
Commerce of the Prairies

islands, the river is so entirely bare of trees that the unthinking traveler might approach almost to its very brink without suspecting its presence.

Thus far, many of the prairies have a fine and productive appearance, though the Neosho River (or Council Grove) seems to form the western boundary of the truly rich and beautiful country of the border. Up to that point the prairies are similar to those of Missouri—the soil equally exuberant and fertile; while all the country that lies beyond is of a far more barren character—vegetation of every kind is more stunted—the gay flowers more scarce, and the scanty timber of a very inferior quality. Indeed, the streams from Council Grove westward are lined with very little else than cottonwood, barely interspersed here and there with an occasional elm or hackberry.

Following up the course of this stream for some twenty miles, now along the valley and again traversing the points of projecting eminences, we reached Walnut Creek.²⁸ I have heard of a surgical operation performed at this point in the summer of 1826, which, though not done exactly *secundum artem*, might suggest some novel reflections to the man of science. A few days before the caravan had

²⁸ Walnut Creek rises north of Garden City, Kansas, and flows almost directly east into the Arkansas just below the town of Great Bend. Fort Zarat was later established at the mouth of Walnut Creek.

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reached this place a Mr. Broadus, in attempting to draw his rifle from a wagon muzzle foremost, discharged its contents into his arm. The bone being dreadfully shattered, the unfortunate man was advised to submit to an amputation at once; otherwise, it being in the month of August and excessively warm, mortification would soon ensue. But Broadus obstinately refused to consent to this course till death began to stare him in the face. By this time, however, the whole arm had become gangrened, some spots having already appeared above the place where the operation should have been performed. The invalid's case was therefore considered perfectly hopeless and he was given up by all his comrades, who thought of little else than to consign him to the grave.

But being unwilling to resign himself to the fate which appeared frowning over him without a last effort, he obtained the consent of two or three of the party who undertook to amputate his arm merely to gratify the wishes of the dying man; for in such a light they viewed him. Their only case of instruments consisted of a handsaw, a butcher's knife, and a large iron bolt. The teeth of the saw being considered too coarse, they went to work and soon had a set of fine teeth filed on the back. The knife having been whetted keen and the iron bolt laid upon the fire, they commenced the operation, and in less time than it takes to tell it the arm was opened round to the bone, which was almost

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in an instant sawed off; and with the whizzing hot iron the whole stump was so effectually seared as to close the arteries completely. Bandages were now applied and the company proceeded on their journey as though nothing had occurred. The arm commenced healing rapidly and in a few weeks the patient was sound and well, and is perhaps still living to bear witness to the superiority of the hot iron over ligatures, in taking up arteries.

On the following day our route lay mostly over a level plain, which usually teems with buffalo and is beautifully adapted to the chase. At the distance of about fifteen miles the attention of the traveler is directed to the Pawnee Rock, so called, it is said, on account of a battle's having once been fought hard by between the Pawnees and some other tribe.²⁹ It is situated at the projecting point of a ridge and upon its surface are furrowed, in uncouth but legible characters, numerous dates and the names of various travelers who have chanced to pass that way.

We encamped at Ash Creek, where we again experienced sundry alarms in consequence of

²⁹ Pawnee Rock, one of the famous landmarks on the Santa Fé Trail, is in Barton County, Kansas, about twenty miles west of Great Bend. Pawnee Rock State Park, established by the state of Kansas in recent years, now includes the famous rock. It figures largely in the literature of the Santa Fé Trail, and gains its name from having been the great lookout of the Pawnee in their incursions against the Sioux.