

INCIDENTS OF WESTERN HISTORY.

IX.

The First Recorded Crossing of Nebraska.

We give below a version, kindly sent us by Mr. A. E. Sheldon, director of Field Work of the State Historical society, of the beginning of all white men's knowledge of Nebraska so far as unequivocal documents go.

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"Editor Conservative: The State Historical society has this winter added to its library the most valuable collection of source material upon the first white exploration of the trans-Missouri region and particularly of Nebraska known to exist. This is Pierre Margry's 'Découvertes et Etablissements des Français dans l'Ouest et dans le Sud de l'Amérique,' in six volumes, printed at Paris. This is nothing less than a collection of letters and reports made by the first French explorers in this region to the French commanders at New Orleans and by them transmitted to France. Margry was keeper of archives at Paris. He explored the early documents relating to America and collected them from private sources until he became chief authority on the subject. When Francis Parkman was writing his books on the west he had access to some of these documents, but his efforts to secure all of them failed because Margry desired to have the honor of making them known to the world. As a result of Parkman's efforts, aided by Senator George F. Hoar, of Massachusetts, a bill was passed in congress in 1873 by which the United States subscribed for 500 copies of Margry's collection. With this encouragement Margry began their publication and the last volume was printed in 1886. It is this last volume which is most interesting to the Nebraskan. It contains the original reports of Le Sueur's expedition to the Sioux in 1693; French Canadians on the Missouri in 1702-4; La Harpe and Dutisne's expeditions to the plains in 1719; Bourgmont's visit in 1721; the war between the French and Spaniards in this region the following year; the expedition of the Mallet brothers up the Platte and across the plains to Santa Fe in 1739; an account of silver mines in Nebraska discovered by a Frenchman who lived with the Omaha Indians,—and more.

"So far as I know there is no complete translation of these original accounts of French explorations. It seems strange that no American scholar has undertaken this work. With the view of making available to students of Nebraska history so much of them as relates to our own state I have begun their translation

and herewith send you the account of the Mallet brothers' expedition—being so far as we now know the first authentic record of white exploration in Nebraska:

A. E. Sheldon."

Silver Mines on the Missouri.

A FRENCHMAN DWELLING AMONG THE PANIMAHAS, GOES TO THE RICARAS. Extract from a letter from Bienville to the ministry of the marine, 22nd of April, 1734:

"A Frenchman who has been living for some years with the Panimahas dwelling on the Missouri, having been with these Indians to the Ricaras, who inhabit the upper regions of the same river and who have never seen any Frenchmen, has found in those parts many silver mines which seem to him very rich, one among them which he thinks is pure silver. Two voyageurs coming with him verify this report."

VOYAGE OF THE MALLET BROTHERS WITH SIX OTHER FRENCHMEN FROM THE RIVER OF THE PANIMAHAS, IN THE MISSOURI COUNTRY, TO SANTA FE, 1739-40. Extract from the Journal of the journey presented to the MM. de Bienville, governor, and Salmon, intendant at New Orleans.

"For a knowledge of the road which these Canadians have traveled to discover New Mexico, it is well to know that it is 250 miles from the Illinois to the villages of the Missouri Indians on the river of that name,—240 miles from there to the Kanzas, 300 from the Kanzas to the Otocatas (Otoes) and 180 from there to the mouth of the river of the Panimahas in the Missouri. This nation is settled upon the river of their name, and from there the discoverers took their departure May 29, 1739.

"All of those who have attempted up to the present time to reach New Mexico have thought they would find it on the headwaters of the Missouri, and to that end they have gone up stream as far as the Ricaras, who dwell more than 375 miles from the Panis. The discoverers took, upon information from some Indians, an altogether different route, and leaving the Panis they crossed the country and returned upon a way almost parallel to the Missouri.

"June 2 they reached a river which they named the River Plate and seeing that it took a direction not far from the route they had in mind, they followed it, going up its right bank for a distance of 70 miles, and at that place they found that the river made a fork with the river of the Padocas which just there flows in.

"Three days afterward, that is June 13, they crossed to the left bank of said river, and travelling over a tongue of land, they camped on the

14th on the other bank of the River des Costes [Hill river] which here falls also into the river Platte.

"The 15th and 16th they continued to cross over the country and on the 17th they reached another river, which they named des Costes Blanches [White Hills river]. These three days they were travelling over plains, where they found absolutely no wood, not even for fire, and it seems from their journal that these plains extend as far as the mountains near Santa Fe.

"The 18th they slept on the bank of another river, which they crossed and named River Aimable [Friendly].

"The 19th they found still another river, which they crossed and named River des Soucis [Care river].

"The 20th they came to the river des Cances [Arkansas?] where they saw the trail which they had travelled on setting out from the Panis; they crossed there and lost seven horses loaded with merchandise. This river is deep with a strong current.

"On the 22nd, they crossed another river which they named River à la Flèche [Arrow river].

"On the 23rd they crossed another river and entered upon great, bare prairies where they could not make fire except with cow-dung.

"On the 24th they found another river, and from the 26th to the 30th, inclusive, they found them every day. At length on the 30th they found on some rocks, on the bank of the last river, evidences of Spaniards.

"They had travelled then 387 miles, by their estimate, across the country from the Panis, almost all the time westwardly. They calculate that this river is a branch of the Arkansas and the same one which they found lower down on their return, the 10th day after leaving Santa Fe.

"They followed it on the left bank until the 5th of July when they came to a village of Indians named Laitanes; [Here a note to page 457 of Margry vi, says: "The same account calls them 'Laitanes and Litanes'—Perrin Dulac calls them 'Halitanes or Têtes Pelées;'" Shave-heads].

They made a present to these people and received a number of deer. They made a camp two and one-half miles from there, having perceived that the Indians had evil designs.

"On the 6th they left the banks of this river, and on leaving there a Ricara Indian slave of the Laitanes, who told them that these Indians had a design to destroy them, went with them. They sent him back, telling him that the Indians had only to come and they would wait for them. The Laitanes made no movement and the slave having returned to them [the French] they asked him if he knew the road to the Spaniards. He re-