

Fort Rice

Historical Notes from the Journal of the Late Major B. F. Slaughter
By Jessamine S. Burgum

Arthur, N. D., July 15, 1913.
Editor Tribune:

I am enclosing a copy of my father's journal, kept at Fort Rice, D. T., in 1871. I think it would be of particular interest to the readers of the Slope, particularly the story of the trip to "Painted Woods" and to all those who are interested in the Fort Rice Memorial Park, which is to be dedicated July 27. I have copied it in shape for the printer, as the journal was written on both sides and is discolored with age.

We expect to be in Bismarck next week, as I have some of my father's relics, which I intend to present to the Historical society.

Yours truly,
JESSAMINE S. BURGUM.

The following excerpts are taken from the journal of the late Maj. B. F. Slaughter of the 17th Infantry, who was stationed at Ft. Rice, D. T., in 1871-2, by his daughter, Mrs. Jessamine S. Burgum of Arthur, N. D., and are valuable historically and interesting at this time in connection with the dedication of the Ft. Rice Memorial Park, July 27.

To appreciate the situation one must take into consideration the conditions in 1871. The country was unsettled. The Indian and the buffalo ran wild and safety only was found in the vicinity of the military forts, of which there were, Ft. Rice, Ft. Stevenson, Ft. Buford (in North Dakota), Ft. McKean (afterwards called Ft. A. Lincoln), was not yet located, nor was there any Camp Hancock (now on the site of Bismarck) located till 1872.

The mails were brought up the river overland from Yankton, seasonally, by Indian scouts, who enlisted for that purpose. Owing to frequent attacks from the hostile Sioux on the Arrikaree scouts, the mail was often delayed for weeks. There were no settlers between the Missouri and the Red rivers. Camp Seward was located on the present site of Jamestown. Col. T. C. Crittenden of the 17th Infantry was the commanding officer at Fort Rice. His widow afterwards became the bride of Admiral Dewey.

Several expeditions to the Yellowstone were sent from Ft. Rice, under military escort by General Whistler in 1871, General Stanton in '72 and General Custer in 1873. Fort Rice was the rendezvous and point of departure of these expeditions under military escort, of the surveyors and engineers of the Northern Pacific.

The mound alluded to were built to mark the trail, as the mail carriers often lost their way on the winter trail.

Journal of Dr. B. F. Slaughter of the 17th Infantry, kept at Fort Rice, D. T., in 1871.

June 22, 1871.
This has been an exciting day. Had just returned from sick call at the hospital, at 7:30, and taken my seat looking out the back window of my bed room, when I noticed several Indians dashing across the plain at a furious rate. As this plain presents an unobstructed view of a couple of miles in width and three or four in length, I took in the whole performance in an instant. I then saw for

first time in reality what I had often seen in pictures. Fifty hostile Indians on their ponies (Shunkacarr) dashing across the plain to intercept our herd of about 100 beaves, horses and mules, then grazing on the plain. The herders forced the stock into a run, but they are too late; some half dozen have gotten between them and the fort. The long roll is sounded—next moment soldiers are pouring out of the fort. A party of Indian scouts belonging to the fort here joined in the chase. The next instant hostile Indians, friendly Indians, herders, horses and cattle are indiscriminately mixed. On my right, an Indian scout who has been caught out without arms is doing very handsome tumbling, whilst his enemy, seated on a pony that has been checked so suddenly as to throw it on its haunches, is firing at him with a revolver. On my left, two herders cut off, still hurrying the stock toward the fort, which have now become thoroughly frightened by the shooting and whooping, but have their heads turned in the right direction, and are moving so compactly that the Indians cannot turn them or get to the herders in the rear. The crack of firearms can now be heard in all directions, but in his undertaking, as far as the government stock is concerned, they managed, however, to secure six ponies belonging to the "Ree" scouts. The whole affair, from the beginning, did not occupy fifteen minutes. Nobody hurt.

Forgot to mention the "Kate P. Kountz" passed down on the 10th Wm. Braithwaite, clerk, and David Campbell, pilot, came up to the fort to see me.

June 25, 1871.
The "Halle Moore," Capt. Moore commanding, passed up this afternoon for Ft. Buford. Met Maj. Cunningham, paymaster, on board.

June 27, 1871.
The "Peniah" passed down this morning. She went to Ft. Benton. Was introduced to the captain, Daniel Brady.

June 28, 1871.
Wrote to John S. Murphy, Union City, Tenn., and Major Nichols, paymaster, at Sioux City, Iowa.

June 29, 1871.
Mail brought in this evening at 6 o'clock, by Indian scouts from Ft. Stevenson. Our mail going to the states leaves tomorrow.

June 30, 1871.
The troops of the fort were mustered today for pay. Expect the paymaster here on the fourth. Wind blowing a hurricane. Was down on the river today.

July 1, 1871.
The "Ida Stockdale," Capt. Gilhim, arrived today from Sioux City. He reports the "Ida Reese" sank near the mouth of the White river. We grounded there coming up, May 25, 1871. Nobody lost; nearly all the freight saved. She was coming up, loaded with freight for Fort Benton. We met the "Ida Reese"—she was going down—just below Fort Sully, May 28, 1871.

July 2, 1871.
Lieut. Josiah Chance was today placed under arrest by the command-

ing officer—his name, the sooner forgotten the better. The "Silver Lake" came up today and stopped. She is bound for Ft. Benton. The "Ree" Indian scouts have been discharged by the commanding officer. Bah! had nothing else to do.

July 3, 1871.
Sunday—a calm, Indian summer forenoon, yet we have no solemn, deep toned bell, nor anything else, to remind us that this is the holy day of rest. How different the day in these wilds, so far beyond the restraints of civilization. Are we by nature "wicked," "totally depraved," and is Christianity but a basis upon which man has super-reared a wall to keep himself within appropriate bounds? Whatever may be his conduct outwardly, he inwardly reverts—a reverence implanted there in infancy, which the hardening influence of a mispent life cannot eradicate. Have heard much and saw much today of the wicked perversity of man (and woman), and good intentions coming still born into the world. Verily, man is a mystery.

July 6, 1871.
The "Miner" passed up today bound for Fort Benton.

July 26, 1871.
Went horseback riding with Lieutenants Greene, Troxel and Potter, visited a gulch three miles west by north from the fort, where we discovered outcroppings of what appeared to be coal. Bringing home some samples; it was found to burn freely. Think this vein could be worked to advantage, barring, of course, the hostile Indians. It would require first, permission, as it is on the government reservation; secondly, capital.

July 27, 1871.
The quartermaster sent out a wagon and brought back a quantity of this coal, which was distributed among the officers' families to experiment with. It is superior, certainly, to the green cottonwood we are now using. Men report hostile Indians in vicinity of mine.

July 28, 1871.
The Sioux scouts packed up last night and left for Grand River. This would be called desertion if they were white or negro soldiers; as they are Indians it is all right and nothing will be done about it.

Our Arrikaree scouts, who were discharged on the 2nd, as a matter of accommodation to Mr. Sioux, will be recalled—if they will come. The Arrikarees have been friendly to the whites for 10 or 15 years. They have been employed at this post for a year and have performed their duties faithfully; were discharged to satisfy their enemies, who then came up, enlisted to do mail service, and then skipped off, went down to Grand River one evening when they knew the mail would be ready for them the next morning. If that is not pure guessedness I would like to know what you would call it.

August 3, 1871.
Lieut. Graves left for the states today, on leave, on the "Silver Lake."

August 4, 1871.
The "May Lowry" arrived today with 50 tons of freight for this post. She returned after unloading. The prairies on the opposite side of the

river have been on fire for four or five days.

August 5, 1871.
Went hunting today; killed 4 prairie chickens and 2 hawks. The "Miner," that passed up, bound for Fort Benton on the 6th, is now due.

August 8, 1871.
Pleasant day. Linda went horseback riding with Mrs. Humboldt and Lieut. Burnes. Just after their return a wind sprang up and after dark it blew a perfect hurricane, making our house creak mournfully. The prairies have been on fire for a week and last night with renewed vigor, lighting up the prairie for a length of 20 miles.

August 9, 1871.
Calm and warm. Thermometer stood 95 degrees in the shade. By 8:00 a. m. it was blowing a young hurricane. The whole northwest is grandly illuminated.

August 10, 1871.
Wind still blowing. Thermometer dropped to 60 degrees. Received this morning the subpoenaed orders. "A. A. Surgeon E. F. Slaughter, U. S. A., will report to Lieut. James Humboldt, commanding detachment on duty under special order No. 110 from Headquarters, Dakota, to build mounds to mark the trail between here and Painted Woods, 50 miles up the river." Am ordered to take medical supplies for thirty days.

August 12, 1871.
Prairies have been on fire since the 1st inst.

August 15, 1871.
Got ready today to leave for Painted Woods. Began crossing wagons and mules at 7:00 a. m. By 11:00 a. m. had over all but two loads, but had to suspend operations on account of high wind. Got in the saw and crossed over 16 see above my traps and, although we had a "bully crew," I found it a hazardous undertaking. The billows were fearful and at one time I was fearful the boat would swamp. One billow struck it in the stern, breaking over and shipping about a barrel of water. Began at 4:00 p. m. to cross over the remainder of the mules. Mail just then came in and we crossed it over. At 5:00 p. m. we were ready. I had started down to embark, when orders came directing that the detachment pitch their tents and await further orders. Orders came in the mail directing that two companies be gotten ready to accompany an expedition to the Yellowstone river. Also an order directing that Capt. John Donovan, now on duty at this post, be sent to the military hospital at Washington, D. C., and that Lieut. Thos. Troxel be ordered to take charge of him.

August 16, 1871.
A "wow," a "wumpus" in camp today. Capt. Donovan felt himself much aggrieved at the order sending him to the asylum and, suspecting Dr. Goddard of being instrumental in having it done, pitched into him and made a black eye. Mrs. Goddard was going up to shoot the unruly captain, but was met by Lieut. Burnes, and the revolver taken from her. Altogether, it has been a lively day. Orders are to leave tomorrow, as soon as we can get off, and mark the trail to Painted Woods, anyhow. Will get ready this time after I know everybody else is.

August 17, 1871.
After much delay, our detachment moved off with 21 men, 16 mules and 2 horses, at 2:00 p. m. We marched to a bottom 6 miles distant, called the "hay camp," and pitched our tents at 4:00 p. m. Just after going into camp a courier came up with a letter directing that the locality in which Private Sheehan was separated from the mail party, six days previous, be examined and ascertained, if possible, his fate. He was cut off by a prairie fire.

August 18, 1871.
Got up at 4:00 a. m., breakfast at 4:30; left at 5:00, and shot chickens at 7:00. Reached Apple Tree creek at 12:00. Rested half an hour at the creek, watered stock and crossed over. Like to have sunk one of our six mule teams. Resolved to reach Burnt creek, 15 miles distant, before halting for the night. Prairie burned in all directions. Reached Burnt creek at 5:00 p. m. Have been in the saddle 12 consecutive hours. Saw two deer at the crossing. This is a beautiful camp ground. A beautiful meadow bottom of 100 acres, perfectly green and strongly contrasting with the burnt and blackened country over which we have passed. The creek almost encircles it and a semicircle of hills invest it, so symmetrical, that I can scarcely believe it to be the handiwork of nature, whilst the other half opens on the black hills, range after range.

August 19, 1871.
Moved at 6:00 a. m. Marched to where Private Sheehan was intercepted by the fire. Rode to the top of the different buttes, from the summit of which I could examine the country for miles around. Don't believe he was burned. Two miles from here is a large belt of unburned country. Think he may have returned to take the trail and striking it at some distant point, passed over it unobserved and got back on the prairies and lost his way. After traveling six miles from camp, concluded to go down under the bluffs, which we did. Had to abandon the mail trail at Burnt creek. Terrible broken country here in sight of the Missouri river. Kept two outsiders busy examining the different points, to avoid getting into some place we could not get our train out of, and 12:00 p. m. in a country where we could not get wood or water enough to cook with. Saw nothing but that interminable succession of buttes, ridges and coulees so characteristic of the "Land of the Dakotas."

Sergt. Ahrens and two men got permission to go ahead this morning and hunt. I let them have my gun. It is now dark and they are not in. We reached here at 3:30 p. m.—"Painted Woods." Fired my signal guns at 9:00 p. m. for the absent party—no answer.

August 20, 1871.
Sergt. Ahrens and the men came in this morning. They had chattered turning down the bluffs, but instead, kept on 15 miles above here. His wolf dog gave out for want of water and he was compelled to leave him

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on the prairie. This is the 3rd anniversary of my marriage.

Went 12 miles above here (Painted Woods) duck hunting, with Potentia, the wood chopper. Killed 12 ducks and 2 chickens.

August 21, 1871.
Sunday—wrote to my wife. Lieut. Cairnes went out with a wagon to strike the road to the top of the bluffs, 12 miles distant. Have only built one mound, so far, as an experiment.

August 22, 1871.
Built three mounds today.

August 23, 1871.
Went hunting today; saw one deer and one antelope.

August 24, 1871.
Went hunting. Killed 1 duck and 23 hawks.

August 25, 1871.
Left Painted Woods this morning. This place is called "Painted Woods" because it was the battle ground between the Sioux Indians and the Arrikarees. Many of the trees are marked with Indian devices representing incidents of battle. Marched 20 miles and pitched our tents at Burnt creek. Killed 8 chickens and 2 ducks on the way.

August 26, 1871.
Left Burnt creek this morning at 7 o'clock, with one six-mule team and two men for Fort Rice, 42 miles distant, for forage for both man and beast.

Got into fort at 2:30 p. m. Brought up the rear of a train of 49 wagons, just getting in from Ft. Wadsworth, destined for the Yellowstone. Saw a wolf, deer and 4 antelopes in the road. Found Rosalyn sick. Sergt. Ahrens' wolf dog was at home.

August 28, 1871.
Left Ft. Rice this morning at 10:00 a. m. Wagon loaded and roads heavy, excessively warm. Reached Burnt creek, 42 1/2 miles distant, at 9:30 p. m. Found camp in good condition and spirits.

Sept. 9, 1871.
The expedition for the Yellowstone left this morning. General Whistler in command.

October 14, 1871.
The great expedition to the Yellowstone, conducted by engineers of the Northern Pacific railroad and escorted by United States troops, that left Fort Rice, has returned, having successfully accomplished the exploration and survey of a route through Yellowstone valley, reaching to the river of that name and to the mouth of Powder river. The party encountered many hostile Indians and their return march is described as a series of constant skirmishes. But few lives

were lost, however, as every precaution was taken to prevent straggling from the main line, it being well known the Indian method of warfare is to hover close to the enemy's outskirts and attack those who stray out of sight. Thus were killed Lieut. Adair of the 6th and Lieut. Eben Crosby of the 17th, two brave and worthy officers. Their dreadful death has filled us all with sorrow. Lieut. Crosby, following a wounded antelope, had ridden out of sight of his party, no Indians having been seen that day, and all felt secure, so near home were they—a day's ride from the fort. But shortly after he disappeared, a force of Indians appeared in full view on a neighboring hill, among them an Indian called "The Gaul," well known at Cheyenne agency, who with derisive shouts and taunting gestures, displayed some object in his hand, which by the aid of field glasses was discovered to be the scalp of the unfortunate officer. Search was at once made and his mutilated body found and taken to Fort Rice for burial.

How I wish the eastern people could see the Indian question as we of the west do, who live in scenes of terror and daily have our ears pained and our souls made sick by some such tale of bloody tragedy.

DANCES CONTINUE.

The dances to be given by Company A will be resumed Saturday night and will be continued weekly till next May. The boys are endeavoring to make them as pleasing as possible. Five large electric fans have been installed and other items have been added for the convenience and pleasure of the guests. O'Connor's orchestra will furnish the music, and those who enjoy dancing will have an opportunity hereafter on every Saturday night to indulge in that pastime.

All are invited and Company A assures every consideration to their guests.—(Adv)

STOPS THE LEAKS.

I have a preparation to repair leaky roofs of all kinds, which I should be pleased to show you if you will call and see me. FAUNCE, 216-218 Fourth St.—(Adv)

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