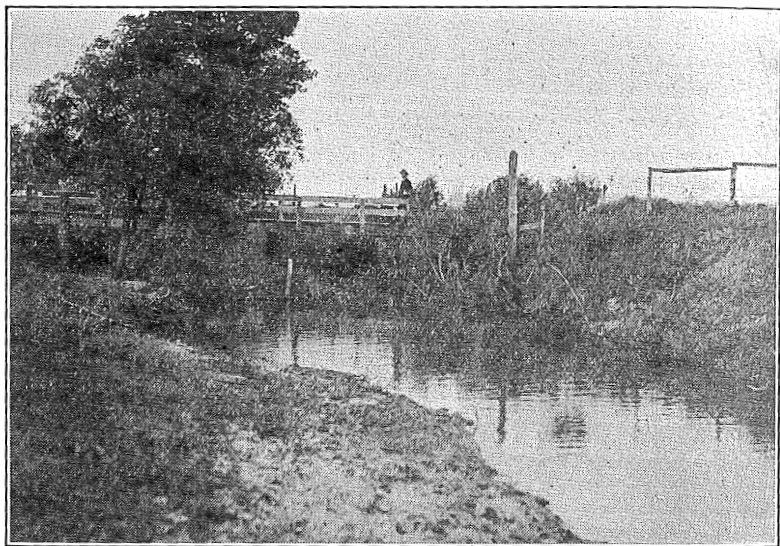


River Jesus Maria (Platte), "Full of Islands" — near Pawnee Trail Crossing.
Photo by A. E. Sheldon, Sept. 26, 1924



Warm Slough Bridge — about 3 miles west of Central City.

Photo by F. H. Shoemaker

NEBRASKA HISTORICAL SOCIETY EXPEDITION

To the Platte-Loup Region in Search of Site of Spanish Massacre of 1720

A Discussion of the Topography, the Streams, the Spanish Officer's Diary

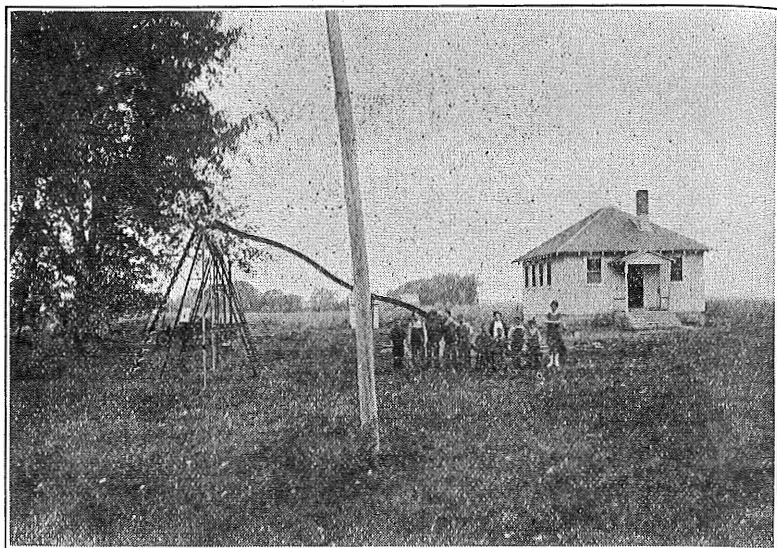
By ADDISON E. SHELDON

"Spanish Expedition Number" is the title of Volume VI, Number 1, of the Nebraska History Magazine. It was printed in 1924. The contents, translated by me from recently discovered Spanish and French documents, give an account of the Spanish invasion of Nebraska in the summer of 1720 and the complete defeat of the invading force by the Otoe and Pawnee Indian tribes at some point in the Platte valley.

Baron De Villiers of Paris, France, the author of this translated document, believes that the Spanish army was exterminated near the junction of the Platte and Loup rivers. His map, printed in the Nebraska History Magazine above referred to, indicates this fact by a star and legend near the present site of the city of Columbus, Platte county. The text of Baron Villier's article, taken from the diary of a Spanish officer who was killed in the battle, gives day by day account of the march of the Spanish force, beginning August 6, 1720 and ending August 10, 1720. This diary describes the direction of the march, the number of leagues marched, the streams encountered on the march and location of the Indian villages.

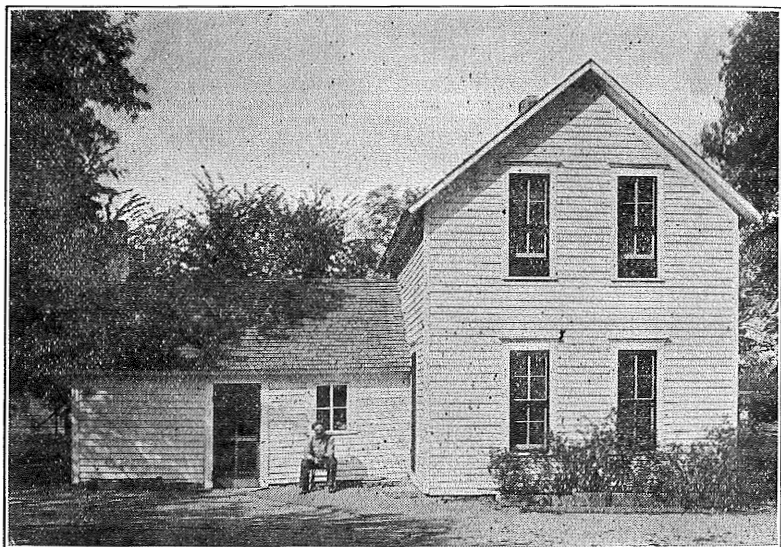
On September 25, 1924, an historical expedition left Lincoln on its way to the valley of the Loup and Platte. This expedition consisted of Frank H. Shoemaker, photographer, E. E. Blackman, curator Historical Society Museum, and Addison E. Sheldon, Superintendent of the Nebraska Historical Society. Our route was over the S. Y. A. to Aurora, thence north to Central City. We reached Central City early in the afternoon and spent the next two days going over the territory between the Platte and the Loup rivers.

The Spanish officer's diary says they crossed the river Jesus Maria (identified as the Platte) where the river was "full of islands" after following the Panane (Pawnee) trail from the southwest. Pawnee trails



School House — Dist. No. 38 — about 6 miles southwest of Central City, near Pawnee Trail Crossing of Platte.

Photo by F. H. Shoemaker



Home of John McMann (Oldest Settler in Merrick County). Pawnee Trail crosses his farm.

Photo by F. H. Shoemaker

leading southwest from the ancient Pawnee villages on the Loup crossed the Platte at several points. On Lieutenant Fremont's map, made in 1842, the principal Pawnee Trail is marked as reaching the Platte just east of the lower end of Grand Island, between the present towns of Chapman and Central City. We adopted the theory that near here was the crossing of the river Jesus Maria by the Spanish army.

The Spanish officer's account says that at a league distance from the river Jesus Maria they found a large creek flowing from west to east whose water was very warm. Warm Slough Creek is such a stream, except that it would not ordinarily be called a large creek. It was named by the early white settlers of Merrick county because its waters were warmer than other streams. It flows from west to east for about fifteen miles, nearly parallel with the Platte and from two to four miles north of that stream.

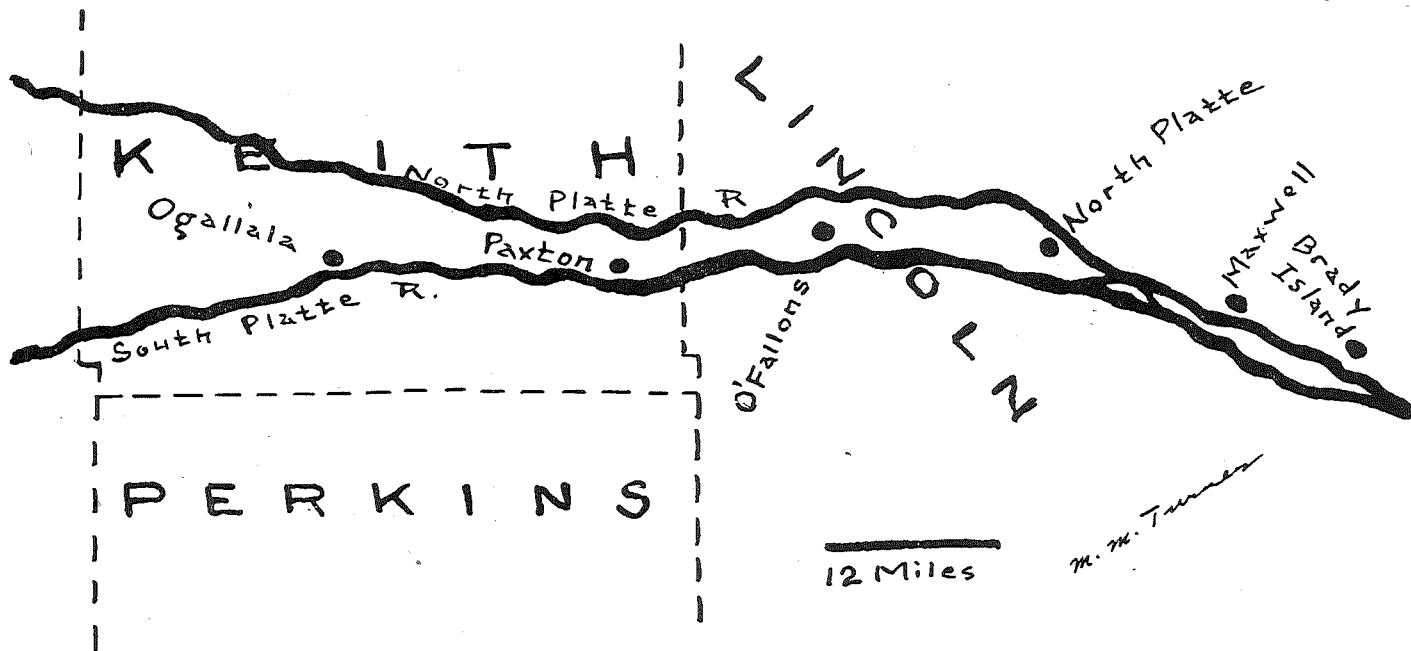
After crossing Warm Slough the Spanish army marched over a plain following the Indian trail. They marched about three leagues (a Spanish league is 2.63 miles) and reaching another creek difficult to cross, they followed this creek about three leagues more on the south side. There they camped over night. Prairie Creek, in Merrick county, in a general way, meets the description of this creek as described by the Spanish officer's diary. It flows from west to east entirely across Merrick county, a distance of about thirty miles. A smooth, elevated plain, visible from afar, marks the divide between Prairie Creek and the Platte for part of this distance.

The next morning, August 9, 1720, the Spanish officer's diary says their scouts reported that they had discovered the Indian village, eight leagues distant on the other side of the creek they were following and that the savages were singing and dancing there in great numbers. This village is further described as "being in a bottom". Eight leagues (about 22 miles) from the camp of the Spanish army, in the general direction of the trail would bring them to the Loup river at some point between Fullerton and Columbus, depending upon the angle of the trail.

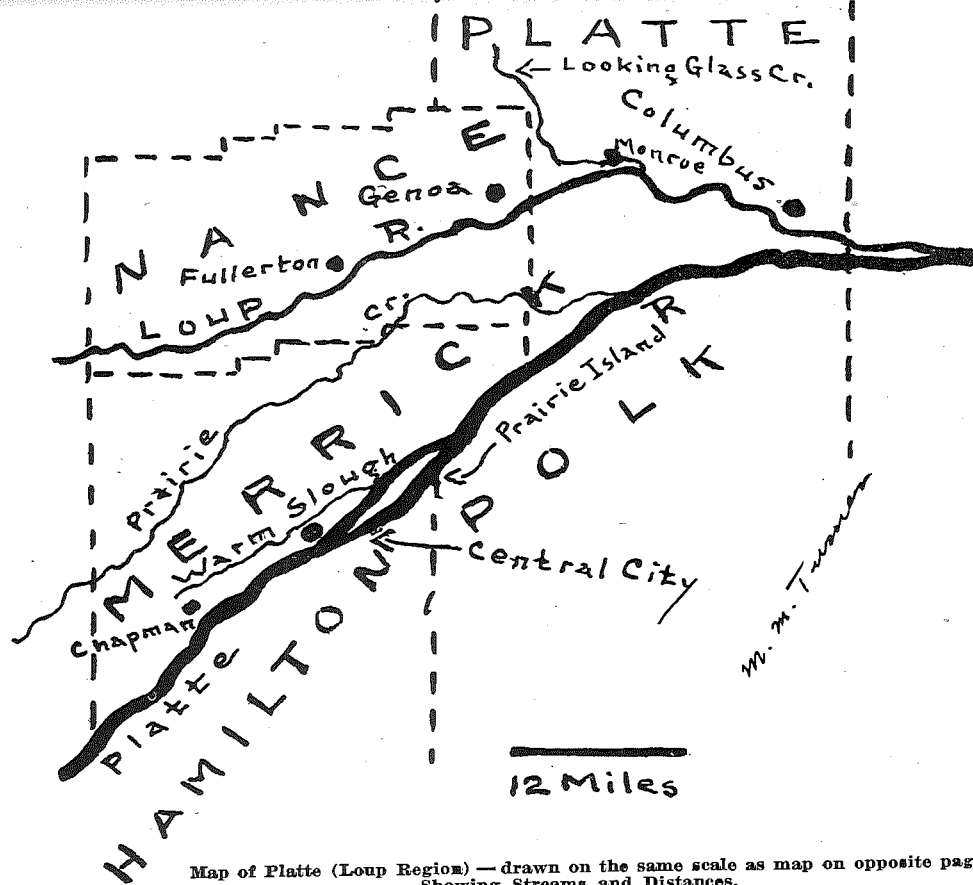
At this point it is not perfectly clear from the Spanish officer's account where the army reached the Loup, which the general named the St. Lawrence, or in Spanish San Lorenzo. It is also not perfectly clear where the Spanish army crossed Prairie creek. But the general conformity of the streams, the topography of the country, the direction of the trails, and the distances fit the region of Merrick and southern Nance counties, in most particulars.]

In addition to the general correspondence between the region as described by the Spanish officer's diary and as it appeared to the Nebraska Historical Expedition on this trip it is a well known fact that the Pawnee Indians for a long time prior to the coming of the whites occupied the region of the Loup river. The ruins of their ancient villages are still found and the evidences indicate occupation at least two or three hundred years ago, perhaps much longer.

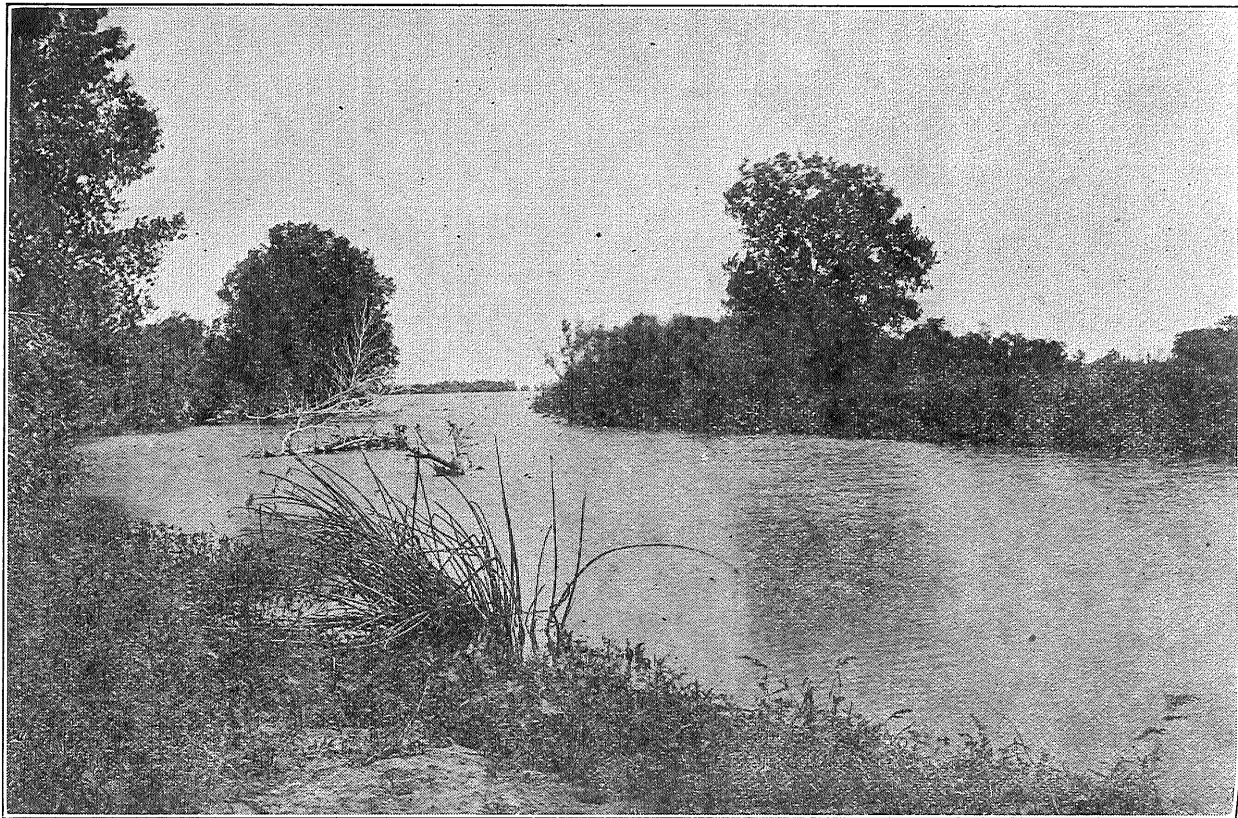
The region between the north and south forks of the Loup river in Lincoln county does not correspond with the Spanish officer's diary with respect to the distances between the river Jesus Maria and the river or creek San Lorenzo. There are no streams there corresponding to the Warm Slough or Prairie creek as described in the Spanish officer's diary. The river "full of islands" might describe the South Platte at this point, but the distance between the two Plattes is too narrow to fit the account of the Spanish army's march.



Map of region at and above fork of North and South Platte Rivers — Showing Distance between Streams.



Map of Platte (Loup Region) — drawn on the same scale as map on opposite page.
Showing Streams and Distances.



Junction of Prairie Creek with Platte — about 10 miles west of Columbus — looking east.