

## THE UPPER MISSOURI HISTORICAL EXPEDITION

BY SOLON J. BUCK

Popular interest in local and regional history seems to pass through a series of stages correlating roughly with stages in the settlement and general development of the region concerned. The pioneers are usually, though not always, too much concerned at first with the future to have much interest in the past. As time goes on, however, they naturally develop a reminiscent interest in the early days of their communities. The second generation is likely to be bored by the reminiscences of its parents and by the familiar survivals and reminders of the frontier life that is passing away. It is only with the third and later generations that the history of a community may possess the glamour of remoteness, both in time and in character, which seems to be a prerequisite of popular interest therein. When a man's family trail runs back several generations in the region in which he resides, he usually has at least a capacity for interest in the past of that region, including its more remote past prior to the advent of his ancestors in it; but when that trail runs quickly back to an eastern state or some European country, such interests in history as he may have are likely to take the same direction.

The last generation witnessed a great increase in both popular and scholarly interest in the history of the Old Northwest: the existing state historical agencies greatly increased their activities and their efficiency and a number of new ones were founded; local societies began to spring up one after another; historic sites were marked; and historical meetings, field days, and expeditions became common. The "New Northwest," however, that section of the country that stretches from the upper waters of the Mississippi to the Pacific along the northern boundary, was still too young to share to any great extent in this movement.<sup>1</sup> There are indications, however, that the next generation will

<sup>1</sup> In this classification Iowa and Minnesota belong with the old rather than the

witness a similar flowering of historical interest in this region, and not the least of these indications is the Upper Missouri Historical Expedition of 1925.

Inasmuch as the railroads played a most important part in the settlement and development of the "New Northwest," it is appropriate that they should lead the way to a greater interest in the history of the region. The Upper Missouri Historical Expedition, although sponsored by the state historical societies of Minnesota, North and South Dakota, and Montana, and the governors of North Dakota and Montana, was actually, as one newspaper man expressed it, "a modest alias for the Great Northern railway, which furnished and planned everything." For months in advance Mr. Ralph Budd, president of the Great Northern, Mr. W. R. Mills, its general advertising agent, and their corps of assistants devoted large amounts of time, energy, and good judgment to planning and preparing for the expedition and all its attendant features, with the result that no single detail that might add to the finish or interest of the affair was lacking.

The invitations, which were distributed in June to thousands of historians, writers, public officials, and others who might be interested throughout the country, were an earnest of the character of the expedition itself. Since the early history of the region to be visited is largely a history of the fur trade, the design of the invitation was appropriately based on the reproduction of a buffalo hide lashed to a framework of birch boughs and laid on a background of birch bark. In the openings between the hide and the frame and lashed to them appear eleven hoops, each of which contains a picture in striking colors suggesting some feature or incident of the days of the fur-trade, such as a portaging, mackinaw boats, Mandan earth lodges, a dog travois, and Indian types. In the largest of the hoops, at the top, is a picture of old Fort Union adapted from the picture by Bodmer. The text of the invitation, which is artistically lettered on the buffalo hide, invited the recipient "to attend a series of memorial celebrations" for the purpose of commemorating "the notable explorations and discoveries of several distinguished pathfinders of the Great Northwest."

new Northwest, although it is significant that effective local societies are much less common in those states than in Indiana and Michigan.

The first event of the expedition was a luncheon given by Mr. and Mrs. Budd at the Somerset Club near St. Paul, on July 16. This was followed by an automobile tour to spots of historic interest in the vicinity, such as the Sibley House at Mendota, maintained as a museum by the D.A.R., and Pilot Knob, where the treaty of Mendota was negotiated with the Sioux in 1851. In connection with this tour the first of the booklets issued by the railroad company for the expedition made its appearance. This is an attractive illustrated brochure entitled *An Important Visit: Zebulon Montgomery Pike, 1805*, and in it is an excellent historical map of the region around Mendota and Fort Snelling.

On the evening of the same day the expedition left St. Paul on a perfectly-appointed special train of Pullmans and private cars carrying about seventy-five passengers. Scarcely had the train pulled out of the station when the distribution of appropriate literature began. This included facsimile reprints of the issues for July 14 and 27 and August 17, 1864, of the *Frontier Scout*, a newspaper published by the soldiers at Fort Union, Dakota Territory; and the following illustrated booklets: *Fort Union and its Neighbors on the Upper Missouri*; *A Chronological Record of Events*, by Frank B. Harper (36 pages including a bibliography); *Chief Joseph's Own Story*, reprinted from the *North American Review* for April, 1879 (31 pages); *A Glance at the Lewis and Clark Expedition*, by Grace Flandrau (29 pages); and *The Story of Marias Pass*, by Grace Flandrau (23 pages). Mention should also be made of the artistic *Program of Events*, which contains a valuable "map showing routes of explorers and G. N. Ry.," and of an eight page *Library List* of the books which were carried on the train and were made available to the passengers by a librarian.

On Friday morning, July 17, the special train stopped at the little station on the Mouse River in North Dakota which had shortly before had its name changed from Falsen to Verendrye, and here the first formal exercises were held. On a parked site near the railroad train was to be seen a great granite globe, which on closer inspection proved to be a monument to David Thompson. This monument and the site were formally presented to the state of North Dakota on behalf of the Great Northern Railway by President Budd and were accepted for the state by

Governor A. G. Sorlie, after which papers were read on "The Verendryes, Discoverers of Dakota" by Lawrence J. Burpee, and "David Thompson, Astronomer and Geographer," by T. C. Elliott. A farmer's picnic at noon was followed by a base-ball game and other sports, and in the late afternoon the expedition moved on to Minot, many of its members taking advantage of the opportunity provided by citizens of that place to make the trip of about forty miles by automobile. At Minot the evening was devoted to a banquet given by the people of the city in honor of the expedition, and among the after-dinner speakers were Doane Robinson, Agnes C. Laut, Lawrence F. Abbott, Stella M. Drumm, and Major-General Hugh L. Scott.

The site of old Fort Union, near the mouth of the Yellowstone was the scene of Saturday's activities. The special train halted at the station of Fort Union, until recently known as Mondak from its location in Montana just across the line from North Dakota; and from there the travelers were taken in automobiles a short distance to the site of the most famous post of the old fur-trade days on the Upper Missouri. Here the first thing that met their eyes was not the remains of the fort, for there are practically none, but a village of Indian teepees. To portray the kaleidoscopic spectacles that ensued is beyond the power of a mere student of history; he can only record the principal events. Groups of Indians representing eleven different tribes, which had been assembled by the scouts of the expedition, met the visitors and entertained them with a great variety of dances, exhibitions, and contests; in a formal flag-raising ceremony the colors of France and Great Britain were successively raised and lowered on a great flag pole, after which the United States flag was raised and left waving in the breeze; Major-General Scott delivered an address, which was interpreted to the Indians in their sign language; and representatives of the various tribes responded with typical Indian orations, which were rendered into English by interpreters for the benefit of the tourists. In the evening three members of the expedition, Justice Pierce Butler, Lawrence F. Abbott, and Mrs. Elsa Jemne, a St. Paul artist, were adopted into different tribes with elaborate and colorful ceremonies.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> An exceptionally good account of the celebration at Fort Union appeared in the

Sunday morning the special train halted at Havre, Montana, to enable the members of the expedition to make an automobile trip to the site of the battle-field where Chief Joseph and his Nez Percés were defeated by General Miles in 1877. Here General Scott told the story of the masterly retreat of Chief Joseph and the ensuing battle, as he had heard it from the lips of General Miles and others; and Charles Smith of Havre, a participant, gave his reminiscences of the battle. In the afternoon the train moved on to Glacier Park, where headquarters were established in one of the hotels for the next two days.

The event of Monday was the formal dedication of a monument to Meriwether Lewis at Meriwether, formerly Bombay, Montana, which marks approximately the farthest point reached by Captain Lewis in his exploration of the Marias River on the way back from the Oregon country in 1806. Here an impressive shaft, designed by Electus D. Litchfield of New York, was presented to the state of Montana on behalf of the railroad by Mr. Budd and was accepted for the state by Governor J. E. Erickson. A paper entitled "The First National Exploration of the United States of America," by Olin D. Wheeler of St. Paul was read, and Mr. Sidney M. Logan of Kalispell gave the dedicatory address on "Captain Lewis' Marias River Expedition." The party spent the remainder of the day at Glacier Park, being guests of Mr. Budd at dinner at Two Medicine Chalets.

The final exercises of the expedition took place at Summit, Montana, where the Great Northern crosses the divide in Marias Pass. Although the existence of this pass, the best and lowest of the northern passes, had been vaguely known for many years, it was first definitely located and explored in mid-winter of 1889 by John F. Stevens, then a young man sent out by James J. Hill to locate a route for his western extension and now an engineer of world-wide reputation. At this place the railroad company had erected an artistic statue of Mr. Stevens, the work of Gaetano Cecere of New York, and after addresses by Robert Ridgway, president of the American Society of Civil Engineers, and Justice Pierce Butler representing the National Geographic So-

Minneapolis *Sunday Tribune* for August 2. The writer of the present report was obliged to turn back at Fort Union, so that for the remainder of the narrative he will have to rely upon information derived from others.

society, the statue was unveiled and Mr. Stevens made a brief response. Again the special train returned to Glacier Park for the remainder of the day, the special features of which were a reception by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Russell at their log cabin on Lake McDonald and a dinner given by them at one of the hotels, at which Irvin Cobb was one of the speakers.

It is too soon, of course, to assess fully the results of the Upper Missouri Historical Expedition, but some of the more obvious ones may be indicated. Three notable monuments have been erected, and three places have been rechristened with names of historical significance; many prominent people participating in the expedition had their interest in and their knowledge of the history of the Northwest greatly increased; and the widespread publicity which the expedition received in the newspapers and magazines of the country will have a similar effect upon the reading public. The *Outlook* for August 12, 19, and 26 contains articles by Lawrence Abbott which were inspired by the expedition; it is written up by Theodore C. Blegen in *Minnesota History* for September, by Grace Flandrau in *Success* for September, by E. F. Flynn in the *Zenith* (Duluth) for September, and by Earl D. Jenks in the *Farmer* (St. Paul) for August 8; and nearly all the August issue of the *Western Magazine* (St. Paul) is devoted to the expedition and its historical background. Most of these articles are illustrated by pictures, of which a great many were taken throughout the trip by representatives of the railroad and of the press. The moving-picture men also were much in evidence, especially at Fort Union, and the results of their work have received extensive showings. The expedition also called forth much editorial comment of a favorable character, some of which has been reprinted by the Great Northern in a thirty page pamphlet; and it is understood that the proceedings and addresses of the expedition are to be published in book form.

That the advertising motive had an important part in the inception of the expedition is undoubtedly true, and it will probably be financially profitable to the railroad in the long run; but no one who has seen the officials of the company and their assistants working day after day in the library of the Minnesota Historical

Society can doubt for a moment that they have inoculated themselves with a very genuine interest in the history of the Northwest and a desire, quite apart from any possible commercial returns, to promote its cultivation. It is not surprising, therefore, that plans are already under way for similar expeditions in future years. The tentative schedule calls for a trip into the "Old Oregon Country" in 1926, a "James J. Hill Memorial Expedition" in 1927; and a return to Fort Union for a celebration of the centennial of its establishment in 1928, by which date it is hoped that a reproduction of the old fort may have been erected and established as a national monument. To promote these and other historical activities an organization, as yet unnamed, was formed before the expedition broke up. Of this organization General Scott is president, Justice Butler and Mr. Burpee are vice presidents, Miss Laut is recording secretary, and Miss Gertrude Krausnick, librarian of the Minnesota Historical Society, is corresponding secretary.