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The "MOSCOW EXPEDITION"

WILLIAM E. LASS

IN MAY, 1863, as a dramatic sequel to the Sioux Uprising, over three thousand Winnebago and Santee Sioux were deported from Minnesota to new reservations on the upper Missouri River. To most Minnesotans the Indians' removal represented the close of an uneasy era. Jubilantly they hailed the end of all contacts with the red men. It came as a surprise, therefore, to learn in October of the same year that a wagon train was being readied at Mankato for a relief expedition to the relocated tribes.¹

Provisioning a Dakota Indian agency from Minnesota was unusual enough, since traditionally supplies had been carried up the river from St. Louis, but even more strange was the timing. The editor of the *St. Paul Daily Press* wondered publicly if undertaking such an expedition across the northern plains in the late fall were not as foolhardy as Napoleon's ill-fated invasion of Russia. A "Moscow Campaign" was under way, the *Press* announced on October 18, 1863, and soon other newspapers as well as many of the people involved in the enterprise were calling it the "Moscow Expedition." It was one of the most newsworthy

events of the time, rigorously defended by its backers as a humanitarian venture that would benefit many hundreds of people, and furiously attacked by its critics as a scheme designed to profit a few Minnesota politicians and contractors. Whatever the motives of its promoters, the story of the Moscow expedition is an intriguing chapter in the history of Indian relations in the 1860s.

The Indian office had intended to relocate the Sioux and Winnebago on land suited for agriculture. In fact, the government had so counted on the Indians existing through farming that only a minimum of supplies and foodstuffs had been sent with them. But Clark W. Thompson, the superintendent of Indian affairs of the Northern Superintendency, was required to select a reservation site along the upper Missouri above Fort Randall. He complied with these instructions when he chose a location near the mouth of Crow Creek. Even under normal conditions only marginal crops could have been expected in this area, and the situation in 1863 was aggravated by an almost unprecedented drought. The parched grass and dust-filled skies that confronted Thompson and his exiled prisoners in late May foretold the inevitable failure of the farming experiment.²

It should have been abundantly evident

¹ For the story of the Indians' deportation, see William E. Lass, "The Removal from Minnesota of the Sioux and Winnebago Indians," in *Minnesota History*, 38:353-364 (December, 1963).

² Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 317.



CLARK W. Thompson

to Thompson from the outset that the meager supplies he had brought up from St. Louis would not long subsist his hungry wards. Almost from the date of the Indians' arrival a rationing system was used. On June 9 John P. Williamson, a young missionary with the Santee Sioux, reported that the daily ration was slightly less than one-quarter pound each of flour, pork, and corn. There was no extra food or medicine for those who had incurred illnesses during their winter's confinement at Fort Snelling. By July 22 seventy of the thirteen hundred Sioux had died from want of proper food and medical care.³

The Santee Sioux, mostly old men, women, and children, had little choice other than to accept the conditions at Crow Creek, but the belligerent Winnebago, who felt persecuted by their removal, were another matter. Within days after their debarkation they were hollowing dugout canoes with the expressed intention of escaping downstream to join their kindred tribe, the Omaha. Some were restrained

by the guard of Dakota militiamen and Thompson's fifty-man civilian work force, but many more escaped. They contended — and rightly so — that they had been peaceful during the Sioux Uprising and were being unjustly punished.⁴

Their pleas were not entirely unheard. Minnesota troops who had escorted the Indians reported publicly when they returned home the unbearable conditions at Crow Creek — or Fort Thompson, as it soon came to be called. The Winnebagos' most influential listener, however, was General Alfred Sully, who interrupted his faltering pursuit of Sioux hostiles in the summer of 1863 to visit at Fort Thompson. Sully promptly relayed the Winnebago complaints about the poor location and harsh treatment to Secretary of the Interior John P. Usher. Whether the general's primary motive was to embarrass the Indian department or to aid the Winnebago is not clear. He did, however, suggest that a removal of the tribe to the Omaha reservation in Nebraska Territory would be both humane and economical.⁵

Sully also helped alleviate the food shortage by escorting a Sioux City beef contractor, Thomas J. Stone, through from Fort Randall, and by leaving some of the army's provisions for the Indians' use. The quality and quantity of the Indian diet was sharply improved by the arrival of this fresh beef.⁶

Thompson well knew that the relief was only temporary, but not until August, when it was clear that at best he had rations for only two months, did he do anything about the impending food depletion. On the eighth

³ John P. Williamson to Thomas S. Williamson, June 9, 1863, Thomas S. Williamson Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society; John P. Williamson to Stephen R. Riggs, July 22, 1863, Stephen R. Riggs Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society. Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 322.

⁴ *Mankato Record*, July 11, 1863; Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 323.

⁵ Thomas J. Stone to Clark W. Thompson, July 1, 1863, Clark W. Thompson Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society; Saint Andre D. Balcombe to William P. Dole, December 12, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Winnebago Agency, in the National Archives.

of that month he left the reservation for Washington to secure provisions for the winter and to transfer the Winnebago annuity money.⁷ Why was the man in charge of the giant undertaking of relocating three thousand Indians not able to determine the amount of his remaining supplies in June, or, at the latest, July? There are a number of possible reasons for his reluctance to acknowledge that he was in trouble.

SINCE Thompson was directly responsible for selecting the reservation site, he was open to accusations that he had erred, and his superiors were only too willing to lay the total blame on his shoulders. After Sully's complaint about the site, the Indian office acted as though Thompson had had the run of the Western Hemisphere in locating the reservation. There was never any recognition on the part of Usher or of Commissioner of Indian Affairs William P. Dole that they had restricted Thompson severely in his selection area.

Thompson, however, had much more than a possible reprimand on his mind during the summer of 1863. His position as superintendent with its power, prestige, and patronage was largely based on the three thousand Indians at Crow Creek who were still under the jurisdiction of the Northern Superintendency, despite their location in Dakota Territory which had its own Indian superintendent, the territorial governor, Newton Edmunds. Thompson suspected that either Edmunds or Walter A. Burleigh, the Yankton Sioux agent,

would welcome jurisdiction over his Indians, too. Edmunds and Burleigh, in turn, feared a geographic extension of the Northern Superintendency to include Dakota Territory.⁸ So Thompson's position rested almost entirely on his ability to administer successfully the Sioux-Winnebago reservation.

Another possible reason for the superintendent's delay was his belief that he could not obtain aid without leaving the reservation. Yet he was tied to the site because he lacked a conscientious and capable assistant. When the Indians left Minnesota Thompson assumed that both Saint Andre D. Balcombe, the Winnebago agent, and Thomas J. Galbraith, the Sioux agent, would move to Crow Creek. Both men made the trip to the new location, but the Indian office saw no need for two agents, since the Sioux and Winnebago were on adjoining reserves. Thus Balcombe was assigned as agent for both tribes in Dakota, and Galbraith was ordered to return to St. Peter to serve with the Sioux Claims Commission.⁹

Balcombe's main concern in the summer of 1863 was to get his family comfortably settled in Sioux City, and he was absent from the agency for weeks at a time. He was present when Thompson left but soon removed himself to Sioux City, ostensibly because one of his children was sick, and there he remained for over two months despite the flight of the Winnebago chief Wineshiek and many of his followers from the agency. Even had Balcombe been faithful to his duties, it is unlikely that Thompson would have trusted him. Though of the same political allegiance, the two men were openly at odds because Thompson suspected that Balcombe was conspiring with Burleigh to lure the Indians from Crow Creek to the Yankton reservation.¹⁰

During Balcombe's absence, command of the agency fell to Chester Adams, a nearly illiterate Hoosier who had come up from St. Louis with Thompson to supervise the civilian work force. Adams evidently did good work in directing the plowing and the

⁷ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1864, p. 394-396; Chester Adams to Thompson, August 15, 1863, Thompson Papers.

⁸ The strained relations between the Minnesota and Dakota officials are revealed in a series of letters written in January, 1864, by James B. Hubbell to Thompson, Thompson Papers.

⁹ Thompson to Dole, June 24, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, St. Peter's Agency; John P. Williamson to Thomas S. Williamson, June 18, 1863, Williamson Papers.

¹⁰ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1864, p. 395; Adams to Thompson, September 30, 1863, Thompson Papers; John P. Williamson to Riggs, January 16, 1864, Riggs Papers.

stockade construction, but accounting and administration were not his forte. Even for such a basic task as compiling weekly reports he had to turn to the missionary Williamson.¹¹

There is another possible explanation for Thompson's tardiness in requesting supplies. He may have wanted to create a situation whereby the Indians could not be supplied by way of the Missouri River. The treaty Indians of the upper Missouri had traditionally been supplied by steamboat from St. Louis, which meant that St. Louis contractors and steamboatmen benefited. As Thompson well knew, any loss to St. Louis would be a gain to St. Paul and other Minnesota supply points. The attractiveness of the upper Missouri trade was sharply increased in the early 1860s by the opening of extensive gold mines in the Idaho-Montana region.

If Thompson wanted to aid business interests in Minnesota, he had a good year in which to do it, since any change in the method of supplying Indians could be attributed to the shallowness of the Missouri. The extraordinarily dry season in Dakota Territory was highlighted by fifty consecutive rainless days in midsummer.¹² Steamboats that had made difficult but successful passage during the early summer could not do so in the fall, as Thompson well knew. Thus any delay in supplying the agency played directly into the hands of Minnesota merchants who could propose transporting the goods overland.

DURING Thompson's Washington stay, throughout most of August and September, he was kept informed of conditions at the agency by Chester Adams. On August 22 Adams wrote that at the current issuing rate the rations would last barely three weeks. In September he managed to borrow about a two weeks' supply of flour and corn from Fort Randall, postponing the exhaustion of food to October 1.¹³

Even these dismal prospects did not stimulate Thompson to act quickly. It was

not until September 15 that he reported to the acting commissioner of Indian affairs, Charles E. Mix, that no provision had been made "for the subsistence of the Winnebago and Sioux . . . after the 1st day of October next." He requested just over \$100,000 to provide for supplies until May 1, 1864, and pointed out that "owing to the low water in the Missouri River these provisions must be hauled overland [:] to accomplish this it must be done immediately and before the grass on the prairies fail or the Department will incur an increased expense in transportation." Not once before this did Thompson report to his superiors the immediate food shortage, nor did he ever mention the plight of the Winnebago. Dole later complained to Balcombe that all he knew about the reservation he obtained from newspaper accounts and from private letters protesting over the condition of the Indians.¹⁴

Other than Thompson and Adams, the people best informed concerning the impending famine were the licensed Winnebago traders, James B. Hubbell and Alpheus F. Hawley of Mankato. Hubbell and Thompson had known each other well for several years. Before 1860 they had been active in the Minnesota Republican party and had worked particularly in support of Morton S. Wilkinson's candidacy for the United States Senate. In 1861, due largely to Senator Wilkinson's influence with President Lincoln, Thompson was given his Indian superintendency and Hubbell his license to trade with the Winnebago.¹⁵ Thompson and Hubbell obviously trusted each other, as indicated by the confidential nature of much of their correspondence.

After traveling to the nation's capital with full knowledge of Thompson's plans, Hub-

¹¹ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 317, 319, 321.

¹² Indian Office, *Reports*, 1863, p. 321.

¹³ Adams to Thompson, August 22, September 12, 1863, Thompson Papers.

¹⁴ Thompson to Charles E. Mix, September 15, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Northern Superintendency; Dole to Balcombe, November 14, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Sent, 72:124, in the National Archives.

bell made an offer to Mix to furnish five hundred head of cattle for the Fort Thompson Agency at four cents per pound live weight. Mix naturally referred Hubbell's offer to Thompson. If the acting commissioner had any suspicions about the closeness of Thompson and Hubbell, he carefully avoided indicating it in his official correspondence. Mix cautioned Thompson that federal regulations required any proposal for supplies to be advertised, and that competitive bidding was necessary unless "the exigencies of the service require immediate action." He left the determination of the "exigencies" entirely to Thompson's judgment.¹⁶

The superintendent immediately concluded that the "exigencies of the service" did require prompt action. The Missouri River was undependable, he stated, and because the cattle would have to be driven nearly three hundred miles, there was no time to lose. Besides, argued the superintendent, he had had many prior applications to supply beef, but Hubbell's bid was clearly the lowest, so there was no need for advertisement and competitive bidding.

¹⁶ Thomas Hughes, *History of Blue Earth County*, 106 (Chicago, 1909). Hubbell, a native of Connecticut, was only twenty-five when he assumed the post of Winnebago trader in 1861. An orphan, he had spent an adventurous youth as a seaman and wanderer before settling in Mankato in 1857. There he soon became active in the local Republican party and in 1859 was elected register of deeds of Blue Earth County. He also engaged in general merchandising with Hawley, who, like Hubbell, was an early booster of both Wilkinson and Lincoln. See *Mankato, Its First Fifty Years*, 228, 238-241 (Mankato, 1903).

¹⁷ Hubbell to Mix, September 18, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Northern Superintendency; Mix to Thompson, September 24, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Sent, 71:434.

¹⁸ Thompson to Mix, September 24, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Northern Superintendency.

¹⁹ Contract between Clark W. Thompson and James B. Hubbell, October 13, 1863, Bureau of Indian Affairs, in the National Archives. "Usher's Landing" was the name first given by Thompson to the reservation at Crow Creek. It was intended to honor the secretary of the interior but soon fell out of general use.

²⁰ Indian Office, *Reports*, 1864, p. 396.

"Mr. Hubbell's proposition," he concluded, "would be advantageous to the Indians and without detriment to their interests in the pecuniary point of view."¹⁷

Despite the Indians' desperate situation, it was nearly a month after the original Hubbell proposal before an official contract was signed. There could have been several reasons for the delay. Since Hubbell trusted Thompson implicitly, he probably felt no urgency about putting the agreement on paper. They may not have wanted the terms made public far in advance of the actual departure date, for the greater the time lapse, the more chance there was that irate competitors might make trouble. At any rate, the actual agreement, signed on October 13, specified that Hubbell "furnish the Government for the use of the Sioux and Winnebago Indians with five hundred head of beef cattle to average twelve hundred pounds, at the place known as Usher's Landing." Hubbell was to be paid four cents a pound live weight. Half of the cattle were to be delivered on or before November 1, 1863, the others by December 1.¹⁸

WHILE the beef negotiations were pending Thompson was authorized to procure other necessary supplies such as flour and corn.¹⁹ There was some question as to where these would be purchased and who would transport them. Senator Wilkinson apparently helped resolve the question. On October 2, 1863, within four days after Thompson had received his authorization, the *Weekly Union* of Mankato proudly announced: "Through the efforts of Senator Wilkinson, the Secretary of the Interior has empowered Col. Thompson, the Superintendent of Indian affairs, to establish a depot for the purchase of Indian goods, provisions, cattle, &c., at Mankato." In a grandiose editorial, the newspaper envisioned the expedition as the forerunner of a new "Minnesota System" of supplying the upper Missouri and painted a glowing picture of a great trail from Mankato to the Missouri dotted with stages, express riders,

and gold seekers and protected by an extensive line of military posts. The writer speculated that the new "system" might be worth as much as \$100,000 or \$150,000 annually to the people of Mankato and its vicinity.

Even before the contract with the Indian office was signed, Hubbell, assisted by Thompson's brother Edward, was busily buying cattle throughout southern Minnesota. The quality of the animals prompted Hubbell to remark that "the Indians will not get out of Beef very soon, if toughness has anything to do with it."²⁰ It must have seemed strange to people that a beef contractor would deliberately purchase old cattle, but perhaps some light was shed on the matter when he began making extensive purchases of wagons, ox yokes, chains, clevises, and keys. Obviously Hubbell would have needed some supply wagons to accompany the movement of the cattle, but he would hardly have had to buy 150 vehicles. The only possible explanation for this was a belief that he or someone closely associated with him would secure the transportation contract for the hundred tons of provisions that Thompson had been authorized to buy. Since Wilkinson was in Mankato helping Hubbell procure wagons, it is safe to assume that the contractor felt his purchases were not wild speculations.²¹

While Hubbell was obviously preparing to move the provisions, Thompson waited until October 15, 1863, before advertising in the *St. Paul Daily Press* for transporting "one hundred tons of Goods and Provisions from Mankato or the late Winnebago Agency, to the new agencies of the Sioux and Winnebagoes, twelve miles above the mouth of Crow Creek, on the Missouri River, by the first of December next." Particularly interesting was the stipulation that any bid had to be submitted to the office of Indian affairs in St. Paul by 6:00 P.M. on October 16. "The time is short," cautioned the *Press*. "This is a complete farce," stormed the *Mankato Record* of October 17, "and will probably result in awarding the contract to some pet contractor."

Having thus barely fulfilled the letter of the law, Thompson did not expect to be deluged with bids. Men who had prior knowledge of the contract letting obviously were in the best position to take advantage of it. In addition to Hubbell, they included James C. and Henry C. Burbank, who were the principal stage and freighting operators in Minnesota. It was understood that in the event the Burbanks should obtain the transportation contract, Hubbell was to use his cattle as oxen and haul the supplies from Mankato to Fort Thompson.

The Burbanks were temporarily bothered by some unexpected competition, however. The situation as described by J. C. Burbank in a letter to Hubbell was this: "the bids have just been opened and range from \$5.95 to \$12.00. Ours was \$5.95 for 50 tons & \$9.00 for all excess — one other bid (Mr. Newton) was \$6.50 — he undoubtedly expects to arrange with you. Make no arrangement with anyone but come here Monday. *All will be right.*" How Newton was disposed of is not revealed in any known records, but on October 20, J.C. & H.C. Burbank & Company signed an agreement with Thompson to transport "one hundred tons, more or less" from either the old Winnebago Agency, about ten miles southeast of Mankato or from Mankato to Fort Thompson for a little over \$7.40 per hundred pounds. The company agreed to deliver the supplies in "good order and condition by the first day of December, A.D., 1863."²²

ONCE the contracts were secured, Hubbell, the Burbanks and their agents, and Thompson, all fearful of an early winter, worked feverishly to complete acquisition of the necessary cattle and supplies. Cattle were somewhat hard to obtain because the

²⁰ Hubbell to Thompson, October 11, 1863, Thompson Papers.

²¹ Wilkinson to Thompson, October 16, 1863, Thompson Papers.

²² James C. Burbank to Hubbell, October 16, 1863, Thompson Papers; contract between Thompson and James C. and Henry C. Burbank, October 20, 1863, Bureau of Indian Affairs.

frugal Hubbell refused to buy when the market price was driven up to two and a half cents per pound live weight. A local shortage of chain, yokes, and keys caused further complications. Wagons had to be hauled in from as far away as Fort Snelling and Fort Ridgely.²³

The purchase and stockpiling of the provisions and supplies ultimately involved Hubbell, Thompson and his brother, C.G. Wykoff, the clerk of the Northern Superintendency, Francis L. Dyer, the former superintendent of farms at the Winnebago Agency, and John L. Merriam, the agent of the Burbank company. In addition to the contract goods, these men had to buy grain and forage for the subsistence of the cattle. Most of the flour, grain, and forage was purchased in the vicinity of Mankato and St. Peter. Hubbell used his recently broken oxen and light wagons to consolidate the grain and flour at Mankato.²⁴

Among the supplies carried to the Indians by the Moscow expedition were some pork and flour of questionable value. When the Winnebago were removed in May, 1863, a number of items, including some farm machinery and some flour and pork were left behind because Balcombe and Thompson believed they could not be moved economically. Commissioner Dole questioned the logic of abandoning these goods on the old reservation and then buying new supplies for the Crow Creek reservation. Dole wondered if Thompson could not send the pork and flour to the new reservation and save purchase costs of replacement supplies. Thompson agreed that the flour and pork

should be disposed of by shipping the food-stuffs to the Indians, because "the flour is not of such quality as is required for that market since the Indians have left."²⁵

Accordingly, he sent Wykoff to the old Winnebago Agency to inspect the 240 barrels of flour and the 149 barrels of pork. Wykoff concluded that only seventy-five or eighty barrels of the pork were good enough to ship. He advised Thompson that he had "concluded not to take any that smells bad unless I hear from you for this reason. The officers and men of the escort are down on the whole arrangement of going across the country. This bad Pork would be a good thing for them to harp on."²⁶

Wykoff's opinion did not keep the decaying pork from accompanying the expedition. When Hubbell learned that some of it was to be left behind, he requested that Thompson advertise and sell it at public auction so that he would have an opportunity to buy it. He was, he wrote, "of the opinion the Indians would buy some of it of a Trader when they would refuse it altogether, if issued by their Agent." Thompson complied by holding a public auction on November 5. The superintendent told the Indian commissioner about the auction, but he did not specifically identify the purchaser or indicate the sale price. The *Record* reported that about ninety-five barrels of the damaged pork were sold at about \$1.25 per barrel. The pork was sorted and about a third of it — three wagonloads — was taken along with the train.²⁷

NONE of the people connected with the massive Moscow expedition was particularly enthusiastic about crossing some three hundred miles of potentially hostile country without a strong military escort. Thompson's request for troops was approved by Major General John Pope, despite Pope's considerable doubts regarding the entire affair. The general wondered why the supplies had not been purchased at some point like Sioux City on the Missouri. He was also concerned about the weather hazard and

²³ Hubbell to Thompson, October 11, 21, 22, 1863, Thompson Papers.

²⁴ Hubbell to Thompson, October 21, 1863.

²⁵ Dole to Thompson, June 3, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Sent, 70:529; Thompson to Dole, July 1, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Winnebago Agency.

²⁶ C. G. Wykoff to Thompson, October 25, 1863, Thompson Papers.

²⁷ Hubbell to Thompson, October 26, 1863, Thompson Papers; Thompson to Dole, November 5, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Winnebago Agency; *Record*, November 7, 1863.

the cost of the escort to the war department. Reluctantly he instructed Brigadier General Henry H. Sibley, commander of the Minnesota district, to furnish an escort because "I do not wish the failure of these Indian reservation operations on the Upper Missouri to be attributed to the military authorities."²⁸

The troops detailed by Sibley were companies D, E, and H of the Sixth Minnesota. All had taken part in Sibley's summer expedition that had advanced as far west as the mouth of the Heart River on the Missouri near present-day Bismarck, North Dakota. After several months of hard, futile campaigning, the men were understandably reluctant to take to the field again.²⁹

While Hubbell and his associates were making their preparations, the expedition became publicly known and was bitterly debated, particularly in and around Mankato. The *St. Paul Press* had intended to be witty rather than critical when it referred to the undertaking as the "Moscow Campaign," not anticipating that the words would be twisted into a condemnation of the enterprise. But John C. Wise, editor of the *Mankato Record*, who had never missed a chance to damn anything Republican during his four years in Mankato, was quick to seize the opportunity for ridicule. Wise had, in fact, severely attacked the expedition several weeks before the *Press* named it. His bitter tirades were partially counteracted by the *Mankato Weekly Union*, a staunchly Republican paper, which came to the defense of Thompson and Hubbell. The *Press*, alarmed by Wise's condemnation of the contracting, hastened to support the *Union*. Someone would benefit from the sale of provisions to the reservation, argued the *Press*, so it might as well be Minnesotans.³⁰

Wise's major premise was that Minnesota had benefited greatly by the removal of the Sioux and Winnebago. Not only was the Indian power broken, but so also was the power of the traders and politicians who had lived well because of their Indian

market in Minnesota. Now, maintained the fiery editor, this group—"The Moccasin-ites"—were trying to renew their contacts with the Indians via the overland route. To Wise it seemed the final desperate attempt of Senator Wilkinson and his associates to exploit the Indians. The only result of the proposed trail or "grand cartway," the editor claimed, would be the drifting of the Sioux back into Minnesota where they would again "plunder the granaries and kill the stock of our farmers."³¹

By November 1, after nearly a month of hurried activity, Hubbell was ready to assemble the train. From November 1 through 4 the contractor's wagons, each pulled by two yoke of oxen, were all moved from Mankato to a rendezvous near Lake Crystal. When Hubbell's train was finally assembled, it numbered 153 wagons, each loaded with 2,500 to 3,000 pounds of goods, including forage and grain for the cattle, the Burbank contract goods, and equipment and supplies for Hubbell's trading post at Fort Thompson. Most of the wagons had been purchased from the army at Fort Snelling and Fort Ridgely. They were light, nearly new, painted red, and resembled in structure and capacity the common farm wagon.³²

The number of oxen taken on the expedition is not easy to determine. Newspaper stories reported about 150 wagons, each pulled by two yoke of oxen. Hubbell wrote years later that he had eight hundred head of cattle. William J. Duley, chief scout on the expedition, mentioned in his report published in the *Mankato Record*, that some loose stock accompanied the wagons. It appears, therefore, that Hubbell had a suffi-

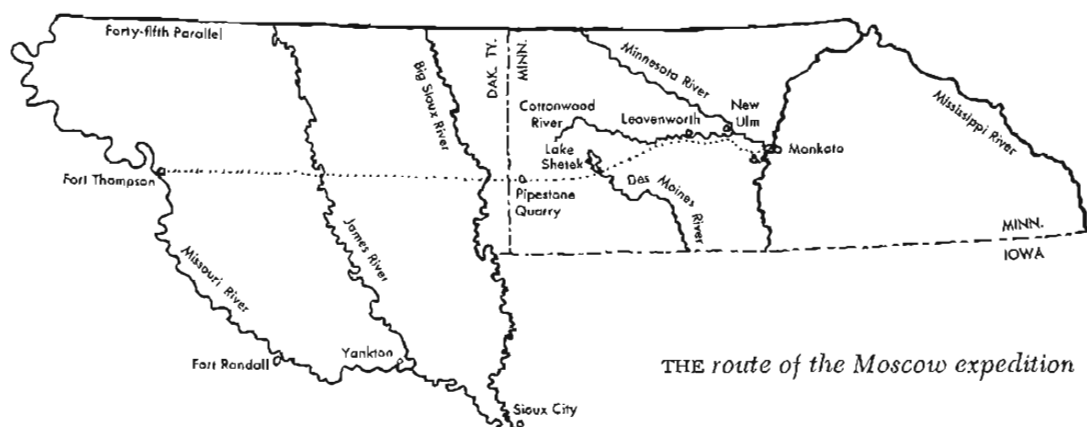
²⁸ Charles W. Johnson, "Narrative of the Sixth Regiment," in *Minnesota in the Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:317 (St. Paul, 1890).

²⁹ Johnson, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:315-318.

³⁰ *Record*, October 3, 1863; *Mankato Weekly Union*, October 2, 1863; *St. Paul Weekly Press*, October 29, 1863.

³¹ *Record*, October 3, 1863.

³² *Record*, November 7, 1863; James B. Hubbell, "Notes by Judge Hubbell," in *The Dakotan*, 5:14 (May, 1902).



THE route of the Moscow expedition

ent number of cattle to easily fulfill the contract provision that he deliver five hundred head.³³

The date of the rendezvous, however, found Hubbell still desperately short of teamsters. Wykoff wrote to Thompson that there were only ten or twelve. The want of teamsters was accounted for by the wartime manpower shortage and also by the marked reluctance of civilians to expose themselves to a winter on the prairie and possible encounters with hostile Sioux. As a last resort Hubbell tried to hire soldiers from the military escort to double as drivers.³⁴

THE TROOPS arrived in Mankato early in November and camped briefly near the town before joining the train at Lake Crystal on November 5. The escort was quite large: three companies of infantry totaling 175 men, plus a detachment of nine men with a small howitzer. They also brought with them twenty-five wagonloads of supplies and three ambulances. The seemingly large amount of equipment was due to the need for winter gear such as Sibley tents, stoves, blankets, moccasin

packs, and buffalo overshoes. In addition, the troops were expected to return immediately and were therefore equipped for a round trip.³⁵

Captain Joseph C. Whitney took command of the escort the day it joined the train at Lake Crystal. He had found it necessary to move his troops from the town "because of the evil influence and suggestions relating to the breaking up of the expedition." In reporting the balkiness of the troops, Wise observed that "the soldiers almost to a man denounce the getters-up of this expedition in the most bitter terms, the feeling bordering almost upon insubordination. They look upon it as a very severe undertaking, and in one instance we heard of, a soldier made his will before starting."³⁶

Some of the more rebellious troops hoped that they could harass the expedition enough to cause its abandonment. They knew that Hubbell wanted to hire a number of them as teamsters and had received permission to deal with them, so the first delaying tactic was to drive a hard bargain with him. After forcing the contractor's initial offer of twenty-five cents a day up to \$1.25, a number of the troops signed as teamsters.³⁷

By hiring the soldiers and by adding some civilian drivers, Hubbell was able to get part of the train under way shortly after the troops joined him. He put wagons on the

³³ Hubbell, in *The Dakotan*, 5:14; *Record*, January 16, 1864.

³⁴ Wykoff to Thompson, October 28, 1863, Thompson Papers.

³⁵ *Weekly Union*, November 6, 1863.

³⁶ Johnson, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:319; *Record*, November 7, 1863.

³⁷ Johnson, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:318.

road as he obtained teamsters, so the vanguard left several days before the last wagons departed from Lake Crystal on November 12. The train was not completely unified until a second assembly was made south of Leavenworth, about forty miles from Mankato, on November 13-14.³⁸

The movement to Leavenworth was slow and difficult. Before the departure from Lake Crystal, soldiers had removed nuts from the wheels of nine or ten wagons, thereby causing them to break down in the area of Butternut Valley, only a few miles from the starting place. Because of the disabled vehicles and a still serious shortage of drivers, about fifteen tons of provisions were abandoned. The goods consisted of 133 barrels of flour, five barrels of salt pork, eight barrels of salt, and some sheet iron, amounting to the equivalent of ten or twelve wagonloads.³⁹

These supplies were ultimately sold for only \$214. The question as to whether they were Hubbell's trade goods or Burbank's contract goods was not asked at the time. The sale was reported to Thompson, who had ordered their disposal at auction, but the proceeds were used to pay Hubbell's teamsters.⁴⁰

With but halfhearted effort on the part of the soldier-drivers, the expedition struggled to a point on the right bank of the Big Cottonwood River opposite the village of Leavenworth. There, with their backs to civilization and the unpromising prairie before them, the troops renewed their resistance. In what proved to be an effective strike, they refused to drive oxen. Some of the more desperate, fearful that civilian teamsters might be obtained, sabotaged the wagons by stealing a patented type of bur that held the wheel to the axle, thus disabling at least forty wagons. Hubbell did not have replacement burs, and probably none could have been obtained nearer than St. Paul. Hostility between the troops and contractors was further aggravated when some of the troops requisitioned foodstuffs from the traders' supplies.⁴¹

The faltering efforts of the train were well known in Mankato. The *Record* consistently reported the difficulties and, if anything, exaggerated them. Wise seemed to place all blame on the poor judgment of the contractors for ever having organized the train. The *Mankato Union*, however, declared that the troops were "instigated by Copperheads in town to use every means to hinder and break up the train. In one instance we know of, a civilian was offered five dollars a day to go along and 'cut up.'" Later the *Union* contended that the troublemakers "are the particular friends of the editor of the *Record*."⁴²

The action of the troops at Leavenworth, amounting to a near mutiny, brought matters to a crisis. The army officers did not care to be blamed for the failure of the movement, as they assuredly would have been had progress been stopped on the Big Cottonwood. Colonel William Crooks, the regimental commander, hastened to the camp near Leavenworth and personally supervised the quelling of the rebellion. After a deliberate search, the missing burs were discovered in a tent belonging to some members of Company D. Crooks arrested about ten of the key troublemakers, but they were never tried and continued to accompany the expedition. The colonel also ordered a close night watch on the wagons, leaving orders that prowlers be shot at. Lastly, the troops were told that they would act as teamsters. They agreed to this, but only after driving the daily wage up to two dollars — a rather substantial supplement to their army pay of only thirteen dollars a month.⁴³

³⁸ *Record*, November 14, 1863.

³⁹ *Record*, November 14, 1863.

⁴⁰ William Reid to Thompson, January 21, September 28, 1864, Thompson Papers.

⁴¹ Johnson, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:318; *Record*, November 14, 21, 1863.

⁴² *Record*, November 14, 21, 1863; *Weekly Union*, November 20, December 4, 1863.

⁴³ Johnson, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:318; *Weekly Union*, November 20, 1863; *Record*, November 21, 1863.

HUBBELL had long before decided to travel by way of Lake Shetek and Pipestone and then due west to the Missouri. His adviser in the selection of the route was William Duley, who had told him that ample forage, wood, and water could be found on the direct route to the Missouri and that there was no need to follow a roundabout course by way of the settlements in the Yankton area.⁴⁴

It was while the train was halted at Leavenworth that Duley joined it. He was the chief of five scouts who included William L. Quinn, a person called Bullo, and two special scouts sent out from Fort Ridgely, Solon Stevens and Corporal James Auge. Stevens and Auge accompanied the train only as far as the Pipestone Quarry and then returned to the fort. Hubbell, as well as Thompson, accompanied the train through to the Missouri. The scouts, particularly Duley, chose the general route that was followed, but the distances and compass measurements were determined by Lieutenant Shepherd H. King, Captain Whitney's adjutant.⁴⁵

The big train, a mile and a half long, pulled out from the camp opposite Leavenworth on the morning of November 15. The route from Leavenworth to the Pipestone Quarry, ninety-one miles, was generally southwestward, closely following the old New Ulm-Sioux Falls trail. During the first four days the expedition followed along the Big Cottonwood, passed through the abandoned townsite of New Brunswick on Dutch Charlie Creek, and farther on crossed the

Des Moines River about a mile below Lake Shetek. The weather was pleasantly warm, and grass, wood, and water—the indispensable items for overland travel—were abundant. Frequent delays were caused by the breaking of wagon parts, chains, or yokes. Whitney wrote that the train averaged one broken yoke per mile during the last eleven miles to Lake Shetek. Because of the uncertain wood supply west of the Des Moines, the expedition halted for the day of November 19 at Lake Shetek and cut enough wood to last until it reached the Big Sioux River. Two days beyond the Des Moines the wagons passed the Pipestone Quarry.⁴⁶

From Pipestone the trail was generally west to Crow Creek. Through use of his compass, King kept the party from veering sharply north or south on the march to the Missouri. The Big Sioux was crossed on November 23 just below the mouth of Flandrau Creek. At this point enough wood was gathered to last through to the James River, about seventy-five miles away. Two days west of the Big Sioux the much-dreaded winter struck ferociously. A raging blizzard that lasted through the night of November 26 and much of the next day ushered in a bitter cold wave, the temperature falling to nearly twenty degrees below zero. On November 27 the Coteau des Missouri was sighted, lying like a great shadow on the horizon sixty miles to the west.

The men of the Moscow expedition had the wind and the snow and the silence of the prairie to themselves. The entire movement from Leavenworth to Crow Creek, 252 miles, was made without seeing anyone outside the party—or for that matter, any sign of recent human activity. The hostile Sioux, of whom there had been so much apprehension, never appeared.

The last important water barrier, the James River, was forded at a point about four miles north of present-day Forestburg, South Dakota, on November 28. The train then passed the Wessington springs and climbed to the crest of the coteau, where

⁴⁴ Hubbell to Thompson, October 22, 1863. Duley had suffered personal losses during the Sioux Uprising and reportedly went west because he was anxious to see the prisoners that Sully had taken. He hoped to identify some that had participated in the Lake Shetek massacre.

⁴⁵ *Record*, January 16, 1864; *Weekly Union*, December 11, 1863; Johnson, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:319.

⁴⁶ The description of the trip in this and the following paragraphs is drawn from the accounts of King, Duley, and Whitney. See Indian Office, *Reports*, 1864, p. 404-407; *Record*, January 16, 1864; Johnson, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:318-320.

its route briefly crossed the trail of Colonel William H. Noble's road-surveying party of 1857. The forty miles beyond the ridge of the coteau was a large plateau broken slightly by long rolling slopes. On December 1, the last full day of travel, the expedition covered twenty-three and a half miles, the best day's distance on the trip. Finally, on December 2, the wagons reached the edge of the Missouri River bluffs and rapidly rolled the last seven miles down into the desolate Indian reservation, 292 miles from Mankato.

THE HOMESICK escort tarried only three days at the agency. Whitney contracted with Hubbell to transport the troops and their supplies and equipment—some ninety thousand pounds—back to Mankato at fifteen cents a pound. The return was made by way of the Missouri River settlements, Fort Randall, Yankton, and Vermillion, to Sioux City. To transport the troops and their equipment he used some of the best oxen. Since from Sioux City the beasts had to return to Crow Creek, Hubbell subcontracted with local teamsters to take the troops home in horse-drawn wagons.⁴⁷

By the time Thompson reached the reservation with the expedition, the Indians' situation was desperate. About six hundred of the Winnebago had fled southward, and many of the Sioux were threatening to leave for the Yankton Agency. A veteran of the Moscow expedition, who styled himself only "One Who Has Been There" wrote later that "We found, upon our arrival at the Agency, the Winnebagoes living in huts or wigwams constructed by themselves of bark and mats, almost destitute of clothing and nearly reduced to starvation. . . . It may seem incredulous [*sic*], but I have actually seen squaws pick the partially digested grains of corn from manure of horses and oxen, wash and eat them! They watched around our camps to pick up the refuse stuffs, and it is not an uncommon thing for them to prostitute themselves to obtain food for themselves and their little ones!" He also



FORT Thompson as it appeared

reported that the spoiled pork sold to the traders at the old Winnebago Agency and taken across the country was being disposed of to the Indians at twenty-five cents a pound.⁴⁸

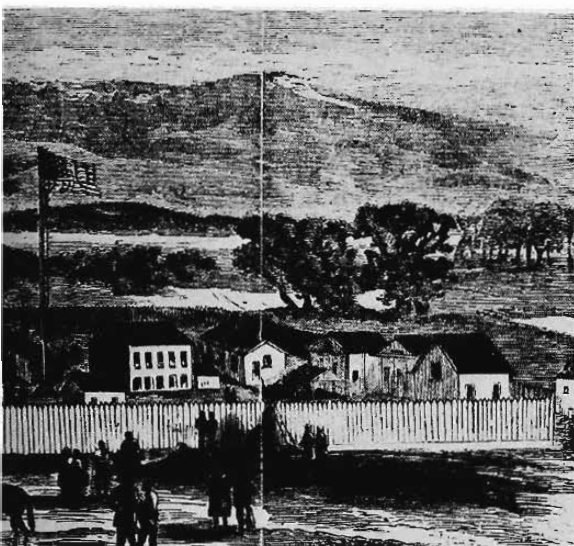
Since the expedition purportedly carried a hundred tons of provisions and brought at least five hundred cattle, one would have anticipated a rather rapid and substantial betterment in the condition of the red men. Such was not the case, however. Williamson noted that most of the supplies that reached the reservation were consigned either to the traders or to the military. He contended that most of the annuity goods had been used by the troops and teamsters on the road. The total amount of Indian supplies that reached the reservation, he said, consisted of about two hundred barrels of flour and some hundred bushels of barley which was intended for spring seeding.⁴⁹

As for the cattle, some had died on the trail, while those that reached the agency

⁴⁷ Johnson, in *Civil and Indian Wars*, 1:320; copy of contract between R. W. McElhany and J. B. Hubbell (by Anson Northup), December 19, 1863; Hubbell to Thompson, December 22, 1863, Thompson Papers.

⁴⁸ *Record*, January 16, 1864.

⁴⁹ John P. to Thomas S. Williamson, December 24, 1863, Thomas S. Williamson Papers.



etch made by John Nairn in 1865

were fatigued, lean, and starving. Most of the stock had initially been selected for pulling wagons rather than for slaughter, so there were very few young steers included in the lot. Shortly after the expedition arrived, the cattle, with the exception of those Hubbell used on his Sioux City trip, were butchered, undoubtedly because there was no forage for them. The tough, muscular beef was stockpiled in the snow. In January when the Sioux City train returned, these cattle were also killed and similarly stacked.⁵⁰

Before leaving the reservation to return to Minnesota, Thompson realized that in spite of the relief train there was still a serious shortage of food. Since he had almost exhausted his funds he instructed Balcombe that "In issuing these provisions you will take every means to economize and make them subsist the Indians as long as

possible." The weekly rations for each person amounted to only two pounds of flour and five pounds of beef. Such things as the corn and the meal had been used on the road. This amounted to only a slight increase over the Indians' fall food supply. Williamson wrote that the Sioux said of conditions at Fort Thompson, "It is not starving to death here yet, but it is starvation all the time."⁵¹

The amount of the rations was soon reduced again. During the first two weeks in January the twelve hundred Sioux were given ten barrels of flour and four thousand pounds of beef per week. This was roughly butchered meat and the weight included the heads and feet of the cattle. The rations for each week were distributed on Saturday. Naturally within a day or two, the Indians had used the week's food and demanded more.⁵²

By mid-January a unique feeding plan, ordered as a possible emergency measure by Thompson before he left, was put into effect. A great box, with about thirty barrels capacity, was made out of green cottonwood. The use of this trough was well described by Williamson. "They put into it 600 lbs beef 100 lbs pork & 1 brl. flour — filled up with water & turned the steam from the sawmill into it all night & give it out." An army surgeon reported that such things as beef heads, entrails, hearts, and lungs were put in. The odor of the soup, which had the composition of thin gruel, was said to be offensive and the settlings in the vat smelled like carrion. Because of a wood shortage about half the Indians were camped more than a mile from the soup vat and some as far as four miles away. Every other day they made the trek to the trough with their buckets.⁵³

The soup arrangement was distasteful to all connected with it. In February and March Williamson was given permission to lead several hundred of the Sioux and Winnebago on a buffalo hunt. In the absence of these Indians, John Nairn, the engineer of the sawmill, whom Balcombe had left

⁵⁰ John P. Williamson to Riggs, December 26, 1863, Riggs Papers.

⁵¹ Thompson to Balcombe, December 18, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Northern Superintendency; John P. to Thomas S. Williamson, January 6, 1864, Thomas S. Williamson Papers.

⁵² John P. Williamson to Riggs, January 16, 1864, Riggs Papers; George W. Manypenny, *Our Indian Wars*, 136 (Cincinnati, 1880).

⁵³ Williamson to Riggs, January 16, 1864; Manypenny, *Our Indian Wars*, 137.



AN army supply train crossing the prairie in the 1860s

in charge during another one of his lengthy absences, discontinued the soup making and returned to the original rationing system.⁵⁴ Much of the stockpiled beef was never used because of the impossibility of preserving it during the spring and summer months.

Despite other supplies sent in from Minnesota in 1864, the Sioux and Winnebago never lived adequately at the reservation. After much chaos, blundering, and scandal, the Winnebago were formally moved to northeastern Nebraska in 1865, and the next year the Sioux were transferred to a reservation in north central Nebraska. Both locations were considerably more hospitable and nearer to major supply centers than Crow Creek had been.⁵⁵

THE Moscow expedition was but a brief phase in the successful and varied careers of Hubbell and Thompson. Hubbell went on to become prominent as a fur trader, banker, railroad constructor and speculator, and politician. Thompson worked with Hubbell in the building of a railroad from Mankato to Wells, served in the Minnesota legislature, and became one of the principal landowners in the Wells area.⁵⁶

The condition of the Indians at Crow Creek and the conduct of the Moscow expedition prompts one to ask why such an episode should have occurred. Much of the

scandal can be blamed on the simple lack of a responsible man with a conscience. None of the people closely concerned—Hubbell, Thompson, or Balcombe—ever manifested the slightest feeling or sympathy for the Indians. Along with this collective inhumanity went a total want of sound judgment. The facts that the soup vat arrangement was ever made and that much of the beef was allowed to rot indicate this.

Nearly all who were connected with the Indian service at that time held their jobs because of political patronage. These men could not have policed each other, nor did they care to, for fear of jeopardizing their own positions and perhaps even the success of their party. The Moscow expedition was but one of countless episodes which led Helen Hunt Jackson to justly describe this period in Indian relations as "A Century of Dishonor."

⁵⁴ John P. to Henry Williamson, March 16, 1864, Thomas S. Williamson Papers.

⁵⁵ John P. to Thomas S. Williamson, August 13, 1864, Thomas S. Williamson Papers; Indian Office, *Reports*, 1865, p. 410; 1866, p. 46.

⁵⁶ Warren Upham and Rose B. Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies*, 350, 777 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, vol. 14—1912).

THE picture on pages 238–239 is from *Harper's Weekly*, October 28, 1865; the others are from the Minnesota Historical Society's collection.



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