

MINNESOTA AS SEEN BY TRAVELERS

ISAAC I. STEVENS AND THE PACIFIC RAILROAD SURVEY OF 1853¹

Judged by its influence on the development of Minnesota, perhaps the most significant expedition that passed through the future state during the middle nineteenth century was that of 1853 commanded by Isaac I. Stevens, for this party surveyed a route for a railroad which eventually was to connect the Northwest with the Pacific coast. The leader, a West Point graduate with a distinguished record of army service, resigned his commission in March, 1853, to take charge of this expedition and to accept the governorship of the recently organized Territory of Washington. His journey of exploration was to take him to the remote scene of his new-found authority, for he was ordered to operate "from St. Paul, or some eligible point on the Upper Mississippi, to Puget Sound."²

"After considering the subject maturely, I determined to rendezvous the main party in a camp near St. Paul, and thence to start on the survey," writes Stevens. A second party under Captain George B. McClellan was started from Fort Vancouver, however, and the two groups eventually met in northern Idaho. Stevens himself led the westward march of the main party, and it is from his account of the expedition, entitled *Narrative and Final Report of Explorations for a Route for a Pacific Railroad . . . from St. Paul to Puget Sound* and published as a government document in 1855, that the following

¹ The materials herewith printed have been brought together by Miss Bertha L. Heilbron, research assistant on the staff of the Minnesota Historical Society, who has also supplied the connecting narrative and the annotations. *Ed.*

² For Stevens' instructions see Jefferson Davis, secretary of war, to Stevens, April 8, 1853, in 33 Congress, 1 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 1, p. 55-57 (serial 711).

extracts are selected. Minnesota Territory was a vast domain extending westward to the Missouri River, and therefore the movements of Stevens and his followers have been traced far beyond the present state boundary at the Bois des Sioux.

Several advance parties were sent to St. Paul to prepare for Stevens' arrival. "A. W. Tinkham and F. W. Lander, engineers, were despatched, in April, to St. Paul, to examine the several crossings of the Mississippi, and to collect information generally in that region"; and Captain John W. T. Gardiner "was instructed to repair to St. Paul, *via* St. Louis, to hasten on the quartermaster and commissary arrangements, select the escort, establish the camp near St. Paul, and prepare the expedition for the field." Accompanied by J. M. Stanley, the artist for the expedition, the leader made his way to the Northwest by way of St. Louis and the Mississippi River and arrived at St. Paul on May 27. That city he describes as follows:

St. Paul (see accompanying sketch) is beautifully located upon a high bluff on the east bank of the river, and is rapidly growing in size and importance. It is quite a business place, everything indicating vigor and activity. Among its prominent buildings are the territorial capitol, modelled after the Capitol at Washington, and several very fine churches.

Stevens began at once to find out what had been accomplished by the assistants who preceded him.

Starting from St. Paul at 3½ a. m. on the 28th, I reached our camp in about an hour, and had the pleasure of rousing the gentlemen of the expedition from their sleep. Captain Gardiner had located our camp on the borders of Lake Amelia, and, in honor of the President, I called it Camp Pierce. It was situated about nine miles from St. Paul, and about three northwest from Fort Snelling. About a quarter of a mile to the eastward lay another lake or pond, connected with Lake Amelia by a creek, which was very convenient for watering our animals, and formed a fine meadow on which they grazed.³ These lakes furnished us with

³ Lake Amelia is the present Lake Nokomis, within the city limits of Minneapolis. The small lake to the east is known as Rice Lake.

fish in abundance, consisting of bass, pickerel, and sunfish. Dr. [George] Suckley [*the surgeon and naturalist for the expedition*] here made a very handsome natural history collection. . . .

After a brief visit to St. Paul in the course of the day to attend to business connected with supplies and information of the country, in which connexion I desire particularly to make my acknowledgments to Captain J. H. Simpson, United States Topographical Engineers, I finally, towards night, took up my quarters at Camp Pierce.⁴ I had, however, much positive information in regard to the country, derived from the labors of Mr. Lander. In obedience to his instructions he had, previous to my arrival at St. Paul, examined the several crossings of the Mississippi, as high up as the Little Falls, and had collected information as to the general character of the country on either bank of the river. There were good locations for railroad bridges at the Falls of St. Anthony; near the mouth of Sauk river; at the mouth of the River Watab; near the mouth of Swan river; and near Little Falls. Indeed, the bridging of the Mississippi was found to be an entirely practicable undertaking, and the principal question was to select a point which would lead us on a practicable line on our general westward course, have an easy and as short a connexion as possible with Lake Superior, and be in a region of country over which we could pass our wagons. It was not doubted that a line could be run westward from the Falls of St. Anthony, but it would be through a wooded country, where much cutting would be required for our train. By crossing at Sauk Rapids we entered at once upon the Red river trail, known to be practicable, though thus early in the season somewhat difficult for wagons.⁵ The country westward from Little Falls, at least to Long Prairie, to which point it was examined, was extremely favorable; but there was the same difficulty in moving with a train as from the Falls of St. Anthony. The object of the exploration being to determine the question of practicability, rather than the best route, and the details of locations, I determined to cross the Mississippi at Sauk Rapids, continuing for some time on the Red river trail, and then move as the information, yet to be collected, should determine.

. . . I determined also to start off advance parties and small trains immediately, in order to infuse hope into the whole party and avail myself of the present high spirit of the camp.

⁴ James H. Simpson had charge of the construction of government roads in Minnesota Territory from 1851 to 1856.

⁵ For a map of the Red River trails, see *ante*, 6: 278. The trail which Stevens followed is here designated as the east plains trail.

Moreover, there was every reason why reconnoitering and surveying parties should be kept ahead, in order to procure timely information, both of the features of the country, which would determine our general course, and the special difficulties which might impede our progress; and we had the experience of the good results already obtained by pursuing this course, not only to justify but to render imperative its being persisted in.

The next two days (29th and 30th) were rainy, and were spent in camp, examining into and arranging the details of organization. . . .

May 31. — Mr. Lander was despatched this morning, with Mr. Evelyn as assistant, and two teamsters, in charge of a wagon, drawn by mules never before in harness, to proceed northward, on the east side of the Mississippi river, to Sauk Rapids, where he was to make arrangements for crossing the main party, which would follow in a few days. . . .

The wildness of the animals which were selected may be shown by the fact that when Mr. Lander mounted the mule selected by him for his own use he was thrown with such force as to dislocate his shoulder, which required the force of three men to replace it; after which he again mounted and rode off at the head of his small party.

Other small detachments were started for Sauk Rapids under Tinkham and James Doty on May 31 and June 3. On June 4 Stevens "issued orders for the whole camp to be in readiness to move on Monday next, (the 6th,) so as to reach Sauk Rapids on Friday and cross the river on Saturday. The officers and gentlemen of the scientific corps will take the boat at the Falls on Monday and reach Sauk Rapids Tuesday evening, where an astronomical and magnetic station will be established."

While preparations for traveling were thus being made, Stevens found time to see something of the country around Camp Pierce.

One of the curiosities of our vicinity, which was sketched by Mr. Stanley . . . is the Minne-ha-ha, or the Laughing Water, called also Brown's Falls. It is situated west of the Mississippi, and distant about three miles from Fort Snelling. Ten miles above the Falls the stream flows from Lake Calhoun, and it passes through a level but fertile prairie, its margin decked with a whole-

some growth of willow, poplar, and hazel, while at a short distance there are little forests of black-jack . . . and other trees of like character. Here the sheet of water is from twenty to twenty-five feet wide, and its fall forty-one feet. The rock over which it pours shelters an oval cave about seventy-five feet wide and thirty feet from the falling water to the back. . . . Though the magnitude of this cascade is not such as to excite our wonder, its picturesque beauty and pleasing melody attract the admiration of every visitor.

Finally, with everything ready, the start was made.

June 6. — Broke up camp at 10 a. m., sending forward the command in three parties; one under Lieutenant [Cuvier] Grover, consisting of the astronomical, magnetic, and meteorological parties, Mr. John Lambert, topographer, assisted by Mr. [Max] Strobel and the necessary men, fourteen persons in all, were sent on the steamer that plies between St. Anthony and Sauk Rapids, with directions to land on the west side of the Mississippi river, below the mouth of Sauk river, and crossing it by a good ford about a mile and a half above its mouth, established an astronomical, magnetic, and meteorological station on the Red river trail. The directions were given to sketch in the river and make all the observations practicable for determining geographical positions and the altitude, in order to connect carefully the river with the work of the land parties; fourteen mules, two horses, and one wagon were also put on board as transportation to reach the Red river trail from the point of landing.

The second, under Lieutenant [Beekman] Du Barry, consisting of Mr. Stanley, Dr. Suckley, Mr. Le Frambois,⁶ the guide, a sergeant, and fourteen men, were instructed to follow on the trail of the advance parties on the left or east bank of the Mississippi, to cross the river at Sauk Rapids and encamp with the former party; the third consisting of the train in charge of Mr. [T. S.] Everett, the quartermaster and commissary clerk, with the same general instructions.

I accompanied Lieutenant Du Barry's command to the ferry at St. Anthony, and then went to the point whence the steamboat Governor Ramsey started, which was to convey Lieutenant Grover's party up the Mississippi.⁷ The stores, instruments, bag-

⁶ This probably was Joseph Laframboise, a French half-breed who was occasionally employed as a guide and interpreter.

⁷ Captain John Rollins had been operating the "Governor Ramsey" above the Falls of St. Anthony since 1850. See *ante*, p. 106, 107.

gage, with a quantity of oats, made four heavy wagon loads. The boat got off about half-past 2 o'clock, when I went to our old camp to make the final arrangements for the moving of the remainder of the train, and late in the evening went to St. Anthony, where I left Mr. [Isaac F.] Osgood and a light wagon to await Mr. [B. F.] Kendall, whose arrival from New York, with numerous instruments and two India-rubber boats, was daily expected. I remained in St. Anthony till noon of June 7, to secure the services of several voyageurs, and particularly of the guide Pierre Bottineau and the hunter Menoc, in which I was successful;⁸ and starting about noon, and taking a rapid conveyance, I pushed forward the same day forty miles, overtaking at Rum river Lieutenant Du Barry, and some miles beyond both Doty and Simpson;⁹ and reaching Sauk Rapids, a distance of 30 miles further, by 11 a. m., found Mr. Tinkham actively engaged in the survey of that portion of the river. The crossing at St. Anthony is by a rope ferry, its motive power being the action of the current, having a short rope at the bow, and a longer or slack rope astern. On the west side of the Mississippi, about three miles above Rum river, there was a large encampment of Winnebago Indians, consisting of about one hundred lodges. These are constructed of oak bark, fastened by strips of buckskin over arched poles, resembling in shape the cover of a wagon; they are about eight feet high, and from ten to thirty feet long, according to the number of families to be accommodated. The chief's lodge, in the centre, is much larger, and distinguished by the flags upon it, two

⁸ Bottineau was a guide of wide experience and established reputation. In a letter from Stevens to his wife, written on June 10, 1853, Bottineau is described as the "great guide and voyageur of Minnesota." The letter continues: "He is famous as a buffalo-hunter, is a Chippewa half-breed, and surpasses all of his class in truthfulness and great intelligence. Not only is he experienced in all the vicissitudes of travel and frontier life, being the hero of many interesting events, but he has the broadness of view of an engineer, and I am confident he will be of the greatest service to us in finding our way. . . . He understands, as Mr. Sibley in Washington told me, everything from shooting a bird or paddling a canoe to hunting buffalo, and conducting a large party through a long extent of difficult country. I also secured Menoc, the best hunter of the Territory." See Hazard Stevens, *The Life of Isaac Ingalls Stevens*, 1: 310, 311 (Boston and New York, 1900). A thesis on the life of Bottineau, by Margareth Jorgensen, is in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

⁹ William Simpson was pack-master for the expedition. Stevens, *Life of I. I. Stevens*, 1: 306.

British and two American colors. The shores are lined with canoes, and the village extends an eighth of a mile along the river. The country, for the first seven miles after leaving camp and striking the St. Anthony road, is a wet prairie. After leaving St. Anthony the country appears to rise towards the north; the road lies on the eastern bank of the Mississippi, along the plateau, which is generally timbered. . . .

June 8.—On the road and at Sauk Rapids several additional men were engaged, among them some Canadian voyageurs. These men, being sometimes half-breeds, speak a jargon of patois French, Chippewa, and other Indian dialects. They are a hardy, willing, enduring class, inured to hardships, and used to encounter all sorts of difficulties in their journeys between different posts of the fur companies. They must be treated with kindness and a certain degree of familiarity, and, their confidence and affections being secured, they are the most obedient and hard-working fellows in the world.

Within a few days Stevens had formed an opinion of his new assistants:

My acquaintance with the voyageurs, thus far, has impressed me favorably. They are thorough woodsmen, and just the men for prairie life also, going into the water as pleasantly as a spaniel, and remaining there as long as needed; stout, able-bodied, and willing to put their shoulders to the wheel whenever necessary; no slough or bog deters them.

Pierre Boutineau, engaged as our guide, I find a most useful man, to whom all the voyageurs look up with great confidence.

On his arrival at Sauk Rapids Stevens found that several detachments were already safely encamped. On June 9 he inspected Lander's camp; and on June 10 he established himself at "Lieutenant Grover's camp, which was beautifully situated on the north bank of the Osakis or Sauk river, about two miles from its mouth. . . . In honor of the Secretary of War we named it Camp Davis." Within a few days other members of the expedition arrived.

June 12.—Messrs. Osgood and Kendall reached camp this morning, with the barometers and India rubber boats. This mission had been performed with exemplary promptitude and success. At St. Louis, I was telegraphed that many of the barometers had been broken, and they could not be supplied short of New York.

They were absolutely indispensable. I sent Mr. Kendall there immediately, and in thirty days the boats and instruments were made and brought to my camp, eighty miles on our way. Mr. Everett also arrived about noon to-day, having left Camp Pierce on the 8th instant. . . . Assembling both officers and men to-day, I caused to be read the camp regulations which I had prepared for the government of the party, and made a short address, in which I informed them that every man would be expected to look to the safety of his comrades; that all alike, whether soldier or civilian, would be expected to stand guard, and in case of difficulties to meet them promptly. I exaggerated the difficulties which lay before us, and represented that the country through which they would pass was intersected by bogs, marshes, and deep morasses; that rivers were to be forded and bridged, mountains and valleys to be crossed; that the first 180 miles of the journey was reported to be through a continuous marsh, barely practicable, where every man would have to go through mud and water, and apply his shoulders to the wheel; that in ten days we would reach the Indian country, where heavy guard duty would have to be performed to protect property and preserve lives; and still further on we would probably be compelled to force our way through the country of the Blackfoot Indians, a tribe proverbially treacherous and warlike; and then the snows of the mountains would have to be overcome, and that every man would be expected to follow wherever he might be led; that no one would be sacrificed, nor would any one be subjected to any risk, which I would not freely incur; and that whoever was not willing to co-operate with us had better at once retire. After these remarks the camp regulations were read by Mr. Kendall, and my views were cordially approved.

Stevens continued the "project of sending off the train in detached parties." Lieutenant Grover was sent ahead "to reconnoitre carefully the country north and in the vicinity of White Bear lake, with a view of ascertaining the point where the expedition should leave the Red river trail."¹⁰ A second group under Dr. Suckley also was started. In the meantime Stevens arranged for the movement of the main party.

June 13. — . . . To-day I issued an order creating assimilated rank in the expedition, by which certain gentlemen of the party were appointed to the grade of lieutenant, and others to the grade of non-commissioned officer, for purposes of convenience in de-

¹⁰ White Bear Lake is now known as Lake Minnewaska.

tailing guard. By this course the relative position of each man was fixed; and whether in the main or detached parties, it was known whose duty it was to give orders in case of necessity. Military organization is in some degree indispensable, and the idea of an escort has been entirely abandoned. All are soldiers in the performance of guard duty, and the soldiers accompanying us are on fatigue duty, and not merely to escort us by day and to stand guard at night. Several of the Pembina carts purchased of Dr. Borup arrived in camp to-day.¹¹ Out of the four he sent we were able to make two pretty good ones. They are made entirely of wood, having no iron at all about them, very roughly constructed, and the wheels usually wrapped with raw hide or buffalo skin, in place of an iron tire, to prevent their cutting through the marshy ground so extensive between here and Pembina. They are drawn by horses, oxen, or mules, one person usually driving from two to six carts, and when loaded they will carry from six to eight hundred pounds. They look as if made for only one trip, and the creaking of the wheels on their wooden axle does not give the idea of their standing much service. Their first appearance to those of the party unaccustomed to the sight, with the oxen harnessed in them, caused much merriment; and as they moved over the prairie the singular noise produced by their wheels assured us that with such an accompaniment no need existed for any musical instruments or players, for these discoursed most sweetly.

June 14. — Spent the day in making the necessary arrangements to push forward the whole camp, to be organized for the present in detached parties, under separate heads, and all under my general direction. Lieutenant Du Barry was placed in general charge of the meteorological observations. Everything now presents a favorable aspect and all will be ready to move off to-morrow morning. The wagons are being loaded, and the distribution of weight requires care and attention. Procured several more Pembina carts, as I was able to secure only one good cart and one ox out of the four sent by Dr. Borup. Engaged to-day Paul Boulieau, a half-breed Chippewa, of collegiate education, who has filled a seat in the territorial legislature with credit, and also been long in the services of the [American] Fur Company.¹² . . . Paul Boulieau was placed in charge of the Pembina train,

¹¹ Dr. Charles W. Borup was engaged in the fur trade with headquarters at St. Paul. For a sketch of some of his earlier frontier activities, see *post*, p. 150.

¹² Paul H. Beaulieu was a well-known fur-trader and Chippewa interpreter. His account of fur-trade methods in the Lake Superior region

so called, which, consisting at first of five carts, each drawn by an ox, was this day increased by a very superior wagon team, drawn by two yokes of very large and serviceable oxen, purchased of Captain Todd, in command of Fort Ripley.¹³ It may here be observed that the Pembina train, managed entirely by the voyageurs, invariably moved of itself, crossed all the streams without additional assistance, gave us the least trouble in supervision, and was altogether the most economical and effective transportation we had. . . .

Lieutenant Du Barry left the camp about two o'clock with the main train, and I remained behind with the observers till the next day.

The arrangements thus made left me free either to be with the advance parties or with the train, or to make personal examinations of important features of the country off the lines of the trail.

On June 16 Stevens left Camp Davis with the last members of the party.

June 17.— . . . In the crossing of the Sauk by the main train the India rubber boats were, for the first time, used. The larger one is about twelve feet long and four wide, weighing seventy-five pounds, the other about one-fifth smaller. A rope was stretched across the stream and the boats ferried across by means of a ring attached to their bows and sliding along the rope. They succeeded admirably; and a birch canoe, managed by one of the voyageurs, was also used in crossing. Some of the men were in the water for hours, but worked faithfully and efficiently.

From Sauk River the various detachments pushed westward until on June 23 most of them had reached Pike Lake. "This I consider as the real starting point of the expedition,"

is among the Beaulieu Papers in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. Henry Beaulieu, his brother, also was with the Stevens expedition.

¹³ As its first commandant, Captain John B. S. Todd went to this post at the mouth of the Crow Wing River, then known as Fort Gaines, in the spring of 1849. An "Early History of Fort Ripley, 1849-1859," based on the diary of its chaplain, the Reverend Solon W. Manney, and probably written by the Reverend George C. Tanner, is in the archives of the Minnesota Diocese of the Protestant Episcopal church in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

writes Stevens. "We remained here a day, in order to give the animals a chance to rest."

June 24.— . . . On counting rations, it was found that for the main party there was a supply for twenty days, while it might take forty-five to reach Fort Union. But with the eight oxen in the carts, and the known abundance of game, I feared no scarcity. The men showed some anxiety and talked of a strike, but seeing the confidence of the officers, abandoned any open demonstration. Previous to this time I had ordered a reducing of rations whenever the quantity of game would justify it, and henceforward I gave the most particular attention to it, so that, although we did not reach the Yellowstone for thirty-eight days (August 1,) there was at no time a scarcity of provisions.

June 25.— To-day the expedition may be considered fairly under way. Lieutenant Grover started at 7.30 a.m. . . .

The main party, under my own direction, (and guided by Boutineau,) moved forward at about the same time. . . .

June 26.— The main party moved to-day to the camp of Mr. Tinkham of last night; the head of the column reached the river at eleven o'clock, and the whole command was over and in camp by six o'clock. This river is the *Pomme de Terre* of Pope's map.¹⁴ . . . As we were now approaching the Indian country, I systematized all the arrangements of camp and guards and the details of duty on the march. The dragoons were distributed as follows: two for the pack train; two, with a led horse each, for reconnoitering duty; two to strike and pitch tents; two to catch fish; two with the howitzer; the sergeant Linder, and seven men with the main column. The sergeant was, moreover, charged with the duty of laying out the encampment, under my direction. For the care of the camp an officer of the guard, who also served as officer of the day, two non-commissioned officers, and six privates were detailed.

Cook fires to be made at two o'clock a.m.; the cooks and teamsters called at three, and the animals to be put in good grass; reveille to be sounded at four, and all the officers to be called by name; the whole camp to breakfast about four, and the teamsters

¹⁴ Captain John Pope of the United States topographical engineers was a member of the expedition led by Major Samuel Woods through the Red River Valley from Fort Snelling to Pembina in 1849. Pope's *Report of an Exploration of the Territory of Minnesota* is accompanied by his map of the region (31 Congress, 1 session, *Senate Executive Documents*, no. 42— serial 558).

immediately to commence harnessing up; tents struck at half-past four, and the camp in motion by five; the sentinels instructed to fire upon any prowling Indians.

The following anecdote illustrates the good feeling and zeal which prevailed in the camp, and the disposition to derive amusement even from the execution of laborious duties.

Mr. [Joseph F.] Moffett, who, since Lieutenant Du Barry's departure, has been in charge of meteorological observations, with the rank of lieutenant, was to-night officer of the guard.¹⁵ He is one of the most inflexible men in the party, rigidly interpreting orders, and making the most strenuous efforts to discharge his duties. He never enters upon anything without a determination fully to perform it, having a certain pride in his peculiar mode of doing so, and in guard duty seems to take an especial pleasure. At sundown the guard was summoned to report to their officers. He paraded them outside the line, showed them the position of the various posts, and addressed them in a speech, in which he enjoined them to be on the alert, although we did not apprehend any danger. "Your chief duty will be to watch the animals within camp" (here came a pause, he dreading to mention Indians,) "and *without*." The speech over, they were ordered to get into line, and Corporals Gear and [Elwood] Evans accompanying, paraded them around camp, Farnham whistling the ever-memorable Yankee Doodle. From a line they were ordered to get into double file, and in this way were marched up to my tent, and reported ready for duty.

June 27.—Camp roused at 4 a.m. While at breakfast Lieutenant Moffet gave me notice that we had but "four minutes left to eat in;" and as we failed to get through, he had the tents struck over our heads.

On June 29 the train crossed the Bois des Sioux River. This, in Stevens' opinion, "had been a great point to reach—the end of bad roads and the commencement of the buffalo country." At the Wild Rice River on the following day, a bridge "made of heavy logs, filled in with cut willow brush and mown grass" was constructed and the whole party moved across it.

¹⁵ On June 21, Du Barry, "in compliance with his own request" had been relieved "from duty with the expedition, and ordered . . . to report in person to the Adjutant General in Washington city. He was desired to call upon the Secretary of War and acquaint him with the whole history of the expedition up to this point."

July 1. — I determined to push forward with the engineer party to the Shyenne, and, if I found it necessary, have it bridged. Smooth prairie extended all the way; road good, and the distance $26\frac{1}{2}$ miles.

A very severe thunder-storm occurred this morning, lasting an hour and wetting us thoroughly. At 11 a.m. we met the train of the Red river traders, in charge of Mr. Kittson, and visited their camp, six miles distant, in company with Dr. Suckley, Messrs. Stanley, Osgood, Boutineau, Menoc, and others. We were very hospitably received, purchased some pemmican, common moccasins, and articles of dress worked with porcupine quills. Bought, also, some carts and oxen, being very deficient in transportation.

The main train only proceeded 13 miles, and I returned to them about 3 p.m., accompanied by Kittson, Father Delacour, Roulet, and Cavilaer.¹⁶ Kittson and Roulet were members of the territorial legislature from Pembina; Cavilaer, the collector of customs; and Delacour is a very clever, shrewd priest. They are on their annual trip to St. Paul with robes, skins, pemmican, and dried meat of the buffalo, collected by trading with the half-breeds of the Red river settlements. We found that they had bridged the Shyenne, saving us considerable trouble and delay. Their company proved very agreeable, and we were glad that a heavy thunder-storm coming on obliged them to be our guests for the night.

July 2. — Struck camp at 7 o'clock and parted with our new friends, sending back with them Strobel and two teamsters, who proved inefficient.

The whole train crossed the Shyenne bridge safely by noon, and camped on the other side. We had apprehended that possibly the heavy rain of last night would swell the river and carry away the bridge, but hurrying up the wagons we made the crossing just before the water had risen sufficiently to flow over the bridge. I called this camp McClelland, intending to halt here over Sunday and make up despatches for Washington. I sent Lander and Tinkham to reconnoitre both up and down the river.

¹⁶ Norman W. Kittson, the Reverend Georges A. Belcourt, Joseph Rolette, Jr., and Charles Cavalier were the most prominent members of the little settlement at Pembina. For an account of Kittson's fur-trade activities at Pembina, see the article by Clarence W. Rife, *ante*, 6: 225-252. This narrative also contains some material on Belcourt and Rolette. A manuscript entitled "The Red River Valley in 1851," which includes an account of the first departure of Kittson and Rolette to attend the session of the territorial legislature in St. Paul in 1851, by Cavalier, is in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Fourth of July.—The train started at 6 a.m. I remained behind to get off a mail, and the engineers remained with me. . . .

Got off about 10 and followed the Red River trail some twelve miles, when we left it altogether. . . .

It would be an excellent plan for an emigrant travelling through the country, before reaching one of these rivers on which he expects to camp, to catch a few frogs, for the purpose of fishing in these streams, which abound in pike, pickerel, and large catfish. Frogs are by far the best bait that can be used.

About dusk we raised the American flag, made of white and red shirts contributed by the party and sewed together by Boulieau. As it went up the assembled command gave it three hearty cheers, and then indulged in some refreshments in honor of the day, ending the evening with songs and story telling.

In the region through which the expedition was passing, the Sheyenne River makes its great southward bend; consequently, on July 7, the travelers again found themselves upon the banks of this stream. Here they encamped for a short time.

July 9.— . . . An accurate return was made of the provisions on hand, so as to regulate its weekly distribution. Our flour is fast diminishing, and the issue was reduced to half a pound per day to each man. This state of affairs caused considerable grumbling in camp. We are fast approaching the buffalo country, and then shall be expected to do with much less. About 2½ p.m. the main train, under Mr. Osgood, crossed the river without unloading any of the wagons or doubling the teams, and moved forward to a good camping place, carrying with them a supply of firewood, as none would be found again before reaching Lake Jessie. . . .

About 3 p.m. Mr. Tinkham came into camp and reported that he had been to the Butte Mischeau and Lake Jessie.¹⁷ They found buffalo to be very numerous on our route. Paul Boulieau and Rummel killed some four or five coming back, without going out of the way. . . .

July 10.—Most of our camp arose at 2½ o'clock. After partaking of a cup of coffee at 3 o'clock, our little train, consisting of

¹⁷ The map published with Joseph N. Nicolle's *Report Intended to Illustrate a Map of the Hydrographical Basin of the Upper Mississippi River* (25 Congress, 2 session, *Senate Documents*, no. 237—serial 380) shows "Butte Michaux" just south of Lake Jessie near the west bank of the Sheyenne.

an ambulance and spring wagons, with a cart loaded with charcoal, had crossed the Shynne by sunrise. . . . About 7 o'clock we reached the main train, encamped some seven miles off. The train was preparing to move, and soon after we came up it started. At 8 o'clock we followed and passed them. About five miles from camp we ascended to the top of a high hill, and for a great distance ahead every square mile seemed to have a herd of buffalo upon it. Their number was variously estimated by the members of the party — some as high as half a million. I do not think it is any exaggeration to set it down at 200,000. I had heard of the myriads of these animals inhabiting these plains, but I could not realize the truth of these accounts till to-day, when they surpassed anything I could have imagined from the accounts which I had received. . . .

The timber bordering on Lake Jessie was distinctly visible ahead, and between us and it were countless herds of buffalo, through which we were compelled to pass. The train moved on till 11 o'clock, when we all halted, drew up into line, and picketed the loose animals. About half a mile ahead a large herd was to be seen. Six of the hunters, Boutineau, Menoc, Le Frambois, the two Boulieaus, and Rummell were mounted upon the best horses in the command, some of which were specially reserved, and rode off in fine style, keeping together till ready to dash in among the herd. The immense sea of flesh remained quiet until their approach, and then separating, they rode in among them, selected the fat cows, and riding around until the proper time to do execution, the quick succession of shots announced the fact that our supplies of meat were fast being added to. In less than an hour a wagon or two was called into requisition to collect the choice pieces of nine buffalo cows. While we were resting several small bands came within firing distance of our train. One or two dragoons, on foot, gave one a chase, but the buffalo of course distanced them. The most amusing scene was the dog Zach, of the dragoon detachment, dashing into a whole herd and following them a considerable distance. We arrived at Lake Jessie about 3 o'clock p.m., the bluff shore on which we encamped being some sixty-four feet above the level of the lake. . . .

Between 1 and 2 o'clock at night a herd of buffalo approached our camp, and it required all the exertion of the guard, assisted by many of the men, to prevent an entire stampede of all our animals. As it was, some got loose, though none were lost. The buffalo were followed a considerable distance, and some ten or a dozen shots were fired before the animals without were entirely driven off.

July 11. — . . . Having proceeded about four miles, a small band of buffalo started off ahead of us. Le Frambois's horse and

four loose mules near the head of the column started in pursuit, the horse taking the lead. Boutineau, Le Frambois, Menoc, Guy, Lindner, and Paul Boulieau . . . all well mounted, gave chase in hopes of recovering them. But by this time they had mixed up in the herd, and though they were followed some twelve or fifteen miles, their efforts were entirely unavailing. About a mile further we encountered a very severe slough, the approach to which was marked by a very great curiosity, in the form of a buffalo trail; at least 100,000 must have crossed here by the foot prints and marks visible, and I determined on crossing the slough at the same point which the instinct of these animals had selected. . . .

July 12. — . . . About eleven miles from camp we crossed a deep slough. The water here being good the train stopped an hour and lunched. About a mile further on we crossed a fine little stream, which I took to be Beaver Lodge creek. Shortly afterwards Boutineau killed a fine buffalo cow, not twenty feet from the compass line. The despatch and dexterity with which these men cut up buffalo is truly astonishing. Before the train came up the animal was entirely butchered, and had only to be thrown in the cart.

On this day the party traveled on the plateau between the Sheyenne and the James rivers. Stevens determined the "course N. 85° W., with instructions to Boutineau to keep in advance and point out the way, which was not to be abandoned except in crossing sloughs, and then to return immediately. This is the first day we have run according to the compass, and it succeeded admirably." The next day "we struck James river, and crossed over a good ford. . . . Noticing that the river ran very nearly in the course of our compass, we followed it, and again crossing it some five miles above we encamped." On July 14 the travelers pushed westward, approaching the Sheyenne for a third time. That night they encamped "at the bank of a fine lake."

July 15. — At daybreak . . . I despatched Osgood and Kendall to a high hill to reconnoitre and look for a new camp. The guides and hunters were also sent on to the Shyenne to ascertain the distance. . . .

The men are much interested in the labors of Dr. Suckley, the naturalist. It is amusing to see each one making his contribution of snakes, reptiles, birds, bugs, &c.

Near noon Osgood and his party returned, having been to the Shyenno, where they found no wood, poor grass, and swarms of mosquitos. Soon after the guides returned, announcing that they had seen a party of Sioux of 1,000 lodges, not more than nine miles in advance of us. Boutineau's manner was full of fear, and his public announcement spread alarm through the whole camp. I at once gave orders to make ready, with the intention of visiting their camp; and calling Boutineau to my tent, asked him whether they were not the Red river hunting party. He assured me indignantly that "he knew half-breeds from Indians, and that they were certainly Sioux."

I suggested that they might be friendly Sioux, who, being engaged in the hunt and hearing of our approach, were coming forward to meet us, to receive the usual presents and gratify their curiosity. He still insisted that they were hostile Sioux. . . . We were, in his opinion, to be surrounded and cut off.

After dinner, as the alarm was spreading throughout the command, the arms were inspected and ammunition distributed, and orders given to have the train in readiness to move at once. I sent Boutineau, Le Frambois, and Menoc to the top of a high ridge as a lookout, while a flag was prepared to be sent forward if necessary.

Word soon came that the country was alive with Indians, who were fast surrounding us; and I sent scouts to hills on the right and left, having the lake to protect our rear. Mounting my horse I rode to the hill in front, and saw two horsemen rapidly approaching. Our flag-bearers rode forward to meet them, and soon discovered that they were two of the Red river hunters, and that their camp was three miles beyond the Shyenno. Having discerned our party, they came to invite us to visit them, and express their kindly feelings for us.

The train, which, before this, was in motion, arranged in a double line with the pack and loose animals between, proceeded two miles, where there was better water, and encamped.

The agreeable disappointment established a fine feeling throughout camp. . . .

The men to-day showed a good spirit, and, although there was naturally some anxiety, they obeyed every order with alacrity.

Thus ended the apprehensions of the command concerning Indians, and was the first and last difficulty of the kind which occurred in camp on the trip.

RED RIVER HUNTERS.

July 16. — . . . About 2 p.m. the whole Red river train came in sight, and, as they approached, fired a succession of volleys of

firearms as a salute, which we returned with three rounds from the howitzer. The train consisted of 824 carts, about 1,200 animals, and 1,300 persons, men, women, and children, the whole presenting a very fine appearance.

They encamped near by, and the close yard which they formed presented quite a contrast to the open camp adopted by us. They make a circular or square yard of the carts, placed side by side with the hubs adjoining, presenting a barrier impassable either to man or beast. The tents or lodges were arranged within, at a distance of about twenty feet from the carts, and were of a conical shape, built of poles covered with skins, with an opening at the top for the passage of smoke and for ventilation. They were 104 in number, being occupied generally by two families, averaging about ten persons to the lodge. Skins were spread over the tops of the carts, and underneath many of the train found comfortable lodging places. . . .

The animals were allowed to run loose during the day to feed, but were driven into the corral at dark. Thirty-six of the men are posted as sentinels, remaining on guard all night. We have but twelve guards, three reliefs, not more than four men being on guard at one time.

As our camps were only about two hundred yards apart, there was much visiting between them. I was struck with the good conduct and hospitable kindness of these people. A small band of Prairie Chippewa Indians, who accompanied this party, visited our camp during the evening, and entertained us with one of their national dances.

I was much pleased with Governor Wilkie, who is the head of the expedition. He is a man of about sixty years of age, of fine appearance and pleasant manners. This party are residents of Pembina and its vicinity. When at home they are engaged in agriculture, raising wheat, corn, potatoes, and barley. The land yields about twenty-five bushels of wheat to the acre, their farms averaging about 15 acres each. They are industrious and frugal in their habits, are mostly of the Romish persuasion, leading a virtuous and pious life. They are generally accompanied by their priests, and attend strictly to their devotions, having exercises every Sabbath, on which day they neither march nor hunt.

Their municipal government is of a parochial character, being divided into five parishes, each one being presided over by an officer called the captain of the parish. These captains of the parish retain their authority while in the settlement. On departing for the hunt they select a man from the whole number, who is styled governor of the hunt, who takes charge of the party, regulates its movement, acts as referee in all cases where any differ-

ences arise between the members in regard to game or other matters, and takes command in case of difficulty with the Indians.

In the early part of the year, till the middle of June, these people work at agriculture, when they set out on their first hunt, leaving some thirty at the settlements in charge of their farms, houses, stock, &c. They start out to the southward in search after buffalo, taking with them their families, carts, animals, &c. These carts, when loaded, contain about 800 pounds, and are used in common. There were 336 men in the present train, of whom over 300 were hunters. Each hunt, of which there are two every year, continues about two months, the first starting in June, the second about the middle of October. Their carts were already half full, and they expected to return to their homes in the latter part of August. On their first trip the buffalo are hunted for the purpose of procuring pemmican, dried meat, tongues, &c.; the skins, being useless for robes, are dressed for lodge skins, moccasins, &c. In October the meat is still better and fatter, and they procure a like quantity of dried meat, reserving sufficient for a year's provision, which is about one-half of the whole amount procured; they dispose of the rest at the trading posts of the Hudson Bay Company.

The meat which they carry home finds its way, through the Red river traders of the [American] Fur Company, to Fort Snelling, where it is exchanged for goods, sugar, coffee, &c., at the rate of fifteen cents a pound.

The trade of this company is all in dry goods, sugar, tea, ammunition, &c. Notes are also issued by the Hudson Bay Company, which are currency among them. Several of these, of the denomination of five shillings, payable at York Factory, and bearing the signature of Sir George Simpson, were offered in change to various members of the expedition on purchasing various articles.

The skins collected in the summer hunt are usually retained by the hunters for their own use, while the robes collected in the fall hunt are a staple of trade with the Fur Company, and also with the Hudson Bay Company, which latter company do a large business in this portion of the country, supplying the settlers with most of their clothes, groceries, &c.

The Red river settlements are made up of a population of half-breeds, traders of the Hudson Bay and Fur Companies, discharged employés of these companies, and Indians, representatives of every nation of Europe, Scotch, Irish, English, Canadians, and speaking a jargon made up of these dialects, intermingled with Chippewa and Sioux, patois French being the prevailing tongue.

These settlements, started some twenty-five years since, now number, in the vicinity of Pembina mountain, some four thousand people. The men are generally much finer looking than the wom-

en. On the latter depend all the drudgery of camp duties, pitching the tents, attending to animals, cooking, &c.

The men dress usually in woollens of various colors. The coat generally worn, called the Hudson Bay coat, has a capot attached to it. The belts are finely knit, of differently colored wool or worsted yarn, and are worn after the manner of sashes. Their powder horn and shot bag, attached to bands finely embroidered with beads or worked with porcupine quills, are worn across each shoulder, making an X before and behind. Many also have a tobacco pouch strung to their sashes, in which is tobacco mixed with kini-kinick, (dried bark of the osier willow scraped fine,) a fire steel, punk, and several flints. Add to these paraphernalia a gun, and a good idea will be formed of the costume of the Red river hunter.

The women are industrious, dress in gaudy calicoes, are fond of beads and finery, and are remarkably apt at making bead work, moccasins, sewing, &c.

We purchased from the train a supply of pemmican, dried meat, sugar, and other things, some of the men buying moccasins, whips, and other necessities.

I engaged the service of Alexis Le Bombard, who was in company with this encampment, as guide to the Yellowstone. He is represented as having a thorough knowledge of the country, which was apparent from his conversation. He came from the Yellowstone this season, and the impression gathered from my interview with him, as well as the representations of others, satisfied me that he will be extremely valuable as a guide.

Shortly after the Indians left, Governor Wilkie and several of the principal men came over to my tent. I had a very pleasant conversation with them in regard to the Indians, hunting, &c. During the conversation, I made some inquiries as to their views concerning the establishment of a military post in this vicinity, say at Lake Miniwakan.¹⁸ The suggestion met with their hearty approval, and Governor Wilkie assured me that were one located there, the people would remove and settle near it, cultivating sufficient land to keep the post supplied with vegetables and provisions. Governor Wilkie dined with us, after which the train prepared to move, and at 2¼ p.m., accompanied by our new guide, Le Bombard, we bade adieu to our Red river friends and moved

¹⁸ On the south shore of Devil's Lake, Fort Totten was established in 1867. An earlier military post in the Red River Valley is Fort Abercrombie, which was built in 1860. A. T. Andreas, *Historical Atlas of Dakota*, 104 (Chicago, 1884); William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 2: 164 (St. Paul, 1924).

forward on their trail. Our guide avoided crossing the Shyenne by going around one of its bends, and after travelling ten miles, which we accomplished with ease in two hours and a quarter, we reached a good camping place on the side of a lake where the grass was excellent.

A second group of Red River hunters, this time from one of the Canadian settlements north of the boundary, was encountered a few days later.

July 22. — . . . While making our usual mid-day halt we were overtaken by two hunters of the Red river train, from the vicinity of the Selkirk settlement, who were encamped some eight miles distant. They invited me to visit them, which I determined upon doing, and placing the train under the charge of Dr. Suckley, I gave him directions to move on some eight miles, find a good camping place, and await my return. All the men were to be set to work as soon as they got into camp, and none were to be permitted to visit the Red river train. . . .

July 23. — . . . I sent Guy and Rummell ahead to Dr. Suckley's camp, to apprise him of our coming. At about 4 o'clock, accompanied by Governor de L'Orme and seven of his principal men, we started towards Dr. Suckley's camp. The whole force of the survey, headed by Dr. Suckley, Sergeant Lindner bearing an American flag, met us about a mile out of camp, and saluted us with a volley from their guns, the mountain howitzer being fired three times. A large tent was put up for the accommodation of our guests, and Governor de L'Orme was invited to share my tent. The guard tent was taken and made use of as a banqueting room, and several of the men were detailed to collect buffalo chips. The cooks of the various messes were assisting each other, and the meal was ready for us about 9 o'clock. . . .

Seated around the camp fire between the two tents we had a very pleasant conference with our friends. I was very favorably impressed with Governor de L'Orme, and with his opinion, as well as that of his associates, in regard to their right to hunt on our territory, they being residents of the country north of our boundary line. They claim the protection of both governments, and the doubt as to the position of the boundary line makes them ignorant as to which one they have the most claim upon. During the hunting season they carry with them their families and their property, and they consider that this territory is open to them; that the right to hunt on it belongs to them, and that their children born during this transit over our soil possess the heritage of American citizens. Strongly impressed in favor of American insti-

tutions, they wish to be noticed by our government, and feel a desire to meet and confer with a commissioner sent by it to treat with them. My own opinion is, that while they possess no fee simple in the soil yet they have the same right and title which our government has acknowledged the Indian tribes to possess—a right of occupation, with the view of hunting, &c. With but little care our government could obtain the whole of these people as citizens, thus protecting and building up our frontier, and having in this vicinity always a controlling check upon the Indians. Already is the salutary effect of their presence visible in the entire safety, now, with which single white men and small parties can go through this country. Their virtuous mode of life; their industry and frugality; their adaptation to frontier life, all combine to render them a valuable class of people, and well worthy the attention of our government. They expressed a desire that I should represent these things to the government, and I assured them that I would do so with pleasure. Governor de L'Orme, before retiring to rest, attended to his devotions, and I have been struck with his piety and real goodness, manifested in his conduct and conversation.

The following morning, after parting with their guests, the travelers continued their journey. On July 27 they came for the first time upon a large number of Indians—an encampment of Assiniboin “numbering 150 lodges and some 1,200 persons.” These natives fortunately proved very friendly, and exchanged presents with Stevens in a council. At last Fort Union on the east bank of the Missouri near the mouth of the Yellowstone, and thus on the extreme western boundary of Minnesota Territory, was reached.

August 1.— . . . We came in sight of Missouri river, and the whole party gave three cheers as its beautiful bluff banks, dotted with timber, came in view. As we rounded the hill cutting off view of Fort Union, Grover came up, and was received with three cheers. On the coming out of Lieutenant Donelson and Mr. Denig, in charge of the post, I ordered a volley of the small arms of our command, to express admiration of his first arrival.¹⁹ This was answered by a salute of 13 guns.

¹⁹ Stevens had sent a detachment under Lieutenant Grover over a “more southern course” from Pike Lake, and another under Lieutenant A. J. Donelson up the Missouri by steamboat from St. Louis to Fort

We pitched camp 16½ miles from the camp of last night, and soon after there was an assembling of the whole party at my tent. I congratulated them on the zealous performance of their duty, gave them a cordial invitation to go on, and whatever their determination, even should they leave us here, promised them an honorable discharge. All seemed desirous of going on, and not one availed himself of the opportunity to leave the expedition.

Union. Both men reached the fort in advance of their leader. Their reports of these operations are included in the *Reports of Explorations and Surveys, to Ascertain the Most Practicable and Economical Route for a Railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean*, 1:231-247, 486-488 (33 Congress, 2 session, *House Executive Documents*, no. 91—serial 791). In this volume also are printed special reports by a number of other members of the party. Some years before Stevens' visit, Edwin T. Denig was the bookkeeper and clerk at Fort Union. Charles Larpenteur, *Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri*, 1:122; 2:250 (Coues edition, New York, 1898).



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