

## Early Exploration of Northern Iowa

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prehension of the impending changes. Then the practical overcomes the sentimental. The sadness is displaced by indifference if not stimulated into eagerness for the demolition of what was for that which is to be. At this point the writer would have the Iowa public pause in its hurly-burly, stay the floods and torrents of interest in the new era, to rescue from the oncoming waters not the sites and scenes, but by mound and shaft and tablet retrieve the facts of which they speak. He would have the public go in sentiment with Cruikshank to mark these sites and then with Cooper in his course of progress to submerge them forever.

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### EARLY EXPLORATION OF NORTHERN IOWA.

Endeavoring to assemble in THE ANNALS as much of what students call Iowa source materials as we can, we reprint from the Missouri Historical Society *Collections* the journal of a trip in 1820 by Stephen Watts Kearny across lands now within the States of Iowa and Minnesota.

As a basis from which to better appreciate that article, we here present correspondence through Hon. Horace M. Towner, with the Department of War, disclosing information upon conditions adjoining our western border, nearly a century ago:

My Dear Mr Towner:

I observe in our files of the *Boston Weekly Messenger* for August 24th and for September 28th, 1820, references to conditions at Council Bluffs, and enclose copies of these references herewith. Will you ascertain whether the facts alluded to in these are set out in any report?

Sincerely yours,

EDGAR R. HARLAN.

Hon. Horace M. Towner,

House of Representatives, Washington, D. C.

(Copies of the references enclosed.)

FROM THE COUNCIL BLUFFS.

*Extract of a letter from Council Bluffs, June 24th, 1820.*

I am glad that the fact authorizes me to state, that the troops at this post are restored to perfect health. There are not in both

corps, thirty men on the sick report, nor is there a single case of serious indisposition.

This position is, no doubt, as healthy as any part of the known world. The diseases with which men were afflicted last winter may be attributed to several causes. My own opinion is, however, that the most prominent ones were, unavoidable fatigues and exposures in ascending the river during the summer and autumn—heavy labor in constructing barracks, and being quartered in green, damp rooms, together with the intense cold of last winter. No sooner did the spring open, and the earliest vegetable unfold its bud, than the bowed down patient shook off his loathsome visitor, stood erect and was able to speed his course with the rapidity of the noble stream that fertilizes this garden of the western world.

The great and universal rise of the Missouri has driven us from our winter position. Almost the whole of the bottom lands are inundated. The flood is greater than recollected by the oldest Indian, nor do I believe that their traditions will carry them back to one of equal magnitude. The Platte is also in flood, and we tremble for Boon's-lick settlements and all the lower country.

We are engaged in removing the materials of our cantonment to the summit of the Bluff, where we are encamped, and where we shall put them up. It is quite probable we might occupy our old site for many years, with safety; but it is, nevertheless, possible, that it may be flooded the next season; hence, the propriety of effectually guarding against such a recurrence.

Our earliest planted gardens and a field of sixty acres of corn are deluged; our prospects are not, however, much blighted as our latest planted gardens, 200 acres of corn, 100 in beans, and 30 of potatoes, exhibit the most promising appearance. We shall, no doubt, gather 10,000 bushels of corn, 6 to 8,000 bushels of potatoes, as many turnips, and a large quantity of beans and other vegetables.

Capt. Magee, with a small command, is about setting out to mark a road from this position to the Falls of St. Anthony, and Lt. Fields, with a working party, is about to open the road which has been laid out to Chareton.

*The Boston Weekly Messenger.* August 24, 1820, p. 2.

ST. LOUIS, (Missouri) Aug. 23.—Arrived in town on Saturday, 19th, Col. Morgan, Captain Kearny, and Captain Pentland, of the United States army. These gentlemen, together with Captain Magee, left for Council Bluffs about six weeks ago, and went to the Falls of St. Anthony. They describe the country between the Bluffs and the Falls as eminently beautiful, the prairie predominating, but covered with grass and weeds, indicating a rich soil, the face of the country undulating, the streams of water clear and rapid, and occasionally lakes of living water of several miles cir-

cumference, embosomed in groves of timber, and edged with grass, and presenting the most delightful appearance in nature. They saw immense herds of buffalo and elks, sometimes several thousands in a gang. Having missed their way, they fell on the Mississippi at Lake Pepin, then went up to the Falls. The garrison there was in good health and cheerful, and had fine gardens and a promising crop on hand. Descending the Mississippi, they also saw good crops at Prairie du Chien, and among the Indians which inhabit the borders of the river. They confirm the accounts of the fine gardens and crops at Council Bluffs. Mr. Calhoun deserves well of the country for having instituted this system of cropping and gardening. It adds to the health, comfort and cheerfulness of the men and gives a certain subsistence to these remote posts. Major Bradford, who commands on the Arkansas, also arrived in town last week, and gives the most pleasing accounts of the comfort, health and cheerfulness of his garrison, and the adequate supplies which they are deriving from their own labors.—*Boston Weekly Messenger*, September 28, 1820, p. 1.

Dear Mr. Harlan:

I am enclosing you some information received this morning from the War Department.

Sincerely yours,

HORACE M. TOWNER,

Mr. Edgar R. Harlan,

Curator Historical Department, Des Moines, Iowa.

Hon. H. M. Towner,

House of Representatives.

Dear Sir:

In returning herewith the letter, received by your reference on the 29th instant from Mr. E. R. Harlan, Curator of the Historical Department of Iowa, who desires verification of certain data published in copies of the *Boston Weekly Messenger*, issued during the year 1820, relative to Council Bluffs, Iowa, I beg leave to advise you as follows:

An exhaustive search of the records on file in this office has resulted in failure to find any record of the letter from Council Bluffs, dated June 24, 1820, referred to by your correspondent. However, a letter dated June 19, 1820, from Colonel (afterward Brigadier General) H. Atkinson, 6th Infantry, commanding 9th Military District, to the Secretary of War, is somewhat similar to the letter quoted by your correspondent, in that it refers to the improved health of the command at Council Bluffs, to the effect of the floods, to the condition of the crops, to the opening of a road to Chareton and surveys to the Mississippi, and to an expedi-

tion under command of Captain Magee. A copy of that letter is enclosed herewith.

No record has been found in this office of the matter referred to by your correspondent as having been extracted from the *Boston Weekly Messenger* of September 28, 1820. \* \* \*

Very respectfully,

W. P. HALL,  
Adjutant General.

(Copy of letter enclosed.)

Council Bluffs, June 19th, 1820.

Sir: I have the honor to inform you that I arrived at this place on the 14th inst. The troops are restored to the most perfect health. The reports of this morning, return one non-comd. officer and sixteen privates of the Rifle Regt. and two non-comd. officers and twelve privates of the 6th Reg. sick. There is not, however, a single case of serious indisposition.

The unusual quantity of snow that fell, high up on the Missouri last winter, has produced a greater rise in the river, by many feet, than has ever been known before. All the first bottom land is inundated, and our cantonment unfortunately shares the same fate. We have pitched our camp on the Bluff and are engaged in bringing up the materials of the cantonment to rebuild. The work that we shall repeat up on the Bluff will be ample for all purposes of defense, and accommodations for the troops, for several years. Yet, as you contemplate occupying the post permanently, it will be well to commence, as soon as practicable, to erect barracks and works of brick. I do not think, however, that we shall be able to do much toward it the present season, as taking down and putting up again our present work, tending and gathering our crop, cutting and saving hay, erecting a grist mill, opening a road to Chareton, marking a route to St. Peters, exploring the country between this and the Mississippi, and driving up cattle and hogs to stock the post, will require all or most of our time. When the above objects are accomplished, most of which I consider of the first importance, our attention can be turned to erecting permanent works.

One of our fields of earliest corn, containing sixty acres and our first planted gardens are under water. Our principal corn field, of 200 acres, exhibits a very promising appearance, as do our last planted gardens and a field of thirty acres of potatoes. I shall put down thirty acres in turnips and finish planting amongst our corn an hundred acres in beans.

The land we cultivate is of the finest quality in the world, and if we gather as much from it as some traders say we shall, who have planted here, we shall have as much as we can waste. As soon as the crop arrives at a stage that it can be calculated upon

with a certainty, I will inform the Commissary General of the probable quantity of the several productions we shall reap.

A small party of Indians, supposed to be the Saueks, made an attack on a Mr. Pratt, a trader, some time last month, seventy miles above this. An officer was detached with a body of men in pursuit of the Indians. The report of the officer, Capt. Magee, a copy of which is herewith inclosed, gives a detailed acct. of the circumstances.

The Kamas, Ato, Iowa, Pawnee, Maha, and Sioux tribes continue to manifest the most friendly dispositions.

With the greatest respect, sir, I have the honor to be

Your mo. ob. Sergt.,

H. ATKINSON,

Col. 6th Infy., Comdg. 9th M. Dept.

The Honble. J. C. Calhoun,

Secy. of War, Washington City.

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The ferry boat plying between this and the opposite river is again free to all persons living in the county. We are glad to make this announcement to our friends on the south side of the river. Everything pertaining to the boat is in good order, and with a faithful accommodating ferryman, we invite all who wish to be put across the Des Moines in double-quick time, to come along. Oregon and California emigrants will consult their interests by crossing the river at this point.—*The Western American*, Keosauqua, Iowa, April 17, 1852.

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