

Morton's History of Nebraska

Authentic—1400 to 1906—Complete

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CHAPTER III CONTINUED (9)

The News of April 28, 1860, tells of a new route to the mines, by way of Olathe, on Salt creek, which shortens the distance by fifty to seventy-five miles. June 30 the News says that Cadman's, Goodwin's, and Davison's, on Salt creek, and Vifquain's on the Blue are good farms for entertainment on the new straight road to Kearney. The place on the Blue referred to was for many years subsequently the farmstead of Gen. Victor Vifquain, and Cadman's was John Cadman's home- stead. The News of July 28, illustrating the extensive freighting business at Nebraska City, says that Hawke, Nuckolls & Co. sent in a train of twenty wagons from the mines for supplies. On the 24th of November the same paper gives a statement of Alexander Majors' freighting business to Utah, the western forts, and Pike's Peak, from April 25 to October 13, 1860: Pounds transported, 2,782,258; oxen used, 5,687; wagons used, 515; mules used, 72; men employed, 602.

At that time Hawke & Nuckolls were, next to Majors, the heaviest freighters. The News of December 22, 1860, gives the following itinerary of the freight route from Nebraska City: To Little Nemaha, 9 miles, good bridge across the Nemaha; Nemaha to Brownell creek, 10 miles, good ford; to north branch of Nemaha, 6 miles, good crossing, plenty of good water; to Buck's Bend, 5 miles, a rock ford on the Nemaha; to Salt creek, 20 miles—bridge begun—large steam saw and grist mill; to junction of the old road, 3 miles; to the Blue, 25 miles, bridge absolutely necessary, impossible for heavy teams to cross; Blue to Dry Run, 20 miles, never falling spring of water; Dry Run to a spring, 20 miles; to the junction of Leavenworth road, 60 miles; total, 178 miles.

The same paper contains a map of the route from Nebraska City to Ft. Kearney, giving distances from point to point, making a total of 169 1/2 miles, as follows: from Nebraska City to North fork of Little Nemaha, 6 1/2 miles; up Little Nemaha to Brownell creek, 7 miles; to Little Nemaha, 4 miles; to the head of Little Nemaha, 21 miles; to Salt creek, 11 miles; to east fork Big Blue, 17 miles; to a grove of timber, 17 miles; to head of Big Blue river, 50 miles; to Platte river, 17 miles; to Ft. Kearney, 19 miles.

The Nebraska City News gives the following account of a contract just made between the authorities of the United States army and Russell, Majors & Waddell:

"The contract amounts to \$1,700,000. Five thousand tons of government supplies and stores are now preparing for shipment to this place to be conveyed hence in ox wagons, up the valley of the Platte and across the mountains to Utah. To move this immense mass will require two thousand heavy wagons, twenty hundred ox drivers and train masters, and from eighteen to twenty thousand oxen, and in one continuous column will present a length of forty miles. Mr. Majors, one of the government contractors for transporting this freight, has taken up his residence in this city, and of course will prove an inestimable addition to its society, both socially, morally, and in a business point of view. The capacious wharf, built specially to receive this freight, is nearly completed, and when finished will be one of the very best on the river."

In view of this great commercial boon and boom a public meeting of citizens of Nebraska City was held on the 25th of February at which resolutions were adopted pledging it by the written obligation of "the mayors of the three cities"—presumably Nebraska City proper, South Nebraska City and Kearney City—in the sum of \$100,000, that the levee should be finished by the opening of navigation, and that a committee of thirteen should be appointed to carry out the resolution that "the business of dram selling is demoralizing, illegal, and a public nuisance, and we heartily approve of the condition imposed of their suppression." The committee of thirteen were pledged "to take immediate and efficient measures to abate the nuisance, wherever they arise in this locality, and to maintain the law in our community by moral suasion if possible and that falling by every other lawful and honorable means."

In glorification over this contract, the same paper, of February 27, 1858, announces that in the coming months of April, May, June and July two thousand wagons, hauled by sixteen thousand cattle, hitched up with two acres of ox yokes and driven by two thousand ox drivers, would start across the plains. The item promises to the citizens a season of grand opera, when "Bellows Falls, or the Glory of a Bovine Jehu" would be presented nightly.

The Nebraska City News leaves in unexplained ambiguity the question whether the advantage of the Nebraska City over the Leavenworth route lay in distance or in the superiority of oxen over mules: "The ox trains leaving Nebraska City in May reached Ft. Kearney, unloaded and made four days travel back towards Nebraska City when they met mule trains from Leavenworth that left there in April."

A curious illustration of the dependence of the people upon even impracticable water transportation as late as 1858 is afforded by a statement in the Advertiser that a small steambot had ascended the Big Nemaha as far as

Falls City—twenty-five miles—coupled with the remark that, "this can not fail to prove gratifying to the enterprising citizens of this flourishing and prosperous young city."

The mode of taking pleasure trips, as well as that of commercial transportation, in those ante-railroad days is illustrated in an article puffing the steamer Wautossa which appeared in the Omaha Times June 17, 1858: "The Wautossa arrived here 'up to time' on Sunday morning last. Captain Morrison finding, at our levee and at other landings near here, a large quantity of freight, awaiting shipment for points above, consented to extend this trip to Sioux City. The Wautossa departed for Sioux City on Tuesday morning, having on board pleasure parties from Nebraska City, Council Bluffs and Omaha. A band of music accompanied the party. The trip can not fall of being a pleasant one to all on board."

Travelers at this time report a great deal of gold on the road from the mines to Nebraska City. The Nebraskan notes that two hundred miles of the route to the mines is over a military road, constructed by the federal government, and gives much space to glorifying that route and the importance of the gold fields. A panoramic view of the North Platte route ten thousand feet long was exhibited in Omaha as an advertisement. Cottonwood Springs in those days was counted "ten days from Omaha." May 23, 1860, the Omaha Republican reports that crossing Loup Fork at Columbus can be accomplished "in very few minutes." About four-fifths of the emigrants through Omaha cross the Platte at Shinn's ferry. The correspondent says that since leaving Ft. Kearney there had not been less than fifty to one hundred teams in sight at any time. Residents estimated that two thousand five hundred to three thousand teams had already passed along this route that season, and, allowing about five persons to a team, he estimated that from ten thousand to fifteen thousand people had gone over that road to the mines during the spring in question. There were plenty of antelope and other kinds of game, but no buffalo were to be seen.

The Republican of August 15, 1860, notes that many adventurous individuals are building boats at Denver for the purpose of navigating the Platte, and thereupon gives this sage counsel: "We would advise all that such an enterprise is attended with great difficulties, and often results in the total abandonment of the boat after many weeks of fruitless endeavor to reach the Missouri." The Nebraskan says that not less than twenty Pike's Peak wagons pass its office daily, and thirty were counted one afternoon; and the same paper of April 28 says that teams are passing Ft. Kearney at the rate of two hundred a day. In the same issue there is a statement that the rate for freight from Omaha to Denver is \$9 per hundred pounds, and that there is much of it lying at Omaha awaiting transportation. In this paper James E. Boyd & Co. advertise that they keep a general merchandise store and a stable capable of accommodating forty horses on the north side of the Platte river directly opposite Ft. Kearney, and the Genoa ferry is advertised to carry teams across the Loup Fork "at the town of Genoa, 18 miles west of Columbus, where there is a good crossing from bank to bank." O. P. Hurford also advertises a ferry over the same stream at Columbus. In this interesting issue of the Nebraskan we find also a notice of the organization of the Missouri & Western Telegraph Co. at St. Louis, of which Edward Creighton of Omaha was treasurer and Robert C. Clowry of St. Louis secretary and superintendent. It is announced that the company intends to construct a telegraph line to Omaha and Council Bluffs immediately, and to extend it westward to the Pike's Peak region.

The News notes that the Messrs. Byram will send out two or three heavy trains a week to Pike's Peak guarded by thirty armed men. On the 9th of August, 1862, the News avows that the round trip to Denver from Nebraska City is two hundred miles shorter than from St. Joe or Leavenworth and fifty miles shorter than via Omaha. The following is a good illustration of the importance which the northern route from Omaha had assumed by the summer of 1859:

"The secretary of the Columbus Ferry Co. at Loup Fork informs the Omaha Nebraskan that the emigration across the plains, up to June 25, was as follows: 1,807 wagons, 20 hand carts, 5,401 men, 424 women, 480 children, 1,610 horses, 406 mules, 6,010 oxen, and 6,000 sheep had crossed this ferry at that point. This statement includes no portion of the Mormon emigration, but embraces merely California, Oregon and Pike's Peak emigrants and their stock, all going westward. The returning emigration cross at Shinn's Ferry, some fifteen miles below the confluence of the Loup Fork with the Platte. Many of the outward-bound emigrants also crossed at the same point, so that it is probable that not less than 4,000 wagons have passed over the military road westward from this city since the 20th of March."

The Advertiser, which at this time was fervently loyal, insisted that traffic should be diverted from Nebraska City as a punishment for disloyalty to the cause of the Union. The Nebras-

kian avows that a traveler met seven hundred teams in one day between Loup Fork (Columbus) and the Elkhorn river. About five hundred of these would keep the north route and cross the Loup at Columbus; the other two hundred would cross the Platte by Shinn's ferry, "and take the tortuous route on the other side of the river." Another traveler reported that the whole region about Buffalo and Elm creeks is a valley of death, strewn white with buffalo bones over the whole width of the Platte bottom and fifty miles in length. The same paper, June 2, 1860, says that up to that time an average of thirty-five teams and three men to a team had crossed the Missouri river at Omaha on the way to the mines. The Press of Nebraska City says:

"There are four principal routes to the gold mines: the Omaha route crosses the Papillion, the Elkhorn, and Loup Fork, three large and bad streams, and a great number of smaller ones, and the Platte, the worst river to ford in the west, and is six hundred miles long. The St. Joe and Leavenworth route crosses the Soldier, grasshopper, Nemaha, Walnut, Big Blue, Sandy, Little Blue, and many other tributaries of the Kansas, at points where there are no bridges and are difficult to ford—distance, six hundred and fifty to seven hundred miles. The Kansas City route, up the Kansas and Arkansas rivers is a bad and difficult road. From Kansas City to the mouth of Cherry creek it is nine hundred miles. The Nebraska City route runs along the divide between the southern tributaries of the Platte and the northern tributaries of the Kansas and crosses but one stream of more than a few inches of water on the whole route. There are good timber, water and grazing along the whole line. It is about five hundred miles—the road has not (nor have any) been measured, but we judge from the time of travel; ox teams have come from Auraria to Nebraska City in twenty-five days."

The Huntsman's Echo, published at Wood River Center, Buffalo county, shows that our own heyday of monopoly of transportation is no new thing: "The people of the Pike's Peak mining district, together with all concerned, and the rest of mankind, will be pleased to learn that after being swindled, gouged, imposed upon, and literally robbed in the matter of mail facilities and service by that arch-monopoly, Jones, Russell & Co., for near two years they are now provided by the department, at American rates, a mail from Omaha, by this place and Ft. Kearney, once a week and back. The Western Stage Co., the most accommodating, punctual and reliable in the mail service, has the contract and have already sent out one mail."

Query: Did this editor have a pass? The Nebraska City News notes that a daily mail line overland to California, via St. Joe, has recently been established. The Press, of Nebraska City, quotes an item from the last Nebraskan stating that the telegraph line between Omaha and Ft. Kearney has just been finished and that news by pony express will doubtless come from Kearney by wire in future.

The Nebraska City news reports that grading is going on across the river for the Council Bluffs and St. Joe railway; and the same paper, describing the Salt Lake traffic from Omaha, says that in two days over a month six hundred and thirty-two large government wagons, each carrying on an average five thousand pounds of freight to Colorado merchants at the mines, passed through Nebraska City. The Nebraskan says that "five trains of sixty wagons each, loaded with freight and Mormon poor, have left for Salt Lake, and five more are to go, making six hundred wagons in all—the last to go this week. There are already two thousand emigrants on the plains and two thousand yet to leave." Freight on a cotton mill for Salt Lake had already cost \$1,500 as far as Omaha.

In the spring of 1865 there was bitter complaint by the partisans of the Omaha route because travelers were not protected from the Indians. It was charged that anywhere between the mouth of the Elkhorn and the forks of the Platte the North Platte route was ignored by the military and was in a state of outlawry. After passing Ft. Kearney travelers north of the south fork were at the mercy of the Indians for a distance of two hundred miles. It was charged also that Brig.-Gen. P. E. Connor telegraphed on the 24th of May, 1865, to Capt. S. H. Morer at Omaha as follows: "Please notify all trains coming west that they must cross the Platte at Plattsmouth. They can not cross the Platte east of Laramie, and I have not the troops to escort them on the north side." The Republican at this time charges Morer, Colonel Livingston and General Connor with favoritism for the Plattsmouth route. On the 27th of May, 1865, a meeting was held at Omaha for the purpose of raising a subscription of \$50,000 for building a bridge across the Platte in the interest of the North Platte route, and among those on the subscription committee were Edward Creighton, Ezra Millard and Dr. Geo. L. Miller.

Representatives of the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad Co. took a lively part in the protest against the change of the route of the Union Pacific railway to the southern, or ox-bow line; and on the 21st of Decem-

ber, 1866, Dr. Miller, in the Omaha Herald, assists J. Sterling Morton in his attack in the Nebraska City News on Secretary Harlan's decision that the Burlington company might go outside the twenty mile limit to locate its land grant. The Herald complains bitterly that to do so "withholds from occupation and sale three million acres of the best lands in Nebraska." The Burlington company objected to the Union Pacific's change of line because it lapped over its own land grant.

On the 25th of October, 1867, the News says that there is a tri-weekly stage from Nebraska City to Lincoln doing a large business—"the only regular line of stages from the Missouri river to Lincoln." The Republican says:

"The Burlington & Missouri River railroad has been located as far west as a point opposite Plattsmouth, and surveys have been made from that place west with a view to a connection with the Union Pacific at, or not greatly beyond Columbus. The proposed extension of that line west of the Missouri river is to be in the valley of the Platte and Lincoln City has never been thought of as a point. Besides we venture the assertion that no intelligent man in Nebraska believes that the Burlington road will ever be built west of the Missouri river in any direction. It will seek a connection with the Union Pacific at Omaha, where it can compete on equal terms with the other roads running through Omaha, and will not be guilty of the folly of inviting the opposition of the Union Pacific by seeking to tap it at some point west of this city."

The only excuse for the Republican's prophetic blindness is consideration of the fact that its mistakes had a great deal of company of the same sort at that time. The Republican observes that the Chicago & Northwestern Railway Co. at one time contemplated a connection with the Union Pacific at Columbus or Kearney, crossing the river at Decatur sixty miles north; but, seeing that the Mississippi & Missouri (Rock Island) would form a connection with the Union Pacific at Omaha, the Northwestern changed its route to that city where it could compete on equal terms with its rival. The Republican laughed unrestrainedly at the statement that the Northwestern would go to Lincoln.

On the 4th of December, 1867, the Republican speaks of a famous early transportation company as follows: "The old Northwestern Stage Co. is known by every man, woman and child in Iowa and Nebraska. . . . Its coaches rolled over every road. For years it was the only means of intercommunication—even as late as two years ago."

The Brownville Advertiser gives an interesting sketch of the effect of these freight routes upon the almost sole industry—agriculture—in the course of a complaint of the sloth of Nemaha county in competition for the trade of the lines:

"The truth is farmers, more than anybody else, would be benefited by a good road to Ft. Kearney. The market for farm produce is now west of us in Colorado and the forts. The thousands of gold hunters in the mountains are fed from the Missouri valley. There is no county in Nebraska that produces more than Nemaha. The surplus is gathered up by freighters, but they do not pay as much here by 20 per cent as in Nebraska City simply because the road from here needs a little mending. Freighters pay 25 cents a bushel for corn at Nebraska City and only 15 and 20 cents here. A bridge, or a good ford, across the Blue, at or near Beatrice, would be worth thousands annually to Nemaha, Richardson, Pawnee, Johnson, Clay and Gage counties."

The Advertiser further complains that:

"Ten times as much of the travel across the plains leaves the river from Omaha and Nebraska City as from Brownville. Ten times as many freighters start for Denver, Julesburg and the forts from Omaha and Nebraska City as from this county. The route from here to Ft. Kearney is naturally better than any other; in distance it is shorter than most other routes; the road is comparatively level; no large streams except the Nemaha to cross; plenty of good water and pasture, and between here and the Leavenworth road at Sandy you are never out of sight of timber. Had about two good bridges been built five years ago a large portion of the vast emigration to the mines would have passed over this route. We vainly hoped that government would see the importance of this route and would aid us in making a good road. Meanwhile the tide of travel influenced by interested parties became fixed to other roads."

In August, 1862, the Scientific American copied from the Nebraska City News an account of the trip of a steam wagon—the Prairie Motor—which had started for Denver, "drawing three road wagons containing five tons of freight, two cords of wood, and all the wagons were crowded with excited citizens." The article goes on to relate that there were five regular stage routes between the Missouri river and the west, all of which concentrated at Ft. Kearney, and that the stage fare for a single passenger from Nebraska City to Denver was \$75, and the time taken for the trip one week, traveling day and night. "The citizens

of Nebraska in view of these facts have regarded the introduction of the steam wagon with enthusiasm as a great improvement upon the common slow and expensive system of animal teaming on the prairie road. On the 28th of July last they met in mass convention at Nebraska City and requested the authorities of the county to construct a road to its western limits suitable for the steam wagon so as to make Nebraska City the focus of the steam wagon line." The Nebraska City News relates that, "General Brown's steam wagon which left here last week, has, we regret to learn, met with an accident. About twelve miles from the city one of the cranks of the wagon shaft broke and stopped further progress for the present. . . . The wagon had got over the last rise of ground and was about to start on the long divide which runs clear through to Kearney when it broke. The accident will cause a delay of about three weeks. General Brown left immediately for New York with the broken parts to have them replaced. Messrs. Sloate and Osborne, the engineers, remain here and will push immediately forward when the new shaft arrives." But the experiment was abandoned at this stage.

Since Nebraska was, in law and in fact, exclusively "Indian country" prior to the time of its organization as a territory—1854—it had no roads except such as had been laid out in the natural course of travel, and no bridges except such as might have been voluntarily built by travelers over the smaller streams. The first appropriation for a highway within the present Nebraska was made by act of Congress February 17, 1855, which authorized the construction of "a territorial road from a point on the Missouri river (opposite the city of Council Bluffs), in the territory of Nebraska, to New Ft. Kearney in said territory." On the 3d of March, 1857, Congress appropriated \$30,000 "for the construction of a road from the Platte river via the Omaha reserve and Dakota City to the Running Water river," under the direction of the Secretary of the Interior. Appropriations were made for roads within the original territory, but not within the present state, as follows: February 6, 1855, \$30,000, "for a military road from the Great Falls of the Missouri river in the territory of Nebraska to intersect the military road now established leading from Walla Walla to Puget Sound." July 22, 1856, \$50,000 "for the construction of a road from Ft. Ridgely, in the territory of Minnesota, to the South Pass of the Rocky mountains, in the territory of Nebraska." On the 3d day of March, 1865, an appropriation of \$50,000 was made for the construction of a wagon road from the mouth of Turtle Hill river to Omaha, and from the same point to Virginia City, Montana. The main motive for the construction of these highways in the northwest was national, that is, to provide for transportation of troops and supplies into the country where British influence at the earlier dates and the Indians all the time were most to be feared. Encouragement and accommodation of local settlements was no doubt an important but secondary consideration.

CHAPTER IV.

The Louisiana Purchase.

Quest for the germ of political Nebraska leads us back just through the brief period of the nation's miraculous making, when—April 2, 1743—at Shadwell, Albemarle county, Virginia, in the shadow of the Blue Ridge mountains, we find Martha, the mother, clasping to her bosom the new-born Thomas Jefferson, under whose sandy hair are the brains that are to give to mankind the Declaration of Independence; to give distinction to American diplomacy at the court of France, between the years 1785 and 1789, as the first secretary of state under the federal constitution; to initiate and develop the foreign and domestic policy of the young republic; to become president in 1801; to negotiate and complete the Louisiana purchase from Napoleon Bonaparte in 1803 at a cost of about two and three-fifths cents an acre. The aggregate amount paid for this new empire, of which the present Nebraska forms but about a twelfth part, was \$15,000,000. Of this purchase price France received in United States bonds \$11,250,000, and by agreement the remaining \$3,750,000 was paid to American citizens in liquidation of claims against the French government. When the United States took formal possession of these lands on December 20, 1803, the Union consisted of but seventeen states, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and Vermont, with a total area of 444,393 square miles, or 284,411,520 acres. But Mr. Jefferson's purchase of contiguous territory covered 890,921 square miles, including both land and water surface, or 878,641 square miles—562,330,240 acres—of land alone; and it lacked but little of being twice as large—as it certainly was twice as valuable for agriculture and mining—as the seventeen states named. Today, with all the more extensively and less peacefully acquired islands of Hawaii, Porto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines in the reckoning, the Louisiana Purchase of President Jefferson comprises nearly one-fourth of the republic.