Bypaths of Kansas History

WHEN AN EDITORIAL CUPBOARD WAS BARE

From the Topeka Tribune, December 31, 1859.

Hard Up.—S. N. Wood, editor of the [Council Grove] Kansas Press, after calling on his subscribers for corn, hogs, butter, eggs, wood, &c., and failing to get either, now proposes to take wolf pelts, buffalo chips, and old cast-off clothing.

INDIAN SOLDIERS

From the Fort Scott Bulletin, June 21, 1862.

Parade Rest.—Not long since, one of the new Indian regiments was formed for “Dress Parade,” for the first time. The ceremonies progressed very well until the command “Parade rest” was given, when, with a unanimous grunt of satisfaction, the Indians seated themselves comfortably on the ground. They understood the “rest” perfectly, but the “parade” evidently has no place in their tactics.

From Soldier’s Letter (publication of the Second Colorado cavalry stationed at Fort Riley), August 19, 1865.

In the 9th Kansas cavalry there is one entire company of Indians. They are mostly Kaws, and their head chief is one of the sergeants. Many amusing incidents are related of their early career as soldiers. The greatest difficulty to overcome was to make them dress as soldiers. In the heat of summer they would insist upon walking through the streets of Leavenworth in their drawers alone, and when forced to put on pants, cut out the seats for convenience.

THE PEDESTRIAN HAS ALWAYS BEEN FAIR GAME

From the Leavenworth Evening Bulletin, May 18, 1864.

Fast Driving.—How often it happens in the course of a man’s peregrinations in the city that he barely escapes being knocked down by a team that comes dashing down a side street at a rate of ten miles an hour—the driver, as the wheel of his vehicle grazes the pedestrian, launching a curse at him by way of apology. Every man who drives thus fast in the streets violates an ordinance, and could be arrested and fined for it if any citizen thought it worth while to take up the matter. But no citizen wants to be bothered with petty litigation of that sort. Besides, he is so accustomed to hair-breadth escapes at the street corners, and the subsequent oaths and execrations of drivers, that he looks upon it all as inseparable from city life—as one of the nuisances which are a part of the price that we pay for the delightful privilege of living in town.
From the Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, March 28, 1865.

**Fast Riding.**—The practice of fast riding and driving through our principal streets, is a matter to which we would call the attention of the police, for it is getting to be very dangerous. We are ashamed to own that this is allowed to be practiced in our city on Sunday, more than any other day. It is a common sight to see three or four, and sometimes more horsemen dashing through the streets, and frequently so drunk as to be totally regardless of the safety of those who chance to be crossing.

We call the attention of the proper authorities to this disgraceful practice, to take measures to stop it. Persons who have no respect, either for the Sabbath, themselves, or the good name of our city, ought to be brought to a realizing sense of their degradation by the application of some severe legal punishment. If their benighted minds can find no other amusement, and they must still persist in this horse-racing, let them go out to some lonely spot where nobody lives, and not insult and annoy citizens who have respect and decency enough to pass the Sabbath day in a becoming manner.

We hope to see this unlawful practice attended to at once.

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**Trading with the Indians**

From the Leavenworth *Daily Conservative*, May 17, 1867.

Within the last sixty days buffalo robes to the number of 10,000, worth $30,000, have been shipped by E. H. Durfee, No. 48 Main street. The value of furs and skins handled in the same house during the above time, reaches the handsome figure of $100,000. Mr. Durfee has six posts in different parts of the West, gathering up furs, robes, etc., whose united operations will amount to half a million dollars this spring.

From *ibid.*, May 8, 1868.

**DURFEE & PECK**

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**The Indian Trade.**

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**How It Is Conducted.**

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**Interesting Details.**

Probably there is no business carried on in this country of which so little is known by the public generally as Indian trading. We yesterday had a very interesting chat with Mr. E. H. Durfee, one of the oldest and most widely known Indian traders who have ever been in the West. We are indebted to him for a great many interesting items about the business, which we have decided to lay before our readers.

Mr. Durfee came to Leavenworth in 1861, from Marion, Wayne county, New York, and has since then built up the immense and lucrative trade which he now controls.
THE SOUTHERN TRADE.

He is the sole proprietor of the establishment here, which is the headquarters for the traffic with the Southern Indians. The posts on the upper Missouri are owned by Durfee & Peck. The Southern Indians, or those south of the Arkansas, supplied, are the following, with their estimated numbers: Comanches, 23,600; Apaches and Cheyennes, 3,500; Osages and Kaws, 4,000. The larger tribes, as nearly everybody knows, are divided into bands, under various names, which we will not give here.

THE NORTHERN TRADE.

The Indians of the North with which they trade are all Sioux, numbering, it is estimated, upwards of 70,000. They are located in Dacotah and Montana. The Sioux are divided into twelve or fifteen bands. Some of their trade comes from the British Possessions, and the whole extent of it is from there to Texas. The only rival of Durfee & Peck is the Northwestern Fur Company. The competition is sharp, and is carried on with all the energy which characterizes the Yankee everywhere, whether in Wall street or in a log cabin a thousand miles from civilization.

THE POSTS, AND MEN EMPLOYED.

Durfee & Peck have employed at their posts, in all, about one hundred men. A large number of these are fitted out every season by them with arms and traps with which they get their furs and turn them over to their employers, receiving therefor goods, which they in turn sell to the Indians. They have on the upper Missouri seven posts, at which are stored and kept for sale all kinds of goods which the Indians want to buy, and where they come in with their skins. The houses used are all built of logs, with mud roofs, saw mills being scarce up that way.

THE HUNTING AND TRAPPING SEASON.

The season in which furs and peltries are secured by the hunters and trappers is from October to February. After that time the shedding of the coat commences and the hair fades and becomes worthless.

The animals most sought for and which produce the most desirable skins are the following, placed in the order of value:

Otter, beaver, buffalo, wolf, elk, bear, fox, deer, and coon. Mink is considered too small game, among the Indian trappers in particular.

HOW THEY ARE KILLED.

The buffalo are killed mostly by arrows, as they are not only less expensive, but can be withdrawn and used again. These animals are generally hunted in the following manner: A large herd is surrounded and gradually driven in together. And here is exhibited a piece of strategy thoroughly Indian. The stragglers on the outside of the main herd are shot in the liver and will bleed to death internally in going four or five miles. The hunters still keep on driving them in, and the carcasses at the close of the chase are not scattered over so large an extent of ground as they would be if the stragglers were shot dead. When the circle is well closed in, the hunters begin to shoot at the heart. Their ponies are all trained and will not enter the herd, but keep
always around the outside, though the rider does not draw a rein on them after the main herd is reached.

The wolves are all poisoned in the following manner: A quarter of buffalo is either taken in a wagon or dragged over the prairie; at the distance of about 40 rods apart, numerous stakes are stuck in the ground, on the top of which is impaled a small piece of the meat, which has been poisoned with strychnine. The wolves strike the trail and follow it up, taking the pieces as they go. Next morning the hunters go along the line and skin the dead animals. They stretch the skins over stakes, with the inside up, and there let them dry. No salt or anything else is put on them. Sometimes as many as seventy or eighty wolves are killed with a single quarter of meat; of course an immense amount of strychnine is used. Mr. Durfee says they have sold as many as 1,200 bottles to one man. Each bottle holds one-eighth of an ounce, which is sufficient to kill five wolves.

The otter and beaver are trapped, various kinds of drugs being used for bait.

A few silver-gray foxes have been found up there, but they are very scarce. The skins of these animals are very valuable, bringing from $50 to $75 each. When taken, they are invariably sent to Europe, where they are used only by the wealthiest people.

DRESSING AND TANNING.

The Indians use the brains of the animal to tan it with. They first stretch the skin over a frame. They then rub on the brains, mixed with juices obtained from certain roots and plants. They are then scraped with various implements, hoes being used. They say the brains draw out the grease. After they are dry, they are painted and ornamented. The paint used is of the very finest qualities of Chinese vermillion and chrome yellow and green. These are imported by Durfee & Peck.

BRINGING IN THE SKINS.

As soon as the season is over the Indians put the hides and furs on poles, which are dragged by ponies, sometimes a distance of 300 miles, to the nearest trading post. The whole band generally comes in with them. At the posts are opposition runners, in the employ of the Northwestern Company and Durfee & Peck. They keep on the watch, and as soon as a band comes in sight they mount their ponies and start off to secure the customers.

Those with whom they decide to trade are compelled by custom to give the band a great feast, which lasts one day. Then business commences.

WHAT THE INDIANS BUY.

The articles most in demand by the red men are coffee and sugar, of which they are very fond. In dry goods they want blankets, cloth, prints; a few of them buy saddles and bridles. An ornament called an Iroquis shell, which is picked up on the seashore somewhere in Europe, is in great demand. Mr. Durfee says he has seen an Indian sell fifteen out of twenty buffalo robes for these shells.

"Big Canoes."

The Indians know the boats which are loaded with goods for them by the tops of the smokestacks being painted red. They call them "big canoes," and
as soon as they get into the Indian country the news is carried ahead by runners, and they all know when the boat will arrive. They never molest them, and Durfee & Peck have never met with any loss at their hands.

"Two Bears."

This noted Chief has been employed by the firm as a runner, and being very widely known and popular among his people, is a valuable assistant. "Two Bears" was with Col. Leavenworth, the man after whom our Fort and city were named, when he died, and the Chief assisted to bury him many years ago.

On the 4th inst. old Jesse Chisholm, probably the oldest trader in the West, who came here from Tennessee sixty years ago, and who was fitted out last summer with about $25,000 worth of goods by Mr. Durfee, died, away up near the mountains. Old "Two Bears" thought so much of him that he took from his own neck a gold medal which had been given him by President Harrison and placed it on Chisholm's neck, and had it buried with him.

The first time Mr. Durfee saw this old Chief, was during one of his trips up the river. The old fellow was pointed out to him as a leading Chief, and Mr. Durfee invited him on board, taking him directly to the ladies' cabin. Now it chanced that our red friend was not just then clad in his Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, but on the other hand, looked rather dirty. As soon as he saw the ladies, he wanted to leave, and appeared very bashful. He then went away, and an interpreter told Mr. D. that "Two Bears" was ashamed of his old clothes, and had gone to dress up. Sure enough, in about an hour he made his appearance, decked off in all the gaudiness of a First Family Sioux, stuck all over with gewgaws and feathers, and mounted on a pony, which looked as gay as himself. Everybody on the boat went out to see him, and his wounded pride was healed.

Miscellaneous.

Mr. Durfee has sent off one boat load of goods this season, per steamer Benton, which will be back in June, loaded with furs and peltries. She took up 250 tons. The Big Horn, which has gone up with Government freight, will also bring down a cargo. The Benton will make another trip this season.

The farthest that boats go up is 2,700 miles by the river.

The proceeds of the stock to be brought down by the Benton this year, will be about $150,000.

They have sutler's stores at Ports Sully, Rice and Stevenson, which are entirely separate from the Indian business.

Durfee & Peck handle yearly from 25,000 to 30,000 robes, which average about $8.00 apiece. The furs are, of course, much higher, and the whole business comprises an enormous trade.

There is a popular idea that some of the buffalo robes which we find in market are tanned by white men. This is not so. The Indians do it all. White men have tried it, but failed.

Mr. Durfee has, during his various trips to the mountains secured a large number of pets; among them he has kept the following animals, which are at his New York residence: one bear, one antelope, one deer, one badger, a red fox and two American eagles. He had two buffalo but they died.
As a proof of how profitable the business is to the hunters and trappers, we will state that two young men were fitted out by Durfee & Peck, only a short time ago, who would realize about $5,000 for their winter's work. Nearly all the goods traded to Indians by this firm are imported. Mr. Durfee went to Europe two years ago, and invested largely.

He has established an extensive post at the mouth of the [Little?] Arkansas, from which to supply the Southern Indians, and there are already upwards of fifty families located there.

Mr. Durfee related many interesting incidents of his experience, with which we could fill a page of this paper. We have endeavored, in this, however, to give all the more interesting points in the business, which must necessarily possess a great charm for men who like adventure mixed with profit.

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Those March Winds

From The Southern Kansas Advance, Chetopa, March 13, 1872.

A gentle 'Kansas Zephyr' was blowing yesterday. It turned over a stage coach on Maple street. Charley Davis, the only passenger, coolly stuck out his head and asked what station was called. The driver lay insensible for a while, but his head was soon level again.

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Intemperate in the Antidote

From the Wichita Eagle, July 24, 1873.

A young man by the name of Wolf, living some eight miles from town, was bitten by a rattlesnake on last Monday. Hurrying to town for relief, whisky was recommended as an antidote. He drank about two and one-half pints. That was in the forenoon. By night he was in an insensible condition, the exertions of two or three physicians failing to arouse him. Still continuing in a comatose or lethargic state, on Tuesday morning a galvanic battery, douching and the injection of ammonia were resorted to, which after two or three hours had the effect of arousing him, and yesterday morning hopes were entertained for his recovery. It will not be forgotten that whisky was what the matter was, and not the snake bite, although either are deadly enough.

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A Short Short

From The Globe Live Stock Journal, Dodge City, November 18, 1884.