

**DESCRIPTION OF A
JOURNEY AND VISIT TO
THE PAWNEE INDIANS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649165957

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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GOTTLIEB F OEHLER & DAVID Z. SMITH

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Description of a Journey and Visit to the Pawnee Indians

who live on the Platte River, a tributary to the Missouri,
70 miles from its mouth by Brn. Gottlieb F. Oehler
and David Z. Smith, April 22 — May 18, 1851,
to which is added

A Description of the Manners and Customs
of the Pawnee Indians by Dr. D. Z. Smith.



Univ. of
California

Reprinted from the *Moravian Church Miscellany of 1851-1852*
New York, 1914

E99
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CALIFORNIA

DESCRIPTION

OF A JOURNEY AND VISIT TO THE PAWNEE INDIANS, WHO LIVE ON THE PLATTE RIVER, A TRIBUTARY OF THE MISSOURI, 70 MILES FROM ITS MOUTH, BY THE BRN. GOTTLIEB F. OEHLER AND DAVID Z. SMITH. (April 22d—May 18th, 1851.)

Having in the course of the winter written letters of inquiry to Mr. Samuel Allis, teacher of a government-school for Pawnee children, and Major Barrow, U. S. agent for the Pawnees, both residing at Bellevue, and having received letters from both, of an encouraging nature, we left Westfield on the morning of April 22d, on our intended trip. Br. Paul Oehler accompanied us to Weston, in order to take the wagon back, which was to convey us thither. Passing by the Baptist mission-station, Briggs' Vale, where we called in a few minutes, we soon struck the prairie, which we kept till our arrival at Fort Leavenworth, about twenty-four miles from Westfield. This is a very pretty prairie, undulating, and at places quite broken, with here and there a high bluff or mound, rising above the surrounding country. "Pilot Bluff," a few miles from Leavenworth, stands picturesque in the prairie, and affords a beautiful prospect. We passed a company of infantry in the prairie, traveling from Fort Leavenworth to Fort Gibson. The quartermaster at the fort, Mr. Ogden, with whom Br. Oehler was previously acquainted, received us very courteously, and gave us a letter of introduction to the quartermaster at Fort Kearney, in case we should be obliged to go that way on our return home and need any assistance.—Fort Leavenworth is eligibly situated on a high prairie, near the bank of the Missouri, about 35 miles above the mouth of Kansas River. It is a place of considerable business, in the way of furnishing military stores for the more western forts. At the wharf a large storehouse has been built by the Government for the purpose of depositing military stores. The premises are kept in a very neat and cleanly condition, and a large garden has been prepared near by, for the soldiers to raise vegetables for their use. After crossing the Missouri on a horse-boat, which is kept here at the expense of the Government, we proceeded towards Weston, situated about five miles above. The first part of our road lay through the bottom, in wet weather almost impassable on account of the mud, but at present dry, though rather rough. The latter half of the road lay along the river, on the side of

the bluff, which here comes close up to the river. Along the road, we noticed many sugar-maple trees. Towards evening we arrived at Weston, a place of considerable trade, having about 1,700 inhabitants. We had expected to wait at Weston for a steamboat, that had been advertised at St. Louis for the upper Missouri, but as she had at the latest dates deferred the time of her departure from St. Louis, and the river was in a very low stage, so that it was doubtful, whether after her arrival here, she could run up any further; and hearing of a four-horse passenger coach, running from Weston to Council Bluffs in four days, which was to leave early in the morning, we concluded to take that, April 23rd. Early at four o'clock in the morning we started from Weston in the stage. Leaving the river to our left, we traveled upon the bluffs, which here run close up to the river, the bottom of the Missouri being on the other side. The country through which we passed is a broken country, heavily timbered and with a rich soil. At 8 o'clock we arrived at Bloomington, a little village about sixteen miles N. W. of Weston. On account of the unusual number of passengers, twenty-one in number, the stage proprietor had to furnish an extra four-horse coach, to accommodate all. This being the place of breakfast, the number rather took our worthy host by surprise, and it seemed to give him no small anxiety to entertain so large a company. However, by 11 o'clock we had all breakfasted, and were soon again in motion, the road still continuing for about seven miles on the bluffs, when we again descended into the bottom, which widens here on this side of the river, leaving the bluffs more to our right.

We now traveled over a very rich bottom prairie about seven miles to St. Joseph, the road on both sides lined with farms. The soil here is extremely rich, though inclined to be wet in the rainy season. St. Joseph is a thriving town, laid out only a few years ago, and numbers about 3,000 inhabitants; situated on a bluff on the right bank of the Missouri. Here we were informed that Major Barrow, the Pawnee agent, had left that very day in a boat on his way to St. Louis. The drinking of intoxicating beverage is carried on to a great extent in these frontier towns, and it is a common sight to meet with drunken men in the streets.

After an hour's rest at St. Joseph, we resumed our journey for Savannah, our stopping-place for the night, fourteen miles distant. The roads being very dusty, traveling by stage at present is rather disagreeable. We passed through a fertile and well-timbered country, with neat cottages and beautiful farms scattered on both sides of the road. About sunset we arrived at Savannah. The country around this place is the

prettiest that we have yet seen in the West. The town is situated in a rolling prairie, with some timber on all sides in view. The whole prairie being occupied by the town and adjacent fields, checkered off by fences into lots of a few acres each, gives it the appearance of an old-country settlement, though it was commenced only about fourteen years ago. Land here sells from fifteen to twenty dollars per acre. The village numbers about 800 inhabitants. The houses are mostly one-story frame, neatly painted white, with brick chimneys, surrounded by neat yards and grass-plots. Almost every house is furnished with a lightning-rod, which struck us as something rather unusual in this western country. The whole scenery around reminded us forcibly of the landscape around Bethlehem, Pa. In the village three churches, all of brick, have been erected, belonging to the O. S. and N. S. Presbyterians, and Campbellites. The courthouse, a brick edifice, stands in the centre of the town, in an open square. A few days ago two destructive fires occurred in the village, consuming a whole row of houses facing the square, and destroying property to the amount of 20,000 dollars, supposed to be the work of incendiaries. We were detained here two days, the coach from above, in which we were to proceed, instead of arriving on the evening of the 23rd, did not come in till the evening of the 25th.

26th. At length, after breakfast, we were enabled to leave Savannah and proceed on our journey. Our traveling company was very disagreeable, being shockingly profane. In traveling in these parts one might almost suppose that all the inhabitants were given to profanity, and the name of God and of the Savior is used in the most revolting manner. As we traveled on the country continued more or less broken, the timber becoming scarcer the further North we proceeded. Oregon, through which we passed in the afternoon, is a newly settled but thriving town, with a tolerably populous neighborhood. Soon after leaving Oregon we left the bluffs to our right and descended into a most beautiful bottom country, bordering on the Missouri River. The bottom is about ten or twelve miles wide, quite level, bounded by a line of high bluffs to the right hand, at the base of which our road lay. About five or six miles off to our left a strip of timber (the only to be seen) from four to five miles wide skirted the river all the rest of the bottom, and the neighboring high bluffs were one continued prairie. The soil is splendid, but all the most eligible sites are already occupied by settlers, who hold their claims at enormous prices. Timber is very scarce, and so is stone. Not a pebble is to be seen either on the bluffs, or in the bottom. The settlers are obliged to resort to ditching and mud-fencing. This is done

by digging two ditches in a line about six feet apart, and piling up the sod and ground on the intervening space to form a wall. At 4 o'clock we arrived at Jackson's, thirty-two miles from Savannah, the end of our day's ride.

27th. Left Jackson's after breakfast. Our company was very annoying to us, on account of their shocking profanity, but we were obliged to endure it with patience. After continuing for several miles further through the above-mentioned rich bottom prairie, we again ascended the bluffs to our right, traveling all day, mostly through hilly prairie, timber being very scarce. After a ride of about thirty miles we arrived at a little village named Linden, at 4 o'clock, P. M. Here our driver informed us that his horses (having traveled nearly forty miles to-day) were tired and worn out, and that he thought they could hardly travel any further. After tea, however, he said that he would try and take us a few miles further. We, therefore, proceeded till it was quite dark, but there being a portion of the road before us rather dangerous to travel in the dark we stopped for the night at a post office, where we were well accommodated with beds. We were now in the State of Iowa, having crossed the line between that state and Missouri a few miles back.

28th. Early at 4 o'clock we were again stirring. By sunrise we came to the valley or bottom of the Nishnebotona, which river we crossed on a wooden toll-bridge, newly erected. After breakfast we again struck the bluffs and traveled all day through an extensive prairie country, broken, very fertile, but lacking timber. The country here has been but lately settled, but it would be more thickly inhabited if timber were more plenty. This is all "claimed," and the claims are held at an enormous price. To-day we saw many houses covered with prairie-sod, on account of the scarcity of board timber; the day previous we had already passed many houses, the chimneys of which were made of prairie-sod, which seems to be quite durable. The further north we proceeded the scarcer the timber became along the water courses. Some of the streams run through the prairie with no timber lining them. We had reached the end of our journey, to within five miles, when we took in a way-passenger, a Mormon, who was from Ohio, traveling to see his brethren of the faith at Kanesville, a few miles above Trading Pt., at the Council Bluffs. We soon got into a conversation with him, and, thinking from our inquiries that we were inquirers after the Mormon faith, he proceeded to give us an account of their religious opinions, telling us about the three apostacies from the time of Noah to the time when the great prophet, Joe Smith, arose in 1830! These three apos-

tacies, according to their opinion, are: 1st, the general apostasy of all the nations of the earth to idolatry; 2dly, the apostasy of the Jews, and 3dly the apostasy of the different sects calling themselves christians, etc.

About sunset we arrived at Trading Point, the commencement of a continuation of bluffs on both sides of the river, called "Council Bluffs." On the opposite side of the river is Bellevue, the residence of Mr. Allis, who keeps a government-school for Pawnee children, and of the Pawnee, Otoe and Omahaw Agent, Maj. Barrow; there are also here two trading establishments, and blacksmith-shops for the Indians; about a mile below, on the same side of the river, is the Mission Station of the General Assembly's (O. S.) Board, among the Otoes and Omahaws, under the superintendence of Mr. E. McKinney. Immediately after our arrival at Trading Point we had a conversation with Mr. Allis, who happened to be on that side of the river. He told us that he and Mr. McKinney had been expecting our arrival, and that the Pawnees, to whom he had mentioned our intention of coming to see them, were anxiously awaiting us.

29th. During the night we experienced one of those sudden changes common to this country; in the morning when we awoke the wind was blowing a gale, and it was snowing very fast. About 10 o'clock we thought we would venture to cross the Missouri to the opposite side; the attempt was accompanied with great peril to our lives. The wind beat the water into the skiff, the ferryman's hands became so benumbed that he could hardly pull the oars any more, and by the combined effect of the gale and current we drifted about a mile below the usual landing-place. Mr. Allis stood watching on shore, ready to help us, and as soon as the skiff touched the bank he held to it, and having fastened it he assisted us with our trunks up the steep bank. Having proceeded to his house, we were glad to warm our numb limbs by the fire. The provisions, for the accommodation of Mr. Allis' family and Pawnee children, are wretched, right on the bank of the Missouri. The dwelling which is occupied by them was formerly a trading establishment and is almost in ruins. The family, besides ten or twelve Pawnee children, and several white children, are obliged to live in one small room, the only one hardly fit to be occupied, about eighteen feet square, which serves for parlor, sitting-room, and kitchen, and a sleeping apartment for the children above. Mr. and Mrs. Allis are devoted missionaries. They were among the first missionaries of the American Board, who nearly twenty years ago commenced a mission among the Pawnees; since the abandonment of that mission a few years ago,