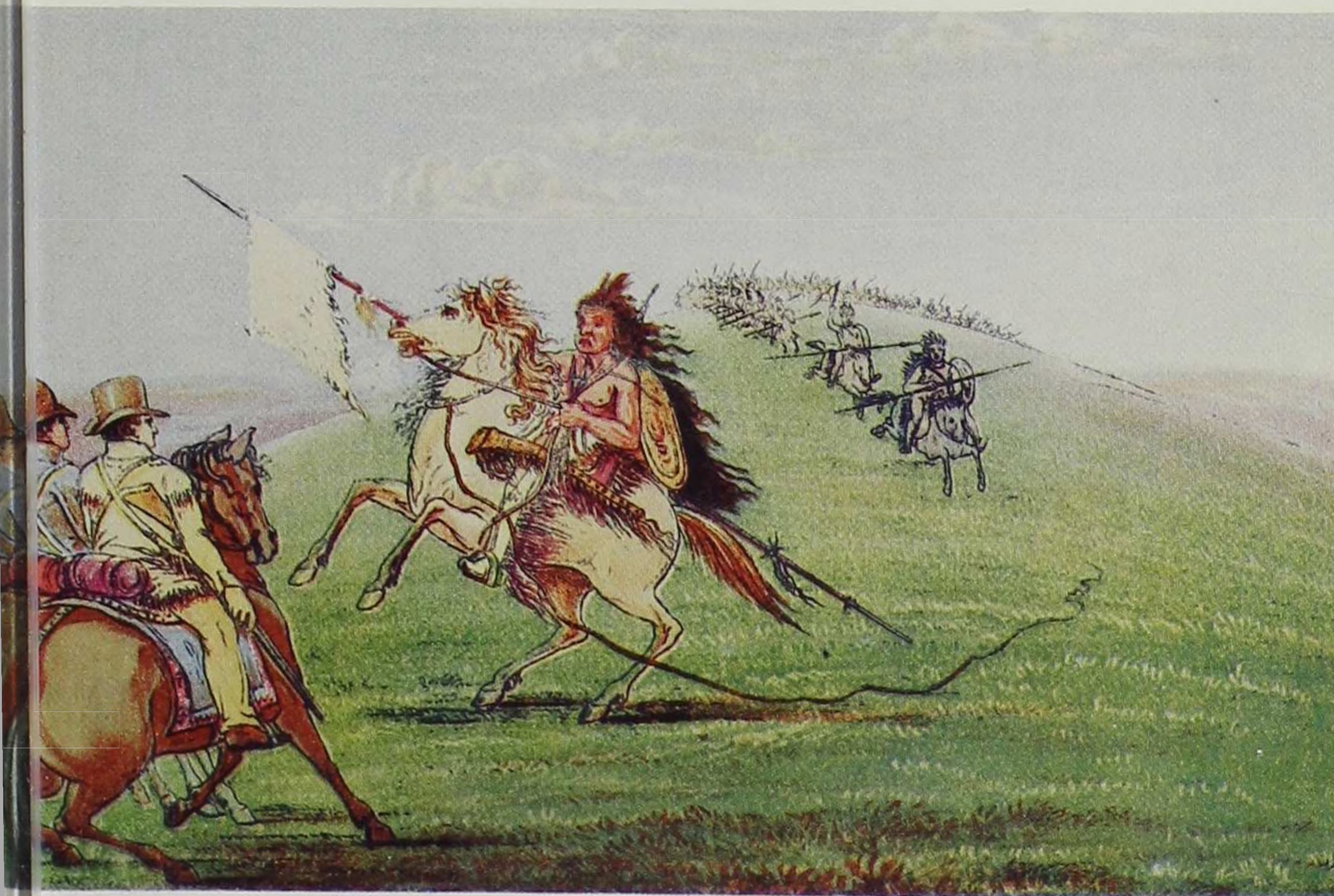


The
PALIMPSEST



Meeting of U. S. Dragoons and Comanche War Party

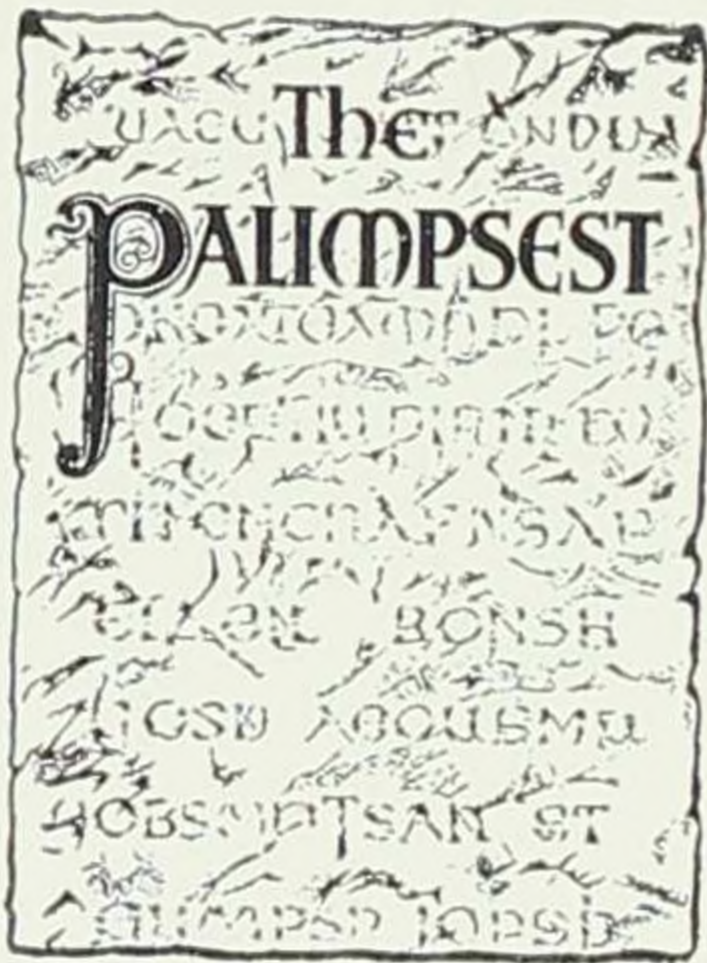
Stephen Watts Kearny

Published Monthly by

The State Historical Society of Iowa

Iowa City, Iowa

JANUARY 1963



The Meaning of Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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Illustrations

Since all three expeditions were made before the advent of photography, pictures are taken from extremely rare Americana. The Charles Bodmer drawings are reproduced in *Early American Travels Maximilian Atlas*. The cartoon on p. 48 and the colored Dragoon uniforms shown in the centerspread are from Rodenboughs *From Everglade to Canon with the Second Dragoons*. The front and back covers are from Catlin's *North American Indians*.

Author

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ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER JULY 28 1920 AT THE POST OFFICE AT
IOWA CITY IOWA UNDER THE ACT OF AUGUST 24 1912

PRICE — Included in Membership. Regular issues, 25¢; Special—50¢
MEMBERSHIP — By application. Annual Dues \$3.00
ADDRESS — The State Historical Society, Iowa City, Iowa

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

VOL. XLIV

ISSUED IN JANUARY 1963

No. 1

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Stephen Watts Kearny

A large force of American regulars, volunteers, and militia crossed the Niagara River on October 13, 1813, and launched a terrific attack upon the British on the heights at Queenston. With the Thirteenth United States Infantry fought Captain Stephen Watts Kearny. As his regiment advanced they encountered a withering fire from a strongly intrenched battery. Almost every commissioned officer about him was killed or wounded within the course of a few minutes. Undaunted, Kearny went on resolutely, stormed the battery at the head of his company, gained the peak of the hill, and drove the enemy from the field. It was one of the most brilliant engagements of the War of 1812.

Young Kearny was a student at King's College when the war began. Descended from a family of unusually able military men, he was eager to enlist. His relatives opposed this ambition because of his youth and the hardships of the campaign along the Canadian line, but with that "fixedness of will, which characterized him through life, he made up

his mind to enter the service, and exhibited such decision, that his friends ultimately consented."

Kearny was commissioned first lieutenant and assigned to the Thirteenth Infantry on March 12, 1812, before he was eighteen years old, and was raised to a captaincy on April 1st in the following year. Born at Newark, New Jersey, on August 30, 1794, he was nineteen when he conducted himself with such heroism at Queenston Heights. Immediately after this charge he was taken prisoner but was soon exchanged. His offer to head a force of marines in Isaac Chauncey's fleet on Lake Erie was refused but he continued to serve throughout the remainder of the war in a manner that added laurels to the distinction of his ancestors of the Kearny, Watts, and De Peyster families.

Despite the reduction of the army in 1815, Kearny retained his rank as captain. Having been transferred to the Second Infantry on May 17, 1815, he was quartered at Sacketts Harbor but later transferred to Plattsburg and then to various forts west of the Mississippi. His activity following his removal to the Western Department of the United States Army was astonishing, even at a time when the regulars were unusually busy. He saw service at almost every post on the frontier.

It is doubtful if any military man or civilian saw and described as much of what now constitutes the State of Iowa as did Stephen Watts Kearny between 1820 and 1835. During the course of three

long expeditions into Iowaland he observed carefully the topography of the country, the kinds of plant and animal life, and the various Indian tribes encountered. His first journey was from Council Bluff, about thirty miles north of the mouth of the Platte River, to Camp Coldwater at the junction of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers and thence down the Mississippi to St. Louis. In 1824 he left St. Louis with Brigadier General Henry Atkinson on an expedition up the Missouri River and did not return for two years. His third excursion through the Iowa country was made during the summer of 1835. Nothing escaped his watchful eyes on these trips. His reputation for insisting upon perfection in military tactics was reflected in the careful daily observations of his journals.

It was while he was stationed at Jefferson Barracks that Kearny acquired the reputation of being "one of the most rigid disciplinarians and best tacticians" in the army. From his entry into the service he had been regarded as "one of the coolest and calmest" of men whom nothing could disconcert. "While stationed at Jefferson Barracks," Fayette Robinson relates, "Kearny was drilling a brigade on one of the open fields near that post. An admirable horseman, he sat with his face towards the troops," while his perfectly trained horse backed in the same direction the command was marching. Suddenly the animal fell, "fastening the rider to the ground by his whole weight.

His brigade had been drilled to such a state of insensibility, that not one of them came to his assistance, nor was it necessary. The line had advanced to within about ten feet of him, when in a loud distinct voice, calmly as if he had been in the saddle under no unusual circumstance, General Kearny gave the command, '*Fourth company, obstacle — MARCH.*' The fourth company, which was immediately in front of him, was flanked by its captain in the rear of the other half of the grand division. The line passed on, and when he was thus left in the rear of his men, he gave the command, '*Fourth company into line — MARCH.*' " Not being seriously injured, he "extricated himself from his horse, mounted again, passed to the front of the regiment, and executed the next manoeuvre in the series he had marked out for the day's drill."

On March 4, 1833, Kearny was made lieutenant-colonel of the First Regiment of United States Dragoons, of which Henry Dodge, later Governor of the Territory of Wisconsin, was colonel. Although an able soldier, Dodge was not a tactician and Kearny was charged with the discipline of the regiment. This was a difficult task but Kearny performed it with such marked success that Brigadier-General Edmund P. Gaines published an order in which he spoke of the First Dragoons as "the best trained troops I ever saw." It is said that more young officers trained under the eyes of Stephen Watts Kearny were chosen for staff duty

than were selected from any corps in the service.

Recognition of this splendid work won for Kearny the rank of colonel on July 4, 1836. He was stationed at Fort Leavenworth with six companies of dragoons "where he made his regiment, or that part of it which he commanded directly, second to no troops in the world."

Fear formed no part of the character of Colonel Kearny. For a quarter of a century he was in almost daily contact with the Indians on the frontier. The red men had faith and confidence in his word. They honored him as a friend and feared him as an enemy. Among the Osage, Kansas, and allied tribes he was called Shonga Kahega Mahetonga, "horse-chief of the long knives."

Kearny's bravery and daring were exhibited on numerous occasions. Thus, while traveling up the Missouri River he impassively noted in his journal on August 4, 1825: "The command was reviewed this morning at 7 by the Genl. [Atkinson] after which a council was held & a Treaty made signed by the Commissioners, and the Chiefs & Principal men of the *Crow Nation* — afterwards a very serious difficulty ensued, by *Mr. O. F.* [Benjamin O'Fallon] striking 3 or 4 of the Chiefs, on the head, & one so severely, that the blood ran down his face, very free — the Army Roll was beat — the Battalions paraded — three or four officers of us, alone remained with the Indians, who were prepared & ready for fight — their guns cocked, their

arrows ready for use — by some trouble and exertion a partial reconciliation was effected, which was afterwards matured by Genl. Atkinson, meeting and talking to some of the Principal men, outside of camp — at one time, it was considered, that the result, *Peace or War* was as uncertain, as in throwing up a copper, whether it comes, head or tail — the *Nation* moved about a mile farther from our camp — a Capts. guard was mounted and our chain of sentinels increased." The following day Kearny very nonchalantly mounted his horse and "went upon duty, as officer of the day."

Later, in 1839, Father Pierre-Jean De Smet related the following incident: "Colonel Kearny arrived at Bellevue with 200 dragoons. Held council with the Iowas. Took four prisoners among the most distinguished for depredations on their white neighbors and missionaries. Preparations were made to whip them. The colonel reluctantly pardoned them at the intercession of their new agent, Mr. Hamilton, and after previously consulting with experienced gentlemen living in this neighborhood. The Otoes came to the council in battle array, bows strung and arrows in hand, apparently ready for a blow. The manly conduct of the colonel, accompanied by great prudence and a great presence of mind, kept them in awe. I observed several chiefs tremble and stutter as they stood before him. Many who knew them well thought that great mischief was brewing."

Shortly after the Mexican War broke out, on June 30, 1846, Kearny was made a brigadier-general and placed in command of the Army of the West. Three hundred dragoons formed the nucleus of the motley army of 1658 men which left Fort Leavenworth late in June and filed across the plains with instructions to capture Santa Fé. "Amidst the fluttering of banners," wrote a volunteer, "the sounding of bugles, the rattling of artillery, the clattering of sabres, and cooking utensils, some of the horses took fright and scampered, pell-mell, with rider and arms, over the wide prairie. Rider, arms and accoutrements, saddles and saddle-bags, tin-cups, and coffee-pots, were sometimes left far behind in the chase." By the time New Mexico was reached, however, the raw recruits had become hardened troopers. Kearny entered Santa Fé on August 18, 1846, "without firing a shot, and after a fifty days' march of nearly nine hundred miles." As the first gun was fired during the hoisting of the flag, Kearny exclaimed, "There, my guns proclaim that the flag of the United States waves over this capital."

Late in 1846, following the conquest of New Mexico, Kearny began a march of a thousand miles from Santa Fé to San Diego to wrest California from the Mexicans. Guided by Kit Carson, the force of a hundred picked dragoons toiled over blazing desert. When Kearny finally reached California, his exhausted and almost starved blue-

coats were "well nigh naked — some of them bare-foot — a sorry looking set." In a drizzling rain they fought a pitched battle at San Pascual on December 6, 1846. Kearny received two injuries and lost forty of his best officers and men, but he won the fight. After untold hardships he reached San Diego and joined forces with Commodore Robert F. Stockton in the capture of Los Angeles on January 10, 1847.

Returning to Washington, Kearny was brevetted major-general and ordered to Mexico. There he served as military and civil governor of Vera Cruz and Mexico City. While on duty in Mexico he contracted yellow fever, from the effects of which he died at St. Louis on October 31, 1848. His funeral was said to have been attended by the largest number of people that had ever assembled for such a purpose in that city.

In his varied career as a soldier Kearny exhibited no trait more conspicuously than his habit of decision and firmness. Calm and dispassionate in the formation of a judgment, he received advice and suggestions with an open mind but once his own decision was made he became immovable. A strict disciplinarian, Kearny "maintained a degree of fellowship, *esprit de corps*, and good feeling among the officers and men of his command which has seldom been equalled at any post." He willingly shared every hardship of the lowliest private. Once, when reduced to a diet of mule meat, he

gave the last pan of flour in camp to Kit Carson and two volunteers who volunteered to break through the enemy lines and secure reinforcements. It was such unselfish comradeship which made it possible for him to lead his men on forced marches against insuperable odds. Kearny was greatly beloved by the frontiersmen. "At all times courageous, bland, approachable, and just, yet stern, fixed, and unwavering when his decision was once formed, he not only acquired the respect, but commanded the confidence of all with whom official business or private relations brought him in contact."

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

Trailmaking on the Frontier

On July 2, 1820, a small force of men set out from Council Bluff, Nebraska, to discover a practicable route for traveling between that post and Camp Coldwater which had just been established at the mouth of the St. Peter's (Minnesota) River. Led by Captain Matthew J. Magee of the rifle regiment, the party consisted of fifteen soldiers, four servants, an Indian guide, his squaw and papoose, eight mules, and seven horses. Captain Magee was assisted by Lieutenant Andrew Talcott of the engineers. Accompanying the expedition unofficially were Captain Stephen Watts Kearny of the Second Infantry, Lieutenant-Colonel Willoughby Morgan and Lieutenant Charles Pentland of the rifle regiment, and another junior officer.

Descending the Missouri River to Manuel Lisa's post, the expedition crossed and encamped on the east bank of the Boyer River a mile from its mouth. The weather was so stormy that the men found it difficult to manage the boat during their crossing of the Missouri. A terrific rain storm accompanied by thunder and lightning made the first night in the Iowa country extremely unpleasant.

On the following morning the company began

its march up the Boyer Valley. On the right stretched a high broken bluff, while well timbered, gently swelling hills lay beyond the broad ravine on the left. By one o'clock the ravine was crossed and the party halted to "feed" on a deer that one of the men had shot. Night found them encamped in the vicinity of the present site of Logan, having gone about fifteen miles that day.

At six o'clock on the morning of the Fourth of July, the party left camp. For twelve miles they trailed over rolling prairies, up the valley of the Boyer River to a point near where Woodbine is now located, which they reached shortly after noon. After proceeding eight miles farther they halted near the site of Dunlap in northeastern Harrison County. "This day being the anniversary of our Independence," wrote Kearny in his journal, "we celebrated it, to the extent of our means; an extra gill of whiskey was issued to each man, & we made our dinner on pork & biscuit & drank to the memory of our forefathers in a *mint julup*."

The next morning Kearny found to his chagrin that the heavy dews which fell in western Iowa left his blankets "as wet as if they had been thrown into the river." By seven o'clock, however, the troop was on its way. Kearny, being in advance of the party, rode to the top of a high bluff where he was "attacked by a swarm of small wasps, with yellow wings & very small heads & not being dis-

posed to contest the point, for the dominion of that tract, of which they were the previous Inhabitants," he beat a hasty retreat but not before he was severely stung by several of the insects.

The Boyer River was forded near the present site of Dow City from whence the route led northward over a "continuation of very high, broken hills, with no timber, & but indifferent soil." That evening they halted on a small creek after having travelled twenty-one miles. The night was cool and Kearny found three blankets "by no means uncomfortable," but swarms of mosquitoes proved very troublesome despite Lieutenant Talcott's "*mosquito net*."

Soon after seven o'clock the next morning the expedition was again ascending and descending high hills with no indication of timber — not even a single tree. The dull monotony of the landscape was "occasionally interrupted by the feats of *Horsemanship* displayed by our squaw, & the affection & gallantry shewn toward her & her Papoose (an infant of but Four months old) by the Indian Guide." Four of the soldiers pursued unsuccessfully a "*gang of elk*" that had been observed a mile from camp near the present site of Odebolt.

The scarcity of timber caused Captain Magee to set out at 4 o'clock in the morning of July 7th and march ten miles along what is now the boundary of Sac and Ida counties before halting for breakfast.

Many elk were seen as the troopers rounded the headwaters of the Soldier River.

Captain Kearny rode a mile eastward the next morning to view the circular mound of the Sioux chief, Red Hawk. Wild game was abundant. Many elk were seen during the day but no one was able to approach near enough to shoot. At noon a large bull buffalo was sighted and a number set out in pursuit. Riding the fleetest horse, Captain Kearny fired three pistol balls into him at a range of ten feet. The chase continued for two miles when two more shots brought the mighty beast down. "He is very large, & would weigh a thousand weight," wrote the twenty-six year old captain proudly in his journal. "Sent back four mules to bring up the buffaloe, which some men have been left to butcher." Having come to some timber, they decided to encamp for they had traveled fifty-nine miles "without the use of wood, and with the exception of a single hill, without sight of any." After feasting that evening, Kearny was convinced that bison meat was "far preferable to our common beef."

The following morning the squaw was very sick in "consequence of eating too greedily of the Buffaloe." Camp had been pitched in latitude $42^{\circ} 58'$, probably about three miles west of where Peterson is now located. There they remained until four o'clock in order to "jerk" the fresh meat before marching four miles farther to encamp near the site

of what is now Linn Grove on a little creek they christened "*Mary's Stream*." During the night it rained and the mosquitoes proved to be so "excessively annoying as almost to exhaust our patience."

In his journal for July 10th, Kearny noted "high hills, well covered with granite and limestone, & the scattered groves of box alder." He noticed "a gang of about 200 *she elks*, but they were too much alarmed, at our appearance, to suffer us to approach nearer than 400 yards to them." In the summer "the males and females run separately," he observed, "& the former shew, by far, much more curiosity, for they frequently come within 150 yards, to discover what we are." He also saw "some wolves & sand cranes, and crossed two or three of the Sioux trails, none, however, lately traveled; reached a fine sulphur spring, strongly impregnated, & halted for our dinner." In a driving rain which did not subside until daybreak the men pitched camp at a spot now in southeastern Clay County. The line of march that day had been almost due east because of the Indian guide's reluctance to cross the Little Sioux which had suddenly risen several feet.

Scattering stones of limestone, granite, and quartz were observed on July 11th as the expedition traveled over level prairie country. Ever alert to the plant and animal life about him, Captain Kearny saw "a large drove of Buffalo to our left,

probably 5 thousand," but did not molest them. Presently, however, they "fell upon a drove of about 100, to which several of us gave chase, & out of which a *yearling* was obtained, after a half mile chase." The main party was overtaken at "Elk Lake" (probably Lost Island Lake).

Refreshed by a night's sleep, Captain Magee ordered the expedition to set out at six o'clock in a northeasterly direction. Presently they came to the West Fork of the Des Moines River and forded without much difficulty near the present site of Emmetsburg. "About ten leagues [30 miles] to the N. West of our crossing place," Kearny relates, "is Spirit Lake, at the Head of Sioux river, respecting which the Indians have a curious tradition." Dinner was eaten on Medium Lake, after which the explorers continued ten miles over a "low, wet, & marshy" prairie, halting for the night on one of the numerous creeks emptying into the East Fork of the Des Moines.

The next morning they crossed the creek and ascended high prairies over which many large granite boulders and other stones were scattered. About noon they came to a marsh from which fresh water was obtained for dinner. "When about to proceed," Captain Kearny relates, they "saw a drove of 100 Buffalo passing from N. to South a half mile in our rear. In the afternoon crossed many of their trails, & continuing our course nearly East, reached at Sun down an old

bed of a river with high banks, about a Quarter or half a mile wide, which with a little difficulty we crossed; the water & mire being occasionally *belly deep*, to our horses and mules." That evening, on a small stream which the guide declared to be the Little Blue Earth River, they spent the better part of two hours warding off the vicious and persistent assaults of swarms of mosquitoes.

A southeasterly course was taken the next morning and after traveling eighteen miles Lieutenant Talcott found their camp to be located in $43^{\circ} 7'$ north latitude. This was probably in the vicinity of the present site of Britt. Steering north-eastward again through prairies of "indifferent soil," Captain Magee led his expedition between two extensive groves of timber. A buffalo cow weighing four hundred pounds was killed. The fresh meat was most welcome, for the "jerked beef" had spoiled and it was accordingly left behind for the wolves. Many rattlesnakes were seen and heard during the day but the Indian guide held little fear of them. Camp was pitched in the present vicinity of Forest City.

Sunday, July 16th, was "Sunshiny," and a cheery attitude prevailed among the men as they waded Lime Creek and took a northerly course over gently rolling prairies. Once they crossed a fresh trail over which a dozen Indians had passed the previous day. For several days Captain Magee had been doubtful of his Indian guide's ability to

lead them to the St. Peter's River. He often conferred with Morgan, Kearny, and Talcott and sometimes refused to heed the Indian's advice. According to Kearny, the guide was "chagrined & mortified at his own ignorance, & his squaw this evening was seen weeping, most piteously, & no doubt thro' fear least, as her *Lord & Master* has failed in his pledge of conducting us in a direct route to our point of destination, we should *play Indian* with him, viz. sacrifice him on the altar of his ignorance; A Tin of soup from our mess to the squaw quieted her apprehension & some kind words satisfied the Indians & they once more retired to their rest, apparently in good humor & spirits." This was the last day the expedition camped in Iowa, the exact location being in latitude $43^{\circ} 29'$ about where Northwood is now situated.

Over low marshy ground, through scattering stretches of oak and underbrush, across wide ravines, Captain Magee pressed on vainly seeking to find the St. Peter's River. Early in the morning of July 18th they reached a river "20 yards wide, knee deep, with stony bottom, and running from N. to *South* with a current of a mile & a half an hour, & the handsomest stream of water we have seen, since we left the Bowyer." The Indian guide thought it was the St. Peter's but it was probably the Cedar near the site of Austin, Minnesota.

The provisions were almost exhausted. A party of four was sent out in search of wild game but

returned from an unsuccessful all day hunt. Gloomily the men retired to be awakened for the march at five o'clock the following morning. Weary and footsore they trudged for thirty-one miles over prairie and through woodlands. Night found them encamped near the present site of Rochester, Minnesota, "without wood, or water, & tho' supperless, & shelterless," they were all "soon lost in quiet repose."

That night it sprinkled but Captain Magee had his men on the march by four o'clock. For two miles they plodded over a rough country wet with the early morning dew and the rain of the previous night. They halted on the banks of a "handsome stream, 12 yards wide, sandy bottom, & 2 or 3 feet deep, for the purpose of cooking & eating." With unconcealed regret Kearny jotted down that "we here took a farewell meal on the last of our pork & bread," though a little parched corn was still preserved. They were encamped on a stream which Kearny described as "well bordered by oak, pine, white ash, & slippery elm." This was probably the Zumbro River in the neighborhood of Zumbro Falls, Minnesota, for Lieutenant Talcott found the latitude to be $44^{\circ} 18'$.

At noon the next day they halted for rest without water. By two o'clock they were again on the march. The officers uneasy, the men desperately in need of food, water, and rest, it was probably with no little joy that Kearny chronicled their ar-

rival at a "small drain of water, & having lately suffered much inconvenience from the want of it, we here filled our canteens & kegs." Two deer constituted the only game they had seen for several days, except geese and "many Prairie hens, but being armed only with rifles, & these hens not to be discovered in the grass, & only when flying," they were not able to shoot any. About four in the afternoon "when every one of the party was much fatigued with traveling, & almost exhausted by a scorching sun & empty stomachs," they saw the Mississippi river from a high ridge and, "with light hearts & quick steps," they "soon reached its water."

From some Sioux Indians they learned that they were at Lake Pepin. Having obtained some provisions from a boat across the river, it was unnecessary to butcher one of the mules, which the explorers would have done that evening, "a selection having been made" and their "appetites perfectly prepared."

A Sioux Indian guide was secured the next day and, striking out into some beautiful little valleys, they reached Red Wing's village up the Mississippi by sundown. During the day Kearny noted many pheasants, the first he had encountered since crossing the Allegheny Mountains. Great numbers of pigeons whirred about overhead and several were shot.

Red Wing, battle-scarred, proud, but friendly

to the Americans, cordially invited the soldiers to encamp in his village. According to Kearny, "some excuse was offered for our declining, on which occasion he was much chagrined & mortified, & expressing it to us & adding that no American had ever before shunned him, we accepted his invitation, & encamped near his *Wig Wams*; after which the officers were invited by him to a feast & seating ourselves alongside of him, his squaw handed each of us a bason of venison, boiled up with parched corn which we found exceedingly palatable." After eating heartily "we then returned to our camp, & were followed shortly after by him, accompanied by his squaw, bringing fish & a deer head. We gave him whisky & tea & making him a present of some tobacco, he retired, & we went to rest."

Although they were nearing their goal, the tempestuous weather together with the "buzzing & stinging of the mosquitoes" served to prevent many of the men from securing proper rest. Despite this handicap, however, they reached the fort at the mouth of the St. Peter's on July 25th in time for breakfast. There they were hospitably received by Colonel Henry Leavenworth and his wife who "were a little astonished at the sight of us, we having been the First Whites that ever crossed at such a distance from the Missouri to the Mississippi river."

"The Object of the exploring party which I

have accompanied," wrote Captain Kearny, "being to discover a practicable route for traveling" between Council Bluff and Camp Coldwater was counted a failure, for the course of their march he considered "not, in the least, adapted for that purpose." Possibly the hardships so recently experienced served to prejudice his opinion, but his reasons were stated emphatically. "Our circuitous & wavering route (which is to be attributed to the Guide's advice, being in direct contradiction to our opinion, & we being occasionally guided by the one, & then by the other); the immense Prairies we have crossed; the want of timber, which we for several days at a time experienced; the little water that in some parts were to be found; the high & precipitous Mountains & hills that we climbed over, render that road impracticable & almost impassable, for more than very small bodies. A very great portion of the country in the neighborhood of our route could be of no other object (at any time) to our gov't in the acquisition of it, than the expulsion of the savages from it, & the driving them nearer to the *N. West*, & the Pacific for the disadvantages (as above) will forever prevent its supporting more than a thinly scattered population. The soil generally we found good, but bears no comparison to that I saw between *Chariton & C. B.*"

For three days following their arrival at Camp Coldwater the weary men rested. The Falls of St.

Anthony did not strike Kearny as being as "majestic & grand" as he had been induced to believe by other travelers. One day they shot at some geese, and later fished with "great success" for several hours. July 28th was spent in inspecting the site upon which Fort Snelling was later erected.

It was nine o'clock on the morning of July 29th when the party embarked for St. Louis. Manned by twelve powerful oarsmen, their thirty-ton boat sped swiftly down the Mississippi. A thick fog blanketed the Mississippi the next morning when they weighed anchor at four o'clock at the mouth of the St. Croix. By noon they entered Lake Pepin, an expansion of the Mississippi twenty-two miles long and from one to three miles broad, which Kearny considered "very dangerous to navigate" because its waters were disturbed by the slightest wind. They did not reach the foot of the lake until eleven that night and then anchored in mid-stream.

At the foot of "Prairie Le Aisle" (Winona), they visited Wabasha's lodge. In a fluent speech accompanied by "graceful gestures," Wabasha declared he "did not relish the idea of the Whites being on the river above him." Night found them anchored near the site of Trempealeau, Wisconsin.

Sandbars delayed their progress on the following day, but at nine o'clock that night they were at

the mouth of the Upper Iowa River and were passing along the eastern border of Iowa. Seven hours later they drifted by the mouth of the Yellow River and arrived at Prairie du Chien on August 2nd. For two days they strolled about Fort Crawford and the village. One evening Kearny visited some "*Wig Wams*" and found a very pretty squaw who "fell into fits" during his visit.

Having traded their heavy boat for a lighter one "with 6 oarsmen," they left Prairie du Chien and sped by the Turkey River, below which they saw a deserted Sioux village of twenty lodges on the east bank. They saw "many Pelicans, which at a distance make a very handsome shew." Having no "cabouse" (open air cooking oven), they put to under a high bluff on the Iowa side near the present site of Waupeton to prepare supper. All efforts to "gig some fish" proved unavailing.

The next day they stopped at a settlement of traders "opposite a 'Fox village' of 17 lodges, & 100 Inhabitants" where they found Dr. Samuel C. Muir with his squaw and two children. On a high bluff nearby they saw a small building enclosing the remains of Julien Dubuque whose mines were then being worked by five or six Indians. At night they camped on a sandy beach now designated as Sand Prairie opposite Bellevue, where they "caught the largest Eel" Kearny ever saw.

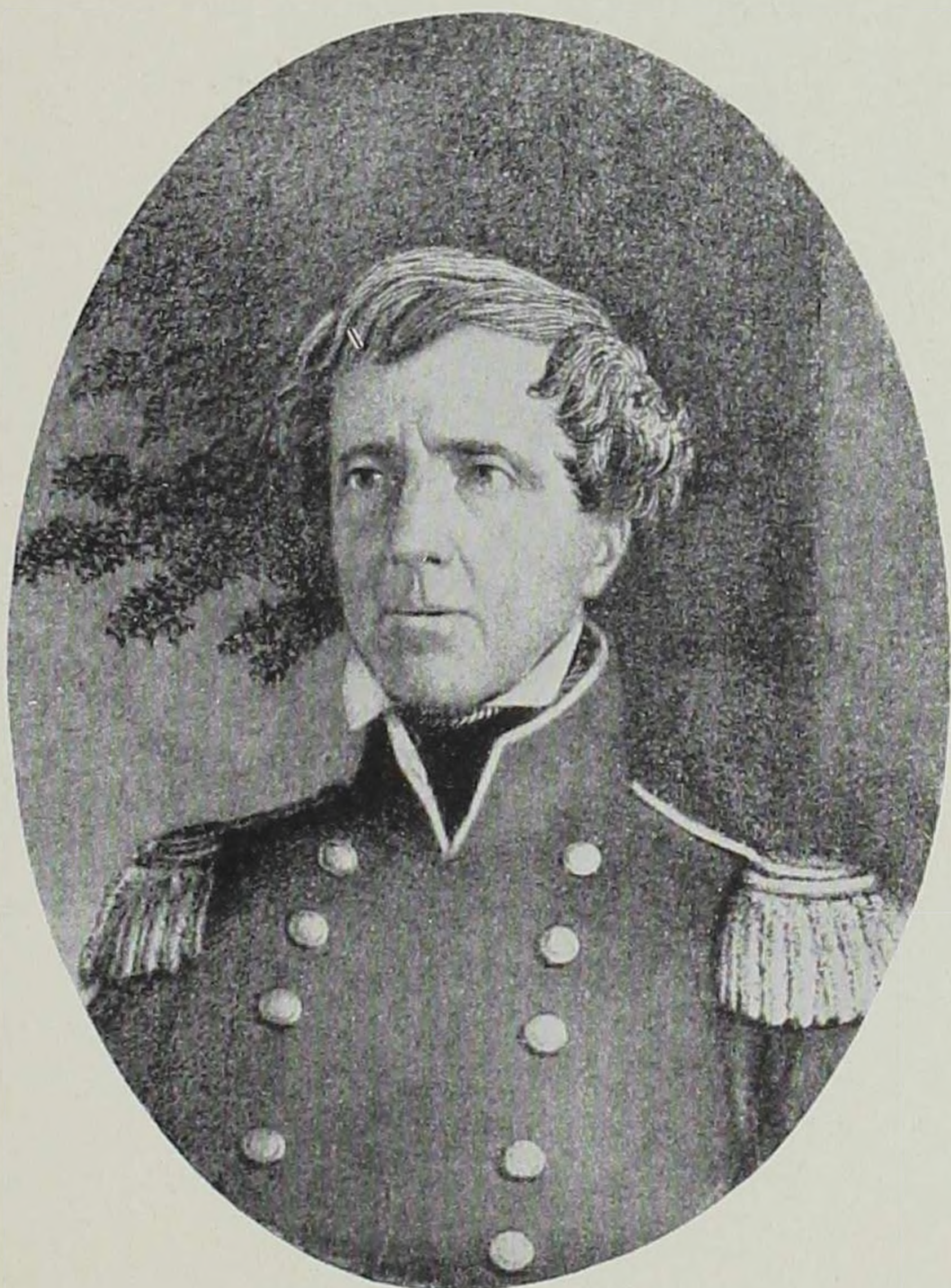
On August 6th, against a "strong head wind," they pressed on. Kearny saw "on the W. shore

several deserted Lodges, & near them a furnace, where the 'Foxes' run their Lead, they having mines in this vicinity — Shortly afterwards passed the mouth of the 'Wapibisinekaw' [Wapsipinicon], about 150 yards wide, & flowing in to the Mississippi from the West." The soil in this region "is clay & the Prairie Bottoms are extending a mile from it, bounded by high hills well covered with timber, & shewing many beautiful situations for Farms & Buildings."

Kearny saw a Fox village of nineteen lodges near the site of the present town of Princeton. Five miles below they came to the head of the Rock Rapids which they descended with "little difficulty." They reached Fort Armstrong shortly after noon, having been "much opposed by strong Head winds, & a severe rain, which increased the difficulty of navigation thro' the Rapids, the current of which however we did not find more than 5 nots per hour."

"Having purchased, for Six bottles of whiskey, a Canoe, 25 feet long, & 2 broad," Kearny left Fort Armstrong at six o'clock on the morning of August 10th with Lieutenant-Colonel Morgan, Lieutenant Pentland, and two waiters. Their light canoe danced gaily downstream and at sundown they encamped a few miles below "Prairie [Muscatine] Island" near what is now Port Louisa.

It required two days to reach Fort Edwards. Although tormented by mosquitoes during the



From the Missouri Historical Society Collections
STEPHEN WATTS KEARNY



A Florida Scout. 1836

Rifleman & Trumpeter. 1843.

Lancer Fort...



Chief Bugler - Sergt Major. 1844.



One of the "Forty" 1841.

E. FORBES.

1843.



A Florida Scout, 1836

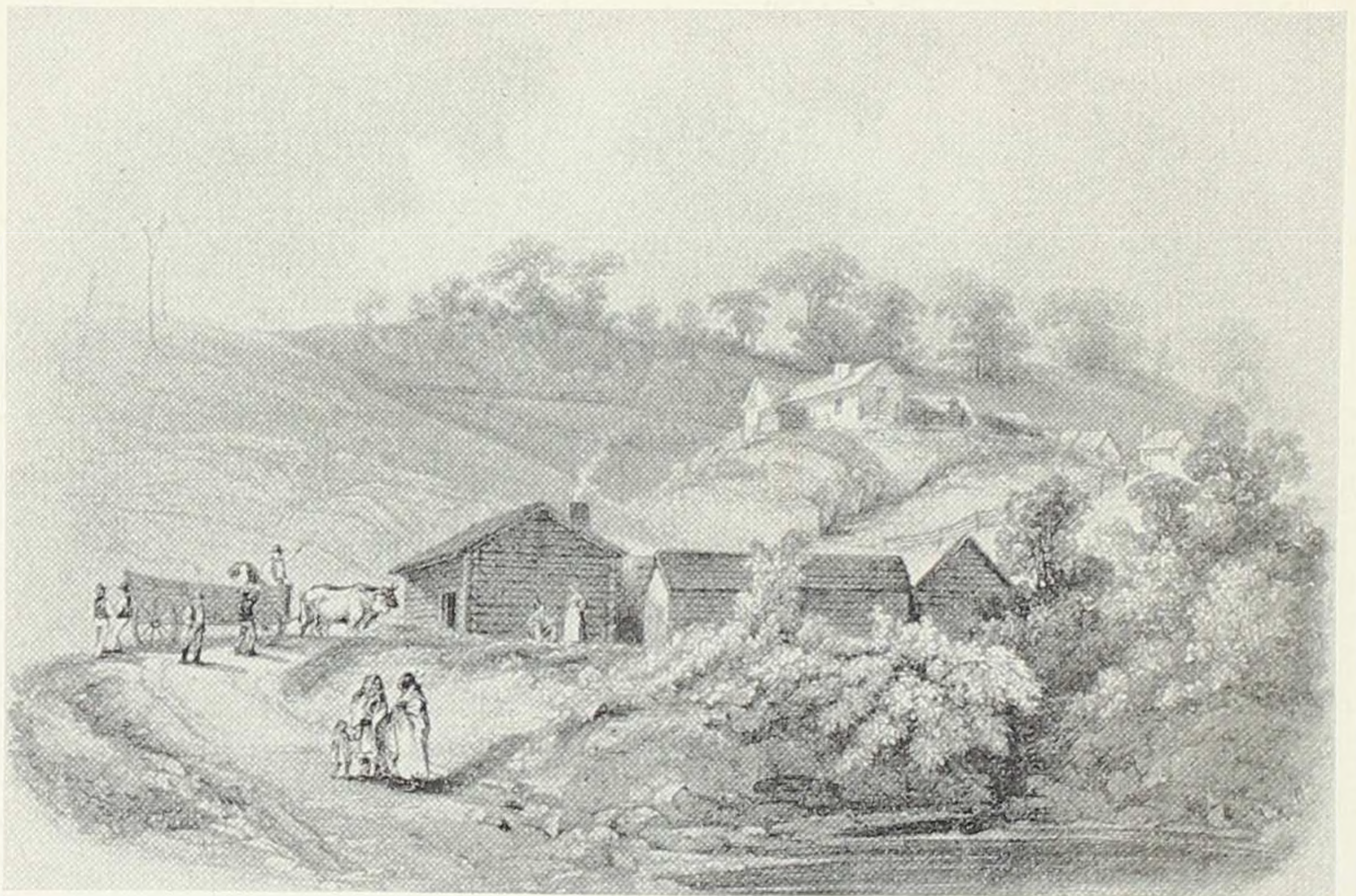
Riflemen & Trumpeeter, 1843.

Lancers Fort Jessup, 1843.

E. FORBES.

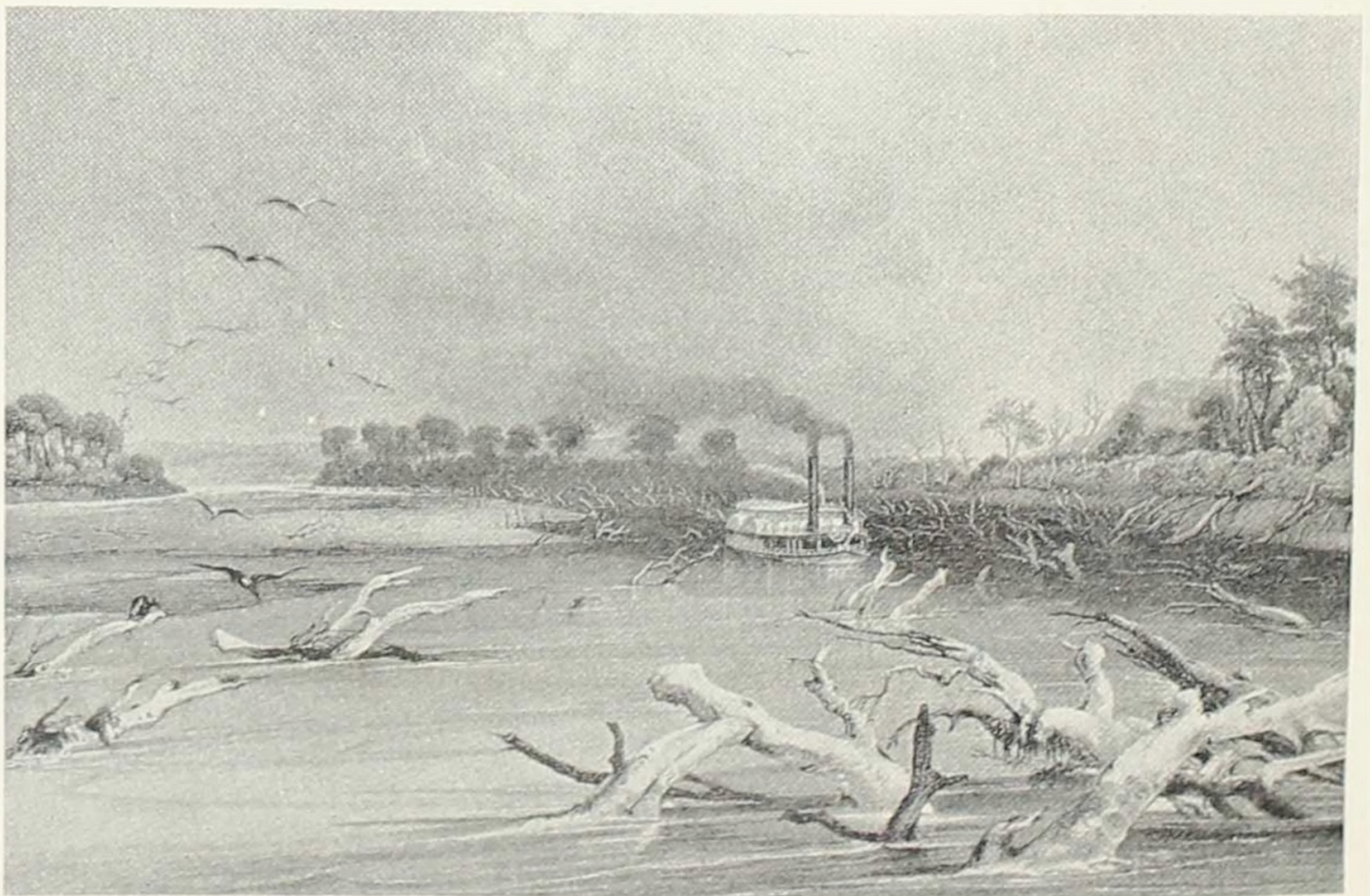
One of the "Forty" 1841.

Chief Bugler - Sergt. Major, 1844.



Drawing by Charles Bodmer

BelleVue, Major Dougherty's Post



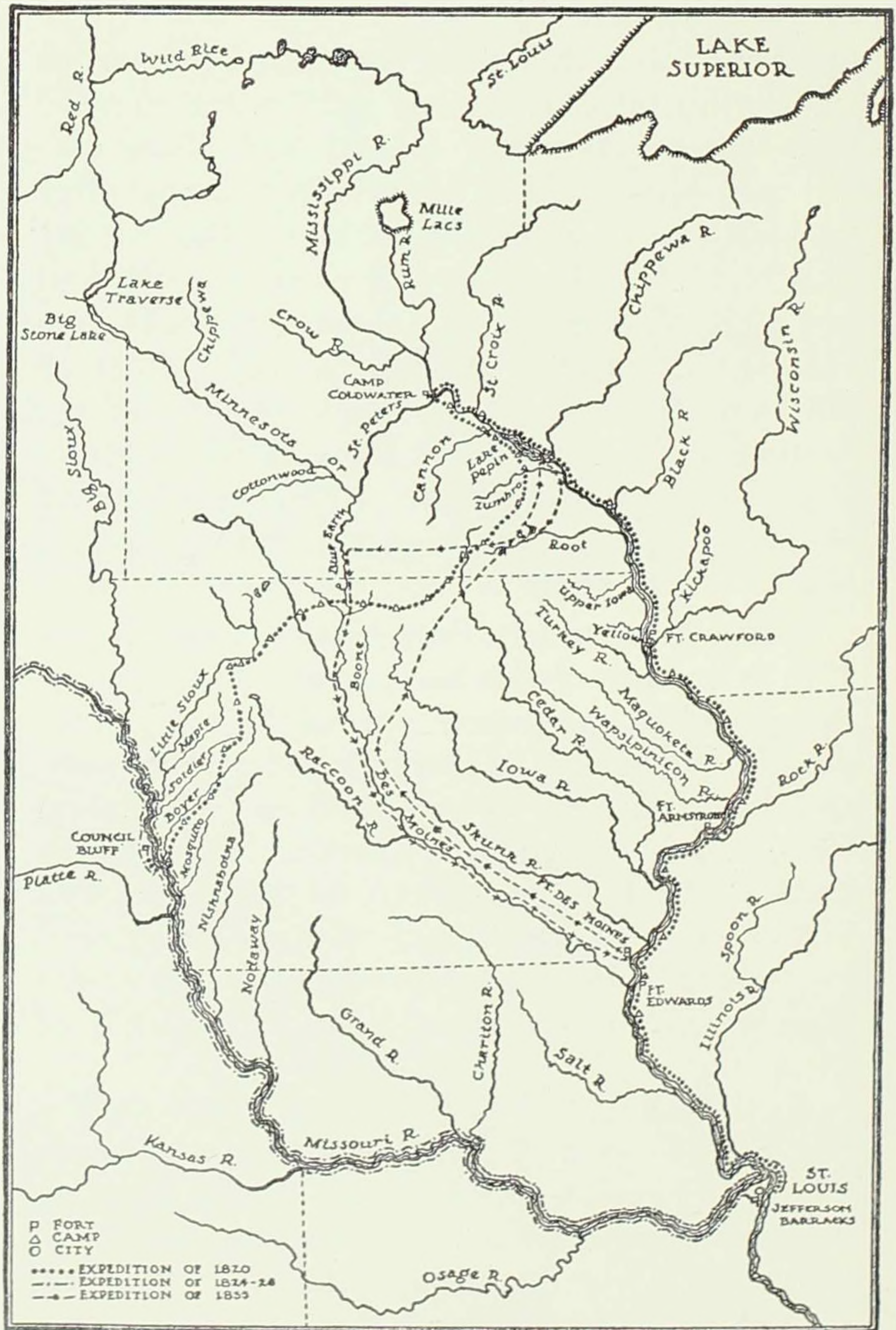
Drawing by Charles Bodmer

Snags in the Missouri

night and sweltering under the intense rays of the sun during the day, Kearny did not fail to make note of the "Ayauwa" (Iowa) and "Pole cat" (Skunk) rivers flowing into the Mississippi from the west. He described "Flint Hill" (Burlington) as a bluff six miles long and about one hundred feet high. The remains of "nine chimneys, & some Pickets, & scattering stones" marked the site of old Fort Madison. At sundown they started the descent of the Des Moines Rapids and arrived at Fort Edwards at midnight. There they found a lieutenant and twenty men stationed to guard against hostile Indians.

When Kearny left Fort Edwards on August 15th he had recorded in his journal a description of three hundred and twenty miles of the eastern border of Iowa as well as four hundred miles of prairie country between Council Bluff on the Missouri River and the Falls of St. Anthony. Altogether he had bounded the Iowa country on three sides. His vivid account of conditions in hitherto unexplored regions and along the Mississippi is one of the most valuable contributions to the early history of Iowa.

At the mouth of the Des Moines River, Kearny met the *Western Engineer*, the first steamboat known to have ascended the Mississippi that far. The explorers boarded the steamboat, but sandbars made navigation so uncertain that after progressing only fifteen miles in thirty hours, they re-



turned to their canoe. At Louisiana, on August 17th, they boarded a keelboat loaded with furs for St. Louis. For two days they moved slowly downstream on this clumsy craft. A little above Alton they again launched their canoe and arrived at St. Louis at five o'clock in the afternoon of August 19, 1820, twenty-two days after leaving Camp Coldwater and forty-nine from the time the expedition set out from Council Bluff.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

Up the Missouri with Atkinson

The levee at St. Louis bustled with activity on the morning of September 17, 1824. Four companies of the First United States Infantry commanded by Major Stephen Watts Kearny were preparing to leave on the keelboats *Muskrat*, *Mink*, *Racoon*, and *Beaver*. They formed a part of the expedition which Brigadier-General Henry Atkinson was leading to the uppermost reaches of the Missouri River to make treaties with the various Indian tribes and to open the entire country for the American fur trade. Already the leading fur center of the United States, St. Louis was deeply interested in the success of the expedition and a motley gathering of fur traders, trappers, and voyageurs lined the shore.

The keelboats, invented by General Atkinson himself, were the subject of "many remarks and observations" since they constituted an entirely new method of ascending the Missouri without the assistance of oars. According to a contemporary account: "The machinery consists of a shaft, thrown across the centre of the boat, with a water wheel at each end — a five feet cog wheel in the centre of the shaft, and put in motion by another cog wheel, three feet four inches, resting on an

iron shaft, which supports a fly wheel at one end, of eight feet in diameter. The fly and small cog wheel are moved by a crank, projecting from an arm of the fly wheel, with two pitmans, which are impelled by soldiers, seated on from eight to ten benches, four abreast, with a succession of cross bars before each bench, contained in a frame that moves on slides, with a three foot stroke of the crank. The men are comfortably seated under an awning, sheltered from the sun and rain — the labor much lighter than rowing with a common oar, and the boats are propelled with a velocity sufficient to stem the most rapid current of the Missouri."

Finally all was in readiness and the last man scrambled aboard. Major Kearny barked out a sharp command and the curious craft arched gracefully out into the current and moved slowly up the Mississippi. Two miles below the mouth of the Missouri River the expedition halted for the night having gone sixteen miles.

At daybreak the bugle sounded. Shortly after sunrise the little fleet was nosing its way into the muddy Missouri and a few hours later the boats reached Bellefontaine. There some of the freight of the heavily laden boats was removed and "considerable Pork, whiskey, Company baggage, &c." was put aboard. Sixty recruits were also distributed among the crews of the four boats.

St. Charles was reached the following afternoon

and Brigadier-General Henry Atkinson came down to the levee with Senator Thomas H. Benton of Missouri to give Major Kearny final instructions. Some difficulties had already been experienced with the boats. It had been found necessary to rearrange the buckets of the *Beaver* since they dipped too deeply into the water. At St. Charles there was further delay on account of the *Beaver*, and the constant complaints of his officers led Kearny to take the head carpenter along for a few days.

As they plied their way up the Missouri, first one boat was in the lead and then another. Races were frequent. On one occasion the *Beaver* and *Muskrat* collided breaking all the buckets of one wheel of the former. "They were replaced in 40 minutes, after which there was a long and well contested race between the *Beaver* & the *Muskrat* — as well as between the *Raccoon* & the *Muskrat*."

Trouble with the machinery, the presence of snags, sawyers, and sandbars together with the ever-changing channel of the winding Missouri, made progress exceedingly slow. Moreover, wind and adverse weather conditions added to the other hazards of navigation. On October 18th they churned past the mouth of the Nodaway River and three days later the Nemaha. The Tarkio was seen on October 22nd and on the following evening they tied up for the night on a small willow bar about ten miles above the Nishnabotna. A solemn

note pervaded the camp that day for at dinner "Thomas of the Recruits attached to the *Mink* was found Dead." He was "buried with the honors of War."

The expedition was at last approaching the northern boundary of Missouri. A brisk wind prevented the boats from advancing more than a half mile on October 25th. During the following morning, however, the expedition unknowingly passed the point that is now on the southern boundary of Iowa. Snow, swiftly moving ice, and a stiff wind added to the difficulties of navigation. A lost hunter was discovered "starving and worn out." After passing Weeping Water Creek and the mouth of the Platte River they came to "*Pilchers* Trading house" where Kearny observed many "Ottoes."

An accident to one of the keelboats usually held up all the others. According to Kearny's journal, the "*Mink* having for the last week or two, kept so far in the Rear, we, after breakfast sent her 24 men, 8 from each of the other boats, & sent as many of hers to them in order to ascertain whether her slow proceeding was caused from the laziness of her crew, or the Boats fault." Early in the afternoon "*Wells* of Compy B. fell overboard from the *Muskrat* (where he had been sent) & was immediately drowned."

The presence of many military officers at "*Robideaus* Trading house" was an indication that the voyagers were nearing their destination. About

sunset they passed the mouth of the Boyer River and made their first camp on Iowa soil. Daybreak, and the four boats were again on their way. Manuel Lisa's old trading post and the Engineers Cantonment were noted that morning and at one o'clock in the afternoon of November 2, 1824, the *Racoon*, *Beaver*, and *Muskrat* reached Council Bluff. The *Mink* came up a few hours later, having been retarded when her rudder was lost.

It had taken twenty-six days to reach the present site of Kansas City and forty-seven days to make the entire journey of almost seven hundred miles from St. Louis to Council Bluff. Meanwhile one man had died, another had drowned, and a third had cut his throat, not to mention the recruit who had been put in jail at Booneville for stealing cabbages. Desertions were frequent, especially among the volunteers, but many were captured and brought back.

Winter quarters were established at Council Bluff and for six months the drudgery of military life at a frontier post held little sparkle for either officers or men. On May 16, 1825, after many delays, Kearny left Council Bluff with the First United States Infantry aboard the *Beaver*, *Otter*, and *Muskrat*. The Sixth Infantry was assigned to the *Elk*, *Buffaloe*, *White Bear*, and *Racoon*. General Atkinson, Indian Agent Benjamin O'Fallon, and five other commissioners were aboard the *Mink*. Night found the expedition encamped on

the Iowa side of the river about eleven miles above Council Bluff.

Strong currents and hard winds retarded the speed of the flotilla as it proceeded upstream past Soldier River. On May 19th, Kearny jotted down the following: "Put off at daybreak, crossed the River and overtook the other Boats — met with much strong water, & drift wood — stopt on the left bank, for breakfast — the *Otter* after having crossed swung & instead of the 2nd boat in advance, became the last — on her next attempt she struck, so hard against the bank, as to move for four inches, the shaft, & to shake her machinery — after being repaired, she started about 12 & after doubling a difficult point, the men being on the cordell, her bridle broke, & her mast snapt in two, near the deck; the Boats of the 6th. Infy. with the Genl. [Atkinson] had left us, while we were repairing the *Otters* machinery — wrote to the Genl. informing him, of our accident, & the carpenters went into the woods cut down a cotton tree, & commenced a new mast."

Kearny's difficulties were innumerable. Lieutenant William L. Harris of the First Infantry, "having been missing since yesterday" was counted as lost in the woods and two hunters were sent in pursuit of him. The *Muskrat* was left behind with directions to fire her swivel occasionally in the hope of attracting his attention.

As they proceeded upstream the stage of the

river became lower and the men found it much easier to navigate. At noon some of the parties that had been sent in search of Lieutenant Harris returned without finding a trace of him. Night was spent near the "old *Maha* village" not far from Blackbird Hill named in honor of the celebrated Omaha chief buried on the summit. Five good hunters were sent in search of the missing lieutenant on May 26th with instructions to return to the place where he left the boat and to "use all possible endeavors to find him." An early start, coupled with a strong, fair wind advanced the expedition twenty miles and it halted for the night on the Iowa bank two miles above "*Floyds Bluffs, & River.*" As Kearny and his men were about to retire, they "were hailed from the opposite shore, sent a small boat over, & found *Lieut. Harris* nearly worn out."

The following day they ran up to the mouth of the Big Sioux River and remained there for the rest of the day awaiting General Atkinson's arrival with the Sixth Infantry. Strong "head winds & currants" rendered navigation so difficult that they made but one mile on May 28th. At daybreak, however, they departed with a fair wind and paddled twenty-two miles, halting at dark near the "*Iowa River*" (Aowa Creek) near Ponca, Nebraska.

By that time the expedition was well out of the Iowa country. Advancing steadily past the White

Stone River, Chalk Bluff, and Calumet Bluffs, the troops arrived at the "*Puncah Village*" at the mouth of "*White Paint Creek*" on June 8th, where they held a council and made a treaty. On up the Missouri River the strange fleet proceeded. Wherever Atkinson found an Indian village he stopped and made a treaty. By August 24th, the expedition had gone one hundred and twenty miles above the Yellowstone River.

Failing to meet either the Blackfoot or Assiniboine nations they turned back, "each Boats crew, giving 3 hearty cheers." At the mouth of the Yellowstone, General William Ashley and his party of twenty-two traders joined them with several boatloads of pelts which they had brought across the Rocky Mountains. It was August 27, 1825, when the combined parties set out from the Yellowstone.

Wild game was abundant throughout the journey up and down the Missouri. One day they encountered a herd of elk and killed about a dozen. On another occasion "at Sundown a Buffalo Bull that had been chased from the hills entered our camp & was killed, directly alongside, one of our Boats." Kearny noted in his journal the presence of deer, buffalo, elk, bear, big horn sheep, ducks, turkeys, pigeons, and other wild animal life. On one day as they were approaching the Big Sioux seven black bears were seen and five of them shot. Game, together with fish, formed a hearty diet for

bronzed soldiers whose hands had become calloused and whose muscles were as hard as rope. It was a strenuous life indeed.

After encountering many snags in the strong current of the Missouri, one of which wrecked the *Muskrat* almost beyond repair, Kearny nosed his fleet onto the Iowa shore at the mouth of the Big Sioux. Some passing boats had supplied them with newspapers and the crew of the keelboat *Elk* brought in seven elk that they had shot. The juicy venison must have been doubly appreciated as the men read or listened to the news of the world from which they had been absent a year, lacking only two days.

The following morning, on September 16, 1825, they continued down the Missouri past the old Omaha village and Blackbird Hill and stopped at sundown on a high sand bar on the Iowa side. Throughout the day Kearny saw geese, ducks, and turkeys in abundance.

On September 19, 1825, the expedition reached Council Bluff, one hundred and twenty-five days after they had departed. According to Kearny they had "traveled above 2700 miles — made several stops — Treated with all the Indians, on that part of the River — met with no serious accident, excepting that of the *Muskrat*, which was shortly repaired — & all returned in good health — no lives having been lost."

A few days after their arrival, Major Kearny

was ordered to remain at Council Bluff awaiting directions from the government. The cantonment of Fort Atkinson not being large enough for all the troops of the First Infantry, Kearny determined to "build huts for wintering Quarters near the *Lime Kiln*" and "accordingly started at half past 3 P. M. & reached the Kiln, at 5." There he camped "on a handsome table Land, on the Right bank about 8 miles, (by water) below *Fort Atkinson*" and "built *Can.* Barbour, in less than 4 weeks, spacious & comfortable Quarters Store Houses &c for the 4 Companies, rafting all our Logs across the Missouri, & sawing the Plank by hand."

On May 1, 1826, Major Kearny received an order to return down the Missouri to Bellefontaine with his command. At eight o'clock the following morning he departed in the "*Elk, White Bear & Muskrat* Transport Boats." The Missouri was a mad, swirling torrent and rough weather made navigation extremely dangerous. The "wind blowing strong from the South & the Waves running tolerable high," the *Elk* came "very near being lost" near Lisa's post when she sprang a leak and for a few moments leaned to the starboard so much as to "have the running board, considerable under water & shipping some of it."

High water, hard winds, and various mishaps continued to delay the detachment as they passed the Nishnabotna. On May 5th the "*White Bear*" fell into an Eddy which turned her around like a

top, her larboard side, bent over, she shipped considerable water, & was in much danger of being lost." One of the men was "bitten by a *Pilot Snake* & several of these, & the *Rattle Snakes*, were discovered & killed."

Despite such incidents, however, they continued down the Missouri much more rapidly than they had ascended more than a year and a half before. At dawn on May 10, 1826, they set out on the last stage of the epochal journey, passed St. Charles, and arrived at Bellefontaine at seven o'clock the same morning. Kearny found that cantonment in a "very decayed state" but, being more comfortable than tents, moved into it. There he remained until July 10th, when he moved down the Mississippi to a point four miles below Carondelet and began the erection of Jefferson Barracks.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

Across the Prairies of Iowa

In the fall of 1834, following a dragoon expedition across the plains of the Southwest, Lieutenant-Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny was ordered to march from Fort Gibson, Arkansas, and establish winter quarters near the site of Louis Honoré Tesson's apple orchard at the head of the Des Moines Rapids. Upon his arrival Kearny was chagrined to find no shelter for his tired horses and troops. "The quarters for the officers and soldiers are not as far advanced as I had expected," he wrote with characteristic bluntness, "and not a log is laid for stables for our horses. We shall on the 28th go to work with all our disposable forces, and I hope by the close of next month we may complete the buildings, tho' they will be less comfortable and of meaner appearance, than those occupied by any other portion of the Army."

A bitter cold winter caused Kearny to complain frequently about the "uncomfortable quarters and the inadequate supplies." But spring finally came and with it orders for a summer campaign. Kearny was instructed to proceed up the Des Moines River to the Raccoon Fork with Companies B, H, and I, for the purpose of examining that vicinity as a suitable place for a military post. From there he

was to march to Wabasha's village on the Mississippi and thence westward to the headwaters of the Des Moines, returning to his post along the right bank of that stream. It was expected that the expedition would prove disciplinary and instructive to the soldiers weary of barracks life, as well as productive of valuable information about the interior of Iowa.

The detachment of dragoons began the eleven-hundred-mile march on June 7, 1835. Six or seven Indians joined them at "Keokuk's town," near the site of Agency, Iowa, and Frank Labashure, a half-breed, was secured as interpreter. Heavy rains impeded their progress as the horses sank deep in the mud or floundered through boggy sloughs. "Marched 16 miles over a marshy Prairie," was the entry for June 15th in the journal kept by an unknown trooper. "Encamped on a dry piece of land but at night had a hard storm of rain and wind accompanied with much thunder and lightning. We left Opponuse or Iway town [the present site of South Ottumwa] 6 miles to our left. Col. Kearny is very mild and the command in good health and spirits. So much rain renders marching unpleasant we have to encamp each night in mud & water but still I am better contented than when in quarters."

Another member of the expedition described the early summer weather as a "succession of rains, blows, and chills: and if the sun happen to shine,

it does so gloomily, as if boding a coming storm. The whole country becomes saturated with water; the low lands are overflowed; the streams are swollen; and locomotion is rendered difficult except by water."

Colonel Kearny had been leading his men along the watershed which divides the Des Moines and Skunk rivers. By the time they had reached the present site of Oskaloosa the weather had changed and the dragoons found themselves traversing prairies "covered with strawberries" in such abundance "as to make the whole track red for miles." Marching at the rate of about fifteen miles a day, the ripening of the strawberries coincided with their progress and gave them "this luxury for many weeks, increased by the incident of one of our beeves becoming a milker."

Wild game was seen in abundance. Turkeys, grouse, ducks, and prairie chickens rose in alarm and took precipitate flight before this unwelcome invasion of the dragoons. In every stream pike, pickerel, catfish, trout and many other varieties of fish were found. Deer was plentiful, while a bear or buffalo sometimes came within range.

Having failed to strike the Raccoon Fork of the Des Moines, Colonel Kearny turned his course northeastward on June 22nd toward Wabasha's village. Their supply of pork had given out and the dragoons were dependent upon the "chase & Beef" of which there proved to be a great plenty.

“Not far from the head of Skunk (Chicaqua) river, in the midst of an ocean of fine native grass, such as only Iowa produces,” wrote Lieutenant Albert M. Lea, “we encountered a small herd of buffalo, to which many of us gave chase.” It was the first time Lea had seen “the lordly beast in his home.” Most of the day was spent in the chase and that night bison meat was plentiful in camp. After Lea’s tent was pitched four rattle snakes were killed within it. The next day he had a bath in a pool, occupied by mosquitoes so large that he pressed one in his journal, and kept it for years as “a specimen of the luxuriant growth of the plains.”

Three hours were spent in crossing the “Iway” River. Continuing their march over the rolling prairie, they passed a “soux Fort” consisting of twenty or thirty holes large enough to contain five or six men and dug in a circular form upon a small eminence with nothing for a barricade except the dirt dug from the holes. A few days later the dragoons killed several more buffalo.

Weary and sore from hard riding, the dragoons crossed the present northern boundary of Iowa north of the site of Osage. Every hilltop presented an ever changing panorama of “high hills & deep Vallies with here and there a fine cascade caused by the water of the Prairie tumbling into the creeks below.” As they marched through a deep vale they beheld on either side a “bed of rocks nigh 1000 feet high forming a most awful appearance

showing the work of an Almighty hand in a remarkable manner."

The expedition rode only ten miles on the Fourth of July and pitched camp near the Mississippi. A number of deserted wigwams surrounded by "Patches of Corn Pumpions & beans" were observed, while many fine springs were seen "gushing from the hills in all directions." The next day a trooper ascended one of the highest peaks, from whence he could "discern the broad waters of the Mississippi & Lake pepin spotted with here and there an Indian Canoe which from the eminence appeared like dots upon a mirror." Three days later Kearny marched his men southward to Wabasha's village near where Winona is now located.

Kearny remained in this vicinity for twelve days, changing only now and then to secure better pasture. Chief Wabasha came into camp with his head men on July 19th and made a treaty. "We have seen but few of the soux & those we have seen give us a poor idea of this tribe," reports the journalist for that day. "They are mostly a dirty thieving race living in the most abominable filthy manner. The Sacks on the contrary are cleanly & decent in their appearance." A search for minerals revealed no "oar except Iron & Ocher." The country was "broken & mountanious except a narrow strip of level land upon the Mississippi." In all the valleys were "fine streams of cold water filled with

fish of all kinds but the most numerous are the spotted brook trout." Trade was reported to be "poor with these Indians on account of their poverty."

On July 21, 1835, Kearny led his dragoons homeward through what is now southern Minnesota. After crossing a branch of the "Iway," probably the Cedar River, he suddenly found his way blocked by a long lake stretching as far as the eye could see from north to south and from one-half to three miles broad. "The officers are now assembled to concert measures to get out of this difficulty," wrote the dragoon in his journal. "In the meantime the men are taking their rest in the shade their horses grazing beside them. No name is mentioned by Geographers for this lake. The land about here is good. Grass & herbage of all kinds in the highest natural state. Grass 8 ft high. One of our Indians killed a grey Eagle on the lake shore. Signs of Beaver Muskrat and otter." Late that afternoon Kearny succeeded in passing the outlet and the dragoons rode on by "handsome lakes" and "romantick" landscapes which exceeded in "beauty & fertility" any country thus far seen.

The following day Kearny met a party of Sioux who informed him that he was on the waters which empty into the St. Peter's River. No nearer home than when encamped at Wabasha's village, Kearny made a forced thirty-five mile march southward,

probably along the course of the Blue Earth River. That night the tired dragoons encamped on the open prairie in what is now Kossuth county, "without wood and bad Water & consequently without eating." One of the weary men wrote they were "wandering about like half starved wolves" and nobody seemed to know in what direction to go.

For eight days they rode southward through rich prairies interspersed with lakes and groves. The weather was warm but not excessively hot. "During this season," declared Lieutenant Lea as he rode through grass six feet high, "the appearance of the country is gay and beautiful, being clothed in grass, foliage, and flowers." On August 2nd they spent six hours crossing a tributary of the Des Moines by means of a raft. The following day they "Crossed the Des Moines by a Ford."

Continuing down the west bank of the Des Moines they crossed the Lizard, Bluff, Beaver, and numerous other creeks, and pitched their tents at the Raccoon Fork on a spot which Lieutenant Lea described as a "grassy and spongy meadow with a bubbling spring." There Lea and two other officers feasted on a fat young deer and enjoyed a bottle of fine old French brandy which Lea had carried in his wallet untasted throughout the campaign.

On the following day, Colonel Kearny examined the locality as a site for a fort. Although the Des Moines River was one hundred and twenty

yards wide he found it easily fordable. On the east bank stood an abundance of timber, such as oak, walnut, elm, ash, linn, and cottonwood, which would prove useful for firewood and building material. But Kearny did not regard the place as suitable for the erection of a military post. Transportation of military stores on large boats was extremely uncertain; the Sacs and Sioux were at peace and needed no such barrier; the site at the upper fork of the Des Moines was much more practicable; and the Indians themselves opposed the erection of a post on the Raccoon River "giving as one of their objections, that the Whites would drive off the little game that is left in their country."

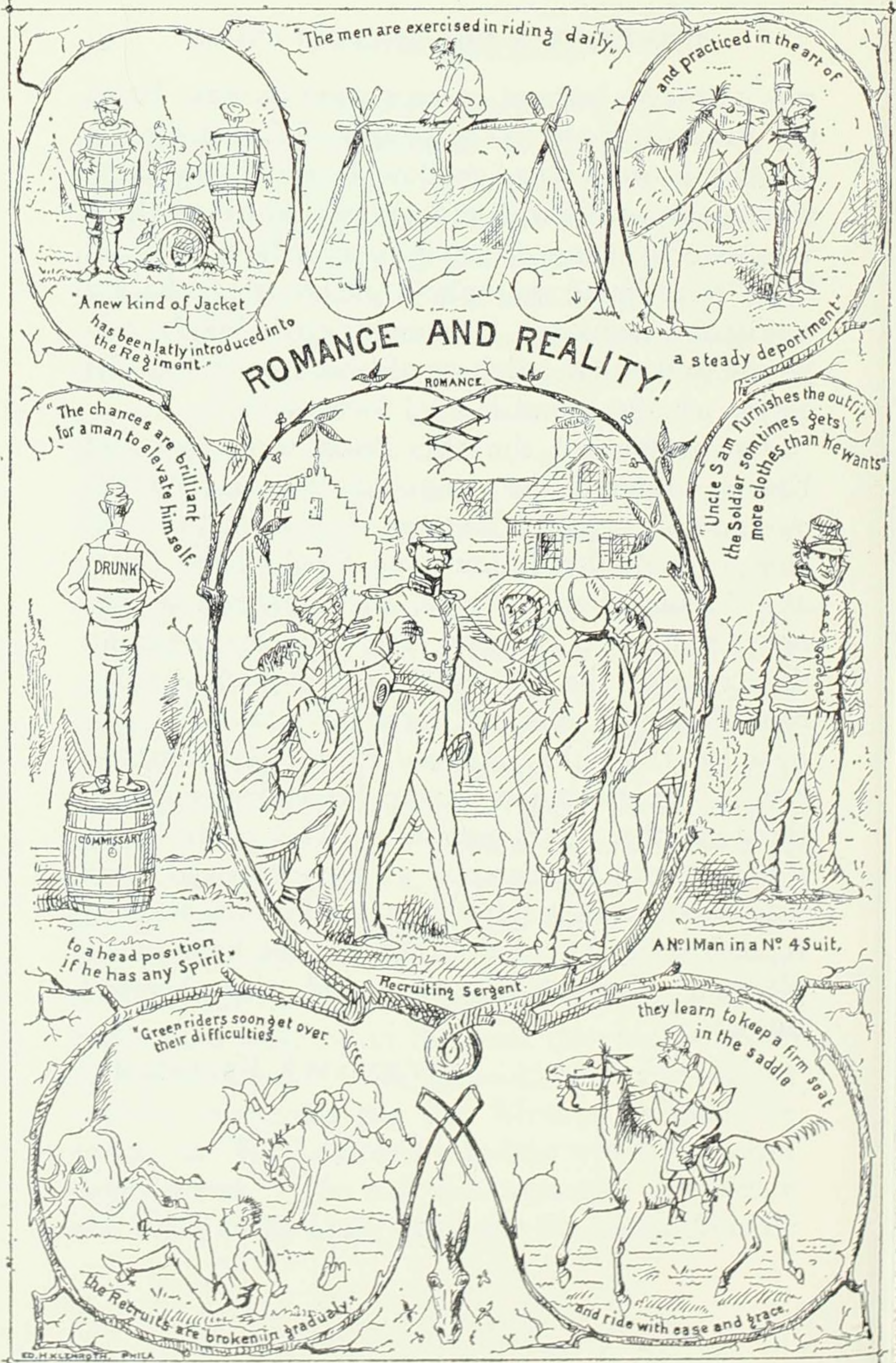
Lieutenant Lea with one dragoon and an Indian was dispatched down the Des Moines in a cottonwood canoe to explore the navigability of the stream, while Kearny followed along the right bank with his detachment of troops. According to Lea, he started on his "toilsome task, sounding all shoals, taking courses with a pocket compass, estimating distances from bend to bend by the time and rate of motion, sketching every notable thing, occasionally landing to examine the geology of the rocks, and sleeping in the sand despite the gnats and mosquitoes." The general character of the country bordering the Des Moines he found to consist of "level meadows, rolling woodlands, and deep forests." The soil was unusually productive and wells could easily be dug in the highland prai-

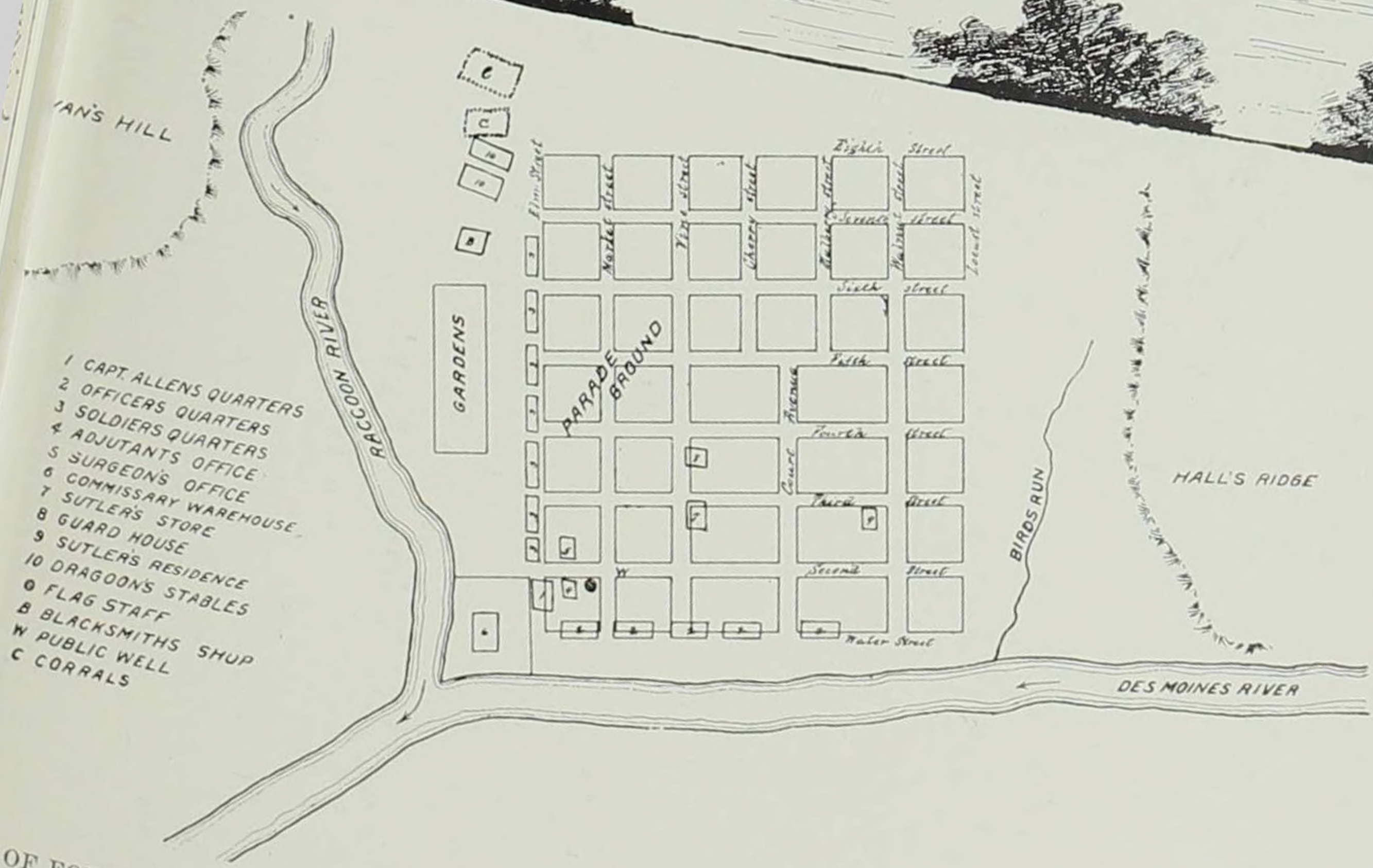
ries whenever natural springs were absent. From the Raccoon Fork to the mouth of Cedar Creek, the Des Moines was "shallow, crooked, and filled with rocks, sand-bars, and snags" but below there was no obstruction to navigation. Minerals of all kinds were found throughout the course, including sandstone, limestone, bituminous coal, "oxide, sulphuret and native sulphate of iron, lignite, and the earths usually found in coal formations."

The rations of the expedition were low and Kearny ordered the dragoons to horse on the morning of August 10th on the last stretch of their eleven-hundred-mile journey. Forging the Otter and White Breast creeks, they reached Appanoose's village on August 15th. The next morning they crossed the Des Moines and pitched camp near Keokuk's village. Three days later, on August 19, 1835, they reached Fort Des Moines at two in the afternoon having been absent almost three months. "Sickness and all Disease has been a stranger to the camp & all have enjoyed good spirits except that stupidity caused by the want of food & upon the whole I can say we have had a pleasant Campaign," concluded the dragoon diarist.

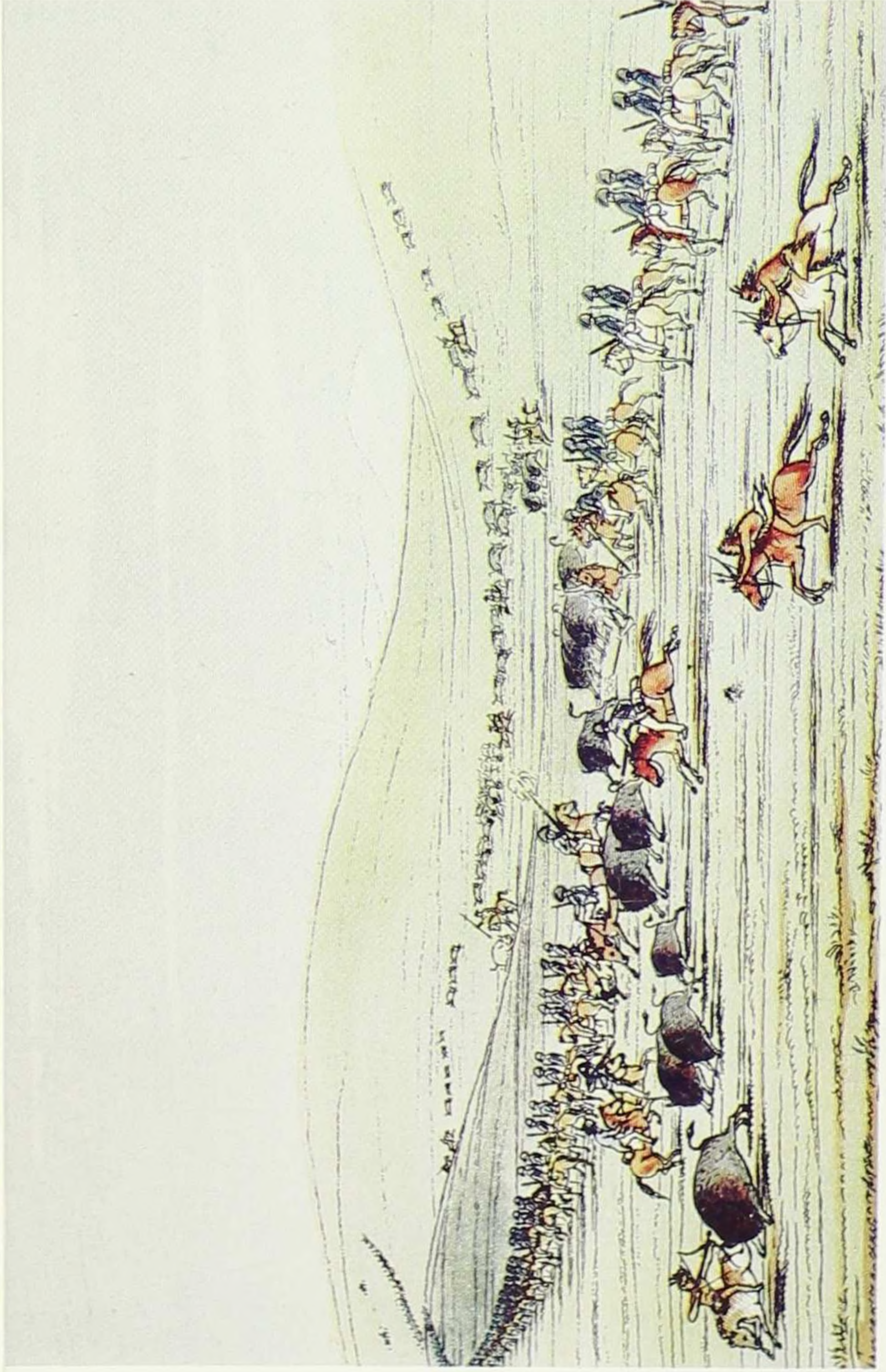
WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

THE MAKING OF A UNITED STATES DRAGOON





PLAT OF FORT DES MOINES, 1844. WITH ORIGINAL PLAT OF TOWN OF FORT DES MOINES, 1846.
 From Porter's Annals of Polk County, Iowa



From Catlin's *North American Indians*

Indian Hunters Drive Buffalo Through Dragoon Line of March

We had with us about thirty Osage and Cherokee, Seneca and Delaware Indians, employed as guides and hunters for the regiment; and with the war-party of ninety or a hundred Camanchees, we formed a most picturesque appearance while passing over the green fields, and consequently, sad havoc amongst the herds of buffaloes, which we were almost hourly, passing. We were now out of the influence and reach of bread stuffs, and subsisted ourselves on buffaloes' meat altogether; and the Indians of the different tribes, emulous to shew their skill in the chase, and prove the mettle of their horses, took infinite pleasure in dashing into every herd we approached; by which means, the regiment was abundantly supplied from day to day with fresh meat.

In one of those spirited scenes when the regiment were on the march, and the Indians with their bows and arrows were closely plying a band of these affrighted animals, they made a bolt through the line of the dragoons, and a complete breach, through which the whole herd passed, upsetting horses and riders in the most amusing manner . . . and receiving such shots as came from those guns and pistols that were aimed, and not fired off into the empty air