

Two Connecticut Yankees

Dreams of empire and the glory of military prowess plunged Europe into seven long years of bloody war. But the principal scenes of the struggle were at the ends of the earth. While Robert Clive was conquering India, British arms, with the able assistance of American colonial troops, wrested Canada and the eastern half of the Mississippi Valley from the French and their Indian allies. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 greatly changed the map of the world, and altered the destiny of North America. Seldom if ever has England profited more from the spoils of war.

The acquisition of such a vast domain quite naturally awakened a new interest in the nature of the country, its fur-bearing animals, and its native human inhabitants, not only among curious and enterprising Americans but in official circles of the British government. School books have given the impression that the war for American independence was caused chiefly by a tax on tea and the tyranny of a headstrong king. As a matter of fact the vital phase of the American problem in the opinion of the British ministry was the development of the interior of the continent. Commercial regulations and political oppression were incidental to the broad, underlying conflict between English and American inter-

ests in the West. The Indians, still hostile toward the English, had to be reconciled and protected, and the land companies wanted the region settled rapidly while the fur traders opposed colonization. Everybody in America and England was eager for information about the West, if for no other reason than the natural romantic appeal of strange lands and people.

In June, 1766, a Connecticut Yankee, named Jonathan Carver, a man of education and good repute, set out from Boston to explore the wilderness about the Great Lakes and beyond. Having served as a captain in the French and Indian War, "I began to consider", he claimed several years afterward, "how I might continue still serviceable, and contribute, as much as lay in my power, to make that vast acquisition of territory, gained by Great Britain, in North America advantageous to it. It appeared to me indispensably needful, that Government should be acquainted in the first place with the true state of the dominions they were now become possessed of. To this purpose, I determined, as the next proof of my zeal, to explore the most unknown parts of them, and to spare no trouble or expence in acquiring a knowledge that promised to be so useful to my countrymen."

It is probable that a spirit of adventure, hope of fabulous profits from the fur trade and the publication of his observations, or relief from the inanities of domestic life had more to do with his journey

than patriotic zeal. Nevertheless, fully cognizant of the dangers before him, Carver left his wife and several children to take care of themselves and started on his "travels through the interior parts of North America", under the auspices of Robert Rogers, erstwhile commandant at Mackinac, whom he had met at Boston in the spring and who was organizing an expedition to explore the country from the Great Lakes to the Pacific Ocean and then follow the coast northward in search of the elusive Northwest Passage.

It was on the third of September when, having made arrangements for obtaining supplies, Carver left Mackinac Island, "the uttermost" British fort in the northwest, and, accompanied by some Canadian traders, plunged into the regions he "designed to explore". More than a month was required to skirt the northern shore of Lake Michigan, paddle down Green Bay, ascend the Fox River, and portage to the Wisconsin River. A week later the first American known to have visited Iowa gazed across the Mississippi at Pike's Hill, "a mountain of considerable height". Let him tell his own story while he skirted the border of Iowa in the autumn of 1766.

"On the 15th we entered that extensive river the Mississippi. The Wisconsin, from the Carrying Place to the part where it falls into the Mississippi, flows with a smooth but a strong current; the water of it is exceedingly clear, and through it you may perceive a fine and sandy bottom, tolerably free

from rocks. In it are a few islands, the soil of which appeared to be good, though somewhat woody. The land near the river also seemed to be, in general, excellent; but that at a distance is very full of mountains, where it is said there are many lead mines.

“About five miles from the junction of the rivers, I observed the ruins of a large town in a very pleasing situation. On enquiring of the neighbouring Indians why it was thus deserted, I was informed, that about thirty years ago, the Great Spirit had appeared on the top of a pyramid of rocks, which lay at a little distance from it, towards the west, and warned them to quit their habitations; for the land on which they were built belonged to him, and he had occasion for it. As a proof that he, who gave them these orders, was really the Great Spirit, he further told them, that the grass should immediately spring up on those very rocks from whence he now addressed them, which they knew to be bare and barren. The Indians obeyed, and soon after discovered that this miraculous alteration had taken place. They shewed me the spot, but the growth of the grass appeared to be no ways supernatural. I apprehend this to have been a stratagem of the French or Spaniards to answer some selfish view, but in what manner they effected their purposes I know not.

“This people, soon after their removal, built a town on the bank of the Mississippi, near the mouth of the Ouisconsin, at a place called by the French

La Prairies les Chiens, which signifies the Dog Plains; it is a large town, and contains about three hundred families, the houses are well built after the Indian manner, and pleasantly situated on a very rich soil, from which they raise every necessary of life in great abundance. I saw here many horses of a good size and shape. This town is the great mart, where all the adjacent tribes, and even those who inhabit the most remote branches of the Mississippi, annually assemble about the latter end of May, bringing with them their furs to dispose of to the traders. But it is not always that they conclude their sale here; this is determined by a general council of the chiefs, who consult whether it would be more conducive to their interest, to sell their goods at this place, or carry them on to Louisiana, or Michillimackinac. According to the decision of this council they either proceed further, or return to their different homes.

“The Mississippi at the entrance of the Ouisconsin, near which stands a mountain of considerable height, is about half a mile over; but opposite to the last mentioned town it appears to be more than a mile wide, and full of islands, the soil of which is extraordinarily rich, and but thinly wooded.

“A little farther to the west, on the contrary side, a small river falls into the Mississippi, which the French call *Le Jaun Riviere*, or the Yellow River. Here the traders who had accompanied me hitherto, took up their residence for the winter. I then

bought a canoe, and with two servants, one a French Canadian and the other a Mohawk of Canada, on the 19th proceeded up the Mississippi."

After he had passed a few miles beyond the northern boundary of Iowa he had a thrilling encounter with a roving band of Indians. "I landed as I usually did every evening," he relates, in his *Travels*, "and having pitched my tent, I ordered my men, when night came on, to lay themselves down to sleep. By a light that I kept burning I then sat down to copy the minutes I had taken in the course of the preceding day. About ten o'clock having just finished my memorandums, I stepped out of my tent to see what weather it was. As I cast my eyes towards the bank of the river, I thought I saw by the light of the stars which shone bright, something that had the appearance of a herd of beasts coming down a descent at some distance; whilst I was wondering what they could be, one of the number suddenly sprung up and discovered to me the form of a man. In an instant they were all on their legs, and I could count about ten or twelve of them running towards me. I immediately re-entered the tent, and awaking my men, ordered them to take their arms, and follow me. As my first apprehensions were for my canoe, I ran to the water's side, and found a party of Indians (for such I now discovered them to be) on the point of plundering it. Before I reached them I commanded my men not to fire till I had given the word, being unwilling to begin hos-

tilities unless occasion absolutely required. I accordingly advanced with resolution, close to the points of their spears, they had no other weapons, and brandishing my hanger, asked them with a stern voice, what they wanted. They were staggered at this, and perceiving they were like to meet with a warm reception, turned about and precipitately retreated. We pursued them to an adjacent wood, which they entered, and we saw no more of them. However, for fear of their return, we watched alternately during the remainder of the night. The next day my servants were under great apprehensions, and earnestly entreated me to return to the traders we had lately left. But I told them, that if they would not be esteemed old women (a term of the greatest reproach among the Indians) they must follow me; for I was determined to pursue my intended route, as an Englishman, when once engaged in an adventure, never retreated. On this they got into the canoe, and I walked on the shore to guard them from any further attack. The party of Indians who had thus intended to plunder me, I afterwards found to be some of those straggling bands, that having been driven from among the different tribes to which they belonged for various crimes, now associated themselves together and living by plunder, prove very troublesome to travellers who pass this way; nor are even Indians of every tribe spared by them. The traders had before cautioned me to be upon my guard against

them, and I would repeat the same caution to those whose business might call them into these parts."

Having spent the winter among the "Naudowessies of the Plains", the Sioux Indians, in the vicinity of the pipestone quarries, Carver returned to the Falls of St. Anthony where he expected to find supplies to enable him to continue his explorations in the hope of reaching Oregon and the Pacific Ocean. Disappointed in this, however, he decided to return to the Yellow River and procure goods from the traders he had left there the previous fall. He appears to have made the trip to Prairie du Chien in three days, arriving early in May, 1767. There he remained for a few weeks, and then, having obtained provisions, he "proceeded once more up the Mississippi, as far as the place where the Chipéway River enters it a little below Lake Pepin."

The remainder of the summer was spent in exploring the Chippewa country and returning to Mackinac by way of the north shore of Lake Superior. There he tarried during the winter and began his homeward journey in June. In October, 1768, he arrived at Boston, "having been absent from it on this expedition two years and five months, and during that time travelled near seven thousand miles." From thence he soon "set out for England, to communicate the discoveries" he had made, "and render them beneficial to the kingdom." But for ten years his plans "for reaping these advantages"

were "obstructed by the unhappy divisions that have been fomented between Great Britain and the Colonies by their mutual enemies."

Peter Pond was another Connecticut Yankee who left an account of his doings in the Upper Mississippi Valley while Iowa was under the rule of Spain and the British lion held sway across the river. Like Jonathan Carver, he participated in the French and Indian War. At the age of sixteen, he relates, "the same Inklanation & Sperit that my Ansesters Profest" became so strong that he could not withstand "the Propensatey for the arme". After the war he turned his "atenshan to the Seas", and made a voyage to the West Indies. Returning he found that his mother had died while his father was away on a trading expedition to Detroit, so that he was obliged to stay at home to care for the family—"the Ondley three years of my Life I was three years in One Plase Sins I was Sixteen years old up to Sixtey." Afterward he engaged in trade about Detroit and in 1773, having formed a partnership with a "Gentelman in New York", he "went In to the Entearer Part of the Countrey first to Mishlemackanack from thenst to the Mississippey and up Sant Peters River & into the Plains Betwene the Mississippey & the Miseurea and Past my Winter among the Nattawaysease on such food as thay made youse of themselves which was verey darte-yaly Cooked."

Despite Pond's remarkable orthography, his journal revealing early American life in the Mississippi Valley is one of the most vivid and enlightening records extant. The manuscript was rescued from the waste basket in 1868. Pond's account of his experiences and other affairs on the Iowa border just before the Revolutionary War follows in his own words.

“After Suplying myself with such Artickels as I wanted and thay Had to Spare I gave them Sum Creadeat and Desended the River to the Mouth which Emteys into the Masseppey and Cros that River and Incampt. The Land along the River as you desend Apears to be Exalant. Just at Night as we ware InCampt we Perseaved Large fish Cuming on the Sarfes of the Water. I had then a Diferant trader with me who had a number of Men with him. We were Incampt Near Each other. We Put our Hooch and Lines into the Water and Leat them Ly all nite. In the Morning we Perseaved thare was fish at the Hoochs and went to the Wattr Eag [water's edge] and halld on our line. Thay Came Heavey. At Lengh we hald one ashore that wade a Hundered and four Pounds — a Seacond that was One Hundered Wate — a third of Seventy five Pounds. The Men was Glad to Sea this for thay Had not Eat mete for Sum Days nor fish for a long time. We asked our men How meney Men the Largest would Give a Meale. Sum of the Largest Eaters Sade twelve men Would Eat it at a Meal.



CAPTAIN JONATHAN CARVER

We Agread to Give ye fish if thay would find twelve men that would undertake it. Thay Began to Dres it. The fish was what was Cald the Cat fish. It Had a large flat Head Sixteen Inches Betwene the Eise. Thay Skind it—Cut it up in three larg Coppers Such as we have for the Youse of our men. After it was Well Boild thay Sawd it up and all Got Round it. Thay Began and Eat the hole without the least thing with it But Salt and Sum of them Drank of the Licker it was Boild in. The Other two was Sarved out to the Remainder of the People who finished them in a Short time. Thay all Declard thay felt the Beater of thare Meale Nor did I Perseave that Eney of them ware Sick or Complaind. Next Morn- ing we Recrost ye River which was about a Mile Brod and Mounted about three Miles til we Come to the Planes of the Dogs [Prairie du Chien] so Cald the Grate Plase of Rondavues for the traders and Indans Before thay Dispars for thare Wintering Grounds. Hear we Meat a Larg Number of french and Indans Makeing out thare arangements for the InSewing winter and sending of thare cannoes to Differant Parts—Like wise Giveing Creadets to the Indans who ware all to Rondoveuse thare in Spring. I Stayed ten days Sending of my men to Differant Parts. I had Nine Clarks which I Imploid in Differant Rivers that fel into the River.

“When I had finished my Matters Hear in Octo- ber I Seat of with two traders in Company for St. Peters River which was a Hundred Leags up the

River But the Season was faverabel and we went on Sloley to Leat the Nottawaseas Git Into the Plain that we Mite not be trubeld with them for Creadit as thay are Bad Pay Marsters. In Going up the River we had Plenty of fat Gease and Duks with Venson — Bares Meat in abandans — so that we Lived as Well as hart Could Wish on Such food — Plentey of flower, tea, Coffee, Sugar and Buter, Sperits and Wine, that we faird Well as Voigers. The Banks of ye River aforded us Plentey of Crab Apels which was Verey Good when the frost Had tuchd them at a Sutabel tim.”

Pond thought that Prairie du Chien was “Very Handsum” and described life at that outpost of civilization. “All the traders that Youseis [uses] that Part of the Countrey”, he wrote, “& all the Indans of Several tribes Meat fall & Spring whare the Grateist Games are Plaid Both By french & Indans. The french Practis Billiards — ye latter Ball. Hear the Botes from New Orleans Cum. They are navigated By thirtey Six men who row as maney oarse. Thay Bring in a Boate Sixtey Hogs-eats of Wine on one * * * Besides Ham, Chese &c — all to trad with the french & Indans. Thay Cum up the River Eight Hundred Leages. These Amusements Last three or four weakes in the Spring of the Year.”

A short distance up St. Peters River Pond and his men “Stopt to Sea Carvers Hut whare he Past his Winter when in that Countrey. It was a Log

House about Sixteen feet long Covered With Bark — With a fireplase But one Room and no flore. This was the Extent of his travels. His Hole toure I with One Canoe Well maned Could make in Six weeks.”

After a winter of successful trading with the Sioux, Pond returned in the spring of 1774 to Prairie du Chien. There he “Saw a Large Colection from Eavery Part of the Misseppey who had arived Before us — Even from Orleans Eight Hundred Leages Belowe us. The Indans Camp Exeaded a Mile & a half in Length. Hear was Sport of All Sorts. We went to Collecting furs and Skins * * * By the Differant tribes with Sucksess. The french ware Veray Numeres. Thare was Not Les than One Hundred and thirtey Canoes which Came from Mackenaw Caring from Sixtey to Eightey Hundred wate Apease all Made of Birch Bark and white Seder for the Ribs. Those Boates from Orleans & Ilenoa and other Parts ware Numeres. But the natives I have no true Idea of thair Numbers. The Number of Packs of Peltrey of Differant Sorts was Cald fifteen Hundred of a Hundred wt Each which went to Mackana. All my outfits had Dun well. I had Grate Share for my Part as I furnish Much the Largest Cargo on the River. After all the Bisness Was Dun and People Began to Groe tirde of Sport, thay Began to Draw of for thare Differant Departments and Prepare for the Insewing winter.”

During the summer of 1774 the Sioux and Chip-

pewa Indians indulged in one of their periodic wars. Pond was commissioned to carry three belts of wampum to the Sioux with a message from the British government calculated to restore peace. When he arrived at Prairie du Chien he found the Indians very much disturbed on account of the strange actions of a French magician at that place. "Thay gave me to understand", he wrote, "thare was a Parson [person] at that Plase that Had an Eevel Sperit. He Did things Beond thare Consep-tion. I wishd to Sea him and Being Informd who he was I askd him Meney Questions. I found him to be a french man who Had Bin Long among the Nations on the Misura that Came that Spring from Ilenoas to the Planes of the Dogs. He had the Slite of Hand Cumpletely and Had Such a Swa over the tribes with whom he was aquanted that thay Con-sented to Moste of his Requests. Thay Gave him the Name of Minneto [Manitou] which is a Sperit In thare Languag. As he was Standing Among Sum People thare Came an Indan up to them with a Stone Pipe or Callemeat Carelessly Rought and which he Seat Grate Store By. Minneto askd ye Indan to Leat him Look at it and he Did so. He wished to Purchis it from the Indan But he would not Part with it. Minneto then Put it into his Mouth as the Indan Supposed and Swalod it. The Poor Indan Stood Astonished. Minneto told him not to trubel himself about it — he Should Have his Pipe agane in two or three Days — it Must first pass

threw him. At the time Seat the Pipe was Presented to the Indan. He Looked upon it as if he Could not Bair to Part with it But would not Put his hand upon it. Minneto Kept the Pipe for Nothing."

After 1775 Pond continued in the fur trade for thirteen years, chiefly in western Canada. He helped organize the North West Company which was given a ten-year monopoly of the trade in the northwest in 1785 as a reward for Pond's important explorations in the Athabasca Valley and the vicinity of Great Slave Lake. The last years of his life were passed in the United States, probably at Milford, Connecticut, where he died in 1807.

JOHN ELY BRIGGS