

Wagon Roads West

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WAGON ROADS WEST

The Sawyers Expeditions of 1865, 1866¹

BY ALICE V. MYERS

The story here told of two expeditions led by James A. Sawyers from Sioux City, Iowa, to the Montana gold fields in the years 1865-1866 is but a part of that larger story of the frenzied search for gold throughout the western part of the United States. It is illustrative of the spirit of adventure which led countless pioneers through Indian dangers across the plains and into the privations of mining camps.

The gold miners' saying "gold is where you find it," is not only true of individual prospector's experiences, but of the whole search man has made for this metal. Man crossed oceans, deserts, and mountains; has suffered the pangs of hunger for long periods of time; and has been willing to change his habitation whenever he heard of new discoveries.

THE OPENING OF THE MONTANA GOLD FIELDS

Cortes and Pizarro found for Spain large quantities of this metal already mined by the Indians of Mexico and Peru. And Coronado with his men trudged many weary miles through southwestern United States in a fruitless search for a similar El Dorado.

Centuries later Johann August Sutter, a German who had acquired Swiss citizenship and gave it up for Mexican naturalization, had an institution in California on the American River which consisted of a fort, farms, herds, and henchmen. Closely following on the heels of Mexico's cession of California to the United States, came the discovery of gold on Sutter's ranch in 1848. The lure for possession of some of this precious metal now brought people by thousands to California. It was not long, however, until it became evident that the number who were to be fortunate in

acquiring wealth would be comparatively small. Some of the unsuccessful adventurers took up their previously learned trades in California; others drifted back to former homes; while some who had become seasoned prospectors, sought new gold fields.

Numerous fields farther north shortly attracted the veteran prospectors who were willing to suffer on and take a chance with what they might find. In what is now the state of Washington, along the Fraser and Quesnelle rivers, British Columbia, the precious metal was discovered in 1855-60. Even later more goldbearing regions in the Cariboo, Kootenai and Upper Columbia regions were located in 1862-1863.

Contemporary with this prospecting were discoveries in Idaho, Oregon, and Montana in 1860-1861.

James and Granville Stuart found gold in Deer Lodge Valley [Montana] in 1861-1862. During August, 1862, John White discovered a rich bar on Grasshopper Creek in the heart of the Rockies and near the headwaters of the Missouri River. In the spring of 1863 Henry Edgar and a party of prospectors left Bannock City to join the Stuarts at the juncture of the Yellowstone and the Big Horn rivers. In halting for camp on their retreat when forced back by a party of Indians they discovered the strike in what was later called Alder Gulch, where Virginia City became the center of a number of mining communities stretching along the creek.

The next big movement of prospectors and emigrants proved to be into the Montana region, which not only attracted these seasoned prospectors, but emigrants from points to the East.

In 1864 territorial government was established in Montana. The succession of discoveries culminating in the mild boom in 1864-65 at Last Chance Gulch (Helena) had brought many people to this region who wished to stay and form a settled government.

With new discoveries in unfamiliar regions and emigrants eager to embark, came the cry for facilities by which eager prospectors and pioneers could reach these destina-

tions. The problems of building roads, forts and bridges; of getting necessary money; of having adequate protection from Indians, both en route and in the settlements; of justly parceling out homesteads and mining rights soon presented themselves. In these tasks the government played a large part.

The Oregon Trail, which was already established, was logically the first one to be considered. This trail was not too far to the south, but mountains presented difficult barriers for north and south travel into the Montana gold fields. Railroads, yet to be extended into the Far West, could have transported large numbers of people and quantities of supplies into the gold regions. But the Civil War abruptly stopped the development of all transcontinental railroad routes. In the meantime eager emigrants had to rely on oxen to pull their wagons the many weary miles across plains and deserts. This delay in construction only emphasized the need for development of the routes.

Routes to the Montana gold fields from points in the Middle West, not only involved the difficulties of geography, but also carried with them the Indian menace. The Indian did not seem to mind the white man's acquisition of gold, but he did feel encroached upon when his hunting grounds were jeopardized. The United States government attempted numerous treaties with the Indians in which their territory was designated. With the ever increasing migration of white people into the region of the roving Indians, sometimes in violation of existing agreements between the Indians and the federal government, this policy of treaty making was ineffective in resolving the clash between the two divergent cultures.

Due to increasing hostility on the part of the Indians toward the western emigrant the government sought means of protection for its pioneering people. Forts and garrisons were stationed at various strategic points. Increasing massacres forced the government to provide military escorts to

¹Based upon a masters thesis, "The Sioux City, Iowa, Expeditions to the Montana Gold Fields, 1865 and 1866 in Relationship to the Minnesota Expeditions," prepared by Miss Myers under the direction of Prof. Charles J. Ritchey, of Drake University, 1940.

trains of emigrants who were moving westward. The necessary money to provide for these was appropriated by Congress from time to time.

EARLY WAGON ROAD EXPEDITIONS

As early as 1861, Congress was induced to spend public money to assist emigrants in overland expeditions. Congressmen from states that would benefit were especially active in this matter of securing government funds. On March 2, 1861, the first of such bills appropriated a sum of fifty thousand dollars to protect emigrants going between the Atlantic slope and California, and Oregon and Washington frontier.²

An expedition under Capt. Medorem Crawford left Omaha over the central route and was disbanded at Fort Walla Walla.

Congressmen from Oregon with the cooperation of a delegation from Minnesota, succeeded in getting Congress to authorize a second appropriation for armed escorts of these mining-emigrant trains the following year. Such protection would encourage people to start out who otherwise would feel that the Indian danger was unsurmountable. The money set aside for this purpose was to take care of escorts to expeditions between the Atlantic States and California, Oregon, and Washington Territory. The statement in the act for distributing the money was very general³

People interested in going to the northern gold fields started congregating in St. Paul early in the spring of 1862.⁴ Those desiring to go to the Idaho-Montana regions came

²12 U. S. Stats. at L. 204. ". . . And be it further enacted, that for the protection of emigrants on the overland routes between the Atlantic slope and the California and Oregon and Washington frontier, the sum of fifty thousand dollars is hereby appropriated, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, to be expended under the direction of the Secretary of War, if, in his judgment, the same may be necessary."

³Ibid., 333. "January 27, 1862. An act to provide for the protection of Overland Emigrants to California, Oregon and Washington Territory.

"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that, for the protection of emigrants on the overland routes between the Atlantic States and California, Oregon, and Washington Territory, the sum of twenty-five thousand dollars be, and the same is hereby appropriated, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, to be expended under the direction of the Secretary of War, if, in his judgment, the same may be necessary."

⁴The discussion of the Minnesota expeditions is largely dependent upon an unpublished study "The Northern Overland Expeditions to Montana, 1862-1867," by Professor Charles J. Ritchey of Drake University.

not only from Minnesota towns but from localities at greater distances. Fort Abercromie on the Red River in Dakota Territory proved to be the "jumping off" place for these groups. Thomas Holmes of Shakopee, Minnesota, became the leader of this expedition, which struck westward from a point about thirty miles west of Pembina, Dakota Territory.

The leader of the government, or authorized, expedition was James Liberty Fisk, who arrived in St. Paul to assume charge of the escort train June 4, 1862. The complete party assembled at Fort Abercromie by July 4, and started west three days later. Past the present site of Minot, Dakota, the party moved northwestward from Mouse River onto the Coteau du Missouri, thence down to Fort Benton and Bannock City.

The success of the first Fisk expedition added much encouragement for an appropriation of another government financed military escort, which was secured without much difficulty the following year. Leaving St. Paul for St. Cloud, Minnesota, June 3, 1863, the second Fisk expedition could see evidences of the Sioux Massacre of 1862 as they moved westward. Cautiously following a route close to the Canadian border, the party finally reached Fort Benton and eventually Bannock City without molestation.⁵

With the success of Fisk's two expeditions of 1862 and 1863, there was considerable popular favor in the west to continue such enterprises. While Minnesota had succeeded in being the starting point for the expeditions to Montana in 1862 and 1863, this state now had some competition from Sioux City, Iowa. That city was advocating a road to be built along the Niobrara, diagonally across to the Powder River, over to the Yellowstone, then west and south into the gold mines located around Virginia City and Bannock. Thus, when the third bill to appropriate money for western wagon roads was passed in 1864, Congress again delegated

⁵12 U. S. Stats. at L. 642, Feb. 7, 1863 ". . . for the protection of emigrants by the overland routes to the states and Territories of the Pacific the sum of thirty thousand dollars be, and the same is hereby appropriated, out of any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, to be expended under the direction of the Secretary of War; provided that ten thousand dollars shall be applied to the protection of emigrants on the route from Fort Abercromie by Fort Benton."

the money to be spent in such a general way that the door was left open for other roads than the one from Minnesota.⁶

Major H. E. Maynadier, Twelfth U. S. Infantry, was assigned to open the route "from Niobrara on the Missouri river, to the valley of the Niobrara and Gallatin, in Idaho."⁷ He received his instructions May 16 in Dubuque, Iowa, and arrived in Sioux City July 4 after traveling from Dubuque since June 16. He was not able to raise a party as large as twenty-five. Since the purpose of Major Maynadier's westward trip was to protect emigrants, there seemed to be no reason for him to start out when the number of emigrants who wanted to go was so small. As a consequence the government property was sold and the party disbanded.

While Maynadier's expedition in 1864 was being disbanded, and a whole year was to elapse before the first Sawyers expedition, two groups in Minnesota were in the process of materializing. These are known as the Holmes and Fisk Expeditions of 1864.

Holmes again led an unheralded and almost entirely unreported expedition. He told all those who wished to go with him that he would accept the protection of General Sully of the U. S. Army. By so doing, he went through to the gold fields of Montana safely.

Fisk, as before, was delayed in his start, and unsuccessful in trying to get his own escort. He finally accepted protection of a military detachment on its way to join General Sully on the Missouri. But when attacked by Sioux Indians near the Montana boundary line, and forced to send back to General Sully for assistance, Fisk's expedition was ordered back to Fort Rice. From this point the expedition broke up, and its failure definitely injured Fisk's prestige.

⁶13 U. S. Stats. at L. 863-65, March 3, 1864 ". . . for the protection of emigrants by the overland route, to the States and Territories of the Pacific, the sum of forty thousand dollars be, and the same is hereby appropriated out of any money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated, to be expended under the direction of the Secretary of War: Provided that ten thousand dollars of said appropriation shall be applied to the protection of emigrants on the route from Fort Abercrombie by Fort Benton, and the further sum of ten thousand dollars of said appropriation shall be applied to the protection of emigrants on the route from Niobrara, on the Missouri river, by the valley of the Niobrara and Gallatin, in Idaho."

It will be noted that this appropriation was for the protection of emigrants rather than for the building of a wagon road as was the case of the appropriations of 1865-66.

⁷War of the Rebellion, Official Records, Series I, Vol. 41, Pt. 4, pp. 882-883.

SAWYER'S SIOUX CITY EXPEDITION, 1865

While Minnesota had obtained numerous appropriations for wagon road expeditions, a number of which had gone through, Sioux City, Iowa, continued dreaming dreams of becoming a starting point for some such road to follow along the Niobrara River and northwestward to the Yellowstone River, and thence westward to Virginia City. A. W. Hubbard, the Iowa Congressional representative from the Sioux City district, was pushing one of the first necessary steps, that of getting government money appropriated. On January 5, 1865, Hubbard introduced in the House of Representatives a bill to provide for the construction of a wagon road from the Missouri river to Virginia City, in Montana. The same bill was introduced in the Senate February 23, 1865, and on March 3, 1865, it became a law.⁸ It read as follows:

An act to provide for the construction of certain Wagon-Roads in the Territories of Idaho, Montana, Dakota, and Nebraska:

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that the Secretary of the Interior be, and he is hereby, authorized and empowered to survey, locate, and construct the following wagon-roads.

First: A road from Niobrara to the mouth of the Turtle Hill River and thence, upon the most direct practicable route, to Virginia City, in Montana Territory, with a branch from the mouth of Turtle Hill River or such other point as may be selected, to Omaha.

Second: A road from a point at or near the mouth of the Big Sioux River via Yancton, Dakota Territory, to a point at or near the mouth of the Big Sheyenne River, thence up said river to its main forks, thence up the north fork to a point of intersection with the road from Niobrara.

Third: For a road from a point on the western boundary of Minnesota, to be determined by the Secretary of Interior, to a point at or near the mouth of the big Sheyenne River.

Fourth: A road from Virginia City, in Montana upon the most practicable route, to Lewiston, in Idaho.

Section 2: And be it further enacted, that to enable the Secretary of the Interior to carry out the provisions of the foregoing section, the sum of one hundred and forty thousand dollars

⁸Congressional Globe, 2nd Session, 39th Congress, Pt. I, 116; *ibid.*, Pt. II, 1006, 1383.

be, and the same is hereby appropriated out of any money in the treasury not otherwise appropriated, fifty thousand dollars of which shall be applied to the construction of the road from Virginia City to Lewiston fifty thousand dollars shall be applied to the construction of the road from Niobrara and branch to Omaha; twenty thousand dollars shall be applied to the construction of the road from the mouth of the Big Sheyenne to its intersection with the Niobrara road ten thousand dollars shall be applied to the construction of a bridge over the Big Sioux River, or so much of this sum as may be necessary, and any balance remaining to be applied to continuing and improving the road from Sioux City, Iowa, to the Big Sheyenne River;

Provided, that any unexpended money now in the treasury, appropriated for the construction of a road from Sioux City to Fort Randall, Dakota Territory, shall be, and is hereby, transferred from the War Department to the Department of the Interior⁹

The Secretary of the Department of Interior, John Usher, appointed James A. Sawyers of Sioux City, Iowa, to lead the Niobrara expedition. Sawyers received notice of this appointment the last of March and started immediately to organize and to equip the outfit necessary to carry out his assignment.

Since much of the region was unexplored, Sawyers "deemed it proper to make ample preparations for going and returning, and decided to purchase supplies for six months with teams and transportation for the same, and all tools necessary for the construction of the road and the making of all bridges and fords over the streams that might have to be crossed on our route." N. C. Hudson, an advocate of the expedition, was sent to Washington to arrange for remittance of funds to be sent to Chicago. But when Sawyers arrived in Chicago to make his purchases, he found no money to his credit and he was delayed until April before he could secure his supplies.¹⁰

A. W. Hubbard procured through Major General Pope, commanding the department of the Northwest, a suitable escort for the expedition. This was to consist of at least 200 cavalry and two howitzers. When Sawyers returned

⁹13 U. S. Stats. at L. 516-517.

¹⁰Executive Documents, Serial No. 1256, Doc. No. 58. See also Sioux City Journal, Dec. 23, 1865 - March 3, 1866.

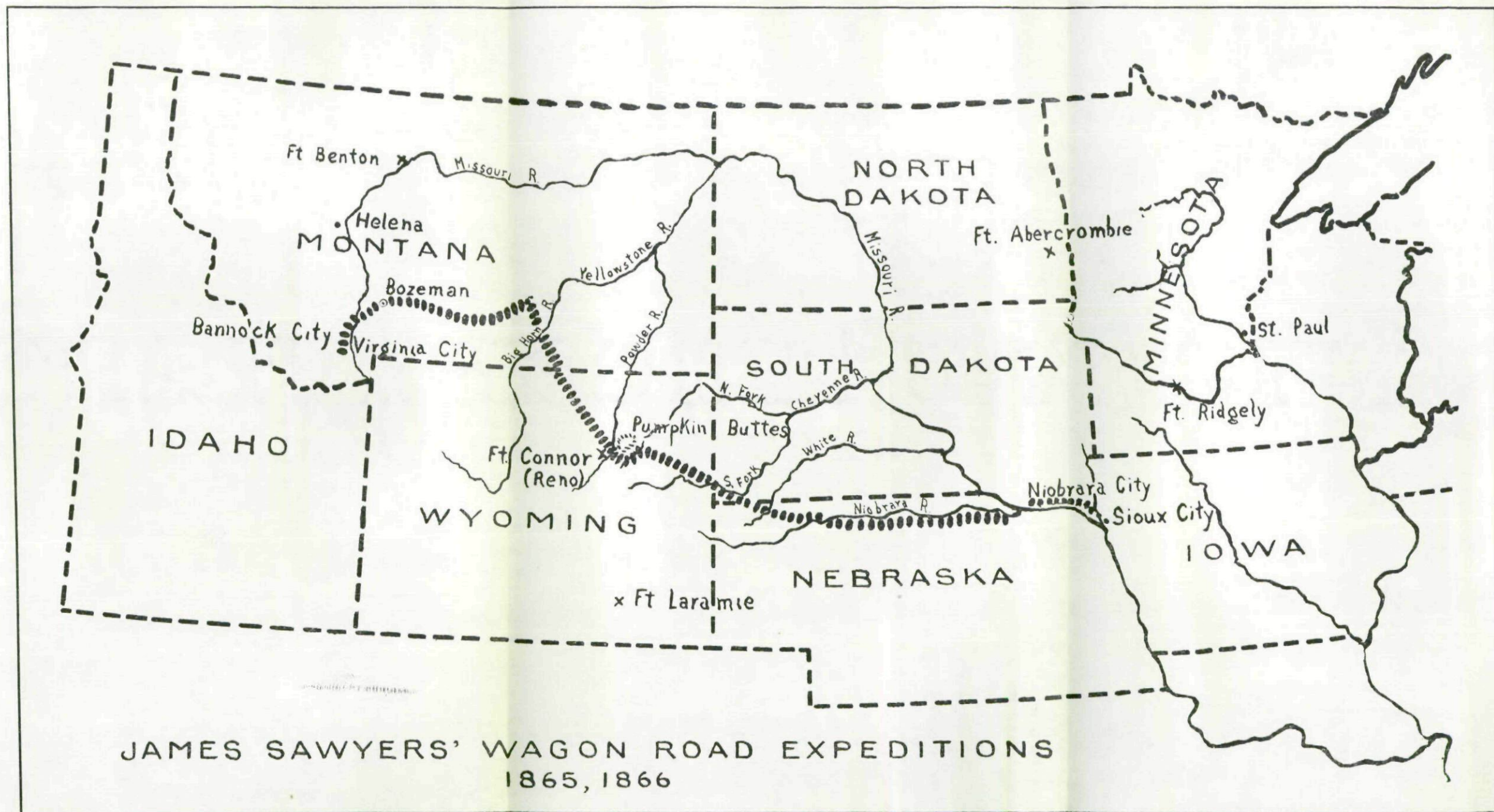
from Chicago to Sioux City he found to his surprise, instead of any cavalry escort, that two companies of the 5th United States Volunteer Infantry, consisting of only about 118 men in all, had been sent to the mouth of the Niobrara, with rations for only three months (including May), and with scanty transportation facilities.

Sawyers immediately sought to better the situation of his escort. As a result of a telegram to General Pope, General Sully detailed an additional escort of twenty-five men from Company B, 1st Battalion Dakota Cavalry, and ordered his commissary to furnish rations to last the whole escort for six months, but he furnished no transportation. A contract was made with C. E. Hedges and Company, private freighters to provide the necessary means of transportation. Sawyers also asked General Sully for forty Springfield rifles, with essential equipment and ammunition. These Sully supplied.

The people of Sioux City were keenly interested in the building of this wagon road along the Niobrara to the gold fields of Montana from the very beginning. While for political reasons the *Sioux City Register* was skeptical for some time concerning the merits and the progress of the building of the road, the *Sioux City Journal* fought many a battle to make the dream of a Niobrara Wagon Road come true. On December 24, 1864, the *Sioux City Journal* published a complete itinerary of the route such a wagon road would take. The people of Sioux City followed closely Hubbard's progress in securing the necessary appropriation and escort. In local newspapers appeared articles, which painted bright and encouraging pictures as an inducement for support and recruits to the expedition. In the *Sioux City Journal* May 20, 1865, appeared an example of the salesmanship used in behalf of the expedition.

All Aboard:

Col. Sawyers returned to town on Tuesday last, from Chicago and the East, where he has been to obtain the necessary supplies for the Wagon Road Expeditions. Mr. Sawyers reports everything in good working order, and nearly in readiness to start. All that now remains to be done, is to concentrate and the expedition is ready. The greater portion of his supplies are shipped to Niobrara



by boat, which will allow teams to start out light and get somewhat accustomed to traveling before taking full loads.

It is expected that the train will leave this place about the twenty-fifth instant, and passing up the Missouri River bottom, via Vermillion and Yankton, in Dakota, to the mouth of the Niobrara, where the town of Niobrara is situated, will there cross the Missouri by ferry, and load the train with supplies for the trip. At this place an escort, consisting of two companies of infantry, together with about thirty government teamsters, is now awaiting the arrival of the train. This force, with the men who go out with the construction train, will be amply sufficient to afford security against the Indians who inhabit the country through which the route passes, so that even the most timid may have nothing to fear from that source. The grass is reported much more advanced up the country than it is here and below us, and already furnishes ample for teams.

In the March 15, 1865, issue of the *Sioux City Journal* appeared a letter from a prospector already in Montana. He urged people to bring along at least six months supplies, as he noted:

It would take a large pile of "greenbacks" to sustain one here with flour at \$60 per hundred, sugar and coffee two dollars per pound, syrup twenty dollars per gallon, and everything in proportion. For the benefit of those interested I will give the current wholesale prices of a few leading articles as they are quoted in *Virginia Post*, in gold; Flour, \$28; vegetables, from 5 to 20 cents per pound; lard, 65 cents per pound; candles, 80 cents per pound; sugar 80 to 90 cents; coffee, 80 to 90 cents; canned fruits, \$25 to \$30 per case; coal oil, \$10; teas, \$2.30 to \$3.00; golden syrup, \$65 per ten gallon kegs; butter, \$1.00 to \$1.50; dried fruits, 37 cents to 90 cents; linseed oil, \$10; The above are gold dust prices and are just twice as much as [sic] in "greenbacks." The emigrant will, therefore, at once see the advantage gained by bringing with him a good supply of the necessities of life.

To offset the discouragement of high prices the writer described several diggings which were producing large quantities of gold. There is no doubt that Sawyers' expedition left Sioux City in high anticipation of gold returns.

It was not until June 13 that Sawyers and his expedition were ready to leave Niobrara City. In spite of his great exertions unavoidable delays had prolonged the start for about two weeks beyond the date earlier set for the departure.

In Sawyers' report to the Secretary of Interior, James Harlan¹¹ appears the following description of this train:

The expedition proper consisted of 53 men including my engineer and clerk, physician, guides, scouts, pioneers, herders, and drivers, 45 yokes of oxen, 5 saddle-horses, 5 mules, 15 wagons, with chains, tools, tents, camp equipage, and subsistence for six months. Our escort train numbered 25 wagons, drawn by six mules each. These teams were small and thin at starting, and very young, but few of them being over three years old, and, as a whole, a very inferior lot of animals wholly inadequate for the expedition, and should never have been sent upon it.

Accompanying the expedition were five emigrant teams and a private freight train of thirty-six wagons, coupled together so to be drawn by eighteen teams of six yoke oxen each, and heavily loaded, some teams being loaded with 6,400 lbs.; and here permit me to say that the entire practicability of the route traveled over may be seen when I state that not one of these wagons were uncoupled during the journey for the passage of any obstacle in the road.

Sawyers' himself was very much disappointed with the escort which was provided for him. He comments that some emigrants and some men, whom he had hired, turned back and would not make the trip because of the insufficiency of the escort.

Several letters were written to and published by the *Sioux City Journal* from the Camp on the Big Coultter Creek, June 18, 1865. In each case fine traveling was reported, and that "everyone seems to be in excellent spirits." One letter gave the following description of their line of march:

We march as follows: A scouting party with the guides go in advance; then comes a section of Artillery with a division of Infantry; the train follows, divided into three sections, with a division of Infantry between each section, while a division of Infantry and a section of Artillery close up the road. In country that is considered at all dangerous, the train will move in double columns; so that it may be more easily protected in case of a dash by Indians. A few more Cavalry would have been desirable for scouts; but with this exception, our escort is all we could expect or ask for. The officers are veterans, first rate men, and perfect gentlemen. The troops are a fine body of men, who have proved their bravery on many battlefields, are perfectly disciplined, and well supplied with ammunition.¹²

¹¹Executive Documents, Serial 1256, op. cit.

¹²*Sioux City Journal*, July 1, 1865.

Other letters were sent to the Journal and this would indicate that there was some connection with the mail all along the route. One letter was written from a camp on the South Fork of the Cheyenne river in Dakota Territory, July 21, 1865. Another was sent from the camp on the Big Horn river, September 16, 1865. Apparently the mail was returned to Iowa through the assistance of military detachments that were met by the expedition in the West.

Sawyers made ample provision for camp equipment, and organized the personnel with an eye to efficiency. The unofficial "Journal of the Wagon Road" for 1865 states that Colonel Sawyers had each mess provided with a good tent, heavy sheet-iron cook stove, mess chest, and furniture complete. He added that these were under charge of men who were hired exclusively for cooking so that the pioneers and teamsters had nothing to do after arriving at camp except to eat and occasionally stand a guard turn over the cattle.¹⁸

The writer of the same journal writes that all provision was made for the necessary comfort and convenience of the men, including a full supply of medicine and a careful physician. Dr. Tingley was the physician in charge. Both this journal and Sawyers' official report for the expedition of 1865 frequently comment on Dr. Tingley's interest in archeology and his search for fossils in which he was quite successful. Accompanying Sawyers' report to the Secretary of Interior is the doctor's own report of the various cases he handled en route. No serious epidemics broke out, and the several instances of death came as a result of Indian fights rather than from sickness. No doubt the aid of a physician kept occasional illness from proving serious.

The camp sites, with very few exceptions, were good all of the way from Niobrara to Virginia City. When Sawyers anticipated a shortage of water at the next camp, he ordered water to be carried along in available containers from the camp site which they were just leaving. On a few occasions in the Niobrara region "buffalo chips" were used

¹⁸*Ibid.*, Dec. 23, 1865.

for the fires when food could not be found. With the abundant sources of water along the route, there was practically always sufficient grass for the grazing of the stock. It was a common happening for some of the expedition to come in from a hunting trip with a goodly supply of fresh meat such as buffalo or elk. All of these factors contributed greatly to the success and comfort of the trip.

Sawyers, as other leaders of like expeditions, hired a guide who was familiar with the country to assist the Niobrara expedition along its approximately one thousand miles of travel. In his report to the Secretary of Interior, he described his experience of losing his first guide by desertion and having to hire another.

Paul Dorian, our Indian guide, who had left camp at Niobrara on the 11th instant, not making his appearance, I went to the Yankton agency in search of him, and found that he had deserted us and gone upon a hunt, notwithstanding his agreement to go with me, at a compensation of \$150. per month. I was sorry to lose his services as he was called the best Indian guide in the country, though subject to sulky fits at times. I engaged in his place Baptiste Defond, a Yankton half-breed, who was recommended to me as a very good guide, and who served very faithfully as such till his discharge on the Big Horn river. My chief guide, Ben. F. Estes, went through with me to Virginia City and back, as I had agreed with him. He was in Lieutenant (now General) Warren's party in 1856, and with us proved himself to combine all the qualities that go to make up a first-rate guide, combining great personal bravery with the most untiring energy, and withal very quite and unassuming in his manner, speaking the Sioux language fluently, and having intimate knowledge of their manners and customs. He was of great assistance in making treaties whereby we were fully enabled to pass through the hostile Indians' country.¹⁴

Seldom did these overland expeditions to Montana travel on Sunday and the Sawyers expedition was no exception to the rule. Wagons were on the trail as early in the morning as four o'clock, and never later than seven in the evening. Between providing for the evening meal, and caring for the stock, the time between halting the march and retiring soon passed. Therefore Sunday was used to rest the

¹⁴Executive Documents, *op. cit.*, entry of June 14.

stock, to repair wagons and harness, to wash and mend clothes, to write letters home, and to break the grind of physical wear. The Fisk expeditions frequently had a church service on Sunday, but there were none on the Sawyers expeditions.

The Sawyers expedition left the town of Niobrara, which is at the juncture of the Niobrara and the Missouri rivers, at one o'clock in the afternoon of June 13, about two weeks later than had been planned for the day of departure. The train traveled south of the Niobrara for about two-thirds the way across northern Nebraska. Sand hills to the south of the trail were noted along most of this portion of travel. During the first few days of July the mercury registered above one hundred degrees, and this was the expedition's only experience with such unbearable weather. On July 10, the Niobrara was crossed just above the mouth of Antelope Creek.

The road being made left Nebraska a few days after crossing the river for which the wagon road was named and out across the extreme southwestern corner of South Dakota. The White River was forded at a point near the present boundary between Nebraska and South Dakota. As the expedition was crossing from Dakota Territory into Wyoming, much interest was shown in the Black Hills, and deposits of coal were noted. Not far from the crossing of the White River, General Harney's trail leading from Fort Laramie to Fort Pierre, was recognized.

The inadequate supplies of the escort were beginning to run short at this point in the journey. On the 21st of July, Lieutenant Dana with an escort of fifteen cavalrymen was directed to go to Fort Laramie about seventy-five miles distant to secure the needed supplies. He returned to the train on the Dry Fork of the Cheyenne, August 1, but with no supplies. Since he was afraid the Indians would capture these supplies, he ordered them sent to Old Woman's Fork which he considered a safer vicinity. The searching party that was later detailed to Old Woman's Fork where Lieutenant Dana had ordered the supplies to be sent came back empty-handed. The train moved on across the North

Fork of the Cheyenne within view of Pumpkin Buttes, and headed north slightly east of the Powder River for two or three days. Upon finding that a good road could not be made to the Powder River from this point without great expense, the decision was made to retrace their steps back to Pumpkin Buttes. This experience represents a loss of six days, the greatest loss of time during the journey to Virginia City.

The expedition met with difficulties while going through the Indian Country. Between August 13 and 16 three men, Nat. D. Hedges, Anthony Nelson and John Rouse, while attempting to find the best place to build a road in the Powder River vicinity, were killed in Indian skirmishes. As a result of another Indian attack near Fort Connor on the Powder River, Captain Cole was killed on August 31 and Captain Lovell escaped only because he had a fleet horse. On this day the expedition went only two and one-half miles beyond the skirmish ground, since the hills were alive with Indians. Two men, Dilleland from Sioux City and Merrill of Cedar Rapids, were killed as the group was in the process of corralling the train. The Indians soon showed signs of making peace; consequently under a truce arrangement several Indian and expedition representatives were sent to General Connor as he had had a battle with the Indians a short time previously and had captured ponies and mules from them.¹⁵

While waiting for supplies that did not come, and searching in vain for General Connor who was in that vicinity, presumably in possession of the supplies, members of the escort were becoming faint-hearted. They were finally successful in forcing Sawyers to order the train to a camp near Fort Connor. Contact was soon made with General Connor who was some distance from the fort. The General ordered Colonel Kidd to furnish an escort of cavalry to the Big Horn river. This escort was to replace the one which

¹⁵*Dictionary of American Biography* IV, 352-353. Gen. Connor, veteran of the Mexican War, was assigned to the District of the Plains with instructions to cooperate in a movement to be known as the Powder River Indian Expedition in 1865. He was on this mission against the hostile Arrapahoes and Sioux and Cheyenne when Col. Sawyers was so desperately trying to get help from him.

was composed of infantry and had begrudgingly accompanied the train thus far. No more Indian dangers of any seriousness were encountered, and the new escort seems to have been quite satisfactory.

The expedition now crossed the Powder river and struck off in a northwestern direction to complete their diagonal line across northeastern Wyoming. Near the Wyoming-Montana boundary both wagon road journals note the expedition passing Father De Smet's Lake.¹⁶

It was September 18 when the train came into the valley of the Big Horn River in Montana, and the 19th when this river was crossed. Captain Kidd left them here as he had been ordered to do by General Connor, but he detailed Sergeant Yoakum with seven men to go on to Virginia City, and thence to proceed to Salt Lake City. Due to the fact that from the Big Horn river to Virginia City the Indian danger was considered practically eliminated, this escort was thought sufficient, and proved to be so.

The northwest direction was continued from the Big Horn to within a short distance of the Yellowstone River. The wagon train followed a little south of the Yellowstone until it was possible to cross and go almost directly to Boseman. While following the Yellowstone, Sawyers was apparently confused as to the streams and forks which the expedition was crossing. While neither journal speaks of the train being lost, in Sawyers' report to the Secretary of Interior he speaks of his guide's unfamiliarity with that part of the country.¹⁷

Boseman City was reached on October 5. While camped here, some of the drivers decided to celebrate on some "awful mean whiskey" which was purchased at the price of ten dollars per gallon.

From Boseman the party traveled in a southwest direction, crossing the Gallatin, Madison, and Jefferson rivers, and arrived in Virginia City on October 12. The expedition had been en route exactly four months. There was no

¹⁶Father de Smet was one of the pioneer Catholic missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century.

¹⁷*Executive Documents, op cit.*, entry of Sept. 25.

doubt that Indian troubles along the way took up some four or five weeks in the one thousand thirty-nine miles of travel between Niobrara City and Virginia City.

Sawyers had intended to go back over the road and complete the cutoff from Omaha to the Niobrara route. But due to the lateness of the season, he immediately set about paying off the men and selling the equipment. The disposition of camp equipment proved to be rather difficult as the market was flooded by like disposals of other travelers to Montana. He finally had to place most of the outfits in the hands of a commission merchant. The wagon-master was left to assist in the sale and to collect the funds for the government while Sawyers left for Salt Lake City, en-route to Sioux City.

Although Sawyers started his return trip realizing that his expedition had taken at least a month longer than he had anticipated, he was well pleased with many aspects of the Niobrara Wagon Road. In his report to the Secretary of Interior he analyzed the practicability and future of this road.¹⁸ He pointed out that this route was six hundred miles shorter than the one hitherto traveled via Salt Lake City. With good traveling by oxen covering fifteen to eighteen miles per day, six hundred miles less would decidedly be an encouraging factor. This route included no mountain ranges to be crossed. With plenty of food, grass, water, and game present most of the way, much suffering was eliminated.

Throughout the trip Sawyers seems to have maintained harmony among the numbers of his train. No note is ever made of anyone questioning Sawyers' authority. Whenever he was spoken of personally in letters to the *Journal* (which were signed "Montana") it was with very high regard. Sawyers closed his journal for 1865 with expressions of appreciation to various members of his party who had, in his estimation, contributed to the success of the expedition. Perhaps such evidence of humbleness instead of ego-

¹⁸*Ibid.*, following entry of October 12.

tism explains at least part of the background of Sawyers success as a leader.

Sawyers and party arrived in Sioux City the first part of December. The *Sioux City Journal* in its issue of December 9, 1865, paid Sawyers quite a tribute for his accomplishment. The article decidedly gave impetus to starting plans for another such expedition the following year.

EXPEDITIONS FROM ST. PAUL AND SIOUX CITY, 1866.

While the authorization law of 1865 designated no armed escort for the northern route from Minnesota, Fisk was again determined to find means by which he could make another trip to the gold fields of Montana.

It was necessary for Fisk first to finance his expedition, and secondly, to secure emigrants. As one means of raising money he chartered the Yellowstone Emigration and Colonization Company. He also filed a claim against the government for \$8000, for losses to him from previous expeditions. While this money was eventually paid to him, it was not in time to assist financially in the 1865 expedition. To enlist emigrants, he not only spoke to groups in St. Paul and vicinity, but went on a speaking tour through the East.

Repeated delays in obtaining his equipment which he was securing via river transportation postponed the possible start until far into the summer. It finally became necessary, with attachments levied on his property, for Fisk to put off his expedition until 1866. Added to that defeat was the fact that General Meagher, recently appointed territorial governor of Montana, became restless waiting to accompany Fisk to Montana, and left St. Paul to go by way of the Central Route while Fisk was still struggling to "whip" his expedition into shape. This veteran of the plains, however, turned his face forward to the next year when he might redeem himself with another expedition that would be successful.

Plans for an expedition in the year 1866 started almost with the return of Sawyers to Sioux City. One of the first matters to be taken care of was a congressional appropria-

tion. On January 8, 1866 such a bill was introduced in the House by Hubbard of Iowa. Later the bill was reported adversely from the Committee on Roads and Canals.¹⁹

Thus there is no new record of new money appropriated by Congress to finance the expedition of 1866 and yet, there is the report which Sawyers made to the Secretary of the Interior. The funds appear to have come from the previous appropriation.²⁰

Fifty thousand dollars were appropriated for the building of a wagon road from Niobrara to Montana and Idaho in 1865. In the Secretary of the Treasury's report for 1866-67 there is a record of Sawyers being paid twenty thousand dollars for his 1865 expedition which would leave unused thirty thousand dollars of the appropriated funds. Sawyers not only made the report to the Secretary of the Interior but received his instructions to make the overland trip from Niobrara to the gold fields of Montana as his reports gives the date when the Secretary of Interior wrote his instructions to Sawyers. Sawyers explained in his report to the Secretary of Interior that he carried out those instructions. Since to date no available sources have been located of newly authorized funds for the expedition of 1866, the assumption is made that the unused funds from the appropriation of 1865 were made available to Sawyers.²¹

Preparations for a second trip with Sawyers as the leader went on during the winter of 1865 and 1866. In the light of the Indian difficulties experienced on the expedition of 1865, an escort for the forthcoming expedition of 1866 seemed imperative. The Sioux City Journal for March 24, 1866, contains an article which describes an escort meeting held a few days earlier. As a result a petition from the citizens of Sioux City was written by a committee and sent to General Pope to express insistent demands for a suitable escort.

¹⁹*Congressional Globe*, Pt. 1, 39th Congress, 1st session, p. 135. A. W. Hubbard introduced a bill to provide for the improvement of the wagon road from Niobrara to Virginia City which was referred to the committee on Roads and Canals. *Congressional Globe*, Pt. IV, op. cit., 3352. Committee on Roads and Canals reported adversely on the Hubbard bill.

²⁰*Sioux City Journal*, Jan. 19, 1867.

²¹13 *U. S. Stats. at L.* 516-517; *House Documents*, 39th Congress, 2nd Session, Doc. No. 12, 1, 135; *Sioux City Journal* Jan. 12, 1867.

We, the citizens of Sioux City, assembled in public meeting for the purpose of giving expression to our views and wishes, would most respectfully and earnestly request you to furnish a sufficient escort to Col. Sawyers, for the protection of the Train he proposes to take to Montana Territory, over the route from this place, already partially established under the auspices of the Department of the Interior, and for the opening of which, an appropriation has been allowed by Congress, Believing as we do, and as unquestionable facts warrant us in believing, that a shorter and better route to the Gold mines of Montana and Idaho will thereby be fully opened and permanently established; and also for the further reasons, that the interests of a very large section of the country, and more especially of that comprising northern Iowa and Illinois, Southern Minnesota, Wisconsin and Dakota, and all portions of the country east of the same, demand the opening of this road. That Montana, through her representatives asked for it, as being in the highest degree desirable for their interests and the accommodation of her people. That similar aid has been extended to the opening of routes, for the protection of emigrants on the roads now leading to Colorado, Oregon and other sections of the West. That it is but simple and impartial justice to our people and the sections of the country mentioned, that the Government should extend the same aid to the opening of this route that has been extended to others; and further, that no equal number of troops can, in the opinion of this meeting, be employed in the northwest this coming summer, with so much benefit to that section, both for the present and the future, as in the service asked for. Therefore, as an expression of this meeting, it is

RESOLVED, That Major General Pope, in whose discretion we learn the detailing of an escort to Col. Sawyers rests, and will, in our judgment, exercise that discretion wisely and beneficially in thus conferring a lasting benefit on a very large section of the country by furnishing said escort for the purposes and objects above named.²²

The Hon. A. W. Hubbard, representative in Congress from Iowa, started early in the winter to do his part in securing the escort. From letters received by him which were published in the *Sioux City Journal*, the escort along with two howitzers were assured by the proper authorities.²³

As preparations were nearing a close, a rumor came

²²*Sioux City Journal*, March 24, 1866.

²³*Ibid.*, June 25, 1866, letters to A. W. Hubbard from Br't. Col. Babcock, Maj. Gen. Pope, and Br't Major Gen. A. B. Dyer, Chief of Ordnance, relating to the matter of troop escort and the use of two howitzers, all of which were favorable.

that General Cooke had countermanded the order for an escort. Investigation proved this rumor to be true. Even with A. W. Hubbard's assistance it was impossible to obtain two howitzers. Sawyers, however, was not to be stopped by such a thing happening so near the date of departure. Independently he secured rifles and revolvers for each of his men and started out with no escort.

To add to his troubles the boat on which his supplies were coming ran aground some distance down the river from Sioux City. It was necessary to transfer these supplies to another boat. All of this retarded the start several days.

There was considerable rivalry between Council Bluffs on the central route across the plains, and Sioux City as to the relative merits of those towns as starting points for western roads. The Council Bluffs *Nonpareil* was always ready to publish rumors or stories which painted a black picture for the Niobara route. The fighting Sioux City *Journal* invariably answered all such articles with contrasting evidence, and gave the Sawyers expedition an encouraging send-off.

The route followed on the expedition of 1866 was practically the same as that of 1865. Many of the fords across streams and rivers made in 1865 were found in good condition. In most cases the trail was still marked. From the previous year's experience distances in many places were shortened and the total distance was cut down over a hundred miles. This second expedition also reduced the time from four months to approximately two and one-half months. The expedition left Niobrara June 12 and arrived in Virginia City August 20.

There were also Indian difficulties on this trip, but this time there was no escort to help. Again the Territory of Wyoming proved to be the region with the Red Man on the warpath. On July 8 between the North and South Cheyenne rivers five Indians made a dash at the expedition's mules. In the melee which followed the Indians got away with two ponies, but one of the Indians was killed. On July 13, a group of Indians attacked the party during the night, but a few shots scared the assailants away.

While in camp near Pumpkin Buttes July 14, two men who were sent out to do some scouting were attacked by Indians. Help was sent immediately and the Indians scattered. After these encounters Sawyers tried to get Colonel Carrington at Fort Reno (formerly Fort Connor) to give the expedition an escort, but the Colonel refused on the ground that it was too dangerous a country in which to divide his forces. In a letter to the *Sioux City Journal* by a person who signed his name "Expedition," the writer stated that the expedition was joined near Fort Reno by Captain Zoller's train.²⁴ This added thirty-two wagons and sixty-one men, making a total of one hundred forty-five men. This letter also made mention of one soldier and one trader being killed in Indian fights while the expedition traveled through the Fort Reno vicinity.

In many ways this trip was similar in its routine and experience to the expedition of 1865. Wood, water, and grass were the ever-present needs. Daily trips averaged between twelve and eighteen miles. Harmony and comfort within uncontrollable conditions seemed to prevail throughout the expedition.

After reaching Virginia City, August 20, it took several weeks for Sawyers to dispose of the outfit as many other emigrants were trying to do the same thing and the market for such goods was flooded. Sawyers finally took part of the outfit to Helena where after several weeks of hard work, he sold it. The remainder was closed out by Cook and Newell, auction and commission merchants.

With business matters closed Sawyers returned to his home in Sioux City. The *Journal*, in an article in which Sawyers' return was discussed, wrote

On Sunday evening last Col. Sawyers arrived at home from Montana, having made the home trip via Salt Lake, California, and around the coast to New York. In a brief conversation with him since his return, he states that he found the route from Niobrara to Virginia City all that was claimed for it last year; and in fact, upon making the trip the second time, he is more than ever convinced of its superiority over any route heretofore traveled from

²⁴*Sioux City Journal*, Sept. 22, 1866.

the Missouri river. Mr. Sawyers is satisfied that the greater portion of the overland travel to the mines is destined to take the Niobrara route as shorter, safer, and better in every way than all others. Mr. Sawyers is a man of no idle words, and his statements can be safely relied upon. He could certainly have no object in trying to deceive the people by misrepresentation, as his work is now done, and his connections with the route at an end, and any effort to induce people to travel by this route against their interests must react upon himself. We learn that a train will be fitted up in this place in the spring to go through upon this route. They intend starting about the middle of May and will go through by the fourth of July.²⁵

While this article emphasized Sawyers' enthusiasm for the Niobrara route, and said that a train would be fitted out to start from Sioux City about the middle of May, 1867, the expedition of 1866 proved to be the last one of any note from Sioux City. Railroads were in the offing soon to replace these wagon roads which had been so courageously made.

Meanwhile Fisk put into the background his failures of 1864 and 1865, and started plans for a Minnesota expedition of 1866. With the Civil War over, large numbers were wishing to try their fortunes in new lands. The business upturn following the war was also in this persistent man's favor. Some freight business was also acquired to add to the profit of the trip.

While the route did not follow exactly those of 1862 and 1863, due to government regulations of following along the way of Fort Abercrombie, Fort Wadsworth, Fort Berthold, and finally Fort Benton, it was quite uneventful. Some of the members of the expedition took part in a fruitless stampede in the Sun River Valley, but most of them finally reached Helena where they tried their fortune in various gulches of that vicinity. Many of these people did not find the wealth which they had anticipated and eventually drifted into the more stable tasks of a settled community.

This trip was the last one for Fisk. He took his family along and, with them, made his home in Montana.

²⁵*Ibid.*, Dec. 1, 1866.

WAGON ROADS YIELD TO RAILROADS

In 1867 the veterans, Fisk, Holmes, and Sawyers took no steps to plan expeditions. Captain P. B. Davy now stepped into the picture as a leader.

Early in the preceding winter, Davy started to make his plans. He was very much interested in getting military protection, but the matter was held up for some time as was the case with other expeditions. At first Davy thought that his group could go through under the protection of a mail train, but finally it moved forward with a detachment of soldiers who were driving cattle through to the army post at Fort Berthold in Dakota Territory. Davy publicized his expeditions widely. When the group assembled at Fort Abercrombie the latter part of June, there was found to be two hundred twenty-seven persons, one hundred fourteen of whom were members of twenty-one German families en-route to Oregon. Captain Smith with one hundred men was to drive the cattle through. The party made the trip in good shape until Fort Ransome was reached. At this point there seemed to be some dissatisfaction with the command and Captain Smith replaced Davy for awhile. When Smith left the group, Davy resumed his command. By the end of the journey harmony seemed to prevail again, and many were eager to champion the cause of Davy. Helena was reached on September 26.

There was no settled route across the plains. The enthusiasm of the gold rush to Montana led the outfitting points, such as Sioux City and St. Paul, to believe that the opening of wagon roads to the Far West was essential for their prosperity. But the development of wagon roads soon faded into history to be replaced by the growing railroad program. Within two years after the last overland expedition, the Union Pacific was ready to take emigrants from Omaha to the coast. In a few more years the Northern Pacific made a connection from St. Paul to the Far West. Railroads as a means of transportation carried on with so much more safety and comfort, as well as in much less time than that with which the wagon roads with unlimited cour-

age had struggled to do so slowly, and with much suffering to those involved.

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