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Comment

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Comment by the Editor

A GAP IN IOWA HISTORY

For adventure, romance, heroic deeds, and epochal events, the annals of the Missouri River are almost without a parallel. From the middle of the sixteenth century, when Coronado and his Spanish cavaliers may have reached the Missouri Valley on their march from Mexico in search of Quivira, to the influx of American settlers just three hundred years later, this longest of North American rivers was the highway for a veritable pageant of explorers, fur traders, missionaries, scientists, soldiers, artists, and even foreign princes with their retinues.

While Louisiana belonged to France a few trading posts were established on the lower Missouri, and French voyageurs probably ventured as far up as Iowa. When the flag of Spain waved over the capital at St. Louis, companies of Spanish traders who worked far up the river past the Iowa country encountered their British rivals among the Sioux and Mandan Indians. During the first half of the American regime heavily laden keelboats, flotillas of canoes, and even steamboats navigated the muddy waters of the snag-strewn stream in ever increasing numbers. Discovery, commerce, and adventure were the principal missions of the daring men who joined

the spring processions from St. Louis to Fort Union and beyond.

Thus the pathway to the Far West formed a boundary of Iowa and the builders of a great empire traversed our western border. More than passing strange it seems then, that the historical records of the Iowa side of the Missouri River are extremely meager. Traders, explorers, and scientists with one accord appear to have neglected the verdant bluffs of the eastern shore from Fort Leavenworth to the mouth of the Big Sioux. Early descriptions of the country are fragmentary and vague. The diary of a man who travelled overland on the east side of the river from St. Joseph to Fort Pierre in 1850, as published in a Smithsonian Institution report, does not begin until he had left the bounds of Iowa. George Catlin's eyes were directed westward as he sat on the hill beside the grave of Sergeant Floyd. And E. de Girardin quite typically has almost nothing to say of the country between St. Joseph and the Big Sioux River.

What can the reason be?

J. E. B.