

OLD FORT KEARNEY AGAIN.

A few more facts have come to light concerning some of the names connected with the first Fort Kearney, the post established in the 40's at Table Creek, the beginning of Nebraska City.

Major S. P. Cox, of Gallatin, Mo., writes as follows in regard to Captain Andrew W. Sublette, of the St. Louis company of the Missouri Mounted Volunteers, who was garrisoned here in the winter of 1847-48, and who was consulted as to Indian affairs and spoke with the voice of experience:

"In regard to the Sublette family, I can only say that I never knew any of them except Captain Andrew; however, I have often heard him and others speak of William and Milton Sublette, who were on the plains, and my recollection is that they were brothers of Andrew.

"One of the old stories told in camp when we were on the plains after the Indians in the early days, was, in effect, that the Pawnee Indians once robbed William Sublette of all that he had with him, and that later he carried the smallpox to them in whisky, by way of revenge.

"Whether this story had any truth in it or not, I never knew, but it was frequently told around the campfire and some of the boys used to express the wish that he had produced even more fatal effects than he did. In fact, sometimes when we were after the Pawnees the boys wished that he had killed them all.

"In our Indian fights on the Platte in the summer of 1848, Captain Andrew Sublette was in command. We captured the head chief of the Pawnees that summer, about seventy-five miles down the river from New Fort Kearney. We had between two and three hundred troops under Captain Andrew Sublette at the time, and surrounded the Indians' camp at a bend in the river; I believe this was in July, 1848. About one thousand of the Indians, including squaws and children, were in camp when we came upon them, after a hard ride of a day and a night.

"We had our troops massed on either side of Captain Van Vliet's artillery, and the hour was just before sunrise. Captain Van Vliet insisted on being allowed to mow them down with his guns, but Captain Sublette would not allow it. We had intercepted the Indian scouts, and got between them and the camp before they gave the alarm. When we were discovered the women and children sprang into the river and swam across. Captain Sublette sent an interpreter to the camp, with a demand for the surrender of their head chief, and the chief was turned over to us and taken back to Fort Kearney, where he was still a prisoner, wearing a ball and chain, when I left the post.

"The Indians (Pawnees) never burned up any more wagon-trains, nor did they

commit any of the depredations that had been common prior to this, after we captured this chief, who was to blame for much of the killing of white men and trouble that had been common before. I have forgotten the chief's name.

"In 1847 and '48 I met the Mormons as they traveled across the country to Utah. In 1858 and '59 I was a wagon-master for Russell, Majors & Waddell, and during that time I freighted between Nebraska City and Salt Lake."

This is the kind of communication THE CONSERVATIVE likes to receive. Major Cox is pleased to express a doubt whether he is not sending us more than we want; but he could not do that if he tried. We would like to have him try, however.

Andrew Sublette was undoubtedly a brother to William and Milton, often mentioned in the early narratives. There was moreover a fourth brother, whose name I do not recall; neither he nor Andrew was conspicuous in the fur-trade, in which the older brothers gained their notoriety. There is no name more frequently met with in the literature of the period than that of "Captain" William L. Sublette; called also Cut Face, from a scar on his jaw, and Left Hand. He figures in the pages of nearly all the old writers; for instance, Irving, Beckwourth, Parkman, Parker, Ruxton, Wyeth, Gregg, Garrard and Catlin. He was senior member of the firm of Sublette & Campbell, and it was from him that Fort Laramie got its first name of Fort William, in 1834. He died in 1845. The smallpox story is doubtful, as Major Cox hints. Cut Face's relations were with the mountain Indians, to begin with. The younger brother, Milton G., was Nathaniel Wyeth's friend, and he was on his way to the mountains with him in 1834 when an old hurt to his leg became so troublesome that he gave up and turned back. This was the beginning of Wyeth's disasters on this voyage; Milton being out of the way, William made bold to repudiate his agreements with the unlucky Yankee, who was at his mercy. He presently wrote Milton a friendly letter of warning, against his brother: "you will be kept, as you have been, a mere slave to catch beaver for others," he told him; but Milton caught no more beaver for anybody; he never recovered from the injury to his leg, and died from the effects of it two years later, at Fort Laramie.

A curious anecdote has come to light concerning the fate of Andrew Sublette. It is to the effect that he emigrated early to California, and, carrying with him the reputation of a notable slayer of bears, sought an early opportunity to sample the California breed, which bore a great renown in those days. He had a dog very skilled in the art, and they made short work of the first bear they met; but being set upon

directly by the animal's mate, Sublette received injuries which caused his death. How the dog fared the story does not tell.

The name of General G. M. Brooke, who first ordered the construction of the old block-house, has been noticed as senior officer of the court martial which sat upon (even so) Colonel Fremont in 1848.

Major Clifton Wharton, who was in command at Table Creek when the block-house was built, in 1846, is a not infrequent figure in the books of the time. He was said to be of a fine Philadelphia family, a man of refinement, but not strong enough for the frontier work. James Hildreth, the dragoon, mentions him as escorting the Santa Fe caravan in 1834. Catlin, the painter, tells how he came back in physical disorder from probably the same expedition, and was sick for a long time at Fort Gibson; also how he came upon him, dying or dead, some time later in the wilderness of interior Missouri, and was able to dispatch physicians to his relief from the next settlement that he came to. It was Major Wharton who, by General Kearney's orders, read to Colonel Fremont the order for his arrest on August 22, 1847, on their return from the conquest of California. This happened at Fort Leavenworth, and Wharton died there in July of the year following. Bigelow's "Life of Fremont" says that it was "Lieutenant" Wharton who performed the act of arrest, but from his association with General Kearney in a number of transactions, and from his being at the post so soon after, there seems to be little room for doubt that it was our friend Clifton; who, however, had been lieutenant-colonel since 1846. It is hard to know by just what title to call an army officer at different stages of his career.

From a passage in one of Father De Smet's books it appears that the site of Nebraska City was visited occasionally in the years between the abandonment of the post and the settlement in 1854. Coming eastward down the Platte in 1851 with a party, "at Fort Kearney we parted with Colonel Mitchell and his suite, who took the route to Table River." The father headed for the southern towns with a company of Fitzpatrick's.

It is strange if there are not in the archives at Fort Leavenworth documents throwing light on what was going on up and down this stretch of the river between 1827 and 1854.

A. T. RICHARDSON.

"Within the scope of the questions submitted to the supreme court our colonial policy is vindicated," comments the Detroit Free Press (Ind. Dem.), "but this will no more stop popular agitation than did the Dred Scott decision."