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Article Summary: Many routes to the West passed Courthouse Rock and Jail Rock. Harris lists and provides quotes from nineteenth-century pioneers' journals commenting on the appearance of the two landmarks.

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Photographs / Images: area map (courtesy Paul Henderson and the author), Courthouse Rock (J Goldsborough Bruff pencil sketch, 1849), Camp Clarke and Camp Clarke Bridge, Courthouse and Jail Rocks from the south (Emil Kopac photo, 1932), Courthouse and Jail Rocks from the southeast (Downey's Midwest Studio photo, Scottsbluff)

Appendix A: Tabulation of references to Courthouse and Jail Rocks in chronological order

Appendix B: List of names applied to Courthouse Rock with the first reference to the use of that name

COURTHOUSE AND JAIL ROCKS: LANDMARKS ON THE OREGON TRAIL

BY EARL R. HARRIS

ONE of the most famous landmarks in the North Platte Valley, Nebraska, is Courthouse Rock. Modern authors of historical narratives have frequently neglected this migrations site, but its prominence is attested by the numerous references made to it in the diaries, letters and other writings of emigrants, military men, traders, trappers, and explorers on their way to Oregon, California and Utah.

Courthouse Rock, and its less famous counterpart, Jail Rock, are located in the northwest quarter of Section 29, T. 19N., R. 50 W. of the Sixth Principal Meridian, in Morrill County, Nebraska, about five miles south of Bridgeport. Their elevation is about 4100 feet, or about 400 feet above the North Platte River.

Deposits of soft sands and gravels were spread over this region from the Rocky Mountains during uplifts there some 60 million years ago. Later, volcanic action in these

*Earl R. Harris is Historian with the National Park Service
at Scotts Bluff National Monument.*

mountains also added ash and other sediments which were easily eroded into valleys. Where hard capped concretions occurred, bluffs were left standing. Courthouse and Jail Rocks are examples of these.¹

Courthouse Rock is divided into four separate sections. The lower fourth is composed of Brule Clay, the middle half, known as the Gering Formation, is coarse sand and soft sandstone and the top one-fourth, known as the Arikaree Formation, has gray sands, volcanic ash, and is capped with concretions. These hard concretions have saved the bluff from erosion.²

Courthouse and Jail Rocks are detached bluffs at the east end of a ridge which separates the Pumpkin Creek Valley from the North Platte River Valley. This ridge, which begins with these two landmarks, is at first low and rolling, but gradually rises and broadens as it extends to the west. As it widens, it is known as the "Wildcat Hills," and finally terminates at Scotts Bluff, over thirty miles away.³

Famous landmarks and gaps in this ridge include Roundhouse Rock, Chimney Rock, Sheep Mountain, Twin Sisters, Smokestack Rock, Castle Rock, Table Rock, Steamboat Rock, Robidoux Pass, Riflesite Pass, Mitchell Pass, and Scotts Bluff. Only Courthouse and Jail Rocks, Chimney Rock, Castle Rock, and Scotts Bluff (or "Bluffs") were referred to by the early emigrants. The term Scotts Bluffs included the Wildcat Hills, Robidoux, Riflesite and Mitchell Passes and the other bluffs and ridges in the vicinity. Other landmarks were named when homesteaders began to settle the area.⁴

As the emigrants moved west across the broad plains, the altitude increased and the air became thinner. As the

¹ N. H. Darton, *Camp Clarke Folio*, U. S. Geological Survey, Atlas 87 (Washington, 1903).

² *Loc. cit.*

³ *Loc. cit.*

⁴ Merrill J. Mattes, "Scotts Bluff National Monument," *Historical Handbook*, No. 28, (Washington, 1958), p. 26.

sun beamed its rays with more intensity on the long columns of wagons keepers of diaries and journals evidently became less able to judge distance.

Many of the pioneers mentioned going over to examine Courthouse Rock, which they reckoned to be but a mile or two away from the trail. Actually, the trail was six or seven miles away. Most of the travelers returned to their trains or camping places without getting a close-up view of the bluff. Emigrants traveling on the north side of the river also mentioned it, but few of these crossed over to examine it more closely.

Courthouse Rock was a landmark not only on the Oregon-California and Mormon Trails, which passed from east to west north of it, but on the famous Sidney to Deadwood stagecoach line and Black Hills gold rush trail as well. This trail passed under the shadow of Courthouse Rock and crossed the North Platte River over the Camp Clarke bridge, just west of present day Bridgeport.

Known to travelers on the Oregon and Mormon Trails, Courthouse and Jail Rocks were also landmarks for the Pony Express (1860-1861) which had a station, Nebraska station number 33, known as the Courthouse Rock Pony Express Station. This was located about five miles south and one and one-fourth miles west of Bridgeport.⁵ Before the Pony Express, as early as 1858, the Hockaday & Liggett mail coach ran over the Oregon Trail past Courthouse Rock. This company was purchased by Jones, Russell & Company in May, 1859.⁶

In 1861, the transcontinental telegraph line was constructed past Courthouse Rock. This line, like the Pony Express and mail routes, came north from Julesburg, Colorado, and joined the trail about nine miles northwest of the landmark. This year also saw the beginning of the

⁵ Merrill J. Mattes and Paul Henderson, "The Pony Express Across Nebraska from St. Joseph to Fort Laramie", *Nebraska History*, 41 (June, 1960), 109.

⁶ O. Allen, *Allen's Guide Book and Map to the Gold Fields of Kansas and Nebraska and Great Salt Lake City* (Washington, 1859).

overland stage and mail service past Courthouse Rock, but this operation was moved south the next year.⁷

The first recognized mention of Courthouse Rock was recorded in 1835 by the Reverend Samuel Parker (who referred to it as "the old castle").⁸ However, other travelers of the Platte River route certainly saw it, and even before the coming of the white man, Indian legend presented a rather colorful series of events revolving around the site.⁹

The Pawnees had heard of the wonderful herds of buffaloes that were in this part of the country, and they decided to drive the Sioux farther westward and take possession of the rich hunting grounds themselves. The warriors left the squaws in the rear, as was their custom, but among those in the forward rank was a brave whose conscience would not permit him to go forward and leave his poor old grandmother. Amid the jibes and jeers of the other warriors, he returned to the lodge of the old woman and assisted her on the forward journey. After many days of travel and hardship they reached the base of the eminence which was afterwards given the name of Court House Rock. A short distance from this eminence the Pawnee village settled, for there were many buffaloes in the part of the country. In one of the large herds there was a spotted calf, and the chief announced that the warrior who brought home the spotted robe should marry his daughter. The poor young man who went back to help his grandmother on the march, mounted an old horse that had been discarded along the wayside, and the other braves laughed at him, but the horse heard them and spoke to the young man, thus: "Take me to a stream and plaster me with mud; my legs, my head, my back." The young man did as the horse directed, and at the cry of "loo-ah," the old dun horse, covered with mud, sped away so fast that to the Indians he seemed to fly, and when the other braves came up to where the herd had been they found the young man skinning the spotted calf. The other braves returned to the village and as they rode past the grandmother's lodge, they told her of the young man's good fortune, and when he came in on his old dun horse, covered with mud,

⁷ Mattes, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁸ Samuel Parker, *Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1844), p. 64.

⁹ Alfred James Mokler, *Transition of the West*, Chicago, 1927), pp. 148-152.

and laden with buffalo meat and the spotted robe there was great rejoicing in the little tepee. Here the old dun horse spake again, saying: "The Sioux war parties are coming; they are now near 'The Wigwam,'" meaning a landmark which was later named by the fur traders as Chimney Rock. "Tomorrow they will come and our people will meet them about half way. When we meet, ride among them and kill their chief and return. Then ride among them and kill another chief and return. Do this again and again, four times only, for if you go the fifth time some disaster will befall you or me."

As the horse had said, there was a great battle the next day between the Pawnees and the Sioux. The young man and the old dun horse were there, and as they were in the thick of the conflict there were many arrows in the air, but the young man found the chief of the Sioux, slew him and returned unhurt. For the fourth time, he rode among the enemy and each time he killed a chief and came back unharmed. The battle continued, and the young man, disregarding the instructions of his faithful horse, plunged into the fray the fifth time, when the horse was shot and cut to pieces. The young Pawnee, however, fought his way out of the Sioux and again returned to his people unhurt, but after the battle, in which the Pawnees were victorious, the young man mourned the loss of his horse, and he went out on the plains and gathered up the pieces of the animal and put them in a pile. Then he went up on the rim of rocks to mourn and would not return to the village to celebrate with people over their triumph of the Sioux. In the night there came a roaring mountain storm; the lightning flashed, the thunder roared and there was a deluge of rain. Two black arms reached down from the dark clouds to the field of battle. When the storm had passed the young man saw an animate form on the battlefield. Then came another storm, fiercer than the first, and when it had passed he could see the form of an old horse. Then came another storm, and the lightning was brighter, the thunder louder and the rain harder than the other two, and when it passed, he went down to the battlefield where he found his old dun horse, with the clay and mud washed off its legs, head and back, and it was in the same poor and pitiable condition as when he first found it. This made the young man very sad.

The horse said to the young warrior: "Ti-wa-ra (meaning the God of the Court House Rock) has let me return, and for your devotion to your grandmother and for your kind treatment to a poor old horse, and because you are

sad, I have returned, but in the future you must do as I tell you—no more and no less. Now lead me through yonder gap to the other valley and leave me, but return alone tomorrow and tomorrow, ten successive tomorrows in all."

The young man followed the orders given him by his faithful horse and upon returning the next day he found with his old horse a beautiful young white gelding, which he rode back to the Pawnee village. The next day, he found with the old horse a beautiful young black horse, and this he also rode back to the village, and each day upon his return to the old horse he found with it another young horse of a different color, until he had ten young horses, more beautiful and better than any of the other horses rode by the Pawnee braves. The old horse was then brought in from the valley and was given kind treatment by the young man for several years.

Now the young man was rich, and he reminded the chief of his pledge, and spread before him the Spotted Robe. The chief thereupon gave to the young warrior his beautiful daughter, and the Pawnees held the rich hunting ground for a number of years. But with their ease and prosperity, and with the thought that they were secure, they neglected the old dun horse and it died of neglect and starvation. Soon followed the death of the young man's first born child, and its body was wrapped in the Spotted Robe and was "buried" in a cottonwood tree. Other misfortunes and disasters came to the Pawnees, and finally the Sioux returned to give them battle and to retrieve their rich hunting ground. The Pawnees were forced to retreat, but the Sioux followed them and there was a terrible battle between the two tribes from early morn until late at night. The warriors of both tribes had shot away all their arrows, and then they fought with battle axes, tomahawks and clubs until more than a hundred warriors lay cold in death.

A detachment of the Pawnees took refuge on top of Court House Rock, among whom was the young brave who had been kind to his old grandmother, and who had married the daughter of the chief, and who had also been kind to the old dun horse. The Sioux surrounded the rock with the intention of killing the Pawnees if they came down, or starving them to death if they remained on top.

In the night time the young Pawnee, who had many times before delivered his people from disaster, would go alone and plead with the God of Court House Rock, or Ti-wa-ra, to come to the rescue of himself and his com-

panions, and finally, just as they were at the point of starvation, the good Ti-wa-ra showed him the way to escape by letting himself down through a crevice, with the aid of a number of lariats he had tied together. This crevice at the top of the rock was the outlet of a well at the base. He let himself down into this well and he discovered that the outlet was unguarded. He climbed back to the top and the next night called his companions together and told them how they could all make their escape from the prison rock. One by one, by the aid of the rope, they let themselves down through the crevice into the well and crawled through the hole and made their escape, and after many days of travel and hardship they joined their people far to the east where they had been driven by the Sioux.

After these many years, it is said, if one will go to the top of Court House Rock in the night time, when all is quiet, even through the darkness he can see the Sioux sentinels waiting for the Pawnees to come down and he can hear them marching, marching, and he can also feel the presence of the good Ti-wa-ra directing the Pawnees how to make their escape from the elevated outdoor prison.

Zenas Leonard, who passed through the area in 1831, presented a general description of the region, but did not specifically mention Courthouse Rock.¹⁰

As we travelled up the river, we occasionally came in contact with cliffs of rocks and hard clay, from two to three hundred feet above the level of the plain.

He did, however, describe Chimney Rock.

Even before the young mountain man Leonard passed through the area, others who had kept diaries and journals of their proceedings had given general descriptions of the North Platte Valley, but failed to mention the landmark. Robert Stuart and his six companions were the first known white men to travel this route. In 1812, they started back to St. Louis from the trading establishment (Astoria) which they had found at the mouth of the Columbia River in Oregon. Stuart, who kept a diary, did not mention any of the landmarks along the North Platte River by name.¹¹

¹⁰ Zenas Leonard, *Narrative of the Adventures of Zenas Leonard* (Chicago, 1934), p. 10.

¹¹ Philip Ashton Rollins, editor, *Discovery of the Oregon Trail: Robert Stuart's Narrative* (New York, 1935).

After the route was "re-discovered" by some of General Ashley's mountain men in 1824, more and more use was made of this easy route to the mountains. The first wagon wheels to cut a track in the virgin sod for the others to follow were the west bound wagons of the Smith-Jackson-Sublette fur trading party in 1830.

Other travelers followed who kept diaries or accounts of their journeys. Among these were Warren Ferris (1830), Captain Benjamin Bonneville (1832), Nathaniel Wyeth (1832), William Anderson (1834), and Lee and Frost (1834). None of these, however, made any mention of Courthouse Rock, although all of them did describe at least one of the other landmarks in the valley.

The famous artist of the west, Alfred Jacob Miller, who passed through the area with Sir William Drummond Stewart in 1837, is the first to give the rock its name:¹²

In its immediate neighborhood [Chimney Rock], are formations not less singular, to which the Trappers have given names, indicative of their approach in form to different structures in civilized life; for instance,—the "Court House, — Cathedral" & c.

After 1837 the landmark was mentioned more and more frequently by travelers along the trail although many of them gave the structure other names. Dr. Wislizenus, who passed in 1839, called it an "old castle."¹³ Rufus B. Sage gave it a specific name, "McFarlan's Castle,"¹⁴ while others referred to it as the "Solitary Tower."¹⁵

How did it get the name "Courthouse Rock?" Some said that it simply resembled such a structure.¹⁶ Captain Howard Stansbury, who passed with a group of military in 1849, stated that the "... voyageurs, most of whom are originally from St. Louis, had given this name, from a

¹² Marvin C. Ross, editor, *The West of Alfred Jacob Miller*, (Norman, 1951), p. 54.

¹³ F. A. Wislizenus, *A Journey to the Rocky Mountains in the Year 1839* (Missouri Historical Society, 1912).

¹⁴ Rufus B. Sage, *Rocky Mountain Life* (Boston, 1857), p. 83.

¹⁵ Joel Palmer, *Journal of Travels Over the Rocky Mountains* (Cincinnati, 1847), p. 24.

¹⁶ Sage, *op. cit.*

fancied resemblance to a well known structure in their own city."¹⁷ In 1850, George Read states that it appears more like the state house in Jefferson City, Missouri.¹⁸ To James Abbey, that same year, it appeared like the courthouse at Louisville, Kentucky.¹⁹ To Richard F. Burton, in 1860, "... [Courthouse Rock] resembles anything more than a court house. . . ."²⁰ Regardless of the other appellations given to the landmark, "Courthouse" seemed to be the most popular and widely used descriptive term applied, and it has remained with us.²¹

One interesting, if somewhat imaginative description of the North Platte Valley was given by Dr. E. A. Tompkins in 1850:²²

The whole country seems overspread by the ruins of some of the loftiest and most magnificent palaces the imagination of man can reach in its most extravagant conceptions. Here lays the ruins of a lofty Pyramid, there a splendid castle. On one hand is a tremendous citidal [*sic*], on the other the grand hall of legislation. Yonder is the facsimile of our nations' capitol at Washington and there again is the City Hall at N. Y., only enlarged perhaps a dozen times or more.

On all sides lay the ruins of more grandeur than man has ever had a conception of. Even the ruins of Rome, Athens, Bagdad and Petria fall into perfect insignificance by the side of these apparent ruins of a city that must have been inhabited by Giants.

It is in vain to attempt a description of those enchanting wonder. Even the strange creations of fancy which gives to Alladdin's Lamp such wonder-working powers could never display to the dreamy mind a tenth of such astonishing grandeur as is displayed on these places where nature has made such mocking of the works of Art.

Jail Rock was as interesting and as prominent to the emigrants, although the name "Jail" was not applied until much later in the migrations. Samuel Parker (in 1835)

¹⁷ Howard Stansbury, *Exploration and Survey of the Valley of the Great Salt Lake*, (Washington, 1853), p. 28.

¹⁸ George Willis Read, *A Pioneer of 1850* (Boston, 1927), p. 52.

¹⁹ James Abbey, "California". A diary. (Typescript, Newberry Library, Chicago).

²⁰ Richard F. Burton, "City of the Saints", (Typescript, Newberry Library, p. 73.

²¹ See Appendix B. for list of names used for Courthouse Rock.

²² Owen C. Coy, *The Great Trek* (Los Angeles, 1931), p. 135.

mentions "... large guardhouses, standing some rods in front of the main building."²³ In 1849, Alex Ramsey stated that "... it very much resembles the courthouse with the clerk's office at a distance of about 20 feet."²⁴

Alonzo Delano also mentioned it: "Near it [Courthouse Rock], on the east end, was another blunt pointed rock, not quite as high, which was not particularly remarkable, but which is embraced in the same view."²⁵

Others mentioning Jail Rock, but not by name, were Orange Gaylord in 1850,²⁶ E. S. Ingalls in 1850,²⁷ James Bennett in 1850,²⁸ and Helen Carpenter in 1856.²⁹

The word "Jail" first appears in the 1852 journal of John T. Kerns: "... There is a large rock on the south of court house which resembles a jail house."³⁰ Thomas Flint, in 1853, states "The jail is represented by a square bluff just east of the court house."³¹ The last mention of Jail Rock is given by Julius C. Birge in 1866: "... it has ... a worthy associate not far away, another prominence known as the Jail. ..."³² Either David or John Dinwiddie, in their diary of 1853, thought Jail Rock looked like a light-house.³³

²³ Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

²⁴ Alex Ramsey, Diary extracts printed in *Scottsbluff Daily Star-Herald*, March 17, 1940.

²⁵ Alonzo Delano, *Across the Plains and Among the Diggings* (New York, 1936), p. 26.

²⁶ Orange Gaylord, "Diary to California, and Oregon in 1850," *Oregon Pioneer Association Transactions, 45th Annual Reunion* (1917), pp. 403-404.

²⁷ E. S. Ingalls, *Journal of a Trip to California*, (Waukegan, 1852).

²⁸ James Bennett, "Overland Journey to California", (Typescript, Newberry Library), p. 20.

²⁹ Helen M. Carpenter, "Overland Journey" (Typescript, Newberry Library), p. 20.

³⁰ John T. Kerns, "Journal of Crossing the Plains in 1852", *Oregon Pioneer Association, Transactions, 42nd Annual Reunion* (1914), p. 165.

³¹ Thomas Flint, *Diary* (Los Angeles, 1923.)

³² Julius C. Birge, *The Awakening of the Desert* (Boston, 1912), p. 150.

³³ David (or John) Dinwiddie, "Diary". (Typescript.)

With only three or four mentions of Jail Rock in the many journals and diaries which have been handed down to us, it might seem surprising that this smaller elevation has kept that name. However, this appellation appears to outnumber the others given it and has also remained with us to this day.

Not a few of the emigrants and other travelers took the time to get a closer look at the two landmarks. Some even climbed Courthouse Rock, among whom were: Joel Palmer (1845),³⁴ C. W. Smith (1850),³⁵ Walter G. Pigman and three companions (1850),³⁶ James Bennett (1850),³⁷ and two boys in the party of Mrs. Sarah A. Wisner (1866).³⁸

John Bidwell, guiding the first emigrant wagon train west in 1841, narrates the reason why so many started for the famous landmarks, only to turn back to their trains or camps before reaching them:³⁹

Its [Courthouse Rock] distance from us no one supposed more than 1½ miles, and yet it was at least 7—this deception was owing to the pure atmosphere through which it was viewed, and the want of objects, by which only, accurate ideas of distance can be acquired without measure.

From the entries concerning Courthouse Rock, to be found in contemporary diaries and journals, the following quotations indicate the impression that Courthouse and Jail Rocks and their companions made on the travelers:

1835 The Rev. Samuel Parker:

We encamped to-day in the neighborhood of a great natural curiosity, which, for the sake of a name, I shall call the old castle. It is situated upon the south side of the Platte, on a plain, some miles distant from

³⁴ Joel Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

³⁵ C. W. Smith, *Journal of a Trip to California* (New York, 1920), p. 37.

³⁶ Walter G. Pigman, *Journal* (Mexico, Mo., 1942), p. 12.

³⁷ Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

³⁸ Sarah A. Wisner, "A Trip Across the Plains" (Typescript, Newberry Library).

³⁹ John Bidwell, *A Journey to California* (San Francisco, 1937), p. 7.

any elevated land, and covers more than an acre of ground, and is more than fifty feet high. It has, at the distance of the width of the river, all the appearances of an old enormous building, somewhat dilapidated; but still you see the standing wall, the roof, the turrets, embrasures, the dome, and almost the very windows; and large guard-houses, standing some rods in front of the main building.

1837 Alfred Jacob Miller:

In its [Chimney Rock] immediate neighborhood, are formations not less singular, to which the Trappers have given names, indicative of their approach in form to different structures in civilized life; for instance; — the “Court House, — Cathedral” &c.

1839 Dr. F. A. Wislizenus:

So the first cliff in the first chain, perhaps eight miles from the river, presented quite the appearance of an old castle or citadel. More remarkable still is the last cliff of the same chain. Its tower-like top is seen from a distance of thirty or forty miles, for which reason it has been called the chimney.

1841 John Bidwell:

Continued to coast along up the river—encamped on its banks nearly opposite to a huge isolated bluff, bearing some resemblance to an immense castle in ruins. Its distance from us no one supposed more than $11\frac{1}{2}$ miles, and yet it was at least 7—this deception was owing to the pure atmosphere through which it was viewed, and the want of objects, by which only, accurate ideas of distance can be acquired without measure.

1843 Matthew C. Field:

An isolated eminence, known as the “Court House,” or “Church,” blazed up with the glory of departing day, like an illuminated Temple of Solomon,

glittering with still grander effect on account of the rolling darkness above, and the muttering of thunder that came from the heavy clouds.

1842 A. J. Allen (quotes Dr. Elijah White) :

In this vicinity they saw the famous castle, spoken of by Mr. Parker, and the chimney likewise, of which he did not have a view.

(Note: This is in error; the Rev. Parker did see and describe Chimney Rock.)

1842 J. C. Fremont:

To several of these localities, where the winds and the rain have worked the bluffs into curious shapes, the voyageurs have given names according to some fancied resemblances. One of these, called the Court-house, we passed about six miles from our encampment of last night, and toward noon came in sight of the celebrated Chimney rock.

1844 James Clyman:

. . . 4 or 5 miles from our nooning raises a bank of clay & rock having all the appearance [*sic*] of some old castle or circular shape the spire having been Blown down the main walls and dome roof in good state of preservation and still shewing [*sic*] the even range work of rubble rock of which the structure was formed. . . .

1845 J. Henry Carleton:

About six miles to the southward of us, a large, natural structure, resembling the ruins of an old castle, rises abruptly from the plain. It is about three hundred feet in height, and some quarter of a mile in length, by two hundred yards in breadth. Its outline, and general proportions are such, that it is difficult to look upon it and not believe that art had something to do with its construction. The voyageurs have called it the "Court House"; but it looks infinitely more like

the Capitol than it does any building bearing the name they have bestowed upon it.

1845 Phillip St. George Cooke:

We came in sight early this morning of the "Courthouse," a hill, or immense mound, which strongly resembles such a building, with wings; it rests imposingly on a bluff; the sides are near a cream color, with apparently, a black roof.

1845 Joel Palmer:

Five miles, to-day, brought us to Spring Creek; eleven miles further to another creek, the name of which I could not ascertain; there we encamped, opposite the Solitary Tower.

1846 Edwin Bryant:

The atmosphere this morning being clear, we saw distinctly the "Chimney Rock," at a probable distance of thirty-five or forty miles. Some ten or twelve miles this side of it we also saw an elevated rock, presenting an imposing and symmetrical architectural shape. At this distance its appearance was not unlike that of the capitol at Washington; representing, with great distinctness of outline, a main building, and wings surmounted by domes. This, I believe, has been named by emigrants the "Court-house."

1846 J. Quinn Thornton:

The action of the wind and rain upon the soft marly formation of the country presents some very curious and interesting objects, which seen in the distance, are remarkable imitations of magnificent works of art partially in ruins. One of these, called the Court House, was in full view during the afternoon of Monday.

1847 Chester Ingersoll:

We arrived, to day, at the famous ruined castle

and solitary tower. It stands about 6 miles from the road, on Dry Creek, and is about 400 feet high.

1849 Alex Ramsey:

It stands about half way from the river to the main bluff, or about four miles from the road and it very much resembles the courthouse with the clerk's office at a distance of about 20 feet.

1849 Kimball Webster:

Wednesday, July 4. The Fourth of July will remind an American of his home wherever he may be or however far he may be separated from it. Early this morning we fired several rounds, and made as much noise as possible in honor of the day of Independence. . . .

We halted at noon within sight of Court House Rock. This rock is several hundred feet in length and at a distance bears a strong resemblance to a large building with a cupola. It is said to be about 12 miles from the road, but to measure the distance with the eye, a person would judge it to be not more than one mile distant. . . .

1849 Captain Howard Stansbury:

. . . two bald elevations — to which the voyageurs, most of whom are originally from St. Louis, had given this name, from a fancied resemblance to a well known structure in their own city.

1849 Alonzo Delano:

We approached Court-house Rock during the day, over a broad bottom. . . . Court-house Rock appeared only about two miles off, when in reality it was ten or twelve. . . . It . . . was of a circular form, with an elevation on the top much like a flattened dome, and at the distance at which we stood, it resembled a huge building. . . . Near it, on the east end, was another blunt pointed rock, not quite as high,

which was not particularly remarkable, but which is embraced in the same view.

1849 Captain David Dewolf:

July 2nd we rolled out in the morning on fine roads we passed today Court House rock which stands in the open plain presenting an imposing symmetrical architectural shape. . . .

1849 J. Goldsborough Bruff:

July 3d Started at 9 A.M. Made 12 miles near bad water & alkaline wells; an old soldier's rollbook found. . . Dry Ford (stream) near head C. H. Rock—.

1849 Henry A. Cox:

The next thing that presents itself . . . is ash hollow . . . and then comes the Church or Court House almost a perfect representation of the Saint Louis Cathedral and presents a very imposing sight from the bottom where the road run and then 13 miles distant comes the Chimney rock. . . .

1849 George Gibbs:

Two noted landmarks, the Courthouse and Chimney rock, are in sight of our camp. . . Two or three of us rode into the bluffs to visit the Courthouse, or as it is often called, Solitary tower.

1850 William Fouts:

July 25. Noon, near Capitol Rock on a little creek. Camped within 4 miles of Chimney Rock for the night. Made 26 miles.

1850 George Willis Read:

The Court house rock . . . has a most splendid appearance, is a huge pile of white rock, much resembling in size and shape the state house in Jefferson City, Missouri.

1850 C. W. Smith:

At noon, we came nearly opposite the Court House, and as it appeared but a short distance from the road, some of our men determined to go to it and satisfy their curiosity.

1850 Walter G. Pigman:

... encamped in sight of the Courthouse Rock... to all appearances about two miles away. It afterwards proved to be eight miles from our camp.

1850 James Abbey:

It has much the appearance . . . of the courthouse at Louisville.

1850 Orange Gaylord:

May 31 treveled [*sic*] 17 miles and camped opposite Solitary Tower on Little Creek.

June 1 — Went over and examined it . . . found the names of thousands of immigrants cut on it. . . A short distance to the northeast of it stands another tower, not quite as high, but a great deal smaller, We traveled 15 miles, which brought us opposite Chimney Rock.

1850 E. S. Ingalls:

The Court House and county buildings are . . . in sight from our camping ground to-night.

1850 Margaret A. Frink:

Our camp at night was made nearly opposite the Court-house and six miles distant.

1850 John Steele:

Tuesday, June 18. Following up the Platte and passing Convent Rock, which is south of the river and several miles distant. . . In the afternoon we passed Chimney Rock, also on the south side.

1850 James Bennett:

Thursday 20th — At three o'clock today we arrived at a creek opposite Solitary Tower. Nearby stands another pile of materials, similar to that composing the tower, but neither so large nor so high.

1852 John T. Kerns:

June 15 — We traveled twenty miles and passed the opposite of Court House Rock and encamped opposite Chimney Rock and in sight of the Scott's Bluff. The Court House rock or solitary tower is said to be ten miles south of the Platte River. . . It has the appearance of a court house or some public ediface. . . There is a large rock on the south of the Court house which resembles a jail house.

1852 W. Wadsworth:

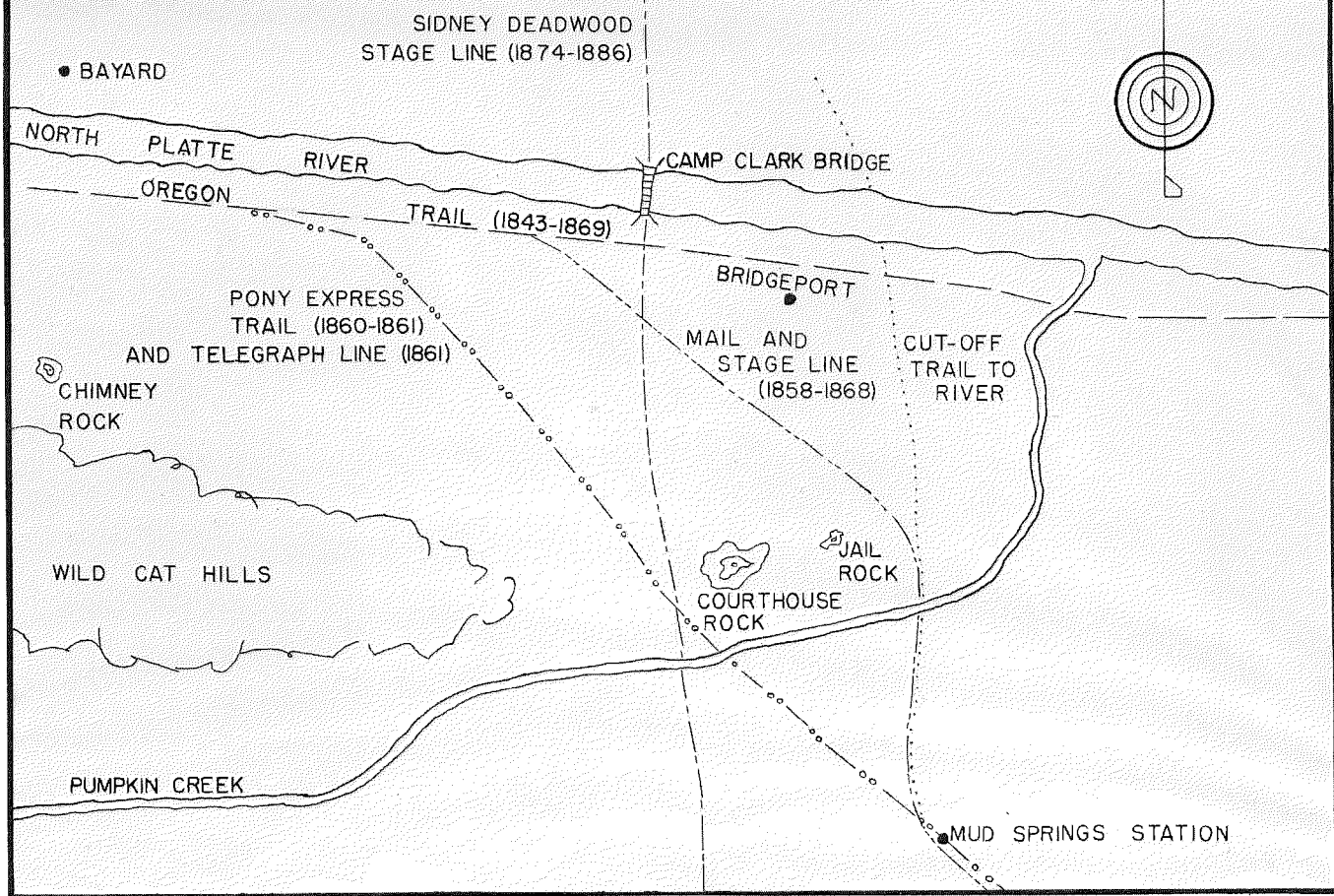
This magnificent formation is situated upon the south border of the Platte river, about two hundred and fifty miles west of Fort Kearny. . . It has doubtless derived its name from the peculiarity of its form as a natural object . . . a conspicuous and noted object, seen by the traveler, as he passes along the great plains, that here border the Platte river, the "Solitary Tower," as one of Nature's own, will ever stand in the front rank for grandeur and magnificence.

1853 David or John Dinwiddie:

Tuesday 7th. Started about six o'clock. Had good roads past the Courthouse Rock, a very singular looking place. It has the appearance of a splendid courthouse with a cupola on it in the center, and has a pillar not far off of the appearance of a lighthouse, all standing on a nice elevated situation.

1853 Thomas Flint:

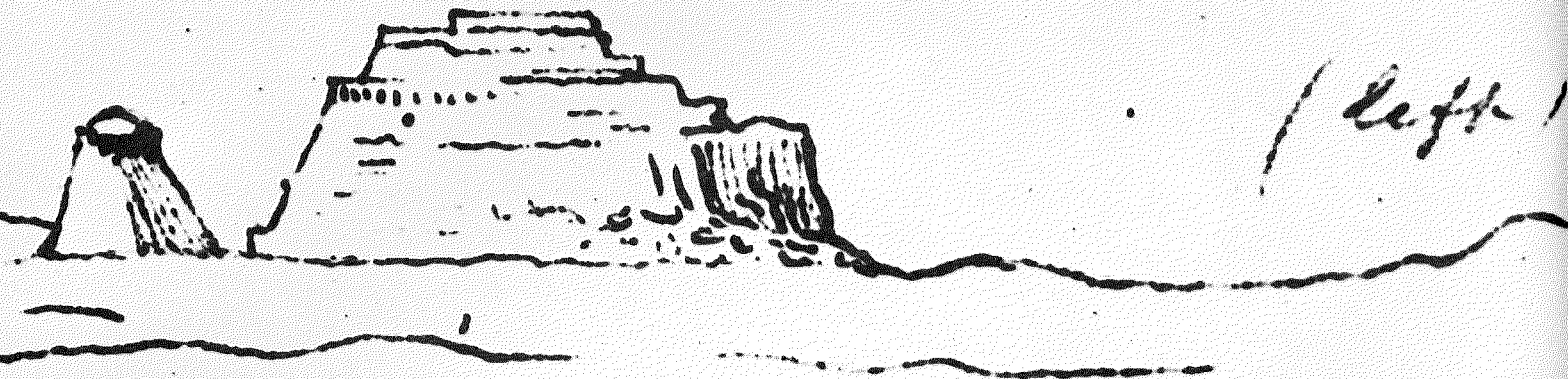
Saturday 9th: Court House Rock nearly opposite across the Platt [*sic*]. It is three stories high in appearance from the different stratifications. The



Map of Area
(Courtesy Paul Henderson, Bridgeport, and author)

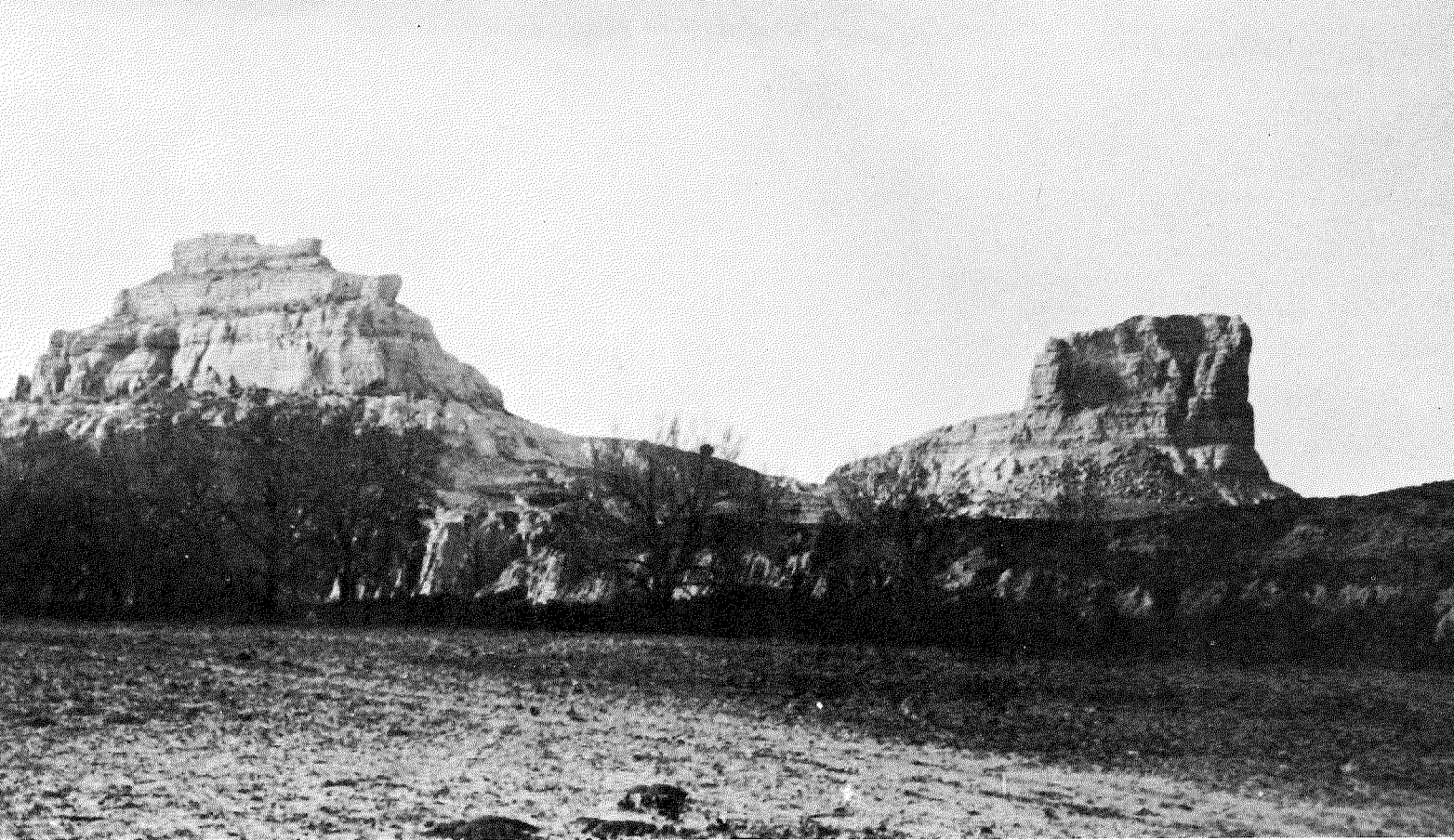


Camp Clarke and Camp Clarke Bridge



Courthouse Rock, 2 miles S.W. by S. from road

Courthouse Rock
(From Pencil sketch by J. Goldsborough Bruff, 1849)



Courthouse and Jail Rocks from South
(Photo by Emil Kopac in 1932)



Court House and Jail Rocks from Southeast

jail is represented by a square bluff just east of the court house.

1854 George McCowan:

Monday 5th June. . . Some heavy sandy roads passed Convent or Courthouse Rock, not near enough to tell what it looks like.

1856 Helen M. Carpenter:

. . . we came in sight of Court House Rock which appeared to be but a short distance ahead, yet it was noon before we were opposite the immense landmark. . . . There are three rocks, two comparatively small ones, and the large one called Court House, which rises to the height of 100 feet.

1860 Richard F. Burton:

The Court-house . . . resembles anything more than a court-house; that it did so in former days we may gather from the tales of many travelers . . . who unanimously accounted it a fit place for Indian spooks, ghosts, and hobgoblins to meet in powwow, and to "count their coups" delivered in the flesh. . . it resembles the rugged earthworks of Sakkara, only it is far more rugged.

1866 Julius C. Birge:

For many miles we observed the majestic outlines of the conspicuous landmark well known as Court House Rock. As our course finally approached within two miles of its cliffs, Ben and I determined to secure a view from its summit . . . it has . . . a worthy associate not far away, another prominence known as the Jail. . . Court House Rock has the appearance of some vast, ancient ruin.

1866 William Henry Jackson:

On Tuesday we came to the banks of the North Platte and camped not far from the massive, square

pile named Court House Rock. There I had time, my first opportunity in more than a week, to do some sketching. I completed two pictures of the rock.

APPENDIX A

Tabulation of references to Courthouse and Jail Rocks

1835	Samuel Parker
1837	Alfred Jacob Miller
1839	F. A. Wislizenus
1841	John Bidwell Rufus B. Sage
1842	Dr. Elijah White John C. Fremont
1843	Matthew C. Field
1844	James Clyman
1845	J. Henry Carleton Phillip St. George Cooke Joel Palmer
1846	Edwin Bryant Virgil R. Pringle J. Quin Thornton
1847	Chester Ingersoll
1849	Alex Ramsey Kimball Webster S. B. F. Clark Lucius Fairchild Howard Stansbury Gershom Day Walter G. Johnson George P. Burrall Alonzo Delano Elizabeth Page

- Joseph Sedgley
David Dewolf
J. Goldsborough Bruff
Elijah Bryan Farnham
Henry A. Cox
George Gibbs
Major Osborne Cross
Isaac Foster
Geiger and Bryarly
Charles Gould
Joseph Hackney
William Kelley
David R. Leeper
Joseph E. Ware
Isaac Wistar
- 1850 William Fouts
George Willis Read
C. W. Smith
Lemuel McKeeby
Reuben Knox
Franklin Street
George Keller
James A. Blood
Walter G. Pigman
Major Willman Packard
James Abbey
Orange Gaylord
E. S. Ingalls
Margaret A. Frink
John Steele
J. J. Scheller
Bryan Nathan McKinstry
James Bennett
Madison Berryman Moorman
- 1851 William C. Lobenstine
- 1852 John H. Clark
E. W. Conyers
Lodisa Frizzell

- Frances H. Sawyer
Lucy Sexton Foster
Thomas Turnbull
W. H. Hart
John T. Kerns
W. Wadsworth
- 1853 Amelia S. Knight
Orange Gaylord (2nd trip west)
Celinda E. Hines
David and John Dinwiddie
Thomas Flint
- 1854 George McCowan
- 1856 Helen M. Carpenter
Moses Sydenham
- 1857 Cornelius Conway
Jesse A. Gove
- 1858 Thaddeus S. Kenderdine
- 1859 J. A. Wilkinson
Randolph B. Marcy
- 1860 Richard F. Burton
- 1863 J. T. Redman
Benjamin M. Connor
- 1866 Sarah A. Wisner
Alfred Lambourne
Julius C. Birge
William Henry Jackson

APPENDIX B

Following is a list of names applied to Courthouse Rock⁴⁰ and the first reference to it as such.

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Old Castle | Samuel Parker, 1835. |
| 2. Court House | Alfred Jacob Miller, 1837. |
| 3. Citadel | Dr. F. A. Wislizenus, 1839. |
| 4. McFarlan's Castle | Rufus B. Sage, 1839. |
| 5. Church | Matthew C. Field, 1843. |
| 6. Solitary Tower | Joel Palmer, 1845. |
| 7. Lone tower | Major Osborne Cross, 1849. |
| 8. Capitol Rock | William Fouts, 1850. |
| 9. County buildings | E. S. Ingalls, 1850. |
| 10. Convent Rock | John Steele, 1850. |

⁴⁰ N. H. Darton, in the Camp Clarke Folio, spells this word as one word, Courthouse, rather than two words, Court House. The one word spelling has been used in this article in accordance with the official U. S. Geological Survey Atlas.