

# Morton's History of Nebraska

Authentic—1400 to 1906—Complete

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## CHAPTER II CONTINUED. (3)

"The party consisted of nine young men from Kentucky, fourteen soldiers of the United States army, who volunteered their services, two French watermen, an interpreter and hunter, and a black servant belonging to Captain Clark—all of these, except the last, were enlisted to serve as privates, during the expedition, and three sergeants appointed from amongst them by the captains. In addition to these were engaged a corporal and six soldiers, and nine watermen to accompany the expedition as far as the Mandan nation, in order to assist in carrying the stores, or repelling an attack, which was most to be apprehended between Wood River and that tribe. The necessary stores were subdivided into seven bales, and one box, containing a small portion of each article in case of accident. They consisted of a great variety of clothing, working utensils, locks, flints, powder, ball, and articles of the greatest use. To these were added fourteen bales and one box of Indian presents, distributed in the same manner, and composed of richly laced coats and other articles of dress, medals, flags, knives, and tomahawks for the chiefs—ornaments of different kinds, particularly beads, looking glasses, handkerchiefs, paints, and generally such articles as were deemed best calculated for the taste of the Indians.

"The party was to embark on board of three boats; the first was a keel boat thirty-five feet long, drawing three feet water, one large square sail and twenty-two oars, a deck of ten feet in the bow and stern formed a fore-cabin and cabin, while the middle was covered by lockers, which might be raised so as to form a breast work in case of attack. This was accompanied by two perquoies or open boats, one of six and the other of seven oars. Two horses were at the same time to be led along the banks of the river for the purpose of bringing home game, or hunting in case of scarcity. . . . All the preparations being completed, we left our encampment on Monday, May 14, 1804. This spot is at the mouth of Wood river, a small stream which empties itself into the Mississippi, opposite to the entrance to the Missouri."

The expedition, following up the Missouri river, came in sight of the present Nebraska on the afternoon of July 11, 1804. It camped on the Missouri side, immediately opposite the mouth of the Big Nemaha, and the next day some members of the company explored the lower valley of that river.

This expedition is of particular importance as it gives the first historical glimpse of the eastern border of Nebraska. From the point where it first touched the present state at the southeast corner to the point at the northeast corner, where the Missouri river reaches its borders, the distance is 277 miles as the bird flies. According to the government survey, the distance between these two points is 441 miles, following the meanderings of the river. The Lewis-Clark expedition recorded 556 miles of river front for the state in 1804.

On the 8th of September the explorers left the present limits of Nebraska and continued their voyage up the Missouri, then crossed the dividing mountain chains, and launched their boats on the swift Columbia, following it to its mouth. Two years later they returned over the same route and gave a graphic description of the vast country they had traversed.

The explorers first camped on Nebraska soil July 15, near the mouth of the Little Nemaha. The camp of July 18 was not far from the present site of Nebraska City. According to Floyd's Journal the camp of July 20 was on the Nebraska side, and under a high bluff, three miles north of Weeping Water creek. On the 21st of July the party passed the mouth of the Platte river and encamped on the Nebraska side (probably not far from the southeast corner of section 31, township 13, range 14 E.). They passed on up the river for a distance of ten miles the next morning and then camped on the eastern shore. Here they remained for five days. They explored the country in all directions and sent for the surrounding Indians to meet them in a council at a point farther up the river. While they were here dispatches and maps were prepared to be sent to the president. July 27, they swam their horses to the Nebraska side and continued the journey northward.

The camp of July 30 was at Council Bluff. This is the most important camp ground of the Lewis-Clark expedition within the state. Subsequently (1819) it became the site of the first military post established in Nebraska. There is no doubt that the recommendation of this site by the captains, Lewis and Clark, determined the location of what was afterward known as Camp Missouri, Ft. Atkinson, and finally Ft. Calhoun. The importance of this camp warrants a quotation from that part of the journal describing Council Bluff:

"The land here consists of a plain, above the high water level, the soil of which is fertile, and covered with a grass from five to eight feet high, interspersed with copses of large plums and a currant like those of the United States. . . . Back of this plain is a woody ridge, about

seventy feet above it, at the end of which we formed our camp. This ridge separates the lower from a higher prairie, of a good quality, with grass, of ten or twelve inches in height and extending back about a mile to another elevation of eighty or ninety feet, beyond which is one continued plain. Near our camp, we enjoy from the bluffs a most beautiful view of the river, and the adjoining country. At a distance, varying from four to ten miles, and of a height between seventy and three hundred feet, two parallel ranges of high land afford a passage to the Missouri which enriches the low grounds between them. In its winding course, it nourishes the willow islands, the scattered cottonwood, elm, sycamore, lynn, and ash, and the groves are interspersed with hickory, walnut, coffeeenut, and oak. . . . The meridian altitude of this day (July 31) made the latitude of our camp 41° 18' 14". . . . We waited with much anxiety the return of our messenger to the Ottos. . . . Our apprehensions were at length relieved by the arrival of a party of about fourteen Ottoo and Missouri Indians, who came at sunset, on the 2d of August, accompanied by a Frenchman, who resided among them, and interpreted for us. Captain Lewis and Clark went out to meet them, and told them that we would hold a council in the morning. The incidents related induced us to give to this place the name of the Council-bluff; the situation of it is exceedingly favorable for a fort and trading factory."

There were fourteen Indians present at this council, six of whom were chiefs. They were all Ottos and Missouris who formed one tribal organization at a later date, and presumably at that time.

After concluding the council they moved up the river five miles and encamped August 3. On the 4th of August they continued the voyage and came to "a trading house, on the south, (Nebraska side) where one of our party passed two years trading with the Mahas." This too brief paragraph is important in disclosing that there were white traders in Nebraska prior to 1804. The camp of August 4 was also on Nebraska soil, but the exact point is not determined.

The next sojourn in Nebraska was on the 11th of August, when they paused to examine "Blackbird's grave." The description given is worthy of repetition here:

"We halted on the south side, for the purpose of examining a spot where one of the great chiefs of the Mahas, named Blackbird, who died about four years ago of the small-pox, was buried. A hill of yellow soft sand-stone rises from the river in bluffs of various heights, till it ends in a knoll about three hundred feet above the water; on the top of this a mound of twelve feet diameter at the base, and six feet high, is raised over the body of the deceased king; a pole of about eight feet high is fixed in the center; on which we placed a white flag, bordered with red, blue and white."

August 13 they reached a spot on the Nebraska side where "a Mr. Mackay" had a trading house in 1795 and 1796 when he called Ft. Charles. This same day men were sent out to the old Maha village "with a flag and a present, in order to induce them to come and hold a council with us. They returned at twelve o'clock next day, August 14. After crossing a prairie covered with high grass, they reached the Maha creek, along which they proceeded to its three forks, which join near the village; they crossed the north branch and went along the south; the walk was very fatiguing, as they were forced to break their way through grass, sunflowers, and thistles, all above ten feet high, and interspersed with wild pea. Five miles from our camp they reached the position of the ancient Maha village; it had once consisted of three hundred cabins, but was burnt about four years ago, soon after the smallpox had destroyed four hundred men, and a proportion of women and children. On a hill, in the rear of the village, are the graves of the nation; to the south of which runs the fork of the Maha creek; this they crossed where it was about ten yards wide, and followed its course to the Missouri, passing along a ridge of hill for one and a half mile, and a long pond between that and the Missouri; they then recrossed the Maha creek, and arrived at the camp, having seen no tracks of Indians or any sign of recent cultivation."

Probably the first large Nebraska "fish story" originated on August 16, when a seine was improvised with which over four hundred fish were taken from the Omaha creek. August 13 they made a camp near the old Omaha village and remained until August 20. At this point another council was held with the Ottos and Missouris, who were then at war with the Omahas and very much afraid of a war with the Pawnees. After concluding this council, they continued their journey, and the next day (August 20) Sergeant Floyd died and was buried on the Iowa side near the Floyd river.

On August 21 the camp was made on the Nebraska side; also on the 23d. On the 24th of August they came to the Nebraska volcano, a bluff of blue clay where they say the soil was so warm they could not keep their hands in it. These volcanic

phenomena were probably due to the action of water, at times of inundation, on iron pyrite, setting free sulfuric acid, which in turn attacked limestone, producing heat and steam. Similar phenomena have been observed in the same locality in very recent years. This night camp was made in Nebraska, and mosquitoes were numerous. On August 25 camp was made very near the Cedar-Dixon county line. August 28 a camp was made in Nebraska, a little way below where Yankton now stands. The Yankton-Sioux had been called here for a council, and on August 31 the council was concluded. A number of Sioux chiefs arranged to accompany Mr. Durion to Washington while the expedition was in camp here.

On the 1st of September they again set sail; on the 2d they stopped to examine an ancient fortification which must have been on section 3, 10, or 11 in the bend of the river and quite near the bank. September 3 they camped again on Nebraska soil, and the next day they reached a point just north of the Niobrara river. September 7 the last camp in Nebraska was pitched six miles south of the north line.

On the return trip down the Missouri river, the expedition reached the northeastern corner of the present Nebraska on Sunday, August 31, 1806, and left the southeast corner on the 11th of September, having made the uneventful journey in twelve days. The up-stream passage of this part of the route had required fifty-seven days.

On the 15th of July, 1806, Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike's party, consisting of two lieutenants, one surgeon, one sergeant, two corporals, sixteen privates, and an interpreter, sailed from Belle Fontaine, four miles above the mouth of the Missouri river, on the famous expedition which resulted in the discovery of Pike's Peak. The object of the expedition, which was sent out by Gen. James Wilkinson, then commander-in-chief of the army of the United States, and also governor of the territory of Louisiana, was ostensibly, and in fact partially, to establish friendly relations with the Indians of the interior, but it is supposed also to gain information about the Spaniards, who, since our acquisition of Louisiana, out of which they felt they had been cheated by Napoleon, had been in a menacing attitude towards the Americans.

The route of Pike's expedition was up the Missouri river to the mouth of the Osage river, then up this stream to the Osage villages at a point near its source. Here the party abandoned their bateau and took a northwesterly course across the country, reaching the Republican river at a point which has not been determined even approximately, and that interesting question is now the subject of investigation by specialists. The party camped on an eminence on the north side of the river, opposite the Pawnee village, and circumstances favor the conclusion that they were within the present bounds of Nebraska, notwithstanding that in 1901 a monument to mark the northern limit of Pike's route was erected within the Kansas line about four miles south of Hardy, Nebraska. Pike's visit to the Republican Pawnees had been preceded a short time before by the expedition of the Spanish Lieutenant Maygares, who had traveled from Santa Fe with about six hundred soldiers and over two thousand horses and mules; but Pike says that about two hundred and forty men and the horses unfit for service were left at the crossing of the Arkansas river. The beaten down grass plainly disclosed to Pike their line of march in the Pawnee neighborhood. This Spanish expedition was sent to intercept Pike and also to establish friendly relations with the Indians, and the American party found a Spanish flag flying over the council lodge of the Pawnees. These incidents, together with the fact that Pike was detained in New Mexico, virtually a prisoner, illustrate the indefiniteness of the boundary of the Louisiana purchase at that time and the insolence of Spain, not yet conscious of her decaying condition, toward the young Republic. The contrast between Pike's little party and the considerable Spanish army which had just passed inspired insolent behavior on the part of the Pawnees, which led the intrepid American explorer to give vent to his feelings in his journal: "All the evil I wished the Pawnees was that I might be the instrument in the hands of our government to open their eyes and ears, and with a strong hand convince them of our power." It would no doubt have given the indomitable but persecuted Pike much satisfaction to know that within a very few years the insolent Spaniard, then invading American territory, would be pushed off the continent finally by American aggression. Pike himself was killed in battle in our war of 1812, but his services had been recognized and rewarded by promotion in 1795.

In 1807 Ramsey Crooks and Robert McLellan, two of the most famous and intrepid explorers of the Northwest, formed a partnership, and in the fall of the year started up the Missouri river with an expedition comprising eighty men fitted out on shares by Sylvester and Auguste Chouteau. On the return of Lewis and Clark in 1806,

they brought with them to St. Louis, Shahaka, the chief of the Mandans, on the way to Washington for consultation with President Jefferson and under promise of safe escort back to his home. The next summer, Ensign Nathaniel Pryor, who had been a sergeant in the Lewis and Clark party, undertook to escort the chief up the river. The command consisted of fourteen soldiers in all, but it was united with a party of thirty-two men led by Pierre Chouteau. When they attempted to pass the lower Arikara village the Indians attacked them and drove them back, and on their return they met Crooks and McLellan, who then turned back and established a camp probably near Bellevue, where they remained until the spring of 1810. Lisa had safely passed the Arikaras before these parties arrived, and, whether true or not, the charge that he inspired the Arikara attack is a concession to his ability and influence as well as an illustration of his reputation for intrigue.

Commerce led to the first exploration and civilized occupation in the Northwest, including Nebraska. The French had led in exploration and the fur trade until the British wrested Canada from them in 1762, and Frenchmen continued to carry on active commercial traffic in this region, with St. Louis, then a French town, as their principal base. But about the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a state of actual hostility between English and American traders. The discovery of the mouth of the Columbia river in 1792 by Captain Gray of the American trading ship Columbia was an important factor in the long dispute over the Oregon boundary. In 1810 John Jacob Astor, of New York, organized the Pacific Fur Company, a partnership including himself, Alexander McKay, Duncan McDougall, Donald McKenzie, David Stuart, Robert Stuart and Wilson Price Hunt, for the purpose of colonization and trade at the mouth of the Columbia river. Astor was encouraged in his enterprise by the federal government. The partners named, with the exception of Hunt, sailed in the ship Tonquin in September, 1810, and founded Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia river in the spring of the following year. In October of 1810 Mr. Hunt started up the Missouri river with a party in three boats to reach Astoria by the overland route. The expedition came to the mouth of the Nodaway river in November, and went into winter quarters, though Hunt returned to St. Louis, where he spent the winter. He reached the winter camp again on the 17th of the following April, and a few days later the party set sail. It consisted of about sixty men, five of them partners in the enterprise, and they embarked in four boats. On the 28th of April they breakfasted on an island at the mouth of the Platte river, and they halted for two days on the bank of the Missouri, a little above the mouth of Papillion creek, and therefore on or near the site of Bellevue. In Irving's account of this journey no mention is made of any settlement at this point; but he set the example of writing enthusiastically of the beauty of the landscape, which has been assiduously practiced by travelers and settlers ever since. On the 10th of May the party arrived at the Omaha Indian village, situated, by their measurement, about two hundred and thirty miles above their Bellevue encampment. On the 12th of June they arrived at the village of the Arikara Indians, about ten miles above the mouth of Grand river, now in northern South Dakota. From this point they proceeded by land to the Columbia river which they reached some distance below the junction of the Lewis and Clark river. They followed down the Columbia in canoes, and reached Astoria on the 15th of February.

Lisa, who represented the Missouri Fur Company, jealously watched the operations of the new Pacific Fur Company, and his successful attempt to overtake Hunt resulted in a famous keel boat race. Lisa explains that this desperate exertion was caused by a desire to pass through the dangerous Sloux country in Hunt's company for greater safety; but it seems likely that his primary object was to prevent Hunt from establishing advantageous trade relations with any of the Indians on the upper river. Lisa traveled with great rapidity, at an average rate of eighteen miles a day, and overtook Hunt's party.

There were twenty-six men on Lisa's boat and it was armed with a swivel mounted at the bow. Twenty men were at the oars. Brackenridge, who, according to Irving, was "a young, enterprising man, tempted by motives of curiosity to accompany Mr. Lisa," gives an account of the starting of the party:

"We sat off from the village of St. Charles on Tuesday, the 28th of April, 1811. Our barge was the best that ever ascended this river, and manned with stout oarsmen. Mr. Lisa, who had been a sea captain, took much pains in rigging his boat with a good mast and main and top sail, these being great helps in the navigation of this river. . . . We are in all twenty-five men, and completely prepared for defense. There is besides, a swivel on the bow of the boat, which in case of attack would make a formidable appearance; we have

also two brass blunderbusses. . . . These precautions are absolutely necessary from the hostility of the Sloux bands. . . . It is exceedingly difficult to make a start on these voyages, from the reluctance of the men to terminate the frolic with their friends which usually precedes their departure. . . . The river Platte is regarded by the navigators of the Missouri as a point of as much importance as the equinoctial line amongst mariners. All those who had not passed it before were required to be shaved unless they would compromise the matter by a treat."

On the 28th of June, 1812, Robert Stuart started from Astoria with five of Hunt's original party on a return overland trip. At Ft. Henry, on the north fork of Snake river, now in southeastern Idaho, he was joined by four of the five men who had been detached by Hunt on the 10th of the previous October. After a journey of terrible hardships they established winter quarters on the North Platte river not far east of the place where it issues from the mountains. At the end of six weeks they were driven out by the Indians and proceeded three hundred and thirty miles down the Platte; and then, despairing of being able to pass safely over the desert plain covered with deep snow, which confronted them, they went back over seventy-seven miles of their course until they found a suitable winter quarters on the 30th of December, 1812. On the 8th of March they tried to navigate the stream in canoes, but found it impracticable, and proceeded on foot to a point about forty-five miles from the mouth of the Platte, where they embarked, April 16, in a large canoe made for their purpose by the Indians.

Such importance in Nebraska annals as may be attributed to what is known as Long's expedition in 1819 is due to the fact that it was the occasion of the passage of the first steamboat up the Missouri river, and the establishment of the first military post within the limits of the territory. This post, at first called Camp Missouri, was developed into a fort of the regular quadrangular form and named Ft. Atkinson after its founder, General Atkinson, the commander of the Yellowstone expedition. It was occupied until 1827 in the main by the 6th regiment of infantry, and was abandoned, June 27, 1827, when Ft. Leavenworth was established and to which the furnishings of Ft. Atkinson were transferred. A reason assigned for the abandonment of Ft. Atkinson, namely, that the site was unhealthy, does not seem plausible. A better, and probably the real reason is that, owing to the insignificance or failure of the up-river fur trading enterprise, this fort was nowhere and protected nothing, while the new site chosen by Colonel Leavenworth was virtually at the beginning of the Santa Fe and Oregon trails, where traffic was of considerable and growing importance.

The failure of Astor's attempt to effect stable American lodgment on the Columbia, and of the Missouri Fur Company and other private enterprises to overcome or successfully compete with British influence and trade aggression in this new northwest, stimulated the federal government to send out what was intended to be a formidable military and scientific expedition for the purpose of establishing a strong post at the mouth of the Yellowstone river, to ascertain the natural features and resources of the country, and, if practicable, the important line between the United States and the British possessions. There were dreams, if not practical intentions, of establishing a trade with the Orient by way of the Columbia river, across the mountains to the Missouri, and down that stream to the Mississippi, but which were to be realized through the steam railroad across Nebraska instead of the steamboat up the Missouri.

Five steamboats were provided for the transportation of the military arm of the expedition, comprising about a thousand men under the command of Col. Henry Atkinson. Mismanagement and miscalculation chiefly distinguished this pretentious enterprise from first to last. The waste of time and money—except as the latter provided a substantial lining for the pocket of the contractor—in attempting to navigate the Missouri with vessels not specially adapted to its very peculiar demands, the lack of proper provisions for the troops at their winter quarters at Council Bluff, resulting in appalling sickness and death, the entire abandonment of the original and important design of the enterprise—to obtain a sure footing or control in the upper Missouri—and the failure of Major Long to reach the Red river at all seem to justify the criticism which the expedition has received. Two of the five boats were not able to enter the Missouri at all; and the Jefferson gave out and abandoned the trip thirty miles below Franklin. The Expedition and the Johnson wintered at Cow Island, a little above the mouth of the Kansas, and returned to St. Louis in the following spring. The troops did not reach Council Bluff, where they established Camp Missouri, till the 26th of September, 1819. Their condition in the spring, March 8, is shown in the journal of Long's expedition: