

Fort Kearney, Oregon Route

Among the frontier outposts of Nebraska none has a more interesting history than Fort Kearney. Established before the territory was organized it was a stopping place for the thousands who journeyed overland before the Union Pacific railroad was completed and was an assurance of protection to the pioneers who came to find homes on the wind-blown prairie.

The buildings have long since disappeared and the only reminders of the scenes of life that were once enacted there are the stately trees that enclosed the quadrangle of the parade ground and the remains of the earth embankment which was thrown up during an Indian scare. The site lies on the south

bank of the Platte river, opposite the city of Kearney, but four miles to the east, and the beauty of the grove attracts many picnic parties during the summer. To reach the spot we drive down the main street of the city of Kearney, cross the two short bridges of the channels, and then reach the mile-long wooden structure that bridges the Platte. On the south side of the river the roadways of the section of country in and around the old reservation are lined with tall trees which give an air of long occupation quite unexpected in a western country. A mile from the bridge the drive lies east down a beautiful avenue of trees. For miles this double row of trees stretches away, narrowing in the distance until the opening at the end of the vista looks like a cleft in a mountain canyon. It is fortunate that the reservation was abandoned and opened to settlement, for this valley land is very productive.



ROAD THROUGH THE RESERVATION—PONTOON BRIDGING IN FENCE.

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First Fort Kearney.

The first Fort Kearney was on the site of Nebraska City, where a blockhouse was erected and five companies of troops wintered in 1847-8. This post was named after the doughty warrior, Colonel Steven Watts Kearney, who commanded the expedition to the South Pass in 1845. This was the first regular expedition which penetrated so far west, and was made for the purpose of becoming better acquainted with the country and perhaps, too, to have an intimidating effect on the various Indian tribes which were encountered on the way. In the spring of 1848 the troops which were wintered at Fort Kearney were ordered to New Mexico and the post was permanently abandoned.

At this time travel to Oregon was just beginning and as the scanty population of what is now Nebraska was huddled along the Missouri river, it became necessary to establish outposts to protect emigrants from marauding Indians. Secretary of War Marcy ordered Colonel Childs of the Missouri volunteers to establish a fort at some point at a considerable distance from the Missouri and on the south side of the Platte. Colonel Childs and his men moved up the Platte valley as far as the ford known as Carson's Crossing and here decided to build the fort, just opposite the point where the little station of Buda now stands. It is related that they began work, but some two or three weeks later a freshet swept away the partially completed buildings. They then moved back about a mile from the bank to higher ground, which place became the permanent location. The buildings were of sod and adobe. Cottonwood saplings were brought from the islands and planted to beautify the lonely spot. The post was at first called Fort Childs, but there is no military record of this name. In this same year Major Ruff succeeded Colonel Childs and the post was then called Fort Kearney, Oregon Route, and was referred to as New Fort Kearney.

Not Named After Phil Kearney.

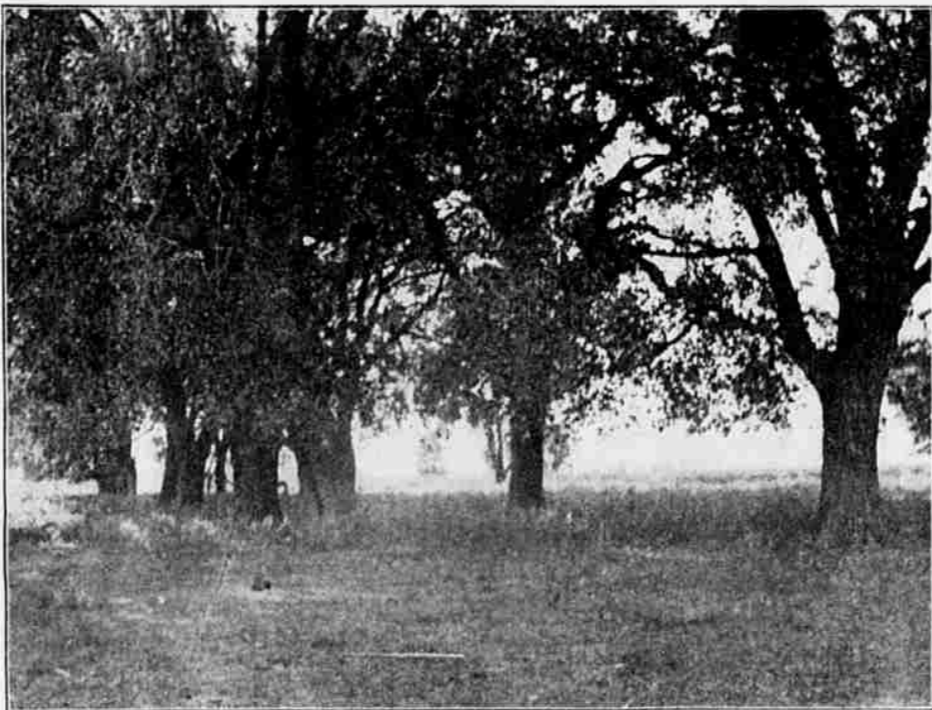
When Nebraska was organized as a territory in 1854, it was called Fort Kearney, Nebraska Territory. It has been stated that this post was named after Philip Kearney—"Fighting Phil"—but this is incorrect. It is true that Philip Kearney accompanied the South Pass expedition, but only as second lieutenant, while his uncle, Stephen Watts Kearney, was colonel, and it is unlikely that the lieutenant would be honored instead of his superior officer. Furthermore Stephen Kearney died in October, 1848, and it was in accordance with established custom that the new fort should bear his name. Besides the old Fort Kearney at Nebraska City was named for him and the new post was practically a re-

moval of the other. It is but an empty honor at any rate. In a list of officers in command of the post at various times, which list is, however, unofficial, the name of Philip Kearney appears as fourth. This seems to be an error, for the "Biography of Major Philip Kearney," published by his admiring kinsman, Major de Peyster, makes no mention of his visiting the fort in any capacity. This Major de Peyster presented to the city of Kearney some years ago a bronze bust of Philip Kearney, which now rests on a bracket in the city hall, the only ornament of an otherwise barren interior. It is noticeable that the family name was spelled "Kearny" and the fort and city "Kearney." The

northern part of the territory from Minnesota and caused general alarm. The second regiment of Nebraska cavalry was hastily organized, and under Colonel Furnas did excellent service in a short but brilliant campaign. The next year the Seventh Iowa volunteer cavalry was ordered to the frontier to protect the line of the overland stage route from Fort Kearney westward. Following the Chivington massacre in Colorado there were fears of a general uprising among all the Nebraska Indians, and, at this juncture the First regiment of Nebraska volunteers was ordered to Fort Kearney. The Indians are thought to have planned a general and simultaneous attack on all ranches and outposts. At Plum creek station, on August 1, 1864, they attacked the stage and killed the entire party, eleven in all. The telegraph sent the news and the attacks at other points were late and found the posts prepared. A general panic ensued and people fled from ranches in all directions to Fort Kearney. All overland travel was stopped and all wagons arriving were detained at the fort. It was at this time the earth embankment was erected for a rifle pit and it was expected that a bloody battle would be fought there, but fortunately it never occurred. The fort itself was never attacked, but numerous sallies were made from there and many brave soldiers gave up their lives. After a time travel was again resumed, but precautions for safety were observed. Travelers and supply wagons were organized into trains of fifty wagons each and after some drill were sent on under guidance of a captain. In all these troubles the Nebraska troops rendered excellent service until mustered out in 1866.

Dobey Town.

Just west of the reservation sprang up a collection of huts and hovels known as Adobe Town, sometimes shortened to "Dobey Town" and also called Kearney City. It is related that the place at one time had fourteen saloons, though there were only six families there. These saloons were, of course, sustained by the custom of travelers. A detailed history of Adobe Town would have a weird sort of interest no doubt if all facts could be brought to light. A little



LARGE TREES ABOUT THE OLD PARADE GROUND.

change was of course an error in recording.

In 1858 Colonel May took command of the fort. He caused the old sod and adobe buildings to be destroyed and replaced by better ones. A saw mill was set up and the cottonwoods of the islands were cut and sawed into lumber for the new buildings. This section of country was claimed by the Pawnees and Colonel May arranged a treaty by which the government gained possession of a tract ten miles square. This extended two miles west of the fort buildings and eight miles east, to the present site of Lowell. On the north it extended across the river and included numerous islands for many miles up and down the Platte. These islands were especially valuable for the timber they afforded. In return for this the Pawnees were given the exclusive use of Nance county, their favorite home, and were promised that schools would be established for them and their children educated and instructed in agriculture. Needless to say, the promises were not fulfilled.

The Military Road.

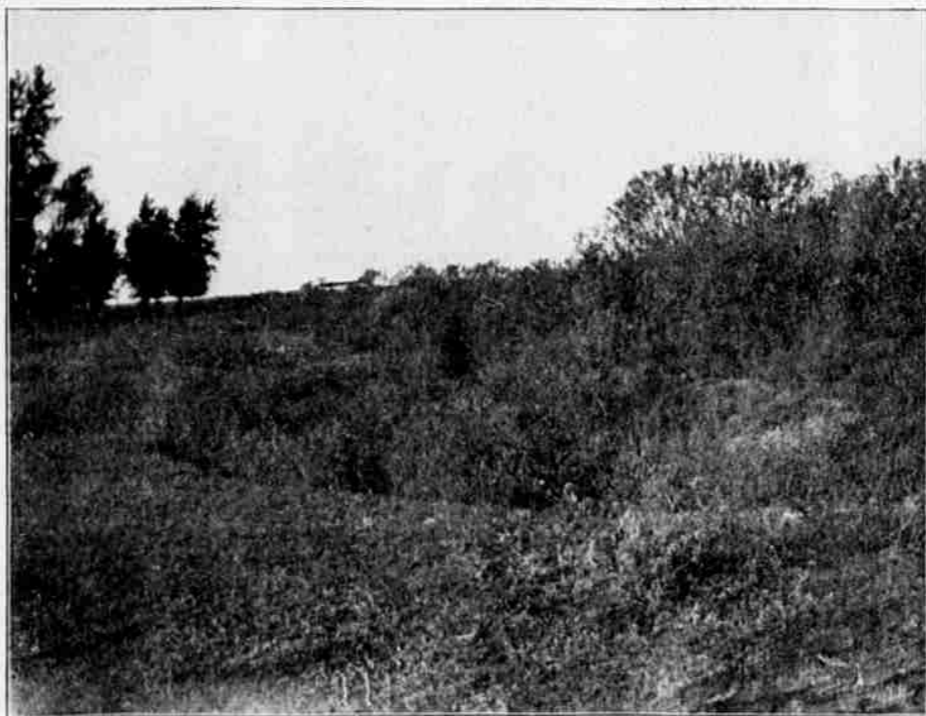
Previously, in 1850, a military road had been established between Fort Leavenworth and Fort Kearney, and was also ceded by treaty. Fort Laramie was established in 1849, and all supply trains to this post passed through Fort Kearney. When gold was discovered in California, and later at Pike's Peak, the rush of gold seekers, together with the Oregon travel, made a steady stream of travel through the fort. By 1860 a daily stage was established and the telegraph line was in operation. Stage ranches or stations were established at frequent intervals, where horses and drivers were exchanged for fresh ones. At this time the fort was a scene of continuous activity and life there was both exciting and interesting.

At the beginning of the civil war the population of the fort was about equally divided in sympathy. There was naturally some friction, but nothing serious occurred. A number of officers left the fort to go south and were afterwards heard from in the southern army.

The worst of Nebraska's Indian fighting began in 1862, and most of the offensive operations against Indians were conducted from Fort Kearney. Powerful bands of hostile Indians were swarming into the

farther west and near the river is a close thicket of cottonwoods enclosing the spot where once stood a house. The place was on the old stage road and was called "Dirty Woman's Ranch" with a due regard to the fitness of things. Travelers were often lodged here over night and if those trees could speak they could tell some wild, weird tales.

After the close of the war, in 1866, General Pope, commander-in-chief, visited Fort Kearney. He was much pleased with the location and under his orders great improvements were made. A steam sawmill was set up, logs were brought from inland and numerous buildings were erected. The next year General Sherman succeeded General Pope and he made a tour of inspection of the Platte valley. While at the fort General Sherman rode out with Colonel Carrington,



REMAINS OF OLD EMBANKMENT.

branches of a numerous family connection. They were variously occupied, and a profusion of wooden horses, penny trumpets and tattered dolls about the floor showed traces of a little troop of fairy beings who had frolicked through a happy day.

While the mutual greetings were going on between Bracebridge and his relatives I had time to scan the apartment. The grate had been removed from the wide, overhanging fireplace, to make way for a fire of wood, in the midst of which was an enormous log, glowing and blazing and sending forth a vast volume of light and heat. This, I understood, was the Yule-log, which the squire was particular in having brought in and illumined on Christmas eve, according to ancient custom.

the post commander, together with officers and ladies of the fort to view the country. As they rode through Adobe Town some one from within one of the squalid little houses hissed the party. Very soon after the general avenged the insult by ordering the abandonment of the post. An urgent protest from settlers who feared to be left without protection resulted in one company of troops being left at the fort and from that time it remained a one-company post until it was permanently abandoned in 1871.

The large trees which were planted in 1848, though cottonwoods, are remarkably beautiful. One of them measures nearly ten feet in circumference. The embankment built for protection in case of an Indian attack is in the form of a square about as large as a city block. The wall of earth still shows an average height of five feet and must have settled, for it was made thirty-five years ago. The corners are rounded out in buttresses or caissons, and at the time a drawbridge was arranged for entrance and exit. The grounds of the former post building are now occupied by a prosperous farmer of Kearney county. When the snap shot of the trees was taken some thrifty calves were taking their supper from a wooden trough and about the embankment peaceful cows were browsing. The quiet scene was in contrast to that other when settlers and emigrants were hastening into the fort for protection.

The railroad reached Kearney station in 1866 and in fact crossed Nebraska in 1866-7 and this put a stop to much of the overland travel. Supplies were then brought by rail to Kearney station and transported across the river to Fort Kearney. The pontoon bridging which now forms part of a fence on the road leading through the old reservation was never used, probably because the water was too shallow to make it practicable. An ox ferry was used for a long time, a flat boat drawn by oxen, which walked or swam according to the depth. The railroad brought many excursionists as visitors and life at the fort was both pleasant and interesting. At one time a party of eastern editors was entertained at the fort and while there participated in a grand buffalo hunt, an account of which was afterwards written up in numerous eastern journals.

When the fort was abandoned the buildings were taken down, part were removed to other posts and others disposed of to settlers. Adobe Town, having no more patronage, dwindled away and fell to pieces until it became but a memory.

M. B. DAVIS.

Christmas Eve

By Washington Irving.

It was a brilliant moonlight night, but extremely cold; the postboy smacked his whip incessantly and a part of the time his horses were on a gallop. "He knows where he is going," said my companion, laughing, "and is eager to arrive in time for some of the merriment and good cheer of the servants' hall. My father is a devotee of the old school and prides himself on keeping up something of old English hospitality. He was always scrupulous in exacting our holidays and having us around him on family festivals. It was the policy of the good, old gentleman to make his children feel that home was the happiest place in the world and I value this delicious home-feeling as one of the choicest gifts a parent can bestow."

The squire ushered us at once to the company, which was assembled in a large, old-fashioned hall. It was composed of different

squire seated in his hereditary elbow chair by the hospitable fireside of his ancestors and looking around him like the sun of a system beaming warmth and gladness to every heart. Even the very dog that lay stretched at his feet, as he lazily shifted his position and yawned, would look fondly up in his master's face, wag his tail against the floor and stretch himself again to sleep, sure of kindness and protection.

Supper was announced shortly after our arrival. It was served up in a spacious oaken chamber, the panels of which shone with wax, and around which were several family portraits, decorated with holly and ivy. Besides the accustomed lights, two great wax tapers, called Christmas candles, wreathed with greens, were placed on a highly polished buffet among the family plate. The table was abundantly spread with substantial fare, but the squire made his supper of frumenty, a dish made of wheat cakes boiled in milk, with rich spices, being a dish in old times for Christmas eve. I was happy to find my old friend, minced pie, in the retinue of the feast.

The supper had disposed every one to gaiety, and an old harper was summoned from the servants' hall. The dance, like most dances after supper, was a merry one. Some of the older folk joined in it, and the squire himself figured down several couples with a partner with whom he affirmed he had danced at every Christmas for nearly half a century.

The party broke up for the night with the kind-hearted old custom of shaking hands. As I passed through the hall on the way to my chamber, the dying embers of the Yule-log still sent forth a dusky glow, and had it not been the season when "no spirit dares stir abroad," I should have been half tempted to steal from my room at midnight and peep whether the fairies might not be at their revels about the hearth.

I had scarcely got into bed when a strain of music seemed to break forth in the air just below the window. I listened, and found it proceeded from a band which I concluded to be the waits from some neighboring village. I drew aside the curtains to hear them more distinctly. The moonbeams fell through the upper part of the casements, partially lighting up the antiquated apartment. The sounds as they receded became more soft and aerial, and seemed to accord with quiet and moonlight. I listened and listened. They became more and more tender and remote, and as they gradually died away my head sank upon the pillow and I fell asleep.

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Prominent Young Business and Professional Men of Omaha

The young men whose pictures are presented on the opposite page are today without question the most potent factors in the prosperity and advancement of the city's social and material interests. Their success in commercial and professional life is due solely to energy, ability and enterprise and they are today the best representatives of the progressive element. Some of these young men control and direct large commercial interests and others have already achieved distinction in their chosen professions. The closing days of the nineteenth century show a large number of young men occupying positions of trust and honor and in this respect, as in everything, Omaha is well to the front in the race with other cities.

Kruger's Armored Trains

The South African armored trains now being employed consist of nothing more or less than ordinary cars covered over with from half to three-quarters of an inch of common steel, the locomotive being similarly protected and a car placed in front with a gun in advance. These trains are, of course, of little or no use if the line falls into the hands of the enemy—a few dynamite cartridges, or the removal of a rail or two (as was painfully demonstrated in the recent disaster to the Mafeking train) would render them a source more of danger than of service.

German Spinners Coming

The Zreuz Zeitung of Berlin says that the large spinning works at Gera, a group of worsted spinners and several Rhenish silk and woollen spinners will soon establish branches in the United States.