

THE UNFINISHED AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF HENRY HASTINGS SIBLEY

INTRODUCTION

Henry Hastings Sibley has been characterized as "the most prominent figure in Minnesota" from 1834 to 1891.¹ As fur-trader, frontier politician, representative in Congress, first governor of the state, commander of the forces that quelled the Sioux Indians in 1862 and 1863, university regent, and public-spirited citizen, he was associated in outstanding fashion with most of the important Minnesota happenings from the thirties to the nineties. Naturally, printed material on his career is abundant. As long ago as 1889 Nathaniel West brought out a book on Sibley's ancestry, life, and times, a work which, although uncritical in approach, possesses considerable historical interest, especially because of the documentary material that it embodies.² A generation later a student of the westward movement in American history, Dr. Wilson P. Shortridge, wrote a monograph on the career of Sibley treated in its setting of the transition of the western frontier from wilderness to civilization.³ This study, a contribution of much value, was based in part upon the Sibley Papers and other manuscript materials in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society. The extensive collection of Sibley Papers,

¹ William W. Folwell, *A History of Minnesota*, 1: 162 (St. Paul, 1921).

² The title of West's book, which was published in St. Paul, is *The Ancestry, Life, and Times of Hon. Henry Hastings Sibley, LL.D.*

³ Shortridge's monograph is formidably entitled *The Transition of a Typical Frontier with Illustrations from the Life of Henry Hastings Sibley, Fur Trader, First Delegate in Congress from Minnesota Territory, and First Governor of the State of Minnesota* (Menasha, Wisconsin, 1922). A review of this book by Wayne E. Stevens appears *ante*, 5: 48-52. Shortridge has also published a condensation of his monograph in the article "Henry Hastings Sibley and the Minnesota Frontier," *ante*, 3: 115-125. Mention should also be made of J. Fletcher Williams' "Henry Hastings Sibley, a Memoir," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 6: 257-310.

consisting of the correspondence, account books, and miscellaneous papers preserved by Sibley himself, is of exceptional interest for the student of the history of Minnesota and the West, and it is of special importance for the story of the later period of the fur trade and for the political history of the territory and state before the Civil War.

West, in preparing his biography, utilized a manuscript autobiography by Sibley, which, up to a short time ago, was believed to be no longer extant. Several passages quoted by West indicated that the autobiography was an informing and charming narrative, and students of Minnesota history were distressed because of the apparent loss of the original manuscript. Fortunately the document had not gone the way of the world, for it proved to be in the possession of Sibley's daughter, Mrs. Elbert A. Young of St. Paul; and in 1924 Mrs. Young, who has since died, deposited the manuscript with the Minnesota Historical Society. The text, in Sibley's own handwriting, is written in a large notebook or ledger.

The Sibley autobiography, which is now given to the public, was begun at Kittrell, North Carolina, in 1884, when the author was a man of seventy-three years; and the latter part of it was apparently written in 1886. It tells the story of Sibley's life up to 1835 in greater detail than is to be found in any other account. Though Sibley published during his lifetime two reminiscent articles,⁴ there is comparatively little duplication in these articles and the autobiography. The latter is an important and interesting original document and is particularly valuable for its account of the author's ancestry and boyhood, its vivid description of the life of the early fur-traders, and its circumstantial narrative of the author's coming to Minnesota. Only a few scenes from his early experiences in Minnesota are pictured. So far as is known, Sibley did not carry

⁴ "Reminiscences, Historical and Personal" and "Reminiscences of the Early Days of Minnesota," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 1: 457-485 (1872 edition); 3: 242-282.

the autobiography beyond the point to which it is brought in these pages. That he did not leave a full-length autobiography is cause for keen regret, but it is fortunate, at any rate, that the fragment herewith presented has been preserved. In preparing the manuscript for publication a few obvious slips of the pen, such as "along" for "alone," have been corrected. Sibley, in writing about the earlier phases of his career from the perspective of his old age, occasionally fell into error in the matter of dates. These small mistakes may be corrected by comparison with contemporary letters and they cannot be said seriously to impair the general value of the sketch.

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MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ST. PAUL

AUTO-BIOGRAPHY

Commenced Kittrell, N.C. February 22^d 1884

PREFACE

My object in placing upon record my personal history, is simply to leave behind me, for the benefit of my surviving children, and for the gratification of my numerous friends and acquaintances, not only the incidents of my early and mature manhood, eventful and wild as they were, and redolent of adventures, exposures, and dangers, which will be of more or less interest to them, but a narration of events with which I was connected at a later period, immediately preceding, and following the organization of Minnesota as a Territory in 1849, and its admission into the Union as a State in 1858. Whether my life, health, and strength will be spared, to enable me to enter into minute details of my career, or, on the other hand, my physical and mental condition, at any time in the future, shall admonish me to abbreviate my labors, by confining myself to a narrative of the salient, and more important points in my career, time alone can determine. Having entered on my seventy fourth year on the 20th of this month, (February 1884,) I must perform the work as speedily as practicable, for in my case at best, "the night cometh in which no man can work."

I was born in Detroit, Territory of Michigan February 20th 1811. My parents Solomon Sibley, and Sarah Whipple Sibley, had been residents of Detroit since 1804, or 1805.⁵ My father was one of the only two lawyers established there, the other being Elijah Brush father of the late E. A. Brush, who died a few years since, leaving an estate of two or three millions. My father was from Sutton, Worcester County, Massachusetts. The Sibleys were numerous in that town, and the records of the revolution, and of the War of 1812, bear evidence of the voluntary services of many of that name in both of these struggles. Solomon Sibley commanded a Militia Company, when Hull ignominiously surrendered the post of Detroit to the British General Brock, in spite of the indignant protest of all his officers.

My father was elected delegate to Congress from the Territory in 1820-'21, and was afterwards appointed U. S. District Attorney and Judge of the Supreme Court successively, holding the last named office until incapacitated by reason of physical infirmities.⁶ My mother was a noble specimen of a pioneer woman. She was born in Providence, in the State of Rhode Island, and finished her education in a Moravian female Seminary in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Her father was Colonel Ebenezer Sproat a distinguished officer of the continental forces during the revolutionary war, and a member of the Society of Cincinnati, his diploma, or certificate of membership signed by the President George Washington, being in the possession of the family, and preserved as a valued memorial. Her mother was a daughter of Abraham Whipple the oldest Com-

⁵ It is said that Solomon Sibley was "the first settler to go to Detroit after the evacuation of that post by the British in 1796 as provided in the Jay Treaty." According to Shortridge, the elder Sibley was married in 1802 at Marietta and "took his bride by way of the Ohio river to Pittsburg, thence to Lake Erie, and then by boat to Detroit." This seems to be correct, but the journey to Michigan was not made immediately after the marriage. Mrs. Elizabeth F. Ellet in a sketch of Mrs. Solomon Sibley states that she was married in October, 1802, but did not go to Detroit until the following spring. Shortridge, *ante*, 3: 116; *The Transition of a Typical Frontier*, 5; Ellet, *Pioneer Women of the West*, 217 (New York, 1852).

⁶ Solomon Sibley served as a delegate to Congress from Michigan Territory from 1820 to 1823 and was chief justice of the Michigan supreme court from 1824 to 1836. Edward M. Barber, "Michigan Men in Congress," in *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 35: 448.

modore of the revolutionary navy, and noted for his successful daring while in the service. Both of these officers emigrated at the close of the war, with their families, to Marietta, at the mouth of the Muskingum River in the State of Ohio, where they lived until their death. My mother has been made the subject of a special memoir in Mrs. Ellet's interesting history of the "Pioneer Women of the West."⁷

My early youth was in no manner distinguished, unless it was, that I was more given to mischief than my fellows. So many were my exploits in that direction, that my dear mother often declared me incorrigible, and the black sheep of the family. One brother, and one sister were my seniors, and two brothers, and three sisters, younger than myself. Of the eight but three survive, one brother, a sister, and myself, I being several years the oldest. My elder brother Col. E. S. Sibley, graduated at the head of his class at West Point, and remained in the U. S. Army thirty seven years. After having attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Quarter Master's Department, ill health produced by excessive labor in the performance of his duties during the first year of the war of the rebellion, as Deputy Qr. Mr. General in Washington City, compelled his resignation. His long and faithful services to his country, could not secure for him even a place on the Retired List of the Army, General M. C. Meigs, Quarter Master General, persistently refusing to recommend that he be allowed a right which he had well earned, because of the displeasure of the Chief at losing the invaluable aid of his principal assistant.

I was educated in the Academy at Detroit, which was equivalent to the High School of the present day, supplemented by two years tuition in Latin, and Greek, under Rev^d Richard H. Cadle, an Episcopal Minister, and an accomplished classical scholar, and thereafter by the study of law of two years duration. My father intended me to follow his profession, but after the time indicated had elapsed, I frankly told him that the study was irksome to me, and I longed for a more active and stirring life. After long consultations with my mother, they wisely concluded to allow me to follow the bent of my own inclinations, and on the 20th day of

⁷ The pen portrait that Mrs. Ellet draws of "Sarah Sibley" in chapter 12 of her book is that of a woman of rare ability, courage, and charm.

June 1828, being then in my eighteenth year, I left my home never to return to it, except as a transient visitor. My *debut* was in the capacity of clerk to a M^r John Hulbert, who had charge of the sutler's store at the Saut Ste Mary's, the River of that name being the connecting link between Lakes Superior, & Huron. The military post was garrisoned by four companies of the 5th Reg^t U.S. Infantry.⁸

Not fancying the occupation, I remained only a few months with Mr. Hulbert, when I was offered, and accepted the position of Agent for Mrs. Johnson, a widow, and mother of the wife of Henry R. Schoolcraft, who was U. S. Indian Agent near the military post, and who is well known to the literary world, for his many contributions to the history of the Indian tribes of the North-west, as well as to geological science.⁹

Mrs. Johnson's husband had been a quite extensive trader with both whites and Indians, and his widow continued the business after his death. I remained in charge of her affairs during the fall and winter succeeding, and as the family of my employer embraced three educated, and lady-like daughters, the home sickness from which I had previously suffered, was very much alleviated by their company.

In the spring of 1829, having secured a clerkship in John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company at Mackinac, I bade adieu to my kind friends inside, and out, of the garrison, and with half a dozen adventurous young men, embarked on a small schooner, poorly supplied with provisions, and descended the St. Mary's River, until we reached Lake George, a wide expansion of the stream, when to our annoyance and disgust, we encountered a large field of ice in which our frail vessel became firmly imbedded, and where we were detained eight days. Our pork and flour were soon exhausted, and we were only saved from absolute

⁸ This post was Fort Brady. An account of its establishment in 1822 is given in Otto Fowle, *Saulte Ste. Marie and its Great Waterway*, 326-332 (New York, 1925).

⁹ The woman whose affairs Sibley took in charge was the daughter of a Chippewa chieftain, Waubojeeg, and the wife of John Johnston, a fur-trader of outstanding ability and character. Mrs. Johnston's son-in-law, Henry R. Schoolcraft, wrote a "Memoir of John Johnston" which has been published in *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 36: 53-90.

starvation by going ashore, and killing rabbits, of which providentially, there was an abundance. This was my first venture in the hardships, and exposure incident to the wild life upon which I had entered, and it was luxury compared to the privations I was compelled to endure many long years thereafter.

We finally reached Mackinac in safety, although our little craft was sorely tried, and tempest-tossed, on Lake Huron.

Michilimackinac, or Mackinac, as the island is now called, is situated at the entrance of the Straits connecting Lakes Huron & Michigan. It was long the chief entrepot of the fur trade for the country bordering on these Lakes & Lake Superior as well as for the Mississippi valley above Prairie du Chien, and the region watered by the numerous tributaries of that great stream. The whole of this vast area was dominated by the American Fur Company, of which the noted John Jacob Astor of New York City was the head. The capital invested was very large, and the number of traders, clerks, and voyageurs employed in its trade with the numerous tribes of Indians in the northwest, was second only to that of the gigantic Hudson's Bay Company, which controlled the entire British Possessions north of the United States boundary line, a veritable empire in extent.¹⁰

To the central depot at Mackinac, the furs and peltries collected during the winter, were transported by the traders in bark canoes and Mackinac boats, in the months of June and July following, when the usually quiet village was invaded by many hundreds of traders, and voyageurs, arriving from all points of the compass, with their precious freight. There they remained for two months, or more, until the accounts of the principal traders had been settled for the year past, their returns of furs and skins credited to them, and they furnished with the outfit of goods and provisions required for another season's trade, when they departed for their several posts, hundred[s] of miles distant. The period of stay at Mackinac, was a veritable holiday for all the adventurous spirits engaged

¹⁰ The astonishing scope and diversity of the American Fur Company's business are described in Grace Lee Nute, "The Papers of the American Fur Company: A Brief Estimate of their Significance," in the *American Historical Review*, 32: 519-538 (April, 1927). An analysis of this article appears *ante*, 198.

in the traffic with the several tribes of northwestern Indians, and who were self-banished from civilization the greater part of each year. While for the most part, the leading traders, and their clerks were men of more, or less education, and culture, the laborers, or voyageurs, as they were termed, were almost exclusively French Canadians who were divided into two distinct classes, to wit: the "hivernants" or "winterers", who had completed their terms of enlistment of three years, when they were re-engaged at higher wages, and the "mangeurs-de lard," porkeaters, or green-horns, who were held in contempt by the old stagers, and were subjected to many cruel practical jokes by them. These Canadians were especially adapted to the requirements of the fur trade. They were a hardy, cheerful and courageous race, submitting uncomplainingly to labors and exposures, which no other people could have endured. In the winter months, it was their duty to pay periodical visits to the Indian hunting camps scores of miles distant, carrying on their shoulders heavy burdens of goods wherewith to exchange for furs and skins, and to return laden with equal, or greater weights of the latter. Often overtaken by storms in the treeless prairie region, they were compelled to make their beds under the snow, but it seldom happened that any of these voyageurs succumbed to the cold. They were unrivalled as canoe, and boat-men, extremely skilful in their management in the stormy waters of Lakes Huron, Michigan and Superior, and in navigating the numerous rivers, and their tributaries on their way, with valuable cargoes, to the distant interior posts, where the trade with savage bands of Indians was carried on.¹¹ Portages to avoid impassable rapids in many of the minor streams, were required to be made, and the goods, with the frail bark canoes, transported often-times for miles on the shoulders of the voyageurs to the spot, where it was deemed safe to continue the route by water. The labor of bearing these heavy burdens was great beyond conception. The packages of merchandize were, for the sake of con-

¹¹ The *voyageur* was as distinctive and colorful a figure as the lumberjack or the cowboy. A recent writer speaks of him as "the outstanding figure among our makers of folklore" in the upper Mississippi Valley. See Grace Lee Nute, "The Voyageur," *ante*, 6: 155-167. The subject of the *voyageur* is a favorite one with Sibley and is discussed in both of the reminiscent articles cited in footnote 4.

venience, so formed as to weigh about ninety pounds, each one of which was called "a piece".¹² The muscular carriers vied with each [other] in their powers of endurance, and their capacity to transport heavy weights. Two pieces, or one hundred and eighty pounds, were the ordinary charge, the men were expected to carry, but instances were not rare, when individual voyageurs of exceptional strength, and activity, bore three, and even four "pieces" on their backs, for considerable distances without stopping, rivaling in these feats, the famed porters of Constantinople.

Notwithstanding these fearful drafts upon the vital powers, the men as a rule, were merry, good natured, and obedient to the orders of their superiors, and withal long-lived. Leading an existence free from care, their food was simple, & nutritious, and they were debarred from the use of stimulants except tobacco, for ten months in the year. Constant exercise in the open, and pure air of the woods, and prairies, expelled noxious humors from the system, hardened the muscles, and rendered the human machine almost impervious to attacks of disease.

It affords me pleasure to bear witness to the fidelity and honesty of the Canadian French voyageurs. In after years, when at the head of a district, as a partner of the great American Fur Company of New York, comprising the vast region north of Lake Pepin to the British boundary, & west to the streams tributary to the Missouri River, I had within my jurisdiction hundreds of traders, Clerks, and voyageurs, almost all of whom were Canadian French, and I found abundant occasion to prove their honesty and fidelity. In fact, the whole theory of the fur trade was based upon good faith between employers, and employed. Goods, amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars, nay millions, were annually entrusted to men, and taken to posts in the Indian Country, more or less remote, with no guarantee of any return except the honor of the individual, and it is creditable to human nature, that these important trusts were seldom, if ever, abused.

Some of the trading stations were so distant, that no communication could be had with them, until the trader made his appearance with his collection of furs and skins, the following

¹² The word is of course an anglicized version of the French *pièce*.

summer, when his returns were credited to his account at the ruling market price for each article, and a general settlement took place. Furs having no fixed value, but subject to the caprices of fashion, the prices of the finer pelts varied from year to year, sometimes higher, and sometimes lower, so that it was impossible to predict what they would bring in the market, and the poor trader would therefore be a prey to doubts, and fears, until his arrival at the main depot at Mackinac. If his best hopes were realized, he was a happy man, and his employés shared in his good fortune. On the other hand, if prices did not realize his expectations, there was a short period of gloom, and disappointment, but the mercurial spirits of all concerned soon asserted themselves, and they prepared for another long exile from civilization, with the *sang froid* peculiar to the race, and with brightened hopes of the future. It sometimes happened that serious losses occurred by shipwreck, in traversing the stormy lakes, by fire, or other casualties, but in such cases, unless occasioned by gross carelessness, an equitable allowance would be made, in the settlement with the Company, by which the latter assumed a portion of the loss. Whatever might be the result of the year's operations, the employés were scrupulously paid the wages they had so well earned.

It may seem strange that men of education, and culture, could be induced to endure the hardships, perils, and exposure, incident to the life of an Indian trader, nevertheless many such could be found among that class. The love of money was not the incentive, for rarely did a trader accumulate, or become wealthy.¹³ There was a peculiar fascination in such a career, which once entered upon, was seldom abandoned. What constituted that fascination, it would be difficult to describe, except upon the theory, that the tendency of civilized man when under no restraint, is towards savagery as the normal condition of the human race. There was a charm in the fact, that in the wild region, inhabited only by savage beasts, and still more savage men, one was liberated from all tram-

¹³ It is doubtless true that the average trader did not become wealthy, but it must not be forgotten that some of the great organizers of the fur trade gained large fortunes. Of these the most conspicuous example is of course John Jacob Astor. Not a few of the lesser figures also won ample financial rewards. It should be added that some of the traders who made handsome fortunes in furs quickly lost them in speculation.

mels of society, independent, and free to act according to his own pleasure. Even the dangers which environed him gave zest to his existence. Moreover, he was regarded by the savages among whom he was thrown, as their superior, their counsellor, and their friend. When sickness prevailed in their families, he prescribed for them, when hungry he fed them, and in all things he identified himself with their interests, and became virtually their leader. What wonder then, that he should exercise so potent an influence with this wild race?

There was a spice of romance in these surroundings, which was attractive. And there was no lack of chivalry in the character of the Indian trader of the olden time. This trait was especially manifested in his dealings with an opposition trader, who having secured a government license, made free to establish himself by the side of him who claimed a prior, and prescriptive right, to all the privileges, and profits, to be derived from the traffic with that particular band of savages. Hostilities were at once inaugurated, which at first, consisted on the part of the new comer, in attempts to seduce the best hunters from their old allegiance, by gifts, and other appliances. So far indeed, was the strife carried, that not unfrequently, there occurred pugilistic encounters between the voyageurs, over the possession of a package of valuable furs. And yet when the principals met, as they frequently interchanged visits socially, no offensive allusion was made to the existing strife, which was looked upon as purely a matter of business. If either party, or his employés, suffered from illness, accident, or other calamity, the tenants of the hostile camp tarried not, but hastened to the rescue, with all the means and appliances at their command. If, as often occurred, the occupants of one post were temporarily straitened for provisions, the scanty larder of their opponents was, as a matter of course, placed at their disposal. All this, while the contest for the possession of the Indian hunters products was fiercely maintained, by the voyageurs attached to each side, and any, and every means resorted to without scruple, to secure the coveted prize. Thus there existed a broad line of demarcation, in the usages of the Indian traders, between the requirements of social life, and the stern demands of business, which was seldom infringed upon.

Upon my arrival at Mackinac, I reported in person to Mr. Robert Stuart, the gentleman in charge of that great central depot, and the trusted Agent of John Jacob Astor, who was in fact the owner, and embodiment, of the American Fur Company.¹⁴ I was cordially received by Mr. Stuart, and informed that the business season would not open, until about the first of June, and I was at liberty to spend the intermediate month as I pleased. I fell in with an old and intimate friend, John Kinzie, a son of an Indian Agent long stationed in Chicago, and was invited to accompany him on a visit to that spot.¹⁵ We embarked on a sail vessel called the "Napoleon", commanded by Captain Chesley Blake, one of the oldest and best sailors on the lakes, and after an uneventful voyage, varied only by short landings at ports on the South shore of Lake Michigan, we reached Chicago, where we remained several days. I found on the present site of the "Queen City of the Lakes", in May 1829, a small stockade constructed for defence against the Indians, but abandoned, and perhaps half a dozen dwellings, occupied by the Beaubien and other families, and a single store stocked with a small, but varied assortment of goods and provisions.¹⁶ A more un-inviting place could hardly be conceived of. There was sand here, there, and every where, with a little occasional shrubbery to relieve the monotony of the landscape. Little did I dream,

¹⁴ Robert Stuart was in charge of the inland headquarters of the American Fur Company at Mackinac from 1817 to 1834. He had migrated to Canada from Scotland in 1805 and five years later, with his uncle David Stuart, joined the Astorians. After the abandonment of the post at the mouth of the Columbia, he returned to New York by the overland route. A "Sketch of the Life of Hon. Robert Stuart" by Charles C. Trowbridge, a contemporary, is printed in *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, 3: 52-65. The Minnesota Historical Society possesses photostatic reproductions of letters in Stuart's letterbooks, now preserved at Mackinac, for the period when Stuart was in charge of the Mackinac headquarters.

¹⁵ John H. Kinzie was the elder of the two sons of John Kinzie, the well-known Chicago trader. He was "at different times in the employ of Robert Stuart of the American Fur Company, secretary to Governor Cass, and sub-Indian agent at Fort Winnebago." Milo M. Quaife, *Chicago and the Old Northwest, 1673-1835*. 361 (Chicago, 1913).

¹⁶ Jean Baptiste Beaubien has been described as perhaps "the most picturesque character in the little group of civilian residents of Chicago in the decade which began with the restoration of Fort Dearborn." Quaife, *Chicago and the Old Northwest*, 278.

that I would live to see on that desolate coast, a magnificent City of more than half a million of inhabitants, almost rivaling metropolitan New York in wealth, and splendor.

Leaving Chicago the "Napoleon" wended its way to the spot, where the beautiful city of Milwaukee now exhibits her fair proportions. There was but one house there, the dwelling of an Indian trader named Solomon Juneau, by whom we were hospitably welcomed, and entertained.¹⁷ It has been a source of surprise to me, that the City of which Juneau the honest old Frenchman, and original inhabitant, was the actual founder, has done little, or nothing, to perpetuate his memory.

Our craft returned to Mackinac without accident, on the 22^d day of May 1829, and I entered upon my duties as office clerk on the first of June following, finding a home in the charming family of Mr. Stuart.¹⁸

I soon found that the position of clerk was no sinecure. For three months or more in each year, he was closely confined to his desk, excepting Sundays, writing twelve or fourteen hours a day. The winter was comparatively, a season of idleness, affording time for social enjoyments, fishing and other amusements.

I was domiciled in this sequestered spot for the most part of five years. In 1832, I was dispatched in a bark canoe with a crew of nine chosen voyageurs, to transact some important business with

¹⁷ Solomon Juneau established himself as a trader on the site of Milwaukee in 1818. As late as 1833 there were but three huts there. In 1834 Juneau joined with Morgan L. Martin "to preëempt the land east of Milwaukee River and lay out a town site." Louise P. Kellogg, "The Story of Wisconsin, 1634-1848," in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 3:191 (December, 1919); Edwin S. Mack, "The Founding of Milwaukee," in *State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Proceedings*, 1906, p. 195.

¹⁸ Though Sibley is very definite here as to date, there is reason for supposing that the trip described and the entrance upon his new duties at Mackinac occurred in 1830 instead of in 1829. In the Sibley Papers is a letter of recommendation from certain officers of the Bank of Michigan addressed to Robert Stuart and bearing the date April 28, 1830. In it occurs this phrase: "Having understood that our young friend Mr. Henry H. Sibley has some reason to expect employment in the office of your company at Mackinac, we cannot see him depart without availing ourselves of the opportunity to testify to you Sir our respect for his character and talents."

Hon. George B. Porter Governor, and ex-officio Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Territory of Michigan, with headquarters at Detroit. I was furnished with six days rations, which was considered sufficient for the downward trip, and being inexperienced in that direction, I left the supply to the care of the crew, who consumed the whole of it in four days. We encountered a severe storm in crossing Saginaw Bay which few open boats could have safely weathered, but our large, and well built bark canoe skimmed the waves in magnificent style, and we doubled the dreaded "Pointe aux Barques" without accident.

But the night overtook us before we could effect a landing on the iron bound shore, and while we were a full mile or more from the coast, and a heavy swell of the lake prevailing, the canoe settled suddenly upon a submerged rock, making a large hole through the frail bark in the middle of the craft, much to the alarm of myself, and the crew. I thrust my overcoat over the opening, and ordered the steersman to make for the land as speedily as was possible in the darkness. Providentially, we discovered a sand beach, which we reached none too soon, for our vessel was rapidly filling with water.

Having transported our few chattels to the shore, the canoe was speedily emptied, and borne carefully to it on the shoulders of the men, and deposited in a safe resting place. It was then, and there, that I learned the lesson, which stood me in good stead in after years, of not entrusting a scanty stock of provisions, to the custody of careless improvident, and voracious voyageurs. We had, upon investigation, just sufficient bread and pork for supper, and no more. For two whole days and a part of the third, the storm continued with so much violence, that we were completely wind-bound, and during that period we had not a morsel of food, except the bark of trees. We had nearly a hundred miles of the lake to traverse, before reaching a settlement where supplies could be obtained. Meantime, the canoe had been thoroughly repaired, as we had an abundance of bark, gum & other materials for that purpose. On the morning of the third day of our detention, the wind still continued to blow strongly, but hauled a point or two in our favor, and I told the men that although the attempt would be fraught with danger, we might as well perish by drowning, as to

remain and starve to death, and ordered them to prepare for a departure without delay. The preparations were few and speedily made, our canoe launched, and held from injury on the rocks by the men who were up to their waists in water, and every thing being ready, they sprang into their places, and plying their paddles with vigor, we soon gained an offing of two miles or more in the open lake. Having improvised as much of a sail as was prudent to carry in such a storm, the canoe was turned on its course down the lake, the men holding their paddles along the sides so as to prevent lee way as much as possible. Our frail, but noble vessel flew over the tremendous billows like a bird, and we made a run of eighty miles before sunset. The first habitation that met our eyes, was a dwelling situate on the shore of a small stream twelve miles from the lower end of Lake Huron, with a saw mill adjoining. We joyfully entered the mouth of the creek, expecting to obtain what was necessary to satisfy the cravings of ten empty stomachs.

The proprietor met us at the landing, and after salutations had been exchanged, I told him of our starving condition, and of my desire to purchase a supply of provisions sufficient to last us until our arrival at Detroit. To our utter dismay and discomfiture, he replied that he could not afford to sell us a single article of food, that he had to place himself and family upon short rations, as he feared to go to any point below, inasmuch the cholera was raging every where. He gave such fearful accounts of the fatality caused by the pestilence, that I was convinced they were greatly exaggerated. He said that hundreds were dying daily in Detroit, that a steamer which had passed up with a detachment of U. S. soldiers had lost one hundred and twenty of their number after leaving Detroit, that the shores of River St. Clair were lined with dead bodies, and the water so polluted, that the people along the banks of the stream were compelled to go many miles to procure that indispensable article, and he concluded his detail to us hungry men by advising me not to brave inevitable death by continuing our voyage, but to retrace our watery way to Mackinac, with all expedition. I rejoined that such a proceeding was impossible, that I must go to Detroit at all risks, and transact the important business devolved upon me, and I finally prevailed upon him to turn over

to me, six pounds of flour, and a pound [and] a half of pork, for which I paid him a good round price. Not many minutes elapsed before the flour mixed with water in the form of a "galette"¹⁹ or short cake, and the pork cut into thin slices, were upon the fire, and when insufficiently cooked, a fair division was made of the small allowance, speedily disposed of, and thanking the man for his courtesy, we proceeded on our journey.

Fort Gratiot situated near the entrance of the lake, on the shore of the River St. Clair, was at that time garrisoned by two companies of U. S. troops, and as we approached the post, I perceived a sentinel pacing the wharf. I ordered the steersman to go within easy speaking distance, and when sufficiently near, I questioned the man about the condition of things, and he informed me that some fatal cases of cholera had occurred at the post, that the steamer "Henry Clay" bound upwards, with several companies of soldiers under Gen^l Scott, on their way to the scene of the "Black Hawk" war, had lost many of their number, that Detroit was severely scourged, and that there was more or less cholera at nearly every point on the river. Learning from him that no cases had been reported at "Ward's Landing", 25 miles below, I determined to proceed there, and encamp for the night. We reached that place about midnight, and I had some difficulty in persuading a provision-dealer to leave his comfortable couch at that untimely hour, in order to furnish us with the food we were so much in need of. Finally I succeeded, and warning the men that they must indulge sparingly, we retired to rest in the open air, after enjoying the only semblance of a meal we had eaten for more than three days.

The next morning was bright & clear, and after breakfast, I told the men, that as most of them had families to care for, and I had none, I would hire a horse and proceed by land to Detroit, sixty miles distant, and having completed what I had to do there, I would immediately return and rejoin them. That they would thereby escape grave danger. With one accord they protested, that they had accompanied me thus far, and they did not propose I should run any risks which they did not share with me, and they hoped I would not insist on separating from them under any cir-

¹⁹ This is a *voyageur's* term.

cumstances. I yielded to the wishes of the kind-hearted fellows, and at an early hour in the morning, we embarked, and sped rapidly down the River St. Clair, and across the lake of the same name. Not wishing to expose my men to the night air in the City,²⁰ I made the camp at "Grand Marais" seven miles above it, intending to arrive in Detroit at an early hour in the morning, transact my business with Governor Porter, and depart in the afternoon. The mosquitoes were so numerous, our camp being near an extensive marsh, that none of us slept much during the night.

Early in the morning, the voyageurs prepared for a grand entry into the City, by arraying themselves in their best apparel. They donned high crowned hats of same material, with an abundance of tinsel cords, and black plumes, calico shirts of bright tints exactly alike, and broad worsted belts around their waists. Being all fine, athletic fellows they made quite a striking appearance. The canoe had been gaily painted, and on this occasion two large black plumes, and two of bright red of like dimensions adorned the bow, and stern, of our craft respectively. All things being in readiness, we took our several stations, and in a few moments under the impetus of nine paddles wielded by muscular arms, and the inspiration of a Canadian boat song, in the chorus of which all joined, we shot down the current of the grand river of the Straits at almost half railroad speed.

The appearance of a bark canoe of the largest size, with its paraphernalia, manned by a strong crew of hardy voyageurs keeping time with their paddles to the not unmelodious notes of a French boat song, was so unusual, and attractive, that the wharves were crowded with people to witness our progress past the City,

²⁰ The fear of the supposed dangers lurking in the "night air" was widespread before the days of the germ theory of disease. As late as the sixties a professor in one of the reputable medical colleges of the country explained to his students that malaria was caused by certain gases in the air. The presence of these gases "could be detected by exposing starch to the air at night." If "malarial gases were present, the starch would assume a bluish color." Knut Gjerset and Dr. Ludvig Hektoen, "Health Conditions and the Practice of Medicine among the Early Norwegian Settlers, 1825-1865," in Norwegian-American Historical Association, *Studies and Records*, 1: 26 (Minneapolis, 1926).

and as I had previously been informed, that I must report at the quarantine station, we drew up in front of the quay on which the physician's office had been built. The official proved to be a Doctor Whiting, an old friend of my family who had known me from my childhood, and when he came to meet us, I eagerly inquired if all my relatives had escaped the cholera, he replied, Henry, we buried one yesterday, who had fallen a victim. My mind ran over the entire list before I ventured to ask which of the family had been taken away, and I was relieved when he said, it was my grandmother, for she was advanced in years, and although we all loved her dearly, she could not have long been spared to her friends, in the course of nature.

The Doctor informed me further, that the cholera had been quite fatal, but was abating. Returning for a mile, or more, up the stream, an Indian trader named Campan, proffered us the use of a vacant house on the bank of the river, the lot on which it stood being enclosed by a high board fence, affording a safe place for the canoe. We found a cooking stove in the building, and as there was an abundance of wood, the men could not have wished for more comfortable quarters. I provided amply for their physical wants, and after giving strict orders against their rambling, and especially forbidding the use of intoxicating drinks, I wended my way to the house which had been my birth place, and was, of course, warmly received by my parents, brothers, and sisters, who were both surprised, and delighted, at my un-expected appearance among them. My grandmothers remains had been committed to the earth the day previous, and on the same day the body of Elizabeth, the oldest daughter of General Lewis Cass, a highly educated and accomplished lady, who had succumbed to an attack of brain fever, was buried. The two families being on the most intimate terms, deeply sympathized with each other in their affliction. I was fortunate in accomplishing the object of my mission, Governor Porter having readily granted the desired licenses to the Company, and being averse to an exposure of my fellow voyageurs, I spent but one night at my old home, and taking the precaution to cause my men to be examined, lest premonitory symptoms of cholera had developed among them, and securing proper medicines, and an ample store of provisions, we took our

departure for the upper country, and arrived safely at Mackinac. To our great disgust, as we approached the landing, we were warned by an excited crowd, not to attempt to debark under penalty of fine and imprisonment, but to go into quarantine on Round Island, a mile or more away, and remain there until permission was given us by the Trustees of the village, to return. My crew urged me to go on shore, and allow them to fight their way, but I refused, and told them we must not resist the law. So we paddled to the island, expecting to be detained several days, but to our astonishment, the magistrates sent a special messenger for us about sunset of the same day, being probably convinced from our healthy, and vigorous appearance, that there was no danger of cholera from contact with us. Our friends were relieved and delighted at our escape from the perils through which we had passed, as nothing had been heard from us since our departure, and rumors of disaster were rife.

It was quite a relief for me to be selected from among my fellow clerks for the responsible duty of purchasing, during the winters of 1832-3 and 1833-4, the entire supplies of flour, corn, pork, tobacco, and other articles, required for the American Fur Company in its operations for the current year. The aggregate of expenditure for this object was very large, and I was furnished with letters of credit giving me *carte blanche* to draw for funds on New York City. My headquarters were established at Cleveland, Ohio, and I spent the most of the two winters in the saddle, as it was necessary to visit every portion of the State, and a part of Western Pennsylvania, before closing my contracts.²¹ The exercise of horseback riding thousands of miles, was an agreeable change after so long a confinement to an island small in extent, and entirely isolated from the rest of the world during six months of the year. It is a pleasant recollection, that the important trust confided to so young a man as I was, and withal comparatively

²¹ Sibley's work as a supply purchasing agent for the American Fur Company probably deserves more attention than his biographers have accorded it. In a study of "The American Fur Company's Fishing Enterprises on Lake Superior," by Grace Lee Nute, evidence is given that this company was the largest single buyer of "Ohio's butter, cheese, candles, lard, bacon, corn, and flour" in the thirties. *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 12: 502 (March, 1926).

in-experienced in that part of the business, was so well and conscientiously discharged, as to satisfy my superiors, and to pave the way to a position of far greater responsibility, in the distant region of what is now Minnesota.

In the summer of 1834, Mr. John Jacob Astor, whose operations in the fur trade extended to the Pacific coast, sold out his entire interest in the north-west, to a new corporation in New York City, without change of name, of which Ramsey Crooks, the father of our respected fellow citizen, Colonel William Crooks, and for many years one of the trusted, and principal agents of Mr. Astor, was unanimously chosen as President.²² The change in the proprietorship was followed by a re-organization of the business in the entire north-west. I had still one year to serve under my contract with the Astor company, but could not be legally, or equitably held as a chattel, to be transferred to a new corporation, without my consent. I had however, been well acquainted with the incoming president Mr. Crooks, and held him in high esteem. I sought him out, and told him frankly, that my parents were strongly opposed to my longer sojourn in what was little better than a wild Indian country, that I had been offered the position of cashier in two banks, one in Detroit, Michigan, and the other in Huron, Ohio, with a liberal salary for so young a man as I was, and while I did not recognize the right of the new company to insist upon my remaining to fulfil the old contract, I preferred out of respect to him as an old friend of my father, and myself, that he would voluntarily release me from my engagement, in consideration thereof I would pay the new corporation \$1000.

Mr. Crooks listened patiently to my appeal, and replied in substance, that he hoped I would not insist upon leaving, that I was just the young man he wanted, to fill the important place of Agent of the Company, having under my exclusive control, a vast area of country, embracing many trading posts, and a small army of traders, clerks and voyageurs. He spoke of the manner in which I had discharged my duties for five years past, in most flattering

²² A compact account of the career of Ramsay Crooks is given in J. Ward Ruckman, "Ramsay Crooks and the Fur Trade of the Northwest," *ante*, 7: 18-31.

terms, and assured me that I should be guaranteed terms that were satisfactory.

It so happened that Hercules L. Dousman, who with Joseph Rolette Senior, had been in charge of the district included in the Upper Mississippi Valley below Lake Pepin, with the country watered by the tributaries of the Great River, for several years, with headquarters at Prairie du Chien, was, when the business change took place, at Mackinac. Although many years older than myself, we had become warmly attached to each other, and the intimate friendship thus formed, continued until his lamented death in 1868. He was eager in advocating the project of Mr. Crooks, of forming a co-partnership consisting of the new American Fur Company, Joseph Rolette, H. L. Dousman and myself, the former to furnish all the capital required, Rolette (nominally) and Dousman, to conduct the fur trade in their old ground, and I to take exclusive management of the trade with the numerous bands of Sioux Indians from and above Lake Pepin to the distant British boundary line, and to the head waters of the numerous tributaries of the upper Missouri River. My friend Dousman depicted in glowing terms the charms of the region which would be allotted to me, if I would give my consent to the proposed arrangement, and knowing how devoted I had been to field sports, he said the plains were covered with buffalo and elk, while the woods abounded with bear, deer and other game animals, and the numerous lakes with aquatic fowl of every variety. I was finally won over by his repeated and persistent appeals, and assented to the agreement, whereby I became for the remainder of my life, a denizen of what is now the magnificent state of Minnesota.²³

It was with no little reluctance, my parents finally yielded to my earnest entreaties, that they would consent to a project which seemed to them fraught with danger to a son, who whatever were his imperfections, they fondly loved. Although I had become of legal age, I would not have done violence to their feelings, by embarking in an enterprise, which must necessarily add nearly

²³ Sibley, in a "Memoir of Hercules L. Dousman," writes, "Colonel Dousman was, therefore, under Providence, chiefly instrumental in linking my destinies with those of Minnesota." *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 3:194.

a thousand miles to the distance which separated us, without their assent previously obtained. The Falls of St. Anthony or rather a point in their immediate vicinity, at the junction of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers, was my destined headquarters, to be reached after a long and tedious journey by land and by water. The country was to the general public, "a terra incognita", vast in extent, over which roamed numerous bands of untamed savages, who claimed exclusive ownership, and which was the abode of beasts, scarcely more fierce, and dangerous than themselves.

I departed from Mackinaw for my new home, in a schooner destined for Green Bay, which town we reached about the middle of October 1834, thence I ascended the Fox River to the Portage of the Wisconsin, where I was fortunate enough to board a very small stern wheel steamer, navigated by the two Harris brothers of Galena, which was on the point of leaving for Prairie du Chien. The accommodations for the few passengers the small craft could carry were of the rudest description, and the water so low in the Wisconsin River, that our progress down the tortuous stream with its innumerable sandbars was painfully slow. Our tiny boat seemed to have a strong attraction towards these obstacles, for it would ground at some points a half dozen times in an hour, but there was no difficulty in getting the light vessel back into the channel, the strength of two or three men being sufficient for the purpose. We arrived at Prairie du Chien on the fifth day, and I was cordially welcomed by my partner Col. Dousman and other friends. I remained with them several days, and as I had before me a trip by land of three hundred miles through an unexplored wilderness, it was necessary to make ample provision for any emergency.

I was fortunate enough to fall in with Alexis Bailly Esquire, a gentleman who was in charge of four trading stations, that were within my district, with headquarters at St. Peters, (since called Mendota, or M'dota, signifying in the Dakota or Sioux language, "Meeting of the Waters", it being situated at the junction of the Mississippi, and Minnesota Rivers.)²⁴ Mr. Bailly's destination

²⁴ Alexis Bailly was Sibley's immediate predecessor in charge of the American Fur Company's business at St. Peter's. He later established himself as a trader at Wabasha, where he died in 1861. Some details con-

being the same with my own, we formed a party of five, each of us being attended by a Canadian voyageur, and at the request of Col. Dousman I took with me a half breed boy named Duncan Campbell, about sixteen years old, who had relatives in the upper country he wished to rejoin. He is still living (1886), on one of the Sioux reservations in Dakota Territory.²⁵

We left Prairie du Chien on the morning of the 30th of October 1834, all mounted, with one led horse, which was used temporarily by an old Winnebago Indian, who was engaged as a guide, and who told us that his camp where he desired to go, was very near the route we must take, and could be reached in four days. We met with a serious mishap in crossing a channel of the Mississippi above Prairie du Chien. We were compelled to swim our horses over by the side of a wooden dug out or canoe, each with a rope around his neck, the other end of which was held by the rider, while the clumsy vessel was propelled by the arms of a sturdy Canadian. My horse was a powerful animal but wild and intractable, and the moment his hind feet touched the bottom of the stream, he commenced a series of leaps which so alarmed the steersman, that he lost his presence of mind, and allowed the canoe to broach to, when it capsized, and precipitated us into deep water. We succeeded however, in making our way to the shore, our clothing and baggage being thoroughly drenched, a very uncomfortable situation to be found in on a cold autumn day. The day was spent in drying our effects, and in securing our horses, and the next morning we pursued our journey.

We travelled industriously for three days, encamping at night in the open air. What was our chagrin to find, on the morning of the fourth day, that during the preceding night, our old savage

cerning Bailly's removal from St. Peter's in 1835 are given in Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1: 165, and in Major Lawrence Taliaferro's manuscript journals, in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society, under the date of June 23, 1835. On the manuscript records left by Bailly, see *post*, note 34.

²⁵ Duncan Campbell was a brother of the better-known Scott Campbell, the interpreter at Fort Snelling, and a son of Archibald Campbell, an early fur-trader. M. M. Hoffmann, "New Light on Old St. Peter's and Early St. Paul," *ante*, 41 and note. It will be noted that in this paragraph Sibley gives evidence that the latter part of his sketch was written in 1886.

guide had decamped, with his keg of whiskey, leaving us to find our way, as best we could, through a wild region utterly uninhabited, and unknown to any one of the party. We were informed subsequently, that the camp of the Indian was on the Red Cedar river, a branch of the Lower Iowa, and he had led us far to the westward for his own convenience. Luckily, he did not steal the horse, which he could have done with impunity.

With nothing to direct us, but the knowledge of the fact that the course of the Mississippi River, was from north to south, we took up our line of march to the eastward, and two whole days were spent in reaching the banks of the stream. From that point, rapid advance was made, as no other obstacles were encountered, except in crossing the White, *Embarras*,²⁶ and Cannon Rivers, as Indian trails could be followed between the Sioux villages situated along the route.

The only habitation of a white man between Prairie du Chien, and St. Peters, a distance of three hundred miles was near the present town of Wabashaw. It was occupied by an Indian trader named Rocque, who upon our arrival at his door amid the peltings of a pitiless storm, received us with genuine hospitality, and insisted upon our remaining his guests during the night, which invitation was gladly accepted.²⁷ As he was well supplied with *provant*,²⁸ including wild honey, and fresh venison, we fared royally, and the old gentleman provided for us comfortable beds, a luxury of which we had been for several days deprived. To add to our enjoyment, Mr. Rocque had a pretty sixteen years old daughter, who vied with her parents, in endeavors to make our unexpected visit agreeable.

²⁶ The Embarrass River, now known as the Zumbro, appears to have received its earlier name because of the driftwood that obstructed its navigation by canoes. Warren Upham, *Minnesota Geographic Names; Their Origin and Historic Significance*, II (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, volume 17).

²⁷ The trader mentioned was Augustin Rocque or Rock. In the Sibley Papers there is an agreement between Sibley and Louis Massey, dated June 23, 1837, whereby the latter engages himself to carry mail between St. Peter's "and the house of Augustin Rock below Lac Pepin."

²⁸ The word should be *provende*, that is, provisions.

Two days after we arrived at St. Peters, November 7th 1834.²⁹ When I reached the brink of the hill overlooking the surrounding country I was struck with the picturesque beauty of the scene. From that outlook the course of the Mississippi River from the north, suddenly turning eastward to where St. Paul now stands, the Minnesota River from the west, the principal tributary of the main stream, and at the junction, rose the military post of Fort Snelling perched upon a high and commanding point, with its stone walls, and blockhouses, bidding defiance to any attempt at capture by the poorly armed savages, should such be made. There was also visible a wide expanse of prairie in the rear of the Fort. But when I descended into the amphitheater where the hamlet was situated, I was disappointed to find only a group of log huts, the most pretentious of which was the home of my fellow traveller Mr. Bailly, in whose family I became an inmate for the next six months. I was duly introduced to Mrs. Bailly by her husband. She was a handsome, well formed lady, who had received some advantages of education, and I was warmly welcomed by her, and made much more comfortable than the outward appearance of the cabin would indicate. Her father, Mr. John B. Faribault, occupied another of the huts with his family. He was a trader among the Dakota, or Sioux Indians, his post being at Little Rapids on the Minnesota River, about forty miles above its mouth.³⁰ There were dwellings for the blacksmith, carpenter, and common

²⁹ In his "Reminiscences of the Early Days of Minnesota," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 3: 245, Sibley also gives November 7, 1834, as the date of his arrival at St. Peter's, but in this case reminiscence must bow to the evidence in contemporary records, for in a letter written to Ramsay Crooks on November 1, 1834, dated at St. Peter's, Sibley states, "Having been detained some time at Prairie du Chien I did not arrive here until the 28th ult. in company with Mr. Bailly." It is therefore safe to say that Sibley arrived at St. Peter's on October 28, 1834. This correction is also made in Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1: 162 n.

³⁰ Sibley is the author of a "Memoir of Jean Baptiste Faribault," published in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 3: 168-179. Faribault's post was on the south bank of the Minnesota River, in what is now Louisville Township, Scott County. During times of low water, the river drops as much as two feet at this point. Upham, *Minnesota Geographic Names*, 511.

voyageurs in the vicinity of Mr. Bailly's quarters, and storehouses for the goods used in the fur trade.

There were stationed at Fort Snelling, about a mile distant from the hamlet, and on the other side of the Minnesota River, four companies of the 5th Regiment U. S. Infantry, commanded by Major Joseph Plympton, and as several of the officers were married, there was a very pleasant society in the garrison. The Indian Agent, Major Lawrence Taliaferro, with his employés, occupied two stone buildings on the outside of the walls of the post.³¹

As I was supplied with introductory letters to several of the officers, as well as to the Agent, I delivered them in person, and was cordially welcomed, introduced to all the ladies in garrison, and was soon domiciled among them. There were a few u[n]married young lieutenants, who had clubbed together, calling themselves the *bote-screw*.³² They were genial, clever fellows, albeit somewhat fast, so much so, that they sometimes perpetrated practical jokes, which brought them fearfully near to penalties for a breach of military discipline. I was duly installed as a member of the club, but was careful to take no part in such antics.

On one occasion, a contractor for post supplies named Peebles, having delivered his stores, and had them successfully inspected, was so elated that he promised the commanding officer, a barrel of ale, as soon as practicable after his return to Pittsburg, his place of residence, and he made the same promise to all of the Officers, giving them to understand the ale was for general distribution among them. In the course of time, the barrel was delivered at the post, having been consigned to Major Plympton individually. The latter, not knowing that the contractor had informed the other officers, that the ale was for the common benefit, caused it to be placed in his own cellar, where it remained for several days. The *bote-screw* meantime became restive at the delay in the division

³¹ Taliaferro, who served as Indian agent at St. Peter's from 1819 to 1840, is one of the most important figures of that period in Minnesota history. His own account of his experiences, written in 1864, is published under the title "Auto-biography of Maj. Lawrence Taliaferro," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 6: 189-255. An important recent study is "Major Lawrence Taliaferro, Indian Agent," by Willoughby M. Babcock, in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 11: 358-375 (December, 1924).

³² One suspects that this curious name is derived from "boat's crew."

of the coveted liquor, and after consultation with each other, they despatched a soldier with a note, and large pitcher, requesting the commanding officer to have the vessel filled for their use. I need not say, that this impudent proceeding was resented by the Major, who threatened the arrest, and trial by court martial of all concerned, and they only escaped by making ample apologies, and explanations. The contractor never made his appearance at the post afterwards, nor would it have been safe for him to do so.

The winter of 1834-5, was remarkable for its length & severity. The snow was deep, necessitating the employment of snow shoes, and the supply of hay & grain for cattle proved insufficient, and a great mortality among the animals at the military post, and in the vicinity, was the result. Having little business to attend to during the season, my time was spent in reading, and in visiting the Fort. The game of chess was the favorite amusement in garrison, officers and ladies participating, and it served as a useful pastime in the long evenings. Brevet Lieut Colonel Gustavus Loomis was one of the officers stationed at the Fort. He had a charming family, with whom I became quite intimate. His daughter subsequently became the wife of Lieutenant, and A. A. Quarter Master, U.S.A. E. A. Ogden who was a particular friend of mine, and who was born the same day with myself. He died of cholera several years afterwards while engaged in the construction of a military post on the Republican Fork of the Platte River. He was a devout Christian, and he fell a victim to his devotion to the sick soldiers who were stationed at that point, leaving a widow and six children, who were fortunately absent on a visit to her parents.³³

The spring following was a late one, and it was near the end of March before the migratory aquatic fowls began to make their appearance. I shouldered my trusty rifle one pleasant morning,

³³ Major Loomis is said to have "had his peculiarities, chief among which was an engrossing enthusiasm in the cause of religion." During the winter of 1833-34 he "got up a red-hot revival among the soldiers," and one of his converts was Lieutenant Ogden. A sketch of Ogden appears in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 1:437 n. See also John H. Bliss, "Reminiscences of Fort Snelling," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 6:343; and Marcus L. Hansen, *Old Fort Snelling, 1819-1858*, 156, 166 (Iowa City, Iowa, 1918).

and in company with Mr. Bailly wended my way along the bank of the Minnesota River, with no other object in view than much needed exercise. We had not proceeded far, before the unexpected "honk" of a gander attracted our attention, and we saw in the distance a flock of five wild geese, the first that had been seen. Hastily concealing ourselves in the bushes, on the shore of a lake situated between the River and the bluff, we imitated the peculiar cry of the gander so perfectly, that the flock, after making a long detour over Fort Snelling returned, and began to circle around the lake, descending lower and lower, until they alighted on the ice in the center of the body of water, and at least two hundred and fifty yards from the spot where we laid in ambush. I remarked *Sotto voce* to my companion, that the distance was too great to ensure a certain shot, but as there was no way of nearer approach without alarming the keen-eyed bipeds, I would do the best I could in the premises. I took a careful aim at the head of the leader, a huge gander, believing that the ball would be depressed in traversing so long a line of sight, and might possibly strike the body of the fowl. What was our delight when [at] the crack of the rifle, the bird fell with a heavy thud upon the frozen surface, and the rest of the flock took refuge in flight. We tried to beguile them with plaintive goose appeals, but without effect. They could not be persuaded to come back, to ascertain the fate of their unfortunate comrade, whose head had been neatly severed from his body.

The question now presented itself, as to the ways and means, to be taken to secure our coveted prize. The ice was so far affected by the thawing weather, that while it would bear the weight of a goose, it would be very unsafe for a full grown man to trust himself upon it. Nevertheless, the game must not be abandoned. I found a pine board among the drift wood on the shore, and contrary to Mr. Bailly's protests, I started for the victim of my rifle, using the board as necessity required. I broke through several times, but persevered, and after a long and fatiguing experience, I brought the game triumphantly to the dry land, at the cost of a complete immersion in the cold water.

This episode would not, under ordinary circumstances, have been worth recording, but the fact was, that for months we had

to diet on salt pork, and bread, rarely having fresh meat on the table, consequently, the addition to our larder of a huge fat goose occasioned a general rejoicing in the family of Mr. Bailly, and was worthy of commemoration.

As the season advanced, ducks, and geese became abundant in the lakes back of Mendota, and I hunted them industriously. On one occasion, I placed myself between two small lakes, and ere long a large flock of ducks flew across the intervening space. I emptied the contents of both barrels of my gun among them, and at the same instant, a Sioux Indian, concealed in the undergrowth within a few yards of me without any idea on my part of his proximity, discharged his single barrel at them also. What was my surprise, to see the impudent savage stride over to where eight dead ducks laid on the ground, and incontinently thrust the head of each through his belt, with a grin of satisfaction. I finished the loading of my gun, and then walked deliberately to the place where the Indian stood, took the game, one by one, from his belt, and attached them to my own. He looked astounded at my action, and as I could not then speak a word of Sioux, and he no English, I could only explain the situation, by signs denoting that if he had been satisfied with two ducks, I would not have objected, but as he was so gluttonous as to appropriate the whole number, he should have none. As I was doubly armed, he offered no resistance, but when I became well acquainted with the individual in after years, after I had acquired some knowledge of the Sioux language, and could make myself understood on common topics, it pleased me to hold him up to the other Indians, as without doubt, the best specimen of a porcine, in human form, I had ever encountered.

During the winter, I had arranged with Mr. Bailly to purchase his entire interest in the fur trade at the four posts I have before mentioned, and in May he departed from Mendota with his family, and established himself below Lake Pepin on the site of the present town of Wabasha. My relations with Mr. and Mrs. Bailly during the six months I boarded with them, had been so uniformly pleasant, and they had both exerted themselves so constantly, to make my sojourn with them agreeable, that I did not part from them without a feeling of deep regret. Mrs. Bailly who was

of delicate constitution, did not live long after her change of residence, and two or three years subsequent to her death, Mr. Bailly was united to a Miss Corey, formerly of Cooperstown, N. Y., by whom he had three or four children. He died at Wabasha many years since; and his widow is still living in this City.³⁴

It was decidedly a novel and awkward undertaking for me, to form a bachelor's establishment, but I succeeded after a fashion, with the aid of a mulatto man named Joe Robinson, who could cook plain food moderately well, but who proved himself to be not only wasteful, but withal not entirely cleanly in his methods, for which faults I was compelled to reprimand him frequently, and severely. There being no hotel, or other accommodations for travellers, I was the host necessarily, of not only the many who bore letters of introduction to me, but of all of genteel appearance, whose wandering propensities led them to visit this distant region, so that I had to provide food, and lodging, such as they were, very frequently for fifteen or twenty men at a time. As no charge was ever made, some of these strangers would prolong their stay much longer than good manners, not to say decency, would dictate, some instances of which will be given hereafter.

In 1835, I commenced the construction of a spacious stone warehouse, which was completed the following year, and added greatly to the facilities for transacting business not only, but to the accommodations for lodging my numerous guests. I then proceeded to erect a substantial and commodious stone dwelling, which still stands, as the first and oldest private residence, in all of Minnesota, and Dakota.

At the time of which I write, there was not a permanent white settler in all of this immense region, the only persons of that complexion here, consisting of the garrison at Fort Snelling, the attaches of the Indian Agency, those engaged in the fur trade, and the tenants of a small group of huts near the walls of the Fort,

³⁴ A considerable collection of the papers of Alexis Bailly is now available for study in the manuscript division of the Minnesota Historical Society, and the society also has some of the letters of Mrs. Bailly and of her sisters, Phoebe Frances Cory, Mrs. William Forbes, and Mrs. Louis Blum. Accounts of these two groups of papers are published *ante*, 6: 72 and 7: 180.

who had been driven from the British settlements on the Red River, by floods, and other calamities, and had been permitted by the commandant, who pitied their distressed condition, to locate temporarily under the guns of the post, for protection.³⁵

In the fall of 1835, I started with but one of my voyageurs, both of us being mounted, to visit and inspect the trading posts, established at long distances from each other. When obliged to encamp in the prairie, intervening between the stations, as was frequently the case, we had to depend upon our guns for food, but game was so abundant that we were able to procure an ample supply. Our route led us through villages of the different bands of Dakota, or Sioux Indians, by all of whom we were hospitably received, as they had been advised by their traders, that a new man was at the head of the fur trade in the whole of their country, and would doubtless soon make his appearance, on his way to inspect the trading posts. There was a general desire on the part of the red men, women and children, to see the stranger, who occupied a position which in their eyes, was a very exalted one.

The last trading post visited, was situated on the bank of Lake Travers, near the source of the Minnesota River, and of the dividing ridge separating the streams debouching into the Red River of the north, from those flowing south into the Gulf of Mexico. The bands of Indians who habitually came to this point, to exchange buffalo robes, and the skins of other animals, for articles they needed for use or ornament, were of a wild and quarrelsome character, so that the buildings were enclosed in a stockade of high, and substantial oak pickets, with port holes for musketry, and blockhouses at the angles, constituting a formidable defence against savages. The Indians were not allowed to enter this enclosure, except when the chiefs, or headmen, to the number of three or four, asked for admittance, the trading being done through an opening in the massive doors, which was promptly closed after business had ceased for the day. The clerk I had

³⁵ The migration in the twenties from the Red River country to Fort Snelling is dealt with in Mrs. Ann Adams' interesting reminiscences, "Early Days at Red River Settlement, and Fort Snelling," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 6:75-115. The article by M. M. Hoffman, *ante*, 27-51, presents a detailed study of the Catholic element in the population of St. Peter's and St. Paul in the late thirties.

placed in charge of this important depot, was no less a personage than Major Joseph R. Brown, who subsequently became justly prominent in Minnesota history, when the territorial organization was effected, and in full operation. Mention will be made of him hereafter in this work.³⁶

A sad accident occurred during my stay, which narrowly escaped being fatal to a pretty Indian girl. Several of us were engaged in pistol shooting at a mark, Joseph Renville the trader at Lac qui Parle, being present, and of the number.³⁷ He was practising with a fine pair of duelling pistols, furnished with hair triggers, which were the gift to him of a British officer with whom he had become acquainted. When his turn to fire came, he had set the hair trigger of the pistol, and being unaccustomed to so delicate an arm, he unfortunately touched the trigger before taking aim, and the pistol was discharged, sending its missile into a group of women & children, who were assembled to witness the sport. The report was followed by a piercing shriek from the sixteen year old girl, and she was seized by the older women, and placed on a bed in the nearest building. I followed to ascertain the extent of the injury inflicted, and found the bed surrounded by wailing females, who were doing nothing for the sufferer. I pushed them rudely aside, for it was no time for ceremony, and found that the girl had been shot in the groin, the ball passing through that portion of the body. I was soon satisfied that no artery, or other important blood vessel had been severed, as there was but little hemorrhage from the wound. My limited knowledge of surgery would not permit of a further diagnosis, but I feared that inflammation might supervene, and prove fatal to the patient. Knowing that Doctor Williamson, a missionary, and physician of repute, was at Lac qui Parle, sixty miles distant, I suggested to Renville, an instant departure for that post, with a view of procuring his aid as soon

³⁶ Unfortunately this promise was not carried out by Sibley. Much light is thrown on the career of Brown in volume 3 of Dr. Folwell's *Minnesota*, especially in the appendix, no. 3, p. 347-357. See also a "Memoir of Joseph R. Brown" in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 3: 201-212.

³⁷ A general account of this important trader is given in Edward D. Neill, "A Sketch of Joseph Renville: A 'Bois Brule,' and Early Trader of Minnesota," in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 1: 157-165.

as possible.³⁸ We forthwith started, after prescribing the application of cold water to the injured parts, and rode rapidly with a hope of reaching Lac qui Parle some time during the night. But we were overtaken by a fearful wind, and rain storm, after having accomplished about half the route, and the night was so dark, that we could not follow in the proper direction, and were forced to lie down in the prairie, at the crossing of the Pomme de Terre River, exposed to the peltings of the tempests until dawn. On arriving at the station, we hastened the departure of the Doctor, who willingly complied with our urgent request, and I continued on my homeward way. I was rejoiced to learn, subsequently, from Dr. Williamson, that the girl was doing well, and all dangerous symptoms had disappeared. She entirely recovered, and eventually became the lawful wife of Major Brown, by whom she had a number of children, some of whom are yet living, as is the woman herself.

We were overtaken by a driving snow storm in the wide prairie, the day after our departure from Lac qui Parle, and were glad to find partial shelter in a small grove of poplars, where we spent a day, and two comfortless nights, being poorly prepared for such premature winter experience. We reached Mendota safely, and without further adventure.

It was the custom in those days, to leave the doors of all buildings unlocked, save only those of the stores where goods and provisions were kept, and I was lying in bed in the log house, shortly after my return from the long trip, engaged in reading, when about midnight, a male, and female Indian, entered very much to my

³⁸ Dr. Thomas S. Williamson, a Presbyterian who received his medical training at Yale College, was sent to Minnesota as a missionary to the Sioux in 1835 by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. The station at Lac qui Parle, one of several established in Minnesota by Williamson, was opened in the summer of 1835. The Minnesota Historical Society possesses copies of numerous letters by Williamson to the American Board detailing his missionary experiences. See *ante*, 6: 203, 292. A brief summary of his career, with references to printed sources, appears in Warren Upham and Rose B. Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies, 1655-1912*, 863 (*Minnesota Historical Collections*, volume 14); and a general survey of "Early Indian Missions" in Minnesota is made in Folwell, *Minnesota*, 1: 170-212.

surprise. I had mastered enough of the Sioux tongue to understand the purport of common conversation, and I asked the man what had brought him to my room at that untimely hour? He took his companion by the hand, and led her to my bedside, and I recognized in her the young, and good looking daughter of the Indian before me, who was a sub-chief of one of the lower bands. He commenced by saying, that he was about to depart to make his winter hunt, many days march away, and would not return until late in the spring, and as he did not wish to expose his young daughter to hardship & suffering, he had decided to ask me to take her in charge. The poor girl meantime, stood there awaiting my reply, having covered her head with the blanket she wore. I excused myself to the father, telling him it would be wrong in me to comply with his offer, that I had no intention of taking to myself an Indian maiden for a wife, for many reasons I could not explain to him, except one which he could comprehend, and that was, it would make the other Indians, and their families, dissatisfied and jealous. He was obliged to submit to my categorical negative to his proposition, and retired with his youthful progeny, both of them disappointed, and mortified, at the ill success of their mission. It must not be supposed, that from an Indian point of view, there was any thing savoring of immodesty in the proceeding I have narrated. It was considered a laudable ambition on the part of a Sioux girl, to capture a respectable white man, and become his wife without any legal ceremony, but the connection was regarded as equally obligatory on both parties, and in many cases ended only with the death of one of them. I shall have more to write on this subject farther on, when I will demonstrate, that female virtue was held in as high estimation among the Sioux bands in their wild state, as by the whites, and the line between the chaste, and the *demi-monde*, quite as well defined.



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