

they continue to come to light, for it seems a rather curious thing and not altogether easy to explain. Why should Captain Fremont have the popular renown of being the one and only discoverer of the West, rather than Lewis and Clark, Pike, Wilson Price Hunt, Bonneville, Emory, Carson, Bridger, or any other of a score of names? Is it that he was especially endeared to a large class during his presidential candidacy? It would be curious to know.

One of the last instances that have come to the writer's notice is found in Mr. G. L. Brown's excellent historical sketch of Butler county, in volume IV of the Nebraska State Historical Society's reports. It is the statement that "probably the exploring party of Gen. John C. Fremont were the first whites who stepped upon Butler county soil." This is of course not offered as a positive historical verity, but it illustrates the prevalence of the Fremont idea in every quarter. As to the fact, since fur traders had been making a highway of the Platte for fifty years before Fremont appeared on the scene, it is hardly to be doubted that some of them may have stepped ashore at some time on its right bank in Butler county; and there, too, were the missionaries who had been among the Pawnees for ten years, not to mention the Spanish explorers. But the odd thing about the statement is that Fremont never did stand in Butler county, at least with an exploring party. He could have done so only on his first expedition, and then he passed far to the south in going out and came down the opposite bank of the Platte in returning.

Another instance has been noticed in a book by an elderly British officer, Major Price, who went shooting in Wyoming with General Coppinger of the U. S. army, in the summer of 1897. In the course of their travels they passed by Independence Rock, and the Major says: "General Fremont camped here on the 4th of July, 1848, and meeting a train of emigrants on their way to California, made them a speech, and named the rock Independence in honour of the day." His year is wrong to begin with, for Fremont was far from there in 1848.

But all the rest is wrong too, so much so that the only thing worth considering is where he got his information; where could he have gotten it save from his companions? And do army officers of General Coppinger's rank really believe that Fremont named Independence Rock? That was one of the most noted of landmarks throughout the fur-trading and freighting periods, and it would seem that anyone at all well posted ought to know that it bore its name long before Fremont's day. A few travelers who so speak of it that occur to me are the Reverend Mr. Parker in 1835; Thomas J. Farnham in 1839; Father De Smet in 1841.

These all agree fairly well also as to

the way in which it got the title, namely, that a party of early traders camped under it on one fourth of July. One account says that this party was led by one Thorp, and that it was the first to cross the continent by way of the Platte, but this seems too free a statement. Thorp, at least, has never come to the writer's notice elsewhere. Another says that they carved the word "Independence" and their own names upon the rock, and many, Fremont in 1842 among them, mention this use of it as an autograph album. Since the rock is a mass of solid granite, this ought to be easy to verify, for any names that were ever carved on it must be there yet. But how were trappers equipped for making inscriptions in solid granite?

Captain Fremont's Fourth of July's in that region are, moreover, easily accounted for. In 1842 he spent the day near North Platte, and had macaroni soup and rich fruit cake for dinner. The next year he celebrated it with Colonel St. Vrain at his trading-post, and in 1844 at Bent's Fort.

And now we come to what is probably the explanation of the matter. I have

not Fremont's own account of his third expedition, that of 1845; but in Lieut. J. W. Abert's notes of the California invasion of 1846, I find the following passage. "At 10 o'clock, having marched 15 miles, we reached Independence creek, so called by Colonel Fremont in consequence of our encamping here on the 4th of July, one year previous." And that seems to me to tell the story. Instead of its being Rock Independence in Wyoming that Fremont named, it was Independence creek, a slender watercourse in or about Osage county, Kansas, which apparently did not stay christened very long, for there is no appearance of such a name on the maps of today.

Almost humorous, in view of the generosity of the public mind toward this explorer, is the suggestion of another writer in volume IV of the Reports, that Nebraska might well name a county after Captain Fremont. He thinks our omission to do so constitutes a "striking vacancy" in the nomenclature of the counties.

A. T. RICHARDSON.
Nebraska City, Neb., Aug. 20, 1900.

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