

THE UPPER MISSOURI HISTORICAL EXPEDITION

JULY 16-21, 1925.

With its "Upper Missouri Historical Expedition" the Great Northern Railway Company began a challenge to the American public to make its travel more stimulative to higher interests and also with this enterprise this railway corporation makes a continuing appeal to the communities along its route to cooperate in exploring the wealth of cultural background of their home regions. To serve as an enduring means for kindling this new historical consciousness among the Great Northern patrons, monuments were with fitting ceremonies dedicated on the historic sites along its route in North Dakota and Montana during a July week.

The "Upper Missouri Special," starting from St. Paul on the evening of July 16, bore northwestward President Budd and his co-workers in this enterprise along with representatives from the historical societies of the Missouri Valley states and historians who had made special studies of the exploration and early trading activities in this region. At Verendrye, a small town a little to the northwest of the center of North Dakota, the expedition was joined by a small delegation that had come eastward from the Pacific coast. This town (formerly Falsen) on the Mouse River, a tributary to the Assiniboine flowing into Lake Winnipeg, had been renamed "Verendrye" to commemorate the fact that up the water course on its border Verendrye had proceeded in the interest of France in 1738, intent on visiting the Mandans from whom he would get aid towards consummating his long cherished project of crossing the continent to the Pacific. Fifty-nine years later, in 1797, up this same stream came David Thompson as the geographer or exploring agent of the British Northwest Fur Company. To commemorate the achievements of Thompson, whose indefatigable explorations for the most accurate mapping of this belt of the

continent entitle him to a high rank among the geographers of all time, a monument in the form of a huge granite globe grooved with parallel and meridian lines had been placed on a commanding point on the bank of the Mouse, near where the bridge of the Great Northern spans that stream.

It was a lovely Dakota day. The people from a wide range of the surrounding country congregated. The Governor of North Dakota presided. A most impressive and fitting prayer was offered. The "Great Northern Songsters" sang appropriate songs and the story of the heroic purpose and strenuous undertaking of Verendrye and his sons and of the life and most effective services of David Thompson were forcefully told in papers by Lawrence J. Burpee, of Ottawa, and T. C. Elliott, of Walla Walla. A community picnic in the grove down by the edge of the river and athletic games followed.

The historical expedition then proceeded by train and by autos on westward some thirty-seven miles to the enterprising city of Minot. Remarkably rich zoo collections, in its spacious park areas were viewed and in the evening the members of the expedition were feted with a banquet at which addresses were given by a number of the distinguished people of the company, including Major General Hugh L. Scott. During the night the "Upper Missouri Special" took the expedition on to the site of Fort Union on the north bank of the Missouri and at a point directly on the present boundary line between North Dakota and Montana. Fort Union for some forty years following 1829 was the chief trading post of the American Fur Company. To it the Indians of the ten or more tribes frequenting this region were accustomed to take their collections of furs for trade. And there on this morning of the 18th of July their leaders of the present generation were in full force, camped and ready for a day of historical council and festivity. Tribal

groups bedecked in gayest and gaudiest trappings were soon arranged in a semicircle in front of the speakers' stand. Major General Scott, who in his long army service had maintained most fraternal relations with them, spoke, using both oral and sign languages. The chiefs of the various tribes responded. The head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Chairman of the House Committee on Indian Relations were also heard. A pageant of flag raising followed—the French, the English and the American in order. That of the United States remaining to wave from the top of the newly erected pole. In the afternoon and evening there were displays, dances and contests and the initiation of some of the notables of the expedition, including Associate Justice Pierce Butler of the United States Supreme Court, into the Blackfeet tribe.

The expedition then proceeded by train westward to the Montana town of Havre, from which a side trip in autos was made to the scene of the last stand and capitulation of Chief Joseph and his band of Nez Percés in the autumn of 1877. Chief Joseph with his people, including women and children, but with not more than three hundred warriors, had retreated nearly two thousand miles through the enemy's country. He had met the United States troops eleven times, and had fought five pitched battles with them, of which he had won three, drew one and lost one. The total force opposing him was nearly two thousand men. General Miles coming from the east intercepted him at Bear Paw Mountain, and as a fall of snow deprived the Indians of fuel, brought about their surrender. The salient features of this story and the prowess of General Miles as an Indian fighter were related on the spot by General Scott. A survivor who had participated in the affair also added graphic details.

The expedition the next morning, the 20th, arrived at Glacier Park. It retraced its course a few miles to the station Meriwether. Here a granite shaft had been

placed to commemorate the terminus of the trip of Meriwether Lewis, of the Lewis and Clark Expedition in 1806, for determining the northern limit of the Missouri river basin. Governor J. E. Erickson presided here as he had at Fort Union. The dedicatory address was made by the Hon. Sidney M. Logan.

On the 21st the expedition proceeded to the summit of the Rocky Mountains in Marias Pass. Here on a ledge overlooking the Great Northern line of railway had been erected a statue in heroic bronze of John Frank Stevens as he appeared in 1889, when in his reconnaissance he determined the signal adaptability of this pass for the Great Northern's route across the Rocky Mountains. Mr. Stevens himself was there and graciously and gracefully responded after John Frank Stevens III had unveiled the statue. Judge Charles H. Carey presided. Robert Ridgway, president of the American Society of Civil Engineers, and Associate Justice Pierce Butler presented just the sentiments the occasion in honor of this engineer of transcendent achievements called for. These exercises were a beautiful climax to the series in the itinerary of the expedition.

Surely, such recountings of salient phases of the great historical drama enacted on the Plains and in the Inter-mountain country during the romantic era of these regions and such monuments placed to symbolize leadership in these achievements should enliven interest, activity and life in that country and the railway that sponsors all this will evoke every scintilla of good will and cooperation its public is capable of. Furthermore, its plans for the coming year naturally include the continuation of this historical illumination of the country served by the Great Northern lines and subsidiaries, extending from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific coast.