefferts accompanied the regiment on the voyage to Annapolis and the march from there to the capital.

Upon his arrival at Washington Colonel Curtis called upon General Scott and the various army and navy officials and discussed with them the number of troops on their way to Washington and the problem of caring for them. It is said that the Assistant Commissary General, when told that he would soon have to feed 50,000 volunteers, exclaimed in consternation, "Great God, Curtis! What are you going to do with such an army here?"<sup>23</sup>

Having received authority to assist in raising and organizing Iowa volunteers and securing some old-fashioned muskets with which to arm the men, Curtis returned to Keokuk and on the first of June, 1861, he was unanimously elected colonel of the Second Iowa Infantry, the first regiment in the State enlisted for three years. Among his fellow officers were Lieutenant Colonel J. M. Tuttle, Major Marcellus M. Crocker, and Adjutant Norton P. Chipman.<sup>24</sup>

The regiment was in camp at Keokuk and Colonel Curtis began drill at once, but the work had hardly started when, about one o'clock of the morning of the 13th of June, a message was received from General Nathaniel Lyon ordering Colonel Curtis to bring as large a force as possible to Hannibal, Missouri, and guard the railroad from there to

<sup>23</sup> Curtis's *The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas* in the *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IV, p. 630.

<sup>24</sup> Stuart's *Iowa Colonels and Regiments*, p. 37; Curtis's *The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas* in the *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IV, p. 631.

St. Joseph. By daybreak the regiment was embarked on the steamer, "Hannibal City", the first Iowa regiment to undertake duty outside the State. A rapid march from Hannibal to St. Joseph saved the railroad between these two cities from destruction by Confederates. Having established the loyal troops in possession of the line Colonel Curtis, on June 30, 1861, said good-bye to his regiment and started for Washington to attend the special session of Congress called for July 4th.<sup>25</sup> The absorbing question before this session of Congress was the organization of an army and in formulating plans Curtis, because of his West Point training and his practical experience, made valuable suggestions.

There came a day, however, when the deliberations of Congress were interrupted by reports that the Union army was starting its march southward. A little later came the news of a battle at Bull Run and then panic: the United States army had been routed. Colonel Curtis was one of those who tried to halt the panic stricken volunteers, but in vain.<sup>26</sup>

It was about this time that Curtis, at the suggestion of General Winfield Scott, received his appointment as brigadier general, his commission dating from May 17, 1861. On the 6th of August he resigned his seat in Congress and immediately left Washington to report for duty to Major General John C. Fremont at St. Louis. At first General Curtis was placed in charge of a camp of instruction at Jefferson Barracks but early in September, 1861, he was transferred to Camp Benton.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Curtis's *The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas* in the *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IV, pp. 633, 634; *Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers in the War of the Rebellion*, Vol. I, pp. 91, 92.

<sup>26</sup> Curtis's *The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas* in the *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IV, p. 634.

<sup>27</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. III, pp. 470, 474.

At this period Missouri was torn by factions and service there was extremely difficult, for no one knew how others stood. There was much criticism of General Fremont and a report submitted to the Secretary of War by Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas on October 21, 1861, made serious charges against him. General Curtis was quoted as having said "that while he would go with freedom to General Scott and express his opinions, he would not dare to do so to General Frémont. He deemed General Frémont unequal to the command of an army, and said that he was no more bound by law than by the winds."<sup>28</sup>

Three days later President Lincoln wrote to General Curtis, then at St. Louis, enclosing an order and a letter. The order directed General Fremont to turn over the command of the Western Department to Major General D. Hunter; the letter contained advice and directions from the President to the new commander. The letter to General Curtis, however, left much to his discretion. If General Fremont, at the time the order could be delivered to him, had "in personal command, fought and won a battle, or shall then be actually in a battle, or shall then be in the immediate presence of the enemy in expectation of a battle", the order was to be held for further orders. General Curtis evidently found none of the conditions mentioned by the President for he delivered the order.<sup>29</sup>

On November 6, 1861, General Curtis was directed to take charge of affairs in and around St. Louis. Factional feeling was still high, centering around the removal of Fremont. On November 11th in a report to General McClellan, General Curtis wrote: "Frémont is preparing a

<sup>28</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. III, pp. 540, 541; Rhodes's *History of the United States*, Vol. III, pp. 480, 481, 482.

<sup>29</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. III, pp. 553, 554; Stuart's *Iowa Colonels and Regiments*, pp. 37, 38.

defense. He ought to be called away from here, so he cannot do much more harm."<sup>30</sup>

General Curtis was next given command of the Southwestern District of Missouri, the assignment being made on Christmas Day by General H. W. Halleck, the new commander of the Department of the Missouri. Curtis at once established his headquarters at Rolla, Missouri, and began a campaign against the Confederate forces in Missouri and Arkansas, commanded by General Sterling Price. At first there was some dispute as to the relative rank of General Curtis and General Franz Sigel who commanded a division at Rolla. Sigel, who had been fighting in this section for some time and knew the country, felt that it was unfair that he should be made the subordinate of General Curtis, their commissions as brigadier general bearing the same date. Since Curtis's name came first on the list and he had been ordered to take command of the district General Sigel finally accepted the subordinate position.<sup>31</sup>

Among the other officers who served under General Curtis in this campaign were P. J. Osterhaus, a former German soldier, A. Asboth, a Hungarian exile who had come to America with Kossuth, Jefferson C. Davis of Indiana, and Philip H. Sheridan, the chief quartermaster. The campaign dragged through the mud and cold of the winter but early in February, 1862, Curtis began a forced march to clear southwestern Missouri of Confederates. Rations for six days were provided consisting of "hard bread, flour, hominy, rice, desiccated [sic] potatoes, mixed vegetables, sugar, coffee and salt." Fresh beef and pork were to be provided on the way. The men were directed to jerk beef

<sup>30</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. III, pp. 560, 569.

<sup>31</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Vol. VII, p. 594, Vol. VIII, p. 462; Curtis's *The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas* in the *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IV, pp. 642, 643.

at night to eat during the next day's march with pinoli — ground parched corn and sugar.<sup>32</sup>

On the thirteenth of February, Springfield, Missouri, fell into the hands of Curtis's men, General Sterling Price having abandoned it the night previous. General Curtis established his headquarters in the house just vacated by General Price. An order left behind read: "The Comdrs of Divns will instanter and without the least delay see that their entire commands are ready for movement at a moment's notice." The pursuit of Price's army was continued into Arkansas and on March 1, 1862, General Curtis issued a proclamation to the people of Arkansas in which he promised that peaceable citizens would be protected, but warned them against concealing armed men in their homes. Companies enrolled for home defense were ordered to be disbanded.<sup>33</sup> In conclusion General Curtis wrote:

I enjoin on the troops kindness, protection, and support for women and children. I shall to the best of my ability maintain our country's flag in Arkansas and continue to make relentless war on its foes; but shall rejoice to see the restoration of peace in all the States and Territories of our country; that peace which we formerly enjoyed and earnestly desire, and I implore for each and all of us that ultimate, eternal peace, "which the world cannot give or take away."

A few days later the army of General Curtis met the combined forces of Price, Van Dorn, and McCulloch at Pea Ridge, Arkansas, the engagement lasting three days — March 6, 7, and 8. This proved to be a decided victory for the Union forces. As a reward Curtis and Sigel were both advanced to the rank of major general, their commissions

<sup>32</sup> Curtis's *The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas* in the *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IV, pp. 721, 722.

<sup>33</sup> Curtis's *The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas* in the *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IV, pp. 725, 726, 733, 734; *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. VIII, pp. 577, 578.

again bearing the same date — March 21, 1862. Curtis was the first major general from Iowa and the only one to command an independent army.<sup>34</sup>

The battle of Pea Ridge, like many another victory, was the subject of many reports and efforts were made to minimize the part of General Curtis in the battle. General Philip H. Sheridan in writing many years later of this attempt to discredit General Curtis said:

After Pea Ridge was won, certain efforts were made to deprive Curtis of the credit due him for the victory; but, no matter what merit belonged to individual commanders, I was always convinced that Curtis was deserving of the highest commendation, not only for the skill displayed on the field, but for a zeal and daring in campaign which was not often exhibited at that early period of the war. Especially should this credit be awarded him, when we consider the difficulties under which he labored, how he was hampered in having to depend on a sparsely settled country for the subsistence of his troops. In the reports of the battle that came to Springfield, much glory was claimed for some other general officers, but as I had control of the telegraph line from Springfield east, I detained all despatches until General Curtis had sent in his official report.<sup>35</sup>

Not long after this battle came the disagreement of General Curtis and his chief quartermaster, Philip H. Sheridan. The army needed horses and mules and some of the Union soldiers and camp followers were accused of stealing animals from the people of the country and offering them for sale. Sheridan seized the animals as stolen property and refused to pay the reputed owners for them. The men with the horses to sell appealed to General Curtis, and in the altercation which followed Sheridan wrote to General Curtis that he would not participate in "jayhawking" and

<sup>34</sup> Byers's *Iowa in War Times*, pp. 108-121; Heitman's *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, 1789-1903*, pp. 347, 886; Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. IV, p. 66.

<sup>35</sup> *Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan*, Vol. I, p. 132.

General Curtis ordered him under arrest until his trial by court martial. Sheridan, however, seems to have had the confidence of General Halleck for upon his own request he was relieved from duty with General Curtis and sent north to buy horses. Later he joined Halleck's staff.<sup>36</sup>

The care of the wounded, numbering about one thousand for the Union forces, was unusually difficult following this battle because Curtis's army, struggling through the mud and the hills and ravines, had left behind most of its supplies and there were none to be had in the vicinity.

Nearly four weeks were spent in the vicinity of Pea Ridge and then General Curtis led his army southeast across Arkansas. The route lay through the Ozark Mountains and the men had great difficulty in getting their supply wagons and artillery across the ravines. After leaving Batesville, Arkansas, the army was marching in the valley of the White River. General Curtis intended to capture Little Rock, if possible, but the difficulty of getting clothing for his men and the withdrawal of some of his forces to Corinth made this doubtful. On May 12, 1862, General Halleck sent the following order to General Curtis: "On reaching Little Rock you will assume the direction of affairs in Arkansas as military governor. All civil authorities who are untrustworthy, or who will not take the oath of allegiance, will be removed from office and others appointed in their place. The telegraph will follow you as soon as possible."<sup>37</sup>

General Curtis finally abandoned the attempt to capture Little Rock, though he organized a regiment of Arkansas

<sup>36</sup> *Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan*, Vol. I, pp. 134, 135, 138; Curtis's *The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas* in the *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IV, p. 687.

<sup>37</sup> Curtis's *The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas* in the *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. VI, pp. 264-270, Vol. VII, p. 12; *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XIII, p. 378.



infantry volunteers and performed a few other duties as military governor. It soon became evident, however, that the army needed reinforcements and supplies, especially shoes and clothing. Guerillas harassed the lines of communication and incessant rains made the roads almost impassable. "For God's sake", Chief Quartermaster Winslow, who had taken Sheridan's place, wrote to Curtis, "consider the practicability of getting *trains* over the road you are going to take!" In attempting to control the guerilla warfare General Curtis published an order in which he directed that unorganized parties guilty of acts of violence would be treated as robbers and outlaws and Union officers were ordered to inflict the death penalty summarily on such as were captured. General T. C. Hindman of the Confederate army wrote to Curtis soon afterwards that he had heard that Curtis intended to put to death a number of private citizens accused of firing on the Union forces. He asserted that it was their duty to fire on the invaders and declared that he would put to death, without mercy, every soldier and citizen of the United States who fell into his hands. In reply Curtis explained that the prisoners referred to had been sent to the rear as prisoners of war, but he enclosed a copy of his order.<sup>38</sup>

Halleck telegraphed to Curtis that supplies would be sent up the White River under convoy of gunboats and the "Army of the South-West" started south along the river to meet the supplies. It was now July and the march through the canebrakes, swamps, and forests was exhausting to the men already tired by a long campaign. When General Curtis and his men reached Clarendon they found that the boats had been there the day before but had dropped down the river, it was rumored, to take part in

<sup>38</sup> Curtis's *The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas* in the *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. VII, pp. 15, 16, 114, 116.

the demonstration before Vicksburg. Curtis decided to lead his men to Helena on the Mississippi and there he arrived on the 14th of July. Here General Curtis occupied the residence of General Hindman, the Confederate officer who had threatened to hang Union prisoners a short time before. His army had travelled about seven hundred and fifty miles.<sup>39</sup>

Helena was a rendezvous for escaped slaves, many of whom had followed Curtis's army from Arkansas. It was also a center of the cotton industry. Both the "contrabands" and the cotton were sources of embarrassment to General Curtis. Hawkins Taylor says that Curtis put a friend in charge of one of the cotton presses, using the slaves to haul the cotton which was purchased from the owners.<sup>40</sup> The profits were used to feed the fugitive slaves, but the arrangement became the basis for numerous charges against General Curtis when efforts were being made to have him removed from command in Missouri.

Busy as he was at this time with his military operations, the endless bickering over cotton, and the charges and countercharges of treason and disloyalty, General Curtis did not lose sight of the Pacific Railroad project. The act for the construction of the road was approved by President Lincoln on July 1, 1862. Samuel R. Curtis was named as one of the incorporators and secured leave of absence from August 29th to September 24th to attend the organization convention held at Chicago, where he was chosen to preside.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Curtis's *The Army of the South-West, and the First Campaign in Arkansas* in the *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. VII, pp. 215-220.

<sup>40</sup> Taylor's *Gen. Curtis* in *The Iowa Historical Record*, Vol. III, pp. 566, 567.

<sup>41</sup> Trotman's *History of the Union Pacific*, p. 16; *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. XII, pp. 489, 498; Stuart's *Iowa Colonels and Regiments*, p. 45; Appleton's *Cyclopedia of American Biography*, Vol. II, p. 37.

On the 19th of September, 1862, General Curtis was put in command of the Department of the Missouri, including Missouri, Arkansas, Kansas, and the bordering Indian Territory. The assignment did not require fighting on a large scale like that in the East, but it was extremely difficult. Guerillas infested the country. Politicians, some loyal some disloyal, harassed the military authorities. Jealousy prevented the whole-hearted coöperation of subordinates. Concessions had to be made to some prominent men to retain even a semblance of loyalty.<sup>42</sup>

The speculators clamored for privileges and General Curtis was accused of being in partnership with some of the dealers handling cotton, especially at Helena, Arkansas. President Lincoln wrote a personal letter to him concerning the charges and Curtis, in a letter to the President, explained that he had attempted to prevent spies and secessionists from dealing in cotton by permitting only licensed traders to buy and sell cotton. He added: "I have lived too long and filled too many private and public places without reproach to be afraid of lies invented by rebel sympathizers and exasperated knaves generally." He concluded by asking for a copy of the charges and asserted his willingness to respond before a board of inquiry.<sup>43</sup> Nothing definite seems to have come of these charges.

Military operations were on a small scale but none the less dangerous and arduous. Early in December, 1862, General Curtis sent a detachment of about 7000 men southward to Grenada, Mississippi. General A. P. Hovey, the commander of this expedition, reported that in the very heart of Mississippi "we were met with boots, shoes, clothing, and goods purchased by open and avowed rebels at Delta and Friar's Point. The Yankees are deluging the country

<sup>42</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XIII, pp. 653, 654.

<sup>43</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XIII, pp. 783, 784.

with contraband goods, and letters intercepted from the army show from whence they are receiving their supplies. War and commerce with the same people! What a Utopian dream!"<sup>44</sup>

For a time friction seems to have developed between General Halleck who was in command of all the Union forces and General Curtis. For the most part this was due to the imperative demands for troops in opening the Mississippi River and the equally urgent requirement for troops to operate in Missouri and Arkansas. There were also differences of opinion as to military maneuvers.<sup>45</sup>

"I get orders and requests from everybody in relation to a down-river move and try to accommodate all", Curtis wrote to General W. T. Sherman in December, 1862. He continued: "I direct the arrangement of troops to sail as far as I can. Would like to be along. Have been in the advance, and do not think it just right to stand on the bank and present arms to a galley movement. But I am no grumbler. I despise fault-finding, bickering, whining affairs, and stand ready to lead or follow or fall back, just as the circumstances seem to require or commanders arrange. I shall co-operate cordially with any one, you especially, having confidence in your zeal and fidelity."<sup>46</sup>

Political influences also gave General Curtis a great deal of trouble. In January, 1863, President Lincoln wrote to General Curtis, beginning as follows: "I am having a good deal of trouble with Missouri matters, and I now set down to write you particularly about it. One class of friends believe in greater severity and another in greater leniency

<sup>44</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Pt. 1, pp. 528, 532.

<sup>45</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Pt. 2, pp. 382, 383, 401, 402.

<sup>46</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XVII, Pt. 2, pp. 433, 434.

in regard to arrests, banishments, and assessments. As usual in such cases, each questions the other's motives."

Of Governor H. R. Gamble of Missouri, who seems to have objected to Curtis's severity in the treatment of disloyalty, especially the levying of assessments, the President added: "Now, my belief is that Governor Gamble is an honest and true man, not less so than yourself . . . each knows something which the other does not, and that acting together you could about double your stock of pertinent information. May I not hope that you and he will attempt this?"<sup>47</sup>

Conditions in Missouri, however, grew worse instead of better. General H. W. Halleck had, for a long time, been dissatisfied with the military policy of General Curtis and finally, on May 22, 1863, with the consent of President Lincoln, he removed Curtis from the command of the Department of the Missouri and put General John M. Schofield in his place. That this was a political move is evident from a personal letter from President Lincoln to General Schofield in which he said: "Having relieved General Curtis and assigned you to the command of the Department of the Missouri, I think it may be of some advantage for me to state to you why I did it. I did not relieve General Curtis because of any full conviction that he had done wrong by commission or omission. I did it because of a conviction in my mind that the Union men of Missouri, constituting, when united, a vast majority of the whole people, have entered into a pestilent factional quarrel among themselves, General Curtis, perhaps not of choice, being the head of one faction, and Governor Gamble that of the other. After months of labor to reconcile the difficulty, it seemed to grow worse and worse, until I felt it my duty to break it up some-

<sup>47</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XXII, Pt. 2, pp. 17, 18, 109, 110.

how, and, as I could not remove Governor Gamble, I had to remove General Curtis."

S. H. M. Byers says of this removal: "Lincoln had to make his peace with the conservative element of Missouri, or lose the state's vote in the convention for the presidency. He lost the vote, notwithstanding his sacrifice of one of his best commanders."<sup>48</sup>

This disappointment was soon followed by a personal bereavement. Soon after the removal of General Curtis, his son, Major Henry Z. Curtis, who had been assistant adjutant general on his father's staff while he was in command of the Department of the Missouri, asked to be transferred to the staff of General J. G. Blunt who was stationed in Kansas. While on this duty Major Curtis was killed on October 6, 1863, by a force of guerillas under the notorious leader, W. C. Quantrill, near Baxter Springs, Kansas.<sup>49</sup>

General Samuel R. Curtis remained without a departmental command until the first of January, 1864, when he was assigned to the Department of Kansas, consisting of the State of Kansas, the Territories of Nebraska and Colorado, and the Indian Territory.<sup>50</sup> His headquarters were at Fort Leavenworth and his first duty was the protection of the exposed settlements from the Indians.

The new régime in Missouri, however successful it may have been in placating Governor Gamble, soon found itself in serious military difficulties. Late in the summer of 1864 the Confederate General Sterling Price, with an army

<sup>48</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XXII, Pt. 2, pp. 290-293; Byers's *Iowa in War Times*, p. 430. The Missouri delegation was the only one which did not cast its vote for Lincoln in the Republican National Convention in 1864.

<sup>49</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XXII, Pt. 1, pp. 692, 696; *The Weekly Gate City* (Keokuk), October 21, 1863; Connelley's *Quantrill and the Border Wars*, pp. 425, 426.

<sup>50</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XXII, Pt. 2, p. 768.

of some 15,000 men<sup>51</sup> entered Missouri, threatened the capital, and swept across the State into Kansas, intending, if possible, to capture Fort Leavenworth and the supplies collected there.

Curtis took energetic measures to protect his department. Most of the troops under his command were far to the west on an expedition against the Indians and he had only about 3000 available troops, but the entire militia force of Kansas was called out and martial law was proclaimed. Arms for the militia were lacking and Curtis wrote the War Department asking whether he should issue them on Governor Carney's requisition. Secretary Stanton replied rather sharply that the Department had already told him to use his judgment and that there was no restriction as to regulars, volunteers, or militia. "You are very much mistaken if you think I had general authority to issue arms to militia", wrote Curtis in reply, "and at some favorable time I may show that your former orders were very restrictive and your dispatch of the 12th too reproachful. I am collecting, organizing, and arming forces to confront rebels that are moving against me, and my embarrassments, duties, and exertions are sufficient for the occasion." To add to his difficulties the general election in Kansas was approaching and enemies of General Curtis accused him of calling out the militia in order to keep the men from voting.<sup>52</sup>

In spite of these difficulties, the defense organized by General Curtis was successful. In a series of battles and skirmishes General Price was defeated and driven back,

<sup>51</sup> The number of troops in Price's army seems to have varied. In an order dated October 25, 1864, Curtis says that Price had between twenty and thirty thousand men.—*Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IX, p. 498, Vol. X, p. 211.

<sup>52</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XLI, Pt. 3, pp. 761, 768, 821, 860, 867.

losing, it was estimated, over 10,000 men and much of his equipment. One of the battles, fought at Westport, now a part of Kansas City, Missouri, on October 21-23, 1864, has been called the "Gettysburg of the West", and an act of Congress approved on January 30, 1925, instructed the Secretary of War to investigate the feasibility of establishing a national military park to commemorate the victory.<sup>53</sup>

Following one of the skirmishes General Curtis wrote to his wife: "It is certain that among the rebels killed yesterday [October 21, 1864] the notorious Todd, one of the murderers of our son, was among many who were killed. Their loss was much heavier than mine. They are retreating southward, but fighting us hard." With General Curtis on this campaign was another son, Major Samuel S. Curtis, of the Second Colorado, who was aide de camp on his father's staff.<sup>54</sup>

The pursuit of the retreating Confederates into Arkansas was hampered by lack of supplies and by uncertainty as to authority. The Kansas militia objected to going beyond the limits of their State. The expedition took Curtis outside of his department and there were constant disputes as to orders. The necessity of forcing Price to cross the Arkansas River was so great, however, that Curtis persisted in spite of the fatigue of his troops, lack of supplies, and division of authority.<sup>55</sup>

Having pursued the Confederate invaders across the old Pea Ridge battle ground, to a point on the Arkansas River thirty miles above Fort Smith, the Army of the Border under the command of General Curtis fired a final volley at

<sup>53</sup> *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. XLIII, Pt. 1, p. 801; *The National Tribune* (Washington, D. C.), October 1, 1925.

<sup>54</sup> *Stuart's Iowa Colonels and Regiments*, p. 48; *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XLI, Pt. 4, p. 190; *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. VIII, pp. 51, 52, 58, 60.

<sup>55</sup> *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. IX, pp. 625, 626, 631.



Price's men as they crossed the river on November 8, 1864, and then returned to Fort Leavenworth. General Curtis was welcomed back by a grand reception, the legislature of Kansas adopted a resolution thanking him for the defense of the State and recommending his promotion.<sup>56</sup>

The correspondence among the leaders in this campaign reveals a great deal of personal and political jealousy. Curtis attributed much of this to the fact that local troops were usually retained in the border States and recommended, for example that some of the Kansas regiments be sent to the front and regiments from other States, without interest in local politics, be sent to him.<sup>57</sup>

General Curtis, in spite of his successful defense of Kansas against a force much larger than his own, was removed from command by an order dated January 30, 1865, and assigned to the Department of the Northwest, including Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and the Territories beyond, and assumed command at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on February 13, 1865.<sup>58</sup> This assignment, of course, withdrew General Curtis from active participation in the final battles of the war. Aside from some correspondence, protecting the northwestern frontier was about the only duty of the commander of the Department of the Northwest.

One of the biographical sketches of General Curtis presents the following picture of him as he was at the close of his active military service:

Of the Iowa major-generals, General Curtis is the largest in person. He has a tall, fine form, and, though nearly sixty years of

<sup>56</sup> Stuart's *Iowa Colonels and Regiments*, pp. 47, 48; *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XLI, Pt. 4, p. 649; *Annals of Iowa* (First Series), Vol. X, pp. 210, 211.

<sup>57</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XLI, Pt. 4, pp. 970, 971.

<sup>58</sup> *War of the Rebellion: Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XLVIII, Pt. 1, pp. 686, 845.

age, is erect and vigorous. His large, hazel eyes give his countenance an expression of gravity and thoughtfulness which comports well with the dignity of his movements and manners. But, if he is sedate, and if he never laughs boisterously, he is nevertheless easily approached and sociable; he is kind and generous-hearted, and would not knowingly injure the feelings of the most humble or unfortunate.

He has one trait which is not in keeping with his general character. He is nice and precise in dress, and in this respect has been noted for the scrupulousness with which he has complied with the Army Regulations. He never, when on duty, omits a regulation trapping. In many respects he is not unlike General Grant; but not in this.<sup>59</sup>

The Department of the Northwest was dissolved on July 26, 1865, and in the fall of that year General Curtis served as one of six commissioners appointed by the President to treat with Indian tribes on the Upper Missouri. Upon the requisition of General Curtis the steamer *Calypso* was furnished for the transportation of these commissioners and left St. Louis on September 6, 1865. A report was submitted by the commissioners on October 28, 1865, in which the complaints of the Indians were explained and the destitute condition of some, especially the Sioux who had been moved from their homes after the massacre in 1862, was described. Treaties were made with various bands of the Sioux Indians, but the work was not completed that fall because of the lateness of the season.<sup>60</sup>

The following spring the commission was divided, General Curtis and three others going up the Missouri along the route of the previous journey.<sup>61</sup> At Fort Berthold they negotiated treaties with the Arickarees, the Gros Ventres,

<sup>59</sup> Stuart's *Iowa Colonels and Regiments*, pp. 49, 50.

<sup>60</sup> *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1865*, pp. 537-542; Kappler's *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, Vol. II, pp. 883, 885, 896, 898, 899, 901, 903, 905, 906.

<sup>61</sup> *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1866*, pp. 13, 14.

and the Mandans, and at Fort Union they met the Assinaboines and the Crows.

During the winter of 1865-1866 there was much interest in Iowa concerning the selection of a United States Senator and Curtis was one of the candidates suggested to the legislature, but it was evident from the first that either James Harlan or S. J. Kirkwood would be chosen.<sup>62</sup>

General Curtis had received his discharge from the army on April 30, 1866,<sup>63</sup> while still engaged in the Indian treaty negotiations. His war service was at an end but there remained the Union Pacific Railroad of which he had been an early and enthusiastic promoter. On November 22, 1865, while General Curtis was absent on the Missouri, President Johnson had appointed him one of the three commissioners to examine a twenty mile section of the road which had just been completed.<sup>64</sup>

Inspection work along the line of the Union Pacific Railroad took up much of General Curtis's time during the following year. On December 26, 1866, he had just finished the inspection of an additional thirty-five miles of track terminating some three hundred miles west of Omaha. He signed the report at Omaha, walked over the Missouri River on the ice in a biting cold wind, stepped into a carriage on the Iowa side, and died almost immediately. His body was taken to Keokuk for burial, escorted by J. H. Simpson and William White, his fellow commissioners, and a number of railroad officials.<sup>65</sup>

Samuel Ryan Curtis was one of those men who achieve

<sup>62</sup> Cole's *A History of the People of Iowa*, p. 383; Brigham's *James Harlan*, p. 217.

<sup>63</sup> Heitman's *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army*, Vol. I, p. 47.

<sup>64</sup> *Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 1865-1866*, p. 978.

<sup>65</sup> *Annals of Iowa (First Series)*, Vol. V, p. 814; *The Weekly Gate City (Keokuk)*, January 2, 9, 1867.

distinction without becoming famous. He was remarkable for the variety of his interests, being by turns soldier, engineer, politician. In all of these fields he was recognized as a man of ability. It is of interest, too, that in a period when corruption or the charges of corruption were common, a survey of the activities of General Curtis leaves one with confidence in his honesty. An equestrian statue in his home city of Keokuk seems to have been his sole reward aside from a modest living for himself and family.

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