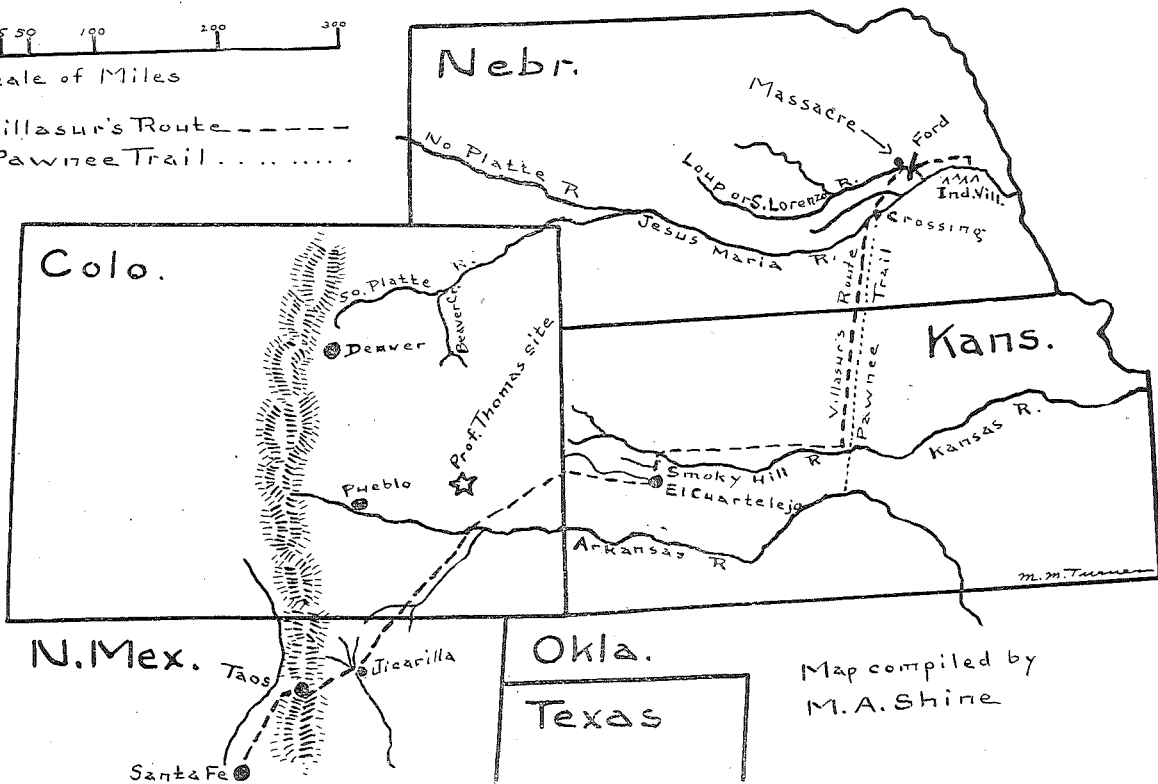




Scale of Miles

Villasur's Route -----
 Pawnee Trail



Map compiled by
M.A. Shine

Map of Route by Father Shine

IN FAVOR OF LOUP SITE

Monignor Shine Gives His Interpretation of Villasur March

By RT. REV. MONSIGNOR M. A. SHINE

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to discuss the enlightening and well presented article by Professor A. B. Thomas on the location of the Villasur Massacre of 1720. Such discussions throw new light on the subject, help to correct mistakes, and enable us to arrive more closely to the truth. While the Professor's hypothesis appears plausible, yet I cannot agree with his conclusions. His argument is based on a supposed location of El Cuartelejo in Colorado, and on his interpretation of the leaf from a Spanish Officer's diary or journal of the expedition.

Our knowledge of El Cuartelejo is meagre and fragmentary as follows: In 1778, the Franciscan, Father Escalante, wrote; "About the middle of the last century (1650) some families of Christian Indians of the town and nation of the Taos revolted, and retired to the plains of Cibola, fortifying themselves at a place, which on this account was called El Cuartelejo (The Far Off Post), where they remained until Juan de Archuleta marched thither, by order of the Governor, with twenty soldiers and some Indian auxiliaries and obliged them to return to their pueblo. He found in their possession kettles and other articles of copper and tin, and asking them whence these had been obtained, they said from the Quivira (Pawnee) towns, to which they had made a journey from Cuartelejo. This statement caused universal astonishment and satisfaction to the Spaniards and Religious in the kingdom, as they supposed these kettles and other utensils to have been made in Quivira, which they believed must be a very civilized and wealthy kingdom. From El Cuartelejo, by that route is the way to the Panana (Pawnee) and it is evident at this day (1778) that there are no other towns in that direction, and the French already trafficked with them (Pawnees) at that time."¹

The above trading events must have taken place after the year 1659, as the first record of French traders in the vicinity of Nebraska or Quivira (Skidi-ra, or Wolf people) was the visit of the Frenchmen Radisson and Grosseilliers in that year, to the "Forked River" (Missouri and Platte Rivers) that divides itself in two with a branch towards the west and the other towards the south which they believed ran towards Mexico from the tokens given them.²

However, the place of this visit is still a matter of controversy. In 1704, some Picuries Indians fled from New Mexico to Cuartelejo, where they remained two years until Captain Uribarri marched there (in 1706) and took possession, naming the province San Luis, and the Indian rancheria Santo Domingo.³

¹ U. S. Catholic Hist. Mag. vol. III, p. 86-87.

² Wisconsin Hist. Colns. vol. XI, p. 70.

So. Dakota Hist. Colns. vol. I, p. 173.

³ Bancroft, H. H., Ariz. & New Mex. vol. XVII, p. 229.

Twitchell says, that after the reconquest of New Mexico some of the Picurries joined the Jicarilla Apaches at this post, and that since that period, both tribes have intermarried.⁴

July, 1715, the Duke of Linares, Mexico, sent an order of the Viceroy for Captain Naranjo, to carry a letter to Cuartelejo.⁵

In 1719 Valverde was visited by the Cuartelejo Apaches somewhere on the Arkansas River⁶, and in 1720 Villasur's Expedition called there, on their way to the Rio Jesus-Maria, or Platte River.⁷

In 1727, Gov. Bustamente notified the Viceroy that the French had settled at Cuartelejo, and proposed an expedition to find out what was being done, and asking for troops for that purpose. His request was not granted, but he was to obtain all possible information about it, from the Indians.⁸

This last report was probably caused by rumors about Bourgmont's expedition to the Padoucas or Comanche in Kansas in 1724, or about the establishment of the military and trading post of Fort Kansa, on the Missouri River, in the vicinity of the present Ft. Leavenworth, in 1726 or 1727.⁹

The above is substantially all that we know, so far, about El Cuartelejo. Now, was it located in Colorado or in Kansas?

It would be interesting to us to read the two diaries of Uribarri and Valverde, and trace out their route for ourselves. Since their destination was El Cuartelejo on the eastern plains, we cannot understand their hugging the foothills of the mountains for eighty leagues to the north.

The Colorado location is only a supposition of where it ought to be, to fit a hypothesis, and is not confirmed or strengthened by a solitary fact. On the other hand the airline proposition is a rather unfortunate one for this hypothesis.

The airline distance from Santa Fe to the junction of the North and South Platte Rivers, on Mooney's "Map of the Kiowa Range"¹⁰, is about 470 miles, or not quite 180 Spanish leagues.¹¹

If the Colorado Cuartelejo, is half way, then it is only 235 miles, or less than 90 leagues from Santa Fe, and consequently, it does not "fit the sources" and amazingly "lacks the support of distance."

Again the airline distance from the Cimarron junction, or Jicarilla, to Pueblo, Col., is only 110 miles, or 42 leagues, whereas 80 leagues north from the same junction, or 210 miles, would bring the expedition within 15 miles of Denver, Col., and Cuartelejo being "30 leagues or 80 miles" eastward, would be, by coincidence, located on a branch of a Beaver Creek in Colorado, a tributary of the South Platte River.

This location would bring Cuartelejo within 175 miles, or 66 leagues of the junction of the North and South Platte Rivers, which location of course, Prof. Thomas could not grant, because it is about two thirds, instead of one half the distance from Santa Fe.

⁴ Twitchell, R. E., Spanish Archives of N. Mex. vol. II, p. 236, no. 542.

⁵ Twitchell, R. E., Spanish Archives of N. Mex. vol. II, p. 178, no. 226.

⁶ Bancroft, H. H., Ariz. & N. Mex. vol. XVII, p. 236.

⁷ Dunn, W. E., Miss. Val. Hist. Rev., vol II, p. 361.

Dunbar, J. B., Kansas Hist. Colns. vol. XI, p. 408.

⁸ Bancroft, H. H., Ariz. & N. Mex. vol. XVII, p. 239.

Dunn, W. E., Miss. Val. Hist. Rev., vol II, p. 361.

⁹ Kansas Hist. Colns. vol. X, p. 336, 338, 340.

¹⁰ 17th Report Bureau of American Ethnology, Part I, Plate LVII.

¹¹ "A Spanish (judicial) league was equivalent to 2.63 statute miles."

14th Rpt. Bu. Am. Ethnology, Part I, p. 399, note.

On the contrary, by taking the distances of Uribarri, as given by Prof. Thomas, of 80 leagues to the northeast, instead of north, from Cimarron junction along the Purgatoire River, crossing the Arkansas River, will bring us to a point on the eastern boundary line of Colorado, that is just about 24 leagues, or 65 miles west of the Kansas Cuartelejo, which nicely fits the sources, and conforms to the required distance.

The Kansas Cuartelejo is by airline about 350 miles, or 133 leagues from Santa Fe, and by marching distance it is 150 leagues, or 394 miles, by allowing about 17 leagues, or 44 miles for meanderings and detours. The ruins of the Kansas Cuartelejo were discovered about 1885, and are located in the valley of Beaver Creek, (called Ladder Creek on the maps) about 12 miles due north of Scott City, in Scott County, Kansas, and about 10 miles south of the Smoky Hill River. The pueblo structure there was built of large sandstones and adobe, and was about 53 by 35 feet, with the inside walls plastered. It was situated on a mound, about 75 yards from the bed of Beaver Creek. Charred corn, charcoal, and burned bone and stone implements indicate that it was destroyed by fire.¹²

Having, as we think, satisfactorily located Cuartelejo in Scott County, Kansas, let us try and trace the Spaniards journey from there to the Rio Jesus-Maria, or Platte River. The airline distance from the Kansas Cuartelejo to North Platte is about 175 miles, or 66 leagues, while the airline distance from the same place to the junction of the Loup Fork with the Platte River, is about 273 miles, or 103 leagues, showing that the support of distance is in favor of the Loup Fork location.

What route was taken we do not know but it is most probable that they followed the well beaten Indian trails. They probably went north the ten miles to the Smoky Hill River¹³, thence east on the north side of that stream about 135 miles to the mouth of Coal Creek, in present Russell County, southwest of the town of Wilson, Kansas, where they found the Pawnee Trail¹⁴, then north about 88 miles to Guide Rock, Webster County, Neb., and from there, to where they crossed the Platte River, about 90 miles, making a total of about 323 miles, or about 124 Spanish Leagues. By making allowances for meanderings and detours, during this last half of the journey would bring the total distance very close to the reckoning of the Lieut. General, who estimated the distance "was about 300 leagues."¹⁵

Our interpretation of the leaf from the Spanish Officer's Diary is as follows:

Tuesday, August 6,—They began to cross the Platte River, at approximately 22 miles airline, southwest from the junction of the Loup with the Platte. The Platte here flows from southwest to northeast.

Wed., Aug. 7,—Finished crossing the Platte, and all together in camp.

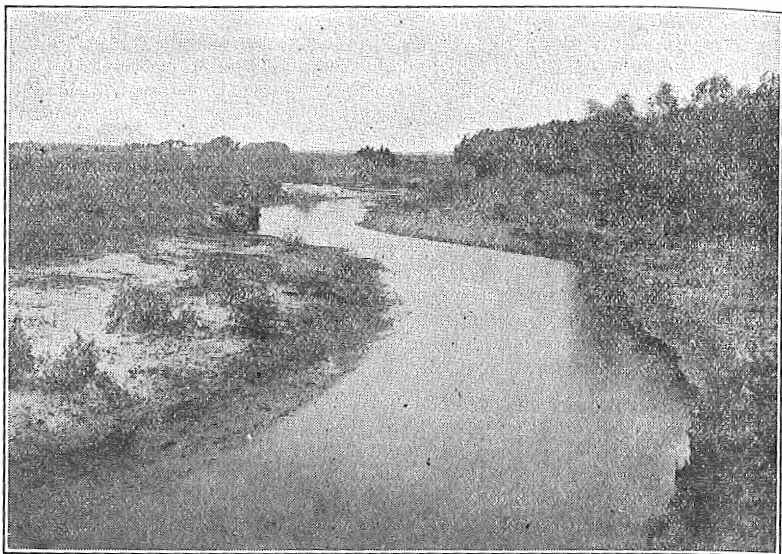
Thurs., Aug. 8,—At one league from the Platte Crossing, they found a large creek (Prairie Creek) which it was necessary to cross, and which they did cross, finding the water very warm, and its course was from west to east, and as they surmised, it was a branch of the Platte river.

¹² Kansas Hist. Colns. vol. VI, p. 124-130.

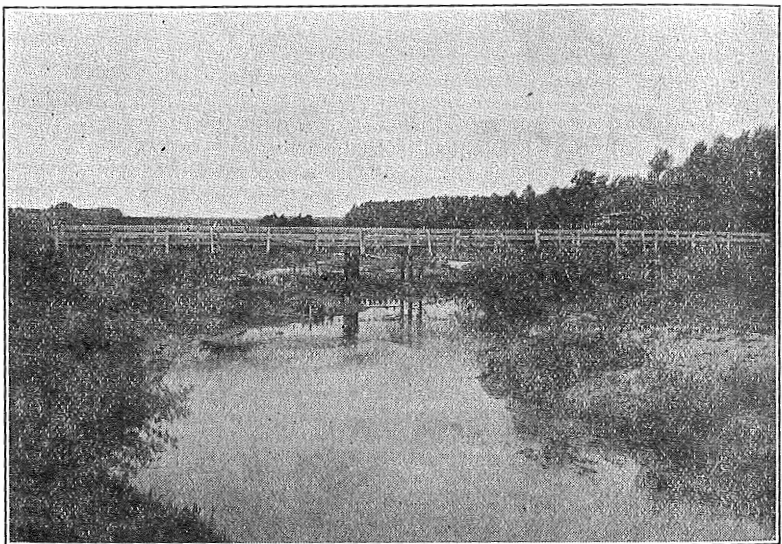
¹³ 18th Rpt. Bu. Am. Ethnology, Part II, maps, 26, 41, 42

¹⁴ Kansas Hist. Colns. vol. V, p. 92.

¹⁵ Neb. Hist. & Record of Pio. days. vol. VI, p. 14.



Prairie Creek — looking west. At a point about 9 miles north of Central City.
Photo by F. H. Shoemaker



Prairie Creek Bridge — 9 miles north of Central City.
Photo by F. H. Shoemaker

They then marched 3 leagues or 8 miles over a plain until they reached the banks of a second creek, (Loup River) which it was impossible to cross, and consequently they continued to march 3 leagues more, along the banks of this creek to a plain, where they halted and went into camp. Total distance marched on this day, 7 leagues. Here two scouts reported, not to worry if Capt. Naranjo did not return to camp that night.

Fri., Aug. 9.—The camp being ready to march, a scout reported that the Pawnee camp was discovered the preceding night 8 leagues distant on the other (north) side of the creek they were following. Orders were given at once to cross the creek (Loup River) which, although deep, was safely crossed. This crossing of the Loup river was about four miles northwest of Columbus, Platte County, Nebr.

They then marched down 3 leagues, or about 8 miles to the junction of the Loup River with the Platte, and encamped about 11 a. m. at a distance of 5 leagues, or 13 miles from the first discovered Pawnee camp. While in this camp the Lieut. General named the creek (Loup River) Saint Lawrence.

From this junction camp, also, the Lt. General sent Francois Sistaca¹⁶, the Pawnee savage of Capt. La Serne, to parley with his tribe. He returned in the evening, reporting that the Indians had moved 3 leagues, or 8 miles, farther on, and were crossing the river to their village. When they approached him, becoming frightened, he galloped 8 leagues back to this junction camp.

Sat., Aug. 10.—The Spaniards marched the 8 leagues or 21 miles, along the north side of the Platte, until they came in sight of the Indian village. After a parley the Pawnee savage, of Capt. La Serne, was sent over the river to the village with instructions and presents of tobacco.

The first discovered Indian camp, 5 leagues, or 13 miles from the junction was about south of the present Schuyler. As the Indians moved on 3 leagues or 8 miles further to cross the river to their village, this crossing was about south of Rogers, and the village was located in the vicinity of the present town of Linwood, an ancient Indian site.

According to the French version, it was in this village that the massacre occurred.

Professor Thomas throws new light on the affair, by giving us the Spanish accounts of the survivors of the massacre. According to these accounts, the Spaniards waited Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 10th and 11th for information, then fearing treachery, they retreated 11 leagues, or 29 miles, instead of 8 leagues, to the crossing of the St. Lawrence Creek, or the Loup River, about four miles northwest of Columbus, and encamped on the south side of the river, on the former site of their camp of Friday, Aug. 9th.

It was here, on August 12th or 13th, according to the Spanish versions, that the massacre occurred.¹⁷

Let us hope that other documents may be found that will tend to clear up all the difficulties, and doubtful points.

Michael A. Shine.

¹⁶ Francois Sistaca, probably from the Pawnee words, Chahis, man or Pawnee, and taka, white, i. e. white man, or white Pawnee.

¹⁷ Dunn, W. E., *Miss. Val. Hist. Rev.*, vol. II, p. 356.