The Sixth's Elysian Fields—Fort Atkinson on the Council Bluffs

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Article Summary: Fort Atkinson was established to protect American territories and people from both Indian tribes and the British. It attempted to establish amicable relations with neighboring tribes and served as the gateway of the westward migration.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Henry Atkinson; Willoughby Morgan; Henry Leavenworth; W S Foster; A R Woolley; Prince Paul, Duke Von Wuerttemberg; James Kennerly; Benjamin O'Fallon; John Dougherty; William H Ashley; A R Woolley, John D Lee

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Photographs / Images: Henry Atkinson, Henry Leavenworth, ruins of Fort Atkinson in 1833

Gen. Henry Atkinson

General Atkinson's achievements in commanding the Yellowstone Expeditionary Forces and establishing a post at the Council Bluffs were recognized in the naming of the post, Fort Atkinson.

THE SIXTH'S ELYSIAN FIELDS—

FORT ATKINSON ON THE COUNCIL BLUFFS

BY SALLY A. JOHNSON

HIGH and alone on the Council Bluffs stood Fort Atkinson, until 1827 the most remote United States military outpost protecting the western frontier from hostile Indian bands. During the 1820's it had one of the largest garrisons in the country. Its guns commanded the Missouri River, and it controlled the traffic to and from the Upper Missouri country.

Fort Atkinson was part of a plan conceived after the War of 1812 to build a chain of forts west of the Mississippi; these posts were intended as protection for the rapidly growing fur trade and to serve as warning to British trading companies that encroachments on American territories would not be tolerated.[1] In 1819 Secretary of War,

[1] A thorough examination of the reasons for the founding of Fort Atkinson may be found in Ray E. Nelson's "Old Fort Atkinson" (MA. thesis, University of Chicago, 1940).

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John C. Calhoun, initiated the project by ordering the Yellowstone Expeditionary Force, under the command of Col. Henry Atkinson,[2] to proceed up the Missouri River to establish fortifications at the Council Bluffs, the Mandan villages, and the Yellowstone River. After weeks cordelling[3] the keel boats, the steamboats having broken down along the way, the troops reached Council Bluffs. There approaching winter forced them to halt and construct shelter. They named their post Cantonment Missouri. In 1820 the plan for the series of forts was sharply curtailed by a budget-minded Congress, leaving only the new post near Council Bluffs.

From its beginning, Cantonment Missouri was plagued by misfortune. During the winter, supplies ran short and over one hundred and sixty of the soldiers died of scurvy and fevers. In June 1820 flood waters of the Missouri River completely destroyed it.[4] When rebuilding was begun, a new site was selected, one on top of the bluff. The site was that recommended by William Clark in his journal of the famous Lewis and Clark Expedition: "The Situation of our last Camp Councile Bluff or Handsom Prarie, (25 Days from this to *Santafee*) appears to be a verry proper place for a Tradeing establishment & fortification."[5]

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[2] Henry Atkinson began his career as a captain in the Third Infantry in 1808; he advanced rapidly and in 1815 was transferred to the Sixth Infantry; in June 1819 he assumed command of the Ninth Military Department; after the consolidation he declined an appointment as adjutant general and in August 1821 was assigned to the Sixth Infantry with brevet rank of brigadier general and commander of the Northwest frontier; his death occurred in 1842. (Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* I [Washington, 1902], p. 174.)

[3] To make headway against the Missouri current, the men cordelled or pulled the boats from along the banks by heavy ropes attached to the vessel. Timber and brush along the banks and frequent plunges into the water made this arduous and unhealthy work.

[4] A more thorough discussion of Cantonment Missouri may be found in the author's "Cantonment Missouri, 1819-1820," *Nebraska History,* XXXVII (June, 1956), 121-134.

[5] Reuben Thwaites (ed.), *Original Journals of Lewis and Clark,* I (New York, 1904), 98-99. (For a discussion of Council Bluffs see the author's "Fort Atkinson at Council Bluffs," *Nebraska History* XXXVIII [September, 1957], 229-236.)

The troops struggled throughout the summer and fall to complete their post. Logs had to be cut and dragged to the bluff; brick was burned in the kiln to make foundations and chimneys. By October 1820 the soldiers were able to move into the cantonment, which was temporarily called Council Bluffs in honor of the important meeting held here in 1804 between Lewis and Clark and the Indians. In January 1821 the post was officially designated Fort Atkinson.[6] At the height of its development, the fortification was surrounded by numerous storehouses, laundresses' cabins, and other buildings, and the post operated a saw mill and a grist mill, capable of grinding 150 bushels a day. At the foot of the bluff, docks were constructed where boats bringing the military supplies and the boats of the fur traders could unload.

Fort Atkinson was constructed and garrisoned by the troops of the Yellowstone Expeditionary Force, the Rifle Regiment and the Sixth Infantry. The crack regiment of the Army was the Rifle Regiment, commanded by Col. Willoughby Morgan.[7] In 1799 Congress had authorized the organization of a battalion of riflemen, but this was not accomplished until 1808 when a regiment was formed. In 1814 three additional rifle regiments were recruited, but a year later the four regiments were consolidated into one. Chosen as part of the Yellowstone Expedition because of their scouting experience, the riflemen received rigorous practice in maneuvers and firing before they moved up the river. They were required to fire their rifles without rests; and they perfected their marksmanship by firing at targets

[6] Secretary of War Calhoun wrote: "In respect of the works at Council Bluffs, I think it sufficiently important to be considered a Fort and in consideration of your indefatigable industry and skillful efforts in accomplishing the objects of the Executive as far as you have progressed toward a completion of the whole plan it will be named 'Fort Atkinson.'" (Letter, Calhoun to Atkinson, January 5, 1821, Clarence E. Carter [comp.], *The Territorial Papers of the United States,* XV, *Louisiana and Missouri* [Washington, 1951], p. 688.)

[7] Willoughby Morgan became a captain in 1812, rose to major in 1813, and was retained in the Army in 1815 as captain in the Rifle Regiment with brevet rank of major from June 1813; he was transferred to the Sixth Infantry in 1821 and to the Fifth Infantry on October 1, 1821. (Heitman, *op. cit.,* p. 726.)

set at fifty to one hundred and twenty yards. When the powder was discovered to be bad, it was decided that those who fired two shots within four inches of the center of the target at one hundred yards were entitled to be called first class marksmen. Riflemen wore distinctive uniforms of grey, the pattern of which is still retained in the uniform worn by West Point cadets today.[8]

The sobriquet, "The Fighting Sixth," seems to be well applied to this infantry regiment. Recruited largely in North Carolina, the Sixth came into existence during the naval war with France 1798-1800 and was discharged in that latter year. The Sixth was again revived under the Act of April 12, 1808. During the War of 1812, the Sixth fought ably in the battles of Queenstown Heights, York, Fort George, and the Siege of Plattsburg. After the war the Eleventh, Twenty-fifth, Twenty-seventh, Twenty-ninth, and Thirty-seventh regiments of infantry were consolidated into the Sixth. The regiment had been stationed in Plattsburg, New York, prior to its arrival on the Missouri River to participate in the Yellowstone Expedition.

The peacetime Army of 1820 was composed of many veterans of the War of 1812, who had remained in service rather than return to civilian occupational pursuits. Discipline, built upon a hierarchy of rank and command, was harsh. Although privilege was accorded to those in command, the rank and file had few rewards for the difficult and often dangerous work they performed. Because of the difficulty in rising from the ranks to higher positions, many young Americans refrained from enlisting, so aliens were recruited to fill the companies. Many of the enlisted men were illiterate; some had criminal records; usually they sought escape from unpleasant conditions at home and looked upon the Army as a refuge where clothing, food, and a measure of security would be provided.

The Army standard for enlistment was low. Each recruit was examined by the medical officer to ascertain

[8] Col. B. R. Lewis, "Early U. S. Military Riflemen," *The American Rifleman,* XVI (December, 1958), 30-33.

whether he was an habitual drunkard, subject to convulsions, that he had "perfect use of all his limbs; that he had no tumors, ulcerated legs, rupture, nor chronic cutaneous affliction." Invalids having piles or other infirmities, which they did not report to the surgeon, were subject to severe punishment as "swindlers and imposters." All recruits that had not had the disease were vaccinated for smallpox.[9]

In 1821 Congress, faced with a depression, decided to reduce the Army from eight regiments of infantry and one of riflemen to seven regiments of infantry. To limit its forces, and yet at the same time maintain maximum effectiveness, the War Department decided to consolidate the Rifle Regiment and the Sixth Infantry into one regiment of infantry, which would be left on the Missouri River at Fort Atkinson. Selection of the officers and men to be retained in the newly-formed Sixth was left to the commanding officer. By May 10 the selection of those who were to remain was made.[10] The old regiments were paraded for the last time, and those who were to be discharged marched to the waiting boats at the landing to embark for Belle Fontaine, under the command of Capt. William Armstrong.[11] To prevent premature celebrations by those being released, no whiskey was sold to the soldiers after May 8.

Once the supernumeraries had departed, Colonel Morgan, now commandant of the post, turned his attention to molding his troops into a well-drilled and disciplined regiment. The routine at Fort Atkinson was typical of that at

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[9] William L. Gordon-Miller, *Recollections of the United States Army. . .* (Boston, 1845), pp. vii-xi.

[10] The officers to be retained were: Capt. W. S. Foster, D. Ketchum, T. Hamilton, W. F. Haile, E. Shaler, W. Martin, M. Magee, J. McGunnigle, W. Armstrong, J. S. Gray, 1st Lts. I. Clarke, J. Browne, J. C. Taylor, Z. C. Palmer, J. Gantt, G. Field, C. Pentland, T. W. Kavanaugh, L. Palmer, S. Shannon; 2nd. Lts. W. N. Wickliffe, J. Bradley, N. J. Cruger, T. Noel, W. W. Morris, W. D. McCray, W. Thompson, J. Duncan, W. Rector, R. Wells, Surgeons J. Gale and W. H. Nicoll. (Fort Atkinson Records, III, Orderly Book 15, April 7, 1821. Typed copy in collections of Nebraska State Historical Society. Hereafter these records will be designated as F.A.R., O.B.)

[11] William Armstrong joined the Rifle Regiment in 1813 and served throughout the remainder of the war; in 1818 he was appointed captain and was transferred to the Sixth Infantry in 1821; he died February 11, 1827. (Heitman, *op. cit.*, p. 170.)

almost every post of this period. At daybreak *reveille* was sounded, and the men assembled in front of their quarters for roll call. After the quarters had been put in order, the front area was swept, the livestock watered and fed, and other fatigues accomplished. The morning reports were handed to the assistant adjutant; and at the sound of the sick call, the first sergeants conducted the ill to the surgeons. Immediately before breakfast, at eight o'clock, roll was again taken, and the signal, "Molly Put the Kettle On," was given. After breakfast, the guard mounted its post, the daily fatigues were commenced, and the post settled into the routine of the day. Although drilling received its share of attention, the major part of the men's time was occupied with the agricultural activities of the post or with repairing barracks and other structures. At noon, another roll call was made, and the men, in response to the signal, "Peas Upon the Trencher," sat down to eat. Fatigue drum beat again at one o'clock. "Roast Beef" was the signal for the evening meal.[12]

Twenty minutes before sundown, the companies marched to the parade ground, where the band sounded "retreat." The senior officer reviewed the parade and received the salute, after which the parade was dismissed. After retreat, the men returned to their quarters; the animals were bedded down, and the music assembled for "tattoo." Roll was called for the fifth and final time; lights were extinguished; and the men retired to "remain perfectly quiet." Tattoo in the summer was eight o'clock and nine o'clock in the winter.

The command at Fort Atkinson frequently changed. On April 3, 1821, Col. Willoughby Morgan succeeded Col.

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[12] The names for the signals are taken from the official "Systems of Martial Law, Field Service, and Police," *American State Papers: Military Affairs,* II, pp. 208-209.

Talbot Chambers,[13] who had been ordered into arrest.[14] In January 1822 Colonel Morgan was transferred from the Sixth to the Fifth Regiment of Infantry. Perhaps it was with a sense of relief that he surrendered the command at Fort Atkinson to Col. Henry Leavenworth,[15] newly transferred from the Fifth. Despite Brig. Gen. Henry Atkinson's warning that he would have "much care & trouble . . . in the discharge of the duties," Colonel Leavenworth assumed command of the post "proud and highly gratified in having the honor to command so honorable and respectable a Regiment. . ." He assured the men that his aim would be to make the situation of the regiment as comfortable and agreeable as possible.[16] During the expedition against the Arikara villages in 1823, Maj. W. S. Foster[17] commanded the fort; and during the peace treaty expedition of 1825, Col. A. R. Woolley[18] was in charge. Leavenworth was transferred in 1825, and Woolley remained in charge until Octo-

[13] Talbot Chambers joined the Army in 1808, rose steadily in rank, becoming lieutenant colonel in the Rifle Regiment in 1817; he was transferred to the First Infantry in June, 1821 and was dismissed from service in 1826. (Heitman, *op. cit.*, p. 294.)

[14] In 1818, Colonel Chambers had been reprimanded for inflicting fifty lashes on a civilian employed as a boatman. On May 2, 1821, he was tried before a general court martial at Fort Atkinson on charges of transcending his authority by having the ears of William Evans and John McCormick cut off for desertion without convening a court martial. He was found guilty and sentenced to be suspended from rank for one month, but the court "earnestly recommended that the sentence be remitted." (F.A.R., I, General Order of Adjt. Gen'ls Office, June 30, 1821.)

[15] Henry Leavenworth entered the Army in 1812 as a captain and was promoted in 1813; a lieutenant colonel, he was transferred to the Sixth Infantry in 1821 and became a colonel in 1825; he was brevetted for distinguished service at Chippewa, Niagara Falls, and for ten years' service in one grade. (Heitman, *op. cit.*, p. 622.)

[16] F.A.R., III, O.B. 18, January 4, 1822.

[17] William Sewell Foster joined the Army in 1812 and was transferred to Sixth Infantry in 1815; he became a major in the Fourth Infantry on July 7, 1826 but had been brevetted major in 1814 for gallant conduct in the defense of Fort Erie; he was brevetted colonel, December 25, 1837, for distinguished service in Florida and particularly in the battle of Kissimme. (*Ibid.*, p. 432.)

[18] Abraham R. Woolley entered the Army as captain in 1812 and transferred to the Sixth Infantry in 1823; he received his lieutenant colonelcy in 1825 and was dismissed May 1, 1829. (Heitman, *op. cit.*, p. 1060.)

ber 1826, when Maj. Daniel Ketchum[19] succeeded him. Woolley resumed command in April 1827, but plans were already under way for the removal of the troops to Jefferson Barracks by then.

The commandant was assisted in his work by his staff officers, the adjutant, quartermaster, commissary of subsistence, ordnance officer, and surgeons, and by company officers.

No departments were more important to the smooth functioning of the post than those of the quartermaster and commissary of subsistence. The nearest depot for supplies was St. Louis, and the problem of feeding and clothing the troops at Council Bluffs was intensified by the poor means of transportation. The loss of boats en route, due to the many hazards of the Missouri River, at times caused stocks of needed articles to run dangerously low. Cargoes which were rescued from wrecked boats usually sustained water damage so that many barrels and boxes had to be destroyed. Food in particular spoiled readily.

Only a subaltern of real ability could handle capably the numerous duties of the quartermaster and keep accurately the many records and reports that had to be filled out and filed. Two of the ablest of the younger officers, Lt. Gabriel Field[20] and Lt. Reuben Holmes,[21] the latter graduating fourth in his class at the Military Academy, were among those who performed this office at Fort Atkinson.

The quartermaster was charged with providing storage houses for all military supplies and provisions, purchasing

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[19] Daniel Ketchum joined the Army in 1812 and was transferred as captain to the Sixth Infantry in 1815; he was brevetted major for distinguished service in the battle of Niagara Falls, Upper Canada, 1814 and died August 30, 1828. (Heitman, *op. cit.*, p. 595.)

[20] Gabriel Field joined the Rifle Regiment in 1817 and was transferred to the Sixth at the time of the consolidation; he served as quartermaster for a time, and his death occurred at the post April 16, 1823. (*Ibid.*, p. 419.)

[21] Reuben Holmes joined the Sixth Infantry as a second lieutenant in 1823; he became a captain of dragoons March 4, 1833 but died in that same year. (*Ibid.*, p. 538.)

wagons and draft animals used at the post, and repairing the barracks for any sum less than $500. He had to oversee the carpenters, blacksmiths, bakery, the express that carried the mail to Chariton, Missouri, and points south, and the building of roads. Strained storage facilities caused Lieutenant Field to complain in August 1820 that his stores were "exposed to every beating rain that falls." Responsible for between $15,000 and $20,000 worth of clothing, which had already sustained some theft, Field felt that priority should be given the construction of new storehouses.[22] Colonel Leavenworth, perhaps motivated by the rising sick reports, failed to concur with his quartermaster, suggesting that the storerooms were "certainly as good at this time as they had been at any other time since the establishment of this post, and if the stores are liable to injury from the rain it is an evil which may be easily cured, as the buildings have good shingle roofs and are c[h]inked and pointed." Field was relieved of the duty and Leavenworth claimed the last word in the argument; he noted firmly that the "Clothing and Quarter Masters Stores in the mean time [until new store rooms were completed] are safe."[23]

The morale of the soldiers stationed at remote outposts depended much on the quality and quantity of the food they received; thus the selection of the officer to serve as assistant commissary of subsistence was made with care. In addition to receiving and accounting for all subsistence stores, the commissary was expected to make requisitions for supplies, with the approval of the commanding officer, to purchase "on the best terms possible" needed articles when goods failed to arrive, and to arrange

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[22] F.A.R., VI, O.B. 35, August 22, 1822. A total of $158.59½ was expended over a five year period on the enlisted man ($31.72 per year). At the time of his death, the estate of Private Gourlay consisted of the following effects: 1 uniform coat, 7 pairs of overalls, 1 vest, 2 prs. gray overalls, 1 pr. drawers (new), 1 pr. drawers (old), 2 prs. stockings, 1 case razors, 1 pr. boots, 4 prs. shoes, 1 pr. socks, 1 woolen cap, 1 pr. shears, 2 razors, 1 gray jacket, 1 pr. overalls, 1 forage cap. (F.A.R., V, O.B. 27, April 3, 1827.)

[23] *Ibid.*, VI, O.B. 35, September 3, 1822.

storage of items in buildings provided by the quartermaster.

The commissary issued to the quartermaster sergeants of each company from four to six days' supplies, which were then taken to the individual kitchens to be prepared. Regulations were prescribed by the War Department concerning the cooking of the mess: meats were to be "boiled with a view to soup, sometimes roasted or baked, never fried." Regulations also established that the component parts of the rations were to consist of: three-fourths of a pound of pork, or one pound and one-fourth of fresh beef, or one pound and one-fourth of salt beef, or twelve ounces of bacon; eighteen ounces of bread or flour, or twelve ounces of hard bread, or one and one-fourth pounds corn meal, and one gill of whiskey. For every hundred rations, the men were provided four pounds of soap, one pound and a half of candles, two quarts salt, four quarts vinegar, and twelve quarts peas or beans.[24] Corn meal, garden produce, and game supplemented these rations. When a meal was ready to be served, the quartermaster corporal of each company was required to report immediately to the company commander, and the food was inspected before the men sat down to the table, a duty frequently neglected by company officers and for which they were sharply reprimanded.

General Atkinson's fond hope was to make Council Bluffs, with the exception of a "few hundred grown Hogs and a moderate supply of beef cattle" wholly self sufficient after the year 1821. Direction of the agricultural activities was assigned to the quartermaster until 1822, when Major Ketchum was appointed Director of Agriculture. That same year an ambitious project of placing 512 acres of land under cultivation was begun. Private gardens as well as regimental and company gardens were laid out; and root cellars were dug in which to store the produce. To forestall depredations to these gardens, the officer of the

[24] "Systems of Martial Law, and Field Service, and Police," p. 210.

day sent out patrols after retreat to protect the cabbages, beets, radishes, parsnips, carrots, and other vegetables that were ripening. The glowing report of Maj. Gen. E. P. Gaines during his inspection tour of the Sixth Regiment more than compensated for the arduous labor performed by the men. Gaines was delighted that, although the crops occasionally had required the labor of sixty to eighty soldiers, their drills had not been neglected. Indeed the soldiers had "rendered themselves quite equal in the Knowledge of Military duty to the men of other Corps not less employed in cultivating the soil;" and "in as much as habits of useful industry are known to create moral Sentiments, & strengthen virtue in every grade of mankind; it is but reasonable to conclude that men employed in the occasional cultivation of the soil possess at least as much if not more sound moral character than those employed in the ordinary garrison duty."[25]

The success of the experiment in farming west of the Missouri was confirmed by the corn harvest in 1822. Almost nineteen thousand bushels of corn were husked for the post, excluding that raised by each company for its own use. To house all of the grain reaped, it was necessary to construct a barn, 120 feet by 30 feet. In addition hogs and cattle were fed, although it was necessary to station the best riflemen as guards to protect the livestock from wolves. A civilian, Ashael Savery, was employed to superintend the care of the cattle and to manage a dairy, where butter and cheese were made. His salary was defrayed from the sale of these products to the officers and their families. Prince Paul, Duke Von Wuerttemberg, was so impressed with the enterprise that he wrote:

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[25] Report of General Gaines, F.A.R., IV, O.B. 20, September 30, 1822. Inspector George Croghan was less complimentary, reporting that the men devoted so much of their time to their agricultural pursuits that military training was entirely neglected. Even before his unfavorable report, Colonel Woolley had posted the following notice: "Farming hereafter is to be subordinate to military instruction and habits and is not to be made an excuse for neglect of duties, strictly military." (F.A.R., V, O.B. 27, April 11, 1826.)

> The American military establishment must be looked upon as a great industrial center . . . In 1823, it was still necessary for the government to supply the post with salt meat and brandy. In the following year the garrison had raised enough stock to supply meat, which took the place of unwholesome salt meat. . .[26]

The agricultural activities did not always succeed well. In 1826 flooding of the lower gardens reduced the size of the lots allowed each company, field and staff officer, and the hospital to two acres each. Disease also plagued the soldiers who worked in the fields. In October 1826, although he was not then aware of it, Capt. Z. C. Palmer[27] began to supervise the harvesting of the last crops grown at Fort Atkinson.

The health of the post was a constant concern to the commanding officer. Various illnesses struck the men from the very beginning of their enterprise. Scurvy and fever caused many deaths during the winter of 1819-1820. Dressed in the black uniform prescribed by regulations, the post surgeons, Drs. John Gale[28] and William Nicoll,[29] did their best to safeguard the health of their men in a day when many diseases had not been correctly diagnosed. Treatment was at best crude, and even the known supplies gave out and stocks were difficult to replenish.

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[26] Paul Wilhelm, Duke of Wuerttemberg, "First Journey to North America in the Years 1822-1824." *South Dakota Historical Collections,* XIX, pp. 361-362.

[27] Zalmon C. Palmer rose from the ranks to a second lieutenant in the Sixth Infantry in 1817, was made adjutant in 1820, became a captain in 1826, and resigned in 1836. (Heitman, *op. cit.,* p. 768.)

[28] John Gale joined the Army in 1812, was relieved of duty at the end of the war and reinstated in 1815, and was transferred to the Rifle Regiment in 1818; he was retained after the consolidation and died in 1830. (*Ibid.,* p. 453.) "Everything appears to be under admirable regulation and nothing is spared that might be used to the benefit of the sick, as might be expected of Dr. Gale, the Senior Medical Gentleman present. The Army is truly fortunate having such a Medical Corps . . . More than once I have questioned myself how it could be, that the Government was enabled to employ such professional worth and talents at so paltry a price." ("Official Inspection Report of Col. George Croghan, Inspector General," *Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society,* IX (October, 1952) pp. 139-140.)

[29] William H. Nicoll joined the Sixth Infantry in 1817 as surgeon's mate, became post surgeon in 1820, assistant surgeon in 1821, was promoted to major and surgeon in 1830, and died in 1831. (Heitman, *op. cit.,* p. 748.)

Agues and fevers occurred from working in the lower grounds, particularly during the fall of 1820 and 1823. In the latter year, Prince Paul noted what he diagnosed as a typhus epidemic. The unhealthful conditions caused some men to ask for transfers. Lt. T. W. Kavanaugh[30] and Lt. D. M. Porter[31] both applied for leaves of absence, on the advice of the doctors, to return to milder climates for the restoration of their health. Lieutenant Kavanaugh's relief came too late; he died after reaching Frankfort, Kentucky. Another, Captain Shaler,[32] tendered his resignation from the regiment, "In consequence of my family having been more or less sick every year since I have been at this post. . .[33] Only robust soldiers could perform the duties required of them on the Missouri.

Except during periods of epidemic, the duties of the physicians were not onerous. Along with their paper work, they signed whiskey passes for the invalids, frequently recommended that the sutler not be allowed to sell liquor when it contributed to the men's illnesses, and inspected the prisoners to determine if their health was too poor to permit them to carry out the heavier part of their sentences, such as wearing iron yokes. Surgeon Gale's pay at Fort Atkinson was $990.90 in 1823; $951.60 in 1824; and $1034.62 in 1825.[34] Both surgeons found time to hunt and on one record day "killed 9 geese at a shott . . . Gale shott seting & Nicoll flying."[35]

Army regulations prescribed other duties by the doctors. One was keeping a "book containing the diary of the

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[30] Thomas W. Kavanaugh joined the Army in 1818, transferred to the Sixth Infantry in 1821, and died May 29, 1823. (*Ibid.*, p. 586.)

[31] David M. Porter graduated from the Military Academy, was appointed to the Fourth Infantry, transferred to the Sixth Infantry in 1822, and resigned July 31, 1823. (*Ibid.*, p. 799.)

[32] Ephriam Shaylor or Shaler joined the Army in 1812 and received his transfer to the Sixth Infantry in 1815; he was regimental adjutant from 1816 to 1819 and was promoted to captain in 1819; he resigned May 1, 1827; in 1818 he changed his name to Shaler. (*Ibid.*, p. 878.)

[33] F.A.R., V, O.B. 28, October 20, 1825.

[34] *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, III, 501.

[35] Edgar B. Wesley, "Diary of James Kennerly, 1823-1826," *Missouri Historical Society Collections*, VI (October, 1928.)

weather, medical topography of the station or hospital, account of the climate, complaints prevalent to the vicinity, &c., and from suitable inquiries concerning the clothing, subsistence, quarters, &c., of the soldiers, he will discover as far as practicable, the probable causes of disease, and recommend the best means of preventing them; and also make such suggestions relative to the situation, construction, and economy of the hospitals and infirmaries, as may appear necessary for the benefit and comfort of the sick, and the good of the service."[36]

Each day, from New Orleans to Fort Snelling, from Plattsburg to Council Bluffs, doctors peered anxiously at the sky and jotted in their books, three times daily, the temperature, the direction of the wind, and the state of the weather. Items of interest, such as the arrival of the sand hill cranes, the breaking up of the ice, the appearance of wild onions, depth of snow, etc., were noted. With their crude instruments, a thermometer and a rain-guage, these amateur meteorologists discovered that, in the six years (1820-1827) in which all the ranges were reported from Council Bluffs, this locale led all others in having the highest temperatures, with the exception of 1825. The lowest temperature recorded at Fort Atkinson was —22°, but the coldest reports came from Prairie du Chien and Fort Howard.

The welfare of the men and the drills and details they performed were the responsibilities of the company officers. Company commanders were usually captains, although upon several occasions when there were not enough senior officers available, the lieutenants filled these positions. Many officers at Fort Atkinson had been given a brevet rank for bravery and meritorious service during the War of 1812. They were entitled to their brevet designation when they commanded as such; but a brevet captain, for instance, had to command a company, a brevet major and

[36] Sur. Gen. Joseph Lovell (ed.), *Meteorological Register for the Yaers* 1822, 1823, 1824, *and* 1825, *from Observations Made By the Surgeon of the Army at the Military Posts of the United States* (Washington, 1826.)

a brevet lieutenant colonel, a battalion, or a brevet colonel, a regiment to be entitled to the advance rank.[37]

The backbone of the Army were the regular noncommissioned officers. In addition to these there were the lance corporals. Candidates for the latter had only to show proof they had been "active in performance of their duties & exemplary in deportment for six months."[38] Although the designation did not raise their pay nor exempt them from the duties of private soldiers, it did give the lance corporal the right to command squads of privates or other lance corporals junior to him. The selection of corporals was usually made from these men.

The discipline problems at Fort Atkinson were typical of those of other garrisons from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. Intoxication, desertion, theft, embezzlement, disobedience to orders, insubordination and riots were among the crimes encountered. Offenders were tried before two military courts that had criminal jurisdiction. The court martial, composed of three officers, did not have the power to try capital cases or officers, nor to inflict on any soldier a fine exceeding one month's pay, nor to imprison or put to labor a soldier for a longer time than one month. These rights were reserved for the general court-martial, which consisted of five to eleven members. Proceedings of the court were reviewed by the commanding officer, who could remit sentences if so inclined. Punishment for crimes ranged from simple fines and stoppage of pay and whiskey rations to dunking in the Missouri River, having to wear an iron collar or a ball and chain, and having to do the most menial tasks.

The Fort Atkinson guardhouse was similar to the one described by a soldier at a contemporary post. It was divided into two rooms, one for the guard and the other for the prisoners. The prison part was partitioned into cells made of a size to admit only one person. Ordinary offenders were confined in the prison room, but those charged

[37] "Systems of Martial Law, Field Service, and Police," p. 265.
[38] F.A.R., III, O.B. 15, November 5, 1821.

with grave offenses, such as mutiny, desertion, or were found riotous and turbulent, were consigned to the cells. In front of the guardhouse was mounted the wooden horse, which offenders were sometimes sentenced to ride, and the choke box.[39]

Laundresses attached to the regiment were subject to the post regulations and liable to court martial for infractions of rules. Their most frequent offense was that of selling whiskey illegally to the soldiers, but they were often involved in disturbances of the peace. Sgt. Samuel Stackpole was reduced to the ranks for creating a noise and riot in his room by severely beating with his sword his wife, Catherine; Pvt. William Vidler brutally attacked laundress Mary Millet with his drum belt; Hezekiah Smith struck Margaret Smith with an earthen pitcher, to cite a few examples found in the post records.

Accumulated grievances provoked some to murder. Corporal Dennis was apprehended with a musket threatening the life of Cpl. James Poland "without cause." Pvt. John Shepherd was convicted of mutiny, disobedience of orders and of "depriving Sergt. Slements of his life by deliberately discharging the contents of a loaded gun into his body. . ." Shepherd was hanged on April 1, 1821, and his body was offered to the surgeon for dissection.[40]

The unspecified but infamous conduct of Samuel Harris was such that he was ordered discharged from the service and set on the opposite shore of the river with ten days' rations to enable him to leave the Indian country "forthwith." Harris was forbidden to ever show his face at Fort Atkinson or in the presence of his regiment.

Desertion was a serious problem at every garrison,

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[39] Gordon-Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-18.

[40] As a warning to future offenders, all men capable of bearing arms were ordered to witness the execution. (F.A.R., III, O.B. 14, December 9, 1820, and March 29, 1821.) There were several instances of this kind: the death of Corporal Hopkins was attributed by Kennerly to a beating Hopkins received from some soldiers; and in 1822 John Meyers demanded a court of inquiry to investigate the death of Archibald McCraven.

where the temptation to slip away was too strong for many soldiers smarting under harsh discipline, heavy labor, and petty indignities. One sergeant, two corporals, and twenty privates were held in constant readiness at Fort Atkinson to pursue deserters. Upon the discovery of missing men, three guns were fired in quick succession by the ordnance officer; and then after a five minute pause, one gun was fired for each deserter. Instructions to the pursuers were explicit:

> . . . Should a deserter be overtaken it will be well to take him alive, but better to shoot him than to let him escape—Hence, if he should not stand when hailed or should attempt to make resistance, the Country will expect the pursuers to do their duty.[41]

In 1824, Sergeant Ceders was sent with a party as far as Santa Fe to apprehend seven deserters. A reward of thirty dollars was made to any soldier, citizen, or Indian who brought in deserters. For apprehending Harris Hill, the Indians received their reward in trade goods: 472 yards strouding, nine scalping knives, eighteen hawk bells, three horse combs, and one paper of vermilion.[42]

Relying heavily upon alcohol to relieve the monotony and dreary situation, both officers and men were frequently in confinement for drunkenness. To prevent the men from hoarding enough of their rations to have a fling or to sell to others, they were required to drink their daily gill when it was issued or to have the officer keep the liquor for the benefit of the company. Whiskey was obtainable legally at the sutler's store or, illegally, at Welch's cabin or the dairy. Both Welch and Ashael Savery, who was in charge of the dairy, were ordered away from the post for selling illicit liquor.

Wild times occurred on occasion; after payday in November 1821 the court was ordered to continue in session

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[41] *Ibid.*, IV., O.B. 20, April 2, 1822.

[42] The Indians were sometimes cheated, however; the total amount deducted from Hill's pay for the goods was only $19.62½. (*Ibid.*, III, O.B. 17, August 25, 1821.)

through the night to enable it to handle all the misdemeanors brought before it.

Officers, as well as enlisted men, broke rules of conduct. The sutler, James Kennerly, makes frequent mention in his diary of the officers being on a "sprey." In 1826, Capt. J. S. Gray[43] was convicted at Fort Atkinson of drunkenness on duty, and Capt. Charles Pentland[44] of disobedience to orders, unmilitary conduct and drunkenness on duty. Both were dismissed from the service. Lt. Joseph Pentland[45] was a particular cross to Colonel Leavenworth. Kennerly noted in his diary that "much feeling excited between the Colnl & Lt P. . .", when he was tried in court. On the following day he recorded, "The trial of Lt. Pentland continues with much warmth, & the Colnl interogated both as a witness, prosecutor & commanding officer (rather odd). . ."[46] In 1824 the colonel issued an order forbidding officers who were in arrest to go beyond prescribed limits unless they applied in person for permission; it occupied too much of his time to grant written permissions.

The laws of the United States declared duelling as a means of settling difficulties between officers to be illegal; nevertheless, the *code duello* was honored at almost every post, and even the most stringent regulations could not entirely stamp out the custom.[47]

Although they were far removed from the "gay de-

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[43] James S. Gray joined the Rifle Regiment in 1813, was retained in the Rifles in 1815, and appointed captain in 1818; he transferred to the Sixth Infantry in 1821 and was cashiered February 15, 1826. (Heitman, *op. cit.*, p. 472.)

[44] Charles Pentland entered the Army in 1814 and served as adjutant of the Rifle Regiment 1818-1821; he was transferred to the Sixth in 1821, serving as adjutant 1821-1823; he was promoted to captain in 1823 and cashiered in 1826. (*Ibid.*, p. 783.)

[45] Joseph Pentland graduated fourteenth in his class from West Point and was assigned to the Sixth Infantry in 1821; he served as adjutant from 1823-1825 and was promoted to captain in 1827; he was dismissed in 1830. (*Ibid.*, p. 783.)

[46] "Diary of James Kennerly," May 2 and 3, 1824.

[47] There were at least two such instances while the troops were stationed at Council Bluffs. Lt. John Clark was killed in a duel in 1820; and Martin Scott related to Randolph Marcy a story of a duel in which he participated, although neither he nor his adversary was killed.

lights" of the garrisons in the East, there is ample evidence that routine was relaxed frequently. A favorite recreation of almost all the men was hunting. Whenever they could secure permission, the officers and men roamed the vast prairies in search of buffalo and deer, and grouse, partridge, and other fowl that were abundant.[48] Indeed, so enthusiastically did they pursue the sport, that the Omaha chiefs were forced to protest the destruction of game on which their tribe depended for subsistence.[49]

Holidays were always occasions for celebrations. Washington's Birthday, the Fourth of July, and Christmas were observed. Christmas was sometimes celebrated with a ball. The warmth of the Yuletide spirit extended to the slaves of the officers who were permitted to attend a dance at Cabanne's post. New Year's Day was traditionally a day for holding open house and exchanging visits.

The ladies whose husbands were stationed at Fort Atkinson occupied their time making social calls, shopping at the sutler's store, and taking rides to Cabanne's post on river boats or in carriages. Frequently the wives of the officers paid visits to the sutler's store to purchase dishes, crockery, cloth and small luxuries. For them Kennerly kept on hand personal items, such as looking glasses. When new stores arrived by keelboat, there was a flurry of excitement as the women sought to be the first to inspect the new wares. At these times Kennerly complained he was unable to unpack, so persistent was the crowd.

Both Kennerly and his wife were fond of entertaining. In his diary he records:

> . . . Had at dinner all the ladies—Colnl, Maj. Kearny, Ketchum, Wickliffe—Noll and Bateman, Col. & Lady went

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[48] Kennerly acidly comments on the accuracy of the officers in his diary: ". . . The Colnl & some officers cross the river to hunt—return with many birds—killed by a soldier." ("Diary of James Kennerly," October 1, 1824.)

[49] F.A.R., VI, O.B. 32, December 30, 1823. In fairness to the Indians, orders were issued that all whites found outside the fifteen mile square of ceded land were to be fined one hundred dollars and imprisoned six months. Details were sent out to bring in all intruders. The order restricting hunting was rescinded in 1824.

home at Dusk, rest staid had a little Dance, day passed agreeably.[50]

The Kennerlys were entertained in turn by Colonel Woolley and others among the officers.

Permission was granted to the enlisted men to hold dances at the Council House, although these were required to end by 2:00 a.m. Music probably was furnished by members of the regimental band. Amateur theatricals were attempted. One, presented January 25, 1827, was enlivened by the forceful removal from the room of Privates Kaim and Parker who were so intoxicated that they disturbed the performance.[51]

Gambling, though illegal, fishing, and horse racing were enjoyed. Practical jokes relieved the monotony. A favorite prank, indulged in by both officers and men, was setting off an explosion within the fort, arousing the entire command late at night. This act particularly enraged Colonel Leavenworth, who censured both the Officer of the Day and the Officer of the Guard for permitting "a noise, tumult and disturbance . . . in a Garrison or at the very edge of the chain of sentinels without being able with all their accustomed vigilance to fix it on the guilty persons." The commandant could "not bring himself to believe that there was any privity or conivance on the part of these officers to an outrage so disgraceful . . . of which three fourth . . . of the Regiment were surprised at being awakened out of sleep at three o'clock in the morning by a noise that bars all description. . ."[52] Furloughs to St. Louis or to homes in the East could be applied for; these relieved the monotony of life at the post.

At each Army post a Council of Administration was required by regulations to meet at least once every two months. The board was composed of the three officers next in rank to the Commandant, and a fourth who acted

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[50] "Diary of James Kennerly," December 24, 1825.

[51] F.A.R., V., O.B. 27, January 28, 1827.

[52] Sergeants Ferguson, Clute, Clark, Elkin and Corporal Maine were all involved in this escapade but were honorably acquitted by the court. (*Ibid.*, O.B. 32, June 26, 1826.)

as secretary. On September 7, 1821, the Council, inactive for a time at Fort Atkinson, was revived. Bvt. Maj. W. S. Foster, Capt. Wyly Martin, and Capt. Bennet Riley,[53] with Lt. Z. C. Palmer, secretary, were members of the board, which continued with changes in personnel, to meet throughout the ensuing years until the abandonment of the post. This Council was charged specifically with the responsibility of managing the post school, the library, the band, the laundresses, and the prices charged by the sutler.

The majority of the minutes of their meetings which are preserved in the orderly books are concerned with the reports of the treasurer. From a fund obtained by assessments against the sutler, profits from the bakery, produce raised in the regimental gardens, and fines from the library, a balance of as high as $3,308.36 was reported. It is typical of the period that of this sum only $3.77½ was in cash, the rest being in bank notes and credits.[54] Special sums were allocated to purchase saddle bags for the regiment, apple trees, and items which would contribute to the comfort of the men. In 1826 two hundred dollars was appropriated to procure stones, on which the name, rank, regiment and date of death were marked, to place on the graves of deceased officers in the post cemetery. The sutler borrowed from this fund, sometimes sums as high as $2000 at an annual interest rate of 6 per cent.

The Council was generous in its appropriation of reading materials for the library and in furnishings for the room itself. Under regulations, one officer served as librarian, whose duties included accurately cataloguing each acquisition with the original cost and inscribing "Regimental Library, 6th Infantry" on the flyleaf. Each book was checked out and a fine of $.02½ per day was levied on overdrawn books. In 1823 from fifty to one hundred

[53] Bennet Riley joined in 1813 and remained with the Rifle Regiment until 1821, when he was transferred to the Fifth and then Sixth Infantry; he rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1850 and particularly distinguished himself by bravery and good conduct and meritorious and gallant service during the battles of Chokachatta, Florida, Cerro Gordo, Mexico and Contreras, Mexico. (*Ibid.*, p. 831.)

[54] *Ibid.*, O.B. 26, November 6, 1825.

dollars was appropriated to furnish "light reading," such as romances, travels, and voyages, for the use of the enlisted men. Books were ordered from S. Potter & Company and Carey and Son of Philadelphia. Shipped via New Orleans, the books were sometimes delayed in St. Louis until the bill was paid.

On January 24, 1822, the adjutant was instructed by Colonel Leavenworth to select a proper noncommissioned officer or private to teach the children at the post, who, though far from the settlements, were not to be deprived of their opportunity to receive an education.[55] The Council inspected the classroom and reported its condition to the commanding officer. Classes began at 9:00 a.m., recessed for an hour at noon, and were dismissed at 3:00 p.m. No classes were held on Saturday afternoons or on Sundays. Then, as today, children played hooky; and Colonel Leavenworth was "compelled to order those having the care of children to do what the strongest principles of nature dictate—To send their children regularly to school."[56] Summer vacation, dear to every child's heart, began in June and ended in September or October.

Perhaps the greatest problems for the Council were those involving the laundresses whose function was to wash the clothing of the officers and enlisted men. Each woman washed for seventeen men, and the Council established the rate of pay. At one time the allowance was fifty cents per month for every noncommissioned officer and soldier; officers paid seventy-five cents per dozen pieces or only sixty-two and one-half cents if the officer provided the soap. Soap being comparatively scarce, a bounty of four cents per pound was offered for any grease saved that could be made into soap with lye leached from the ashes of the fireplace.

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[55] Sgt. Thompson Mumford resigned as teacher in 1825, despite the proffer of permission to purchase two gallons of liquor monthly in addition to the rations if he would remain. By January 1826, Pvt. B. Berry was conducting the classes, which were found to be "in the most excellent order and discipline and progressing fast." (*Ibid.*, O.B. 25, August 9, 1825; O.B. 32, January 8, 1826.)

[56] *Ibid.*, II, O.B. 20, September 9, 1822.

The position, since it enabled them to follow the Army, attracted many of the wives of men in the ranks. Some of the women in camp were hard working, industrious, good women, who lived quietly with their husbands and made homes as best they could under crude frontier conditions. Other laundresses were a source of contention and trouble. When families needed help they turned to the Council, as in 1822 when John Ridge petitioned for money to care for his two motherless babies who were in need of a nurse. Some women, such as Sarah Moore, took in orphaned children to raise. The Council must have felt, however, that the latter's charge was excessively high ($65) for boarding, clothing, and washing the clothes of one Horace Babcock, since the sum was not allowed.

An important adjunct to the garrison was the regimental band. No mere decorative branch of the service, the music co-ordinated all activities and duties of the men within the post. It was to martial music that the soldiers awakened in the morning, learned to march, were informed of their duties each hour, and paraded. The Sergeant Major was responsible for the accuracy of the calls and the various signals were first sounded by the orderly at his room and then repeated by the police guard and companies. A band house was built outside the walls of Fort Atkinson, presumedly at a distance where the rehearsals and attendant din would not interfere with the work of the garrison, and here the men practiced daily. The chief musician, Sergeant Riordan, received fifteen cents a day from the Administration Fund for directing the band. The musicians' accounts were always settled generously. At various times new musical instruments were purchased, including a set of B clarinets, two B flutes, two C flutes, one trumpet, and one serpent.[57] An account presented by Private Driscoll was allowed "for one part of a Tamborin, furnished by him for the use of the band. . ."[58] Oil, papers of ink powder, quills, quires of foolscap paper, and "half a pound of glue" were expense items.

[57] A bass wind instrument, now obsolete.
[58] F.A.R., O.B. 27, December 2, 1826.

In March 1823 a Council House was constructed outside the walls of the fort in which the Indian Agent, Benjamin O'Fallon or his Sub Agent, John Dougherty, met with the Indian chiefs who visited the post. Indian Agents faced real tests as diplomats. Many of the problems that arose were intertribal but nevertheless potential threats to the security of Fort Atkinson. In 1821 the Sioux raided the Omaha, killing two of Big Elk's brothers; in 1822 a group of Oto warriors made a foray against the Osage and all were reported killed; in 1823 the Sauks killed an estimated, but probably exaggerated, ninety or one hundred Sioux in a pitched battle, and the Iowa mourned the loss of their chief, the Hard Heart, killed during a Sioux raid. Numerous other attacks took place.[59]

Much of the unrest and dissatisfaction of the Indians was attributable directly to the traders, who resorted to the lowest tactics to win the furs and trade of the Indian. With an average annual profit of $110,000, it is not to be wondered that strenuous efforts were made to capture their interest. Liquor, which the traders gave out liberally, was rapidly causing the deterioration of all the tribes. Maj. Thomas Biddle,[60] becoming concerned about the situation, wrote:

> . . . The introduction of ardent spirits is one of the unhappy consequences of this opposition among traders; so violent is the attachment of the Indians for it, that he who gives most is sure to obtain furs; while, should any one attempt to trade without it, he is sure of losing ground with his antagonist . . . The Indians witnessing the efforts of these people to cheat and injure each other, and knowing no other or no more important white men, they readily imbibe the idea that all white men are alike bad. . .[61]

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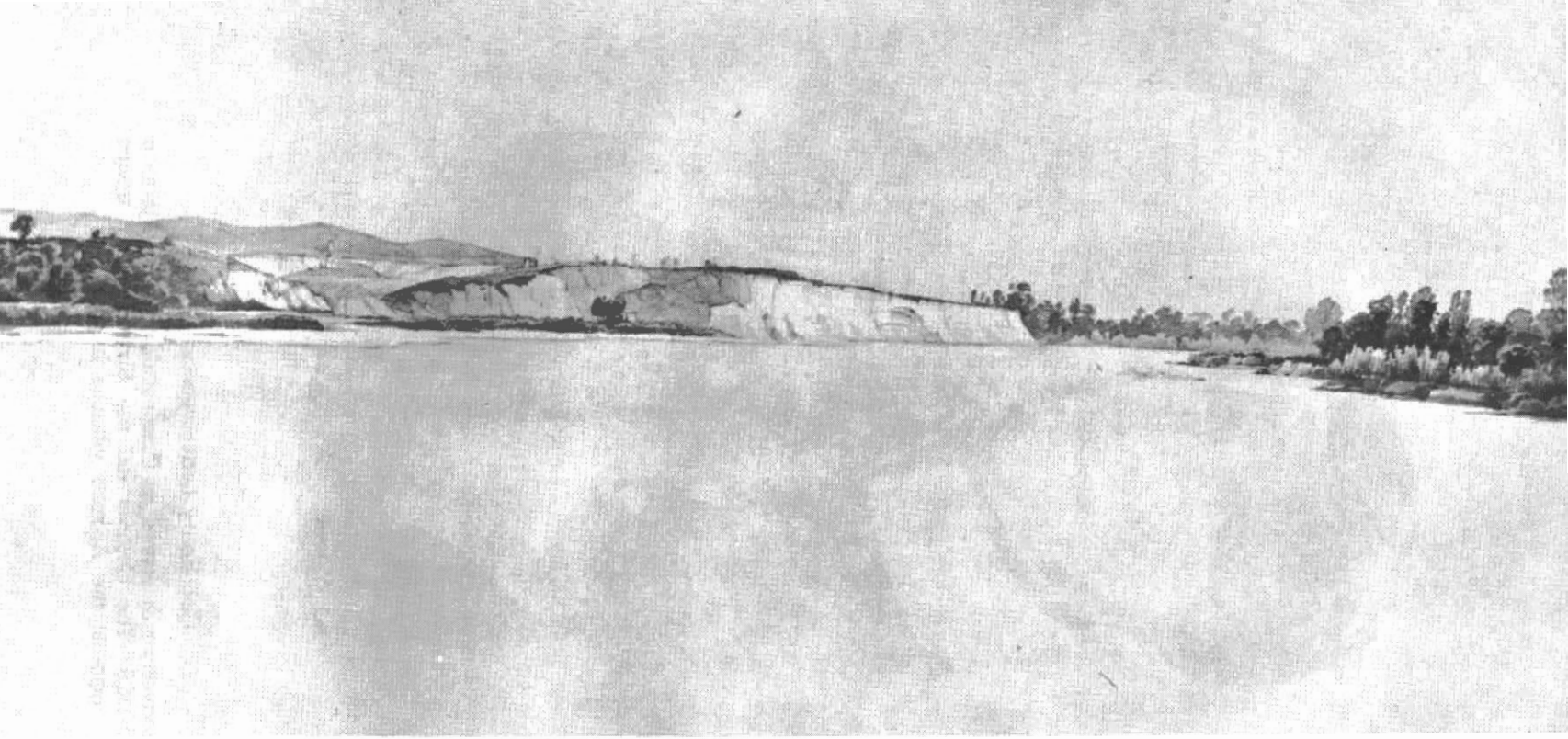
[59] John Dougherty to Secretary of War, Lewis Cass, March 9, 1832, Collections of Missouri Historical Society. (Microfilm copy in Library of Nebraska State Historical Society.)

[60] Thomas Biddle joined the Infantry as captain in 1812, was transferred to the Rifle Regiment January 7, 1820, and became regimental paymaster August 7, 1820; he was retained as major paymaster June 1, 1821; he was brevet major for distinguished service in defense of Ft. Erie, U. C. and killed in a duel August 29, 1831. (Heitman, *op. cit.*, p. 217.)

[61] Biddle to Atkinson, October 29, 1819, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, II, 357.

Col. Henry Leavenworth

Colonel Leavenworth served as Commander of Fort Atkinson from 1822-1826. The Colonel led the Sixth Infantry troops against the Arikara villages in 1823.



Ruins of Fort Atkinson, 1833

Sketch made by Carl Bodmer, Swiss artist who accompanied Prince Maximilian of Wied on his exploration of the Upper Missouri in 1833.

(This painting is reproduced by permission of its present owner, Prince Frederick William of Wied.)

Perhaps one of the greatest evils resulting from this competition was the undermining of the influence of the principal chiefs, themselves. Since the traders, as well as the government, presented medals to aspiring chiefs who would follow the traders' interests, the authority of the older chiefs, friendly to the government, collapsed. Some chiefs, like Big Elk, became completely addicted to alcohol and prey to the trader's wiles.

To counteract the worst of these difficulties, Congress passed an act permitting all Indian traders to be searched for ardent spirits. When liquor was discovered, half the supply was given to the informer, and the license of the guilty was cancelled. No person was permitted to pass Fort Atkinson either by land or water until he had reported to the Indian Agent or had satisfied the officers that he had not infringed upon the laws of the government on the subject. Soldiers and officers were absolutely forbidden to sell or give whiskey to any Indians without previous permission from the Agent, which the sutler was also required to obtain before he could sell to traders or the men employed by them.

The traders and trappers who passed in and out of the fort were a hardy, independent, cantankerous lot. Here stopped Jedediah Smith, serious and worried about his venture into the Upper Missouri where he would soon chart unknown land; Edward Rose whose saga of the "Five Scalps" is still fascinating reading; Hiram Scott whose tragic death would name Scott's Bluff; and Jim Beckwourth on his way to perform exploits that made him forever famous. Here were the Iroquois who had gone overland with Hunt's Astorians in 1811 and now had made the long trip to Fort Atkinson to ask aid from the U. S. authorities in regaining their families who had been captured by the Crow.[62] James Clyman, starving and desperate, came over a rise and unexpectedly saw the stars and stripes waving over Fort Atkinson: "certainly no man ever enjoyed

[62] "First Journey to North America," pp. 362-363.

the sight of our flag" more than he.[63] Days later Thomas Fitzpatrick and his men staggered in, in an even more pitiful state than Clyman. Here was Mike Fink, soon to be shot by Talbott in revenge for Mike's murder of Carpenter in a shooting over a whiskey cup, but now shouting his famous brag: "I'm half wild horse and half cock-eyed alligator and the rest of me is crooked snags an' red-hot snappin' turkle . . . I can out-run, out-jump, out-shoot, out-brag, out-drink, an' out-fight, rough-an'-tumble, no holts barred, ary man on both sides the river from Pittsburgh to New Orleans an' back ag'in to St. Louiee. . ."[64] There may have been some Sixth Infantrymen who were willing to challenge Mike's claim.

The Indians watched the influx of traders with increasing concern, which grew to alarm and hatred as they saw the game on which they depended for subsistence being slaughtered. Each year brought new groups of men to infiltrate Indian territory. Mounting grievances became incendiary in 1823. On June 18 the news of the attack by the Arikara on the fur trading party of William H. Ashley reached Fort Atkinson. Thirteen of Ashley's men were killed and ten men wounded in the encounter, the latter number including old Hugh Glass who was seemingly too tough to die. The Upper Missouri was closed to travel. Colonel Leavenworth, without waiting for the sanction of his superiors, "without pausing to count the numbers opposed to him, or to calculate the various obstacles that so wide a range of dreary wilderness presented . . ." was forced into immediate action.[65]

Companies A, B, D, E, F, and G were alerted to proceed up the river in a concerted attack with Ashley's men on the Arikara villages, which were then located on the banks of Oak Creek, just above the Grand River, in present-

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[63] Charles L. Camp (ed.), *James Clyman, American Frontiersman*, 1792-1881 (San Francisco, 1928), pp. 34-37.

[64] B. A. Botkin, *A Treasury of American Folklore* (New York, 1944), p. 57.

[65] Orders of Maj. Gen. E. P. Gaines, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, II, 595-596.

day South Dakota. Conscious that the eyes of the nation would soon be focused his way, the colonel directed the men to dress as much alike as possible in gray jackets, white pantaloons and forage caps. Those who were able to procure them were ordered to wear knapsacks.

On June 22 the force embarked in boats. The Indian Agent, Benjamin O'Fallon, ill at the time, remained at the fort to prevent the Pawnee and other tribes from joining the Arikara in their defiance. Word had been received of other uprisings, including the attack by the Blackfeet on Robert Jones, Michael Immel, and their party. This same tribe had fired on Major Henry's party near his establishment at the mouth of the Yellowstone and killed four men. At headquarters concern was felt that the expedition would not be successful. Failure to properly subdue the rebellious tribes would not only expose every trader and trapper in the area (over one hundred in number) to marauding war parties, but close the Upper Missouri to traffic and quite possibly give its control to the British trading companies, who were still siphoning off much of the peltry to Canada.

Meanwhile at Fort Atkinson, Maj. W. S. Foster had assumed command. The departure of the expedition left the post stripped of almost half of its strength, but the "labour marked out for a full Regiment of Ten Companies is to be completed the safety of the Garrison ensured and the public property preserved." Realizing the task ahead, Major Foster strictly enjoined the men to refrain from becoming intoxicated and to preserve their "Military Character."[66] Every hour of sunlight was utilized to enable the men to complete their fatigues; breakfast was prepared at 5:00 a.m.; the men were at work by 5:30; and tattoo was not sounded until 9:00 p.m.

Although the Leavenworth forces had been augmented by Sioux auxiliaries, the colonel began to feel misgivings about the projected attack on the Arikara villages:

[66] F.A.R., IV, O.B. 20, June 22, 1823.

> . . . We shall do our best to obtain a victory. The honor of the American arms must be supported at all events; but I can plainly perceive our force is not sufficient to inspire that degree of awe and respect amongst the Indians which I could wish. We make but a small show on a large prairie, by the side of four or five hundred mounted Indians. If we can obtain a fair fight, our superiority will probably be more apparent. . .[67]

On August 9 the soldiers and their Sioux allies skirmished with the Arikara before the villages. The next day the artillery under Lieutenant Morris[68] and Sergeant Lathrop began to bombard the villages, their shots succeeding in killing the chief, Grey Eyes, and in cutting away the staff of the Medicine Flag. A proposed assault on the villages could not be undertaken because the Sioux refused to desist in raiding the Arikara corn fields long enough to aid in an attack. On August 11 after the Sioux allies had departed, the Arikara made peace, the substance of the treaty being that the property taken from General Ashley would be returned to him and that they would not in the future obstruct the navigation of the river but treat the Americans as their friends. The Arikara returned only a part of the goods that they had taken from Ashley, and the traders demanded an assault on the village to recover the remainder. After taking stock of his command, which was bereft of the Sioux allies, short of provisions, and had only a small amount of shot left, Leavenworth refused to attack. The decision was so displeasing to Ashley that he refused to have anything further to do with the colonel.[69]

On August 27 the command was back in Fort Atkinson and Colonel Leavenworth once again in charge. He re-

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[67] Leavenworth to O'Fallon, July 21, 1823, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, II, p. 589.

[68] William Walton Morris graduated from the Military Academy and was assigned to the Sixth in 1820; he transferred to the Fourth Artillery in 1824 and was brevetted for meritorious conduct in Florida and during the Civil War. (Heitman, *op. cit.*, p. 728.)

[69] Leavenworth wrote: ". . . If we succeeded in our charge, all that we could expect was to drive the Indians from their villages and perhaps kill a few more of them. The remainder would be left in the Country in a confirmed state of hostility to every white man. We could not expect to overtake them nor had we provisions sufficient to enable us to pursue them." (Doane Robinson [ed.] "Official Correspondence of the Leavenworth Expedition. . ." *South Dakota Historical Collection*, I, 202-233.)

ported himself pleased with the activities of the post during his absence and wrote:

> He deems it due to Major Foster and the officers and soldiers who were left in charge of the post to say that it appears that the business & duties of the post have been well conducted. . .[70]

The Arikara attack alerted the Western Department to the necessity of reenforcing the garrison at Fort Atkinson in case the expedition against the Indian towns should not be successful. Capt. John Fowle,[71] Fifth Infantry, arrived at the post with one hundred recruits for the Sixth Infantry; and Col. Talbot Chambers brought six companies of the First Infantry. After the danger passed, the troops from the First were reassigned.

Throughout the summer and fall of 1824 the frontier was in a state of unrest. In September there were accounts of several murders by Indians; but the government adopted the policy of conciliation rather than one of engaging the hostiles in warfare. The Department of War strictly enjoined the commanding officer at Fort Atkinson "not to engage in hostilities unless Compelled to it in self defense, or for the protection of the Citizens of the United States or the Agents of the Government resident in their neighborhood, nor then until every pacific measure had been resorted to in vain."[72] To prevent widespread war and to counteract the hostilities of the more remote tribes on the Missouri, which had extended in some degree to the upper lakes, the government authorized a series of treaties of commerce and friendship to be made. The task of drawing up these agreements was entrusted to Benjamin O'Fallon, the United States Agent for Indian Affairs on the Missouri. Gen. Henry Atkinson was selected to lead the military escort which was to be composed of detachments of both the First and Sixth Infantry Regiments. Because of the lateness of the season, the departure of the expedition

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[70] F.A.R., IV, O.B. 20, August 27, 1823.

[71] John Fowle joined the Army in 1812; in 1815 he was transferred to the Fifth Infantry, becoming a major in 1833; he was killed April 25, 1838, in a steamboat explosion. (Heitman, *op. cit.*, p. 432.)

[72] Gaines to Atkinson, May 16, 1822, F.A.R., VI, O.B. 35.

was postponed until the spring of 1825, when the parties who were to participate were to rendezvous at the Council Bluffs.

Fort Atkinson became a scene of busy activity as the soldiers made preparations for the detachment of the First Infantry which would arrive with the general. Supplies and equipment were readied, and the men practiced the novel method of propulsion of boats invented by General Atkinson and which was to be tried out on the trip.[73]

On May 16 the expedition consisting of eight keel boats and four hundred and thirty-five men embarked. Captain Armstrong with a mounted detachment of forty men followed along the banks of the river to scout and hunt. Colonel Leavenworth, having consigned the command of Fort Atkinson to Col. A. R. Woolley, was a member of the party. The commissioners proceeded up the Missouri at a leisurely pace, stopping to have councils with the chiefs of the Ponca, Sioux, Cheyenne, Arikara, Mandan, Gros Ventre, and Crow tribes. Presents were given and the treaties of friendship signed. The Arikara appeared to be cordial, despite the incident two years before, and "appear to be impressed with deep & full contrision for their offences & it is thought they will behave well in future."[74]

The expedition went beyond the Yellowstone River before turning homeward on August 24. After an absence of over three months, the first glimpse caught by the weary

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[73] "Colonel Atkinson . . . has invented a new mode of ascending that river (the Missouri) . . . The Machinery consists of a shaft, thrown across the center of the boat, with a water wheel at each end—a five feet cog wheel in the centre of the shaft, and put in motion by another cog wheel, three feet four inches, resting on an iron shaft, which supports a fly wheel at one end, of eight feet in diameter. The fly and small cog wheel are moved by a crank, projecting from an arm of a fly wheel, with 2 pitmans, which are impelled by soldiers, seated on from eight to ten benches, four abreast, with a succession of cross bars before each bench, contained in a frame that moved on slides, with a three feet stroke of the crank . . . It is ascertained that these transports will make twenty miles per day, and thirty in case of emergency." (*Niles' Weekly Register* [November 6, 1824].)

[74] "Journal of General Atkinson's (1825) Expedition," typescript in collections of Nebraska State Historical Society, entry of July 18.

travelers of the whitewashed walls of Fort Atkinson, with the American flag waving overhead, must have been most welcome. The last of the treaties, those with the Oto, Pawnee, and Omaha, were signed at the post and the work of the commissioners ended.

After the return of this expedition, Maj. Stephen W. Kearny[75] was directed to construct a temporary post for the First Infantry detachment near Fort Lisa. The post was named Cantonment Barbour[76] and the command was separate from, although subject to, the orders of the commanding officer at Fort Atkinson, should necessity arise. Officers of the First were frequent visitors to the post and continued to participate in much of the social life at Atkinson.

On July 5, 1825, a "hurricane" struck the post, destroying the mill. This was a serious blow, for plank from the mill was needed to repair the barracks. Logs had to be boated or carted for some distance; and probably for this reason, brick making was resumed to aid in rebuilding. The fort was rapidly deteriorating; and it was estimated that needed repairs would cost $3,000. To erect a new cantonment would cost about $6,000. Both were large sums the War Department was reluctant to spend. The records of the Sixth Infantry contain few orders regarding the post in the years 1826 and 1827; perhaps Woolley was too discouraged to attempt more than routine shoring up of the sagging structures. The laundresses were moved inside the fort, but this move created new difficulties for the already harrassed commandant. The women and children not only failed to place refuse in designated sites, but had the effrontery to find the gates and esplanade convenient repositories for trash, "contrary to all orders."[77]

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[75] Stephen Watts Kearny entered the Army in 1812 and rose to the rank of captain in 1813; he was transferred to the First Infantry in 1821 and became a brevet major in 1823 for ten years service in one grade and major general for gallant and meritorious conduct in New Mexico and California, 1846. (Heitman, *op. cit.*, 586.)

[76] After the new Secretary of War, James Barbour.

[77] F.A.R., V, O.B. 32, October 27, 1826.

In addition to the poor condition of the post, the arms of the regiment were old and of various patterns and manufactures. Particularly bad were those of the rifle company, which had been manufactured in the early part of the War of 1812. Of a frugal nature, Woolley suggested that these could be traded to the Indians, and the company furnished with the fine type that he had seen at the ordnance office in Washington. The pay was eight months in arrears, the clothing deficient, the barracks so bad that even further repairs were wasted; the only brightness to the scene was the fact that the troops were healthy and that only one man had deserted since May 1825.[78]

For two years the fate of the fort was debated. A powerful argument against rebuilding the post was the fact that it was too far removed from the settlements to be useful in protecting them and not sufficiently removed to intimidate the more remote tribes. Interest was shifting to the Southwest and the Santa Fe trade. In 1825 Col. A. R. Woolley wrote Maj. Gen. Jacob Brown, Commander in Chief:

> I have been convinced that if we ever establish a safe chain of Posts from this to the Columbia River it will be going westward and crossing the Mountains between 40 & 43 —our route from this to the South fork of Lewis' River in say 42½ or to the Multnomah in 41¾ is safe and easy.
>
> Should we proceed by the Missouri River we shall get up into 48½ encountering a severe northern climate and the Blackfeet Indians who are our sworn enemies. On the western route we find the Shoshones who are our friends and the climate will be found mild . . . A Military post established on the Arkansas between where the Mountains were first seen by Pike and point on the map bearing the name of Pike's Block house say in Lat. 39½ would be within striking distance of our route through the Mountains to the Columbia and of the crossing place of the Arkansas in proceeding through the pass of Tous to St. fee. . .

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[78] On May 1, 1825, Pvt. A. Ruelle was sentenced to a stoppage of thirty dollars' pay, solitary confinement on bread and water for three months for desertion; but Shubert Robinson, William Knight, John Wyand, John Jones, Charles Gibson, and Michael Whaling received stiffer sentences of "hard labour with an iron yoke around . . . neck having two prongs each one foot long" for the remainder of their hitch, a sixty dollar fine, and to have 3/5 of their pay withheld for the remainder of their term. (*Ibid.*, O.B. 26, May 1, 1825.)

> This point or near the mouth of the Kanzas would be the best in the connecting chain of Posts, this on very many accounts possesses advantages over any other post on these waters. Let these remarks pass for what they are worth. . .[79]

By March 1827 the decision concerning its future had been reached and the following communication was received at Fort Atkinson:

> The Military post at Council Bluffs will be abandoned and the 6th Regt of Infy will be stationed at Jefferson Barracks.
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> . . . The Comg Officer of the 6 Regt will vacate Ft. Atkinson as soon as the season and a special regard to economy, as well as to the preservation of every species of public property will authorize. . .[80]

Throughout the spring preparations were made for the evacuation of Fort Atkinson. Everything that would not be worth transporting was to be left behind. Commanders of companies were ordered to turn over all their stores to the quartermaster for packing, except the ox carts and yokes. The cattle and dairy items were offered to the Third Infantry for $2,000. The Reverend Mr. Edwards, a visitor at the post, was provided an escort back to Chariton, Missouri. Since the garrison was dangerously reduced and the evidence of the abandonment now apparent to the Indian tribes, Colonel Woolley took precautionary measures: two six pounders on their travelling carriages were brought inside the walls and posted near the magazine. Cannister, round shot, and grape were provided for these and the guns in the Northwest bastion. The men were armed, and officers who wished them were supplied pistols.

On June 4 Capt. Bennett Riley arrived with the transport boats; these were loaded with "light barrack furniture, doors, sashes, and glass, old irons, cart wheels, ploughs, and such articles as are worth taking down to Camp Leavenworth."[81] The men were strictly forbidden to "encumber the boats with baggage—They are to be limited to what in a military sense appertains to a soldier, nor is

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[79] *Ibid.*, O.B. 28, June 20, 1825.
[80] Orders of Major General Brown, *ibid.*, O.B. 26.
[81] *Ibid.*, O.B. 32, June 3, 1827.

an officer allowed to encumber the boats with furniture."[82] The commander relented sufficiently to allow each company commander to place on board property to the amount of two tons beyond the limitation; but the laundresses, burdened with their household possessions, clothing, etc., had to be "closely watched or they will place on board many articles of little or no value." Means had to be provided for the stores of the sutler who was without transportation.

The packing, of course, was not done without trouble and shortness of temper. Corporal Beckwith was court martialed for refusing to secure a boat when an order was sent to him and for declaring that he did not care a "damn" who sent the order. He was reduced to the ranks. Benjamin Carmin, Company H, also got into trouble. Intoxicated, he declared that he was going crazy and would drown himself. Proceeding to the river to do just that, he was arrested and his whiskey rations stopped for fifteen days.

The last detail having been carried out, the soldiers, their women and the children watched the flag being lowered for the last time and then boarded the boats to embark on June 6, 1827. After the abandonment of the site, the fort at Council Bluffs deteriorated rapidly. The river soon deserted the bluff as its restless channel veered to the East. Fur traders continued to push their canoes past the old guardian, and it became something of a landmark. Maximilian commented on the ruins as his party passed:

> . . . we passed the mouth of Boyer's Creek on the east bank, where the Missouri makes a bend, and saw the ruins of the former cantonment, or fort, at Council Bluffs. This military post was established, in the year 1819, for 1,000 men, but, in fact, there were now only 500 men of the regiment in garrison at Jefferson barracks . . . the fort, or, rather, the barracks, formed a quadrangle, with a bastion or blockhouse, in two of the angles. At present there were only the stone chimneys, and, in the centre, a brick storehouse under roof. Everything of value had been carried away by the Indians. We were told that numerous rattlesnakes are found among the ruins. The situation of Council Bluffs is said to have been much more favourable for ob-

[82] *Ibid.*

serving the Indians than that at Leavenworth; and it was even conjectured that the post will be again occupied.[83]

The artist Carl Bodmer made a sketch of the area during his journey up the Missouri with Maxamilian.

In 1847 the Mormons established "Summer Quarters" near the community now known as DeSoto, between Fort Calhoun and Blair. Brigham Young placed John D. Lee, a trusted lieutenant and later a participant in the notorious Mountain Meadows Massacre in southern Utah, in charge of starting farming operations to provide food for the thousands of Mormon immigrants who were waiting in Winter Quarters to begin the trip west. The land chosen by Lee was part of that farmed by the soldiers north of the fort.[84] Increasing hostility from neighboring Indian tribes caused the abandonment of Summer Quarters in the spring of 1848. It was not until 1854, when the first settler, Anselm Arnold, located on a tract near the old fort, that settlement came permanently to the area. The townsite of Fort Calhoun, Washington County, was claimed in the summer of that year, and the site was surveyed and platted a year later by Col. Lorin Miller.[85]

Although never directly assaulted by a hostile army, Fort Atkinson fulfilled its original purpose, that of serving as a warning to both Indian tribes and the British that encroachments on American territories or her people would not be tolerated. During this time the number of men employed by the English in the fur trade was computed at about one thousand and their annual depredations upon the

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[83] Reuben Thwaites (ed.), *Travels in the Interior of North America* (Cleveland, 1905), I, p. 275.

[84] Edith L. Neale, "Mormon 'Summer Quarters,'" Sunday Supplement, *Omaha World-Herald*, December 29, 1957; Charles Kelly (ed.), Journals of *John D. Lee* (Salt Lake City, 1938.)

[85] The name "Fort Calhoun" appears on the maps as early as 1825, although just why such designation was given to the officially named Fort Atkinson is not clear. The intention may have been originally to honor the Secretary of War; and Atkinson modestly referred to the post as Calhoun. Early settlers probably took the name from a map. (Daniel M. Carr [ed.], *Men and Women of Nebraska* [Fremont, 1903], p. 45.)

fur trade at about a million dollars.[86] The struggle for this trade was a long and costly one, but the United States served notice of its intention to maintain its claims by establishing military forces in the area at an early date. Relations with the Indians were, on the whole, relatively peaceful. The one foray against the Arikara concluded in a peace, the merits of which students are still arguing. The Adjutant General, however, with the sanction of the President, expressed satisfaction with the handling of the expedition:

> . . . These papers have been submitted to the Genl in Chief who directs me to express to you his high satisfaction with the success of the expedition & his approbation of the Conduct of Colo Leavenworth & his Officers to whom he desires you to convey his thanks for the zeal & activity which they have displayed upon this occasion.
>
> The destruction of the Aricara Villages is very much to be regreted, as tending to counteract the good effects of the Expedition & on Ma [n] y other accounts but the Genl is happy to observe that neither the Comdg officer nor any part of the Troops of the United States is liable to censure for that occurrence as it appears to have been the act of the Agents of the Miss. Fur Compy, who he is sorry to perceive so illy seconded the efforts of Colo Leavenworth to bring the affair to a successful & amicable termination.[87]

The Army intended to be in the upper Missouri country for a long time and they wanted the occupation to be as peaceful as possible. Perhaps the greatest merit of this military venture was the attempt to establish amicable relationships with the neighboring tribes — Pawnee, Iowa, Omaha, Ponca, Oto and Missouri. The Pawnee, long a scourge to the Spanish settlements in New Mexico, became friendly to the Americans, a friendship that had long-reaching benefits later during the emigration to the gold fields and during and after the Civil War, when Pawnee served as scouts for the Army.

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[86] In 1825, General Ashley claimed to have fallen in with "one of these British parties, which had fur in its possession of the value of $200,000. The number of men employed by the British in our territories is computed at about one thousand, and their annual depredations upon us, perhaps, about a million of dollars in money, besides exciting the Indians against us." (*Niles' Weekly Register,* December 1, 1827).

[87] E. Kirby, A.D.C. to Maj. Gen. E. P. Gaines, October 10, 1823, F.A.R., VI, O.B., 35.

The bountiful harvests of corn, grain and vegetables at the post were irrefutable proof that here was a land that only awaited the pioneer's plow to yield abundantly. It is unfortunate that Long's designation, "The Great American Desert," received such wide-spread publicity, thus delaying settlement in the Nebraska area for another twenty-seven years.

The roster of the officers who served at this fort is filled with the names of those who later distinguished themselves during the Black Hawk War, the Florida Uprisings, and the Mexican War. Martin Scott, Bennett Riley, Henry Atkinson, Henry Leavenworth, Stephen Watts Kearny, William Sewell Foster, Reuben Holmes and many others who gained experience in leadership at Fort Atkinson were later brevetted for gallantry in action. The Sixth remained attached sentimentally to the old post, and in 1831, Phillip St. George Cooke, then a young second lieutenant, wrote:

> . . . I took a trip to Council Bluffs the other day—the 6th's Elysian Fields as I believe in Metempsychosis (I believe that's the word) I believe the lonesome deer, the foxes 'looking out at the window' were the quickened representations of 6th's *dead*—
>
> . . .'Go, Said he tell the 6th You saw Pilcher sitting upon the ruins of Fort Atkinson'—Poor Pilcher.[88]

During its brief existence, Fort Atkinson was the gateway of the westward migration, which was to sweep across the prairies and mountains until it died on the shores of the Great Pacific Ocean. Little known, forgotten by most after its abandonment in 1827, this fortification was the farthest west of all outposts maintained by the War Department at that time. It was a link in a chain of posts founded to protect those adventurers who penetrated deep in hostile Indian territory, and who, in doing so, opened the West. There was a moment of time when the impetus westward paused uncertainly. Settlements had extended to Franklin and Chariton, Missouri; Prince Paul noted a flourishing community growing up at the Council Bluffs. After the re-

[88] Phillip St. George Cooke to Reuben Holmes, original letter in possession of Mr. and Mrs. Gene Saylor, Lincoln, Nebraska.

moval to Jefferson Barracks of the Sixth, pioneer families hesitated to advance farther into Indian territory without military protection. Eyes turned southward, where the opening of the Santa Fe trail revealed new vistas for the adventurous.