

CHAPTER II.

JOHN BRADBURY.

THE RELATION OF JOHN BRADBURY TO THE COONS FAMILY.

In respect to two collateral persons this narrative departs at some length from the direct Coons line. One of these persons is John Bradbury, whose daughter, Sarah, married John R. Coons.* John Bradbury was a botanist; and paradoxical as it may seem, his journal of travels is one of the source books of American history.

BRADBURY'S "TRAVELS."

Bradbury's journals were first published in England in 1817. A second edition appeared in London in 1819. Reuben Gold Thwaites, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, in 1904 republished Bradbury's journals as Volume V of a

"Series of Annotated Reprints of some of the best and rarest contemporary volumes of travel, descriptive of the Aborigines and the Social and Economic Conditions in the Middle and Far West, during the period of Early American Settlement."

The series is entitled "Early Western Travels, 1748-1846." Volume V is entitled "Bradbury's Travels in the Interior of America, 1809-1811."** Any of this series of books can be found in the larger public libraries, in most historical libraries, and in many smaller libraries in the Middle West.

* There is some belief in the Coons family that John R. Coons married the sister of John Bradbury. Washington Irving, "Astoria," page 204, recites that Bradbury was a man of mature age in 1811. Sarah Bradbury, who was born in 1800, and hence then was only 11 years of age, seems ruled out as a sister.

** An original edition of "Travels" in the original binding is possessed by the writer. The original price, 8shil. 6d, is still legible. This valued book was purchased from Wright Howse, dealer in Americana, at 1142 So. Michigan Ave., Chicago. He has available a rebound first edition. The Thwaites edition may be picked up from time to time for from \$7.50 to \$10.00.

BRADBURY'S LIFE AND JOURNEYS.

Comparatively little is known of the life of John Bradbury, naturalist and traveler, beyond what is disclosed in his journals. He was a Scotchman by birth; but had long lived in England when, in 1809, he was commissioned by the Botanical Society of Liverpool to make researches into plant life in the United States. He arrived with a letter of introduction to President Jefferson, and was invited to visit at Monticello, where he remained ten days. The President gave him a letter of introduction to General Meriwether Lewis, Governor of Louisiana Territory at St. Louis. In this letter of August 16, 1809, President Jefferson said:

"I have the opportunity of knowing that besides being a botanist of the first order, he is a man of entire worth & correct conduct. as such I recommend him to your notice, advice & patronage. * * *"

On the last day of December, 1809 Bradbury arrived at the frontier town of St. Louis. The spring and summer of 1810 were spent in short excursions from St. Louis. Living specimens of the flora of that vicinity were sent to Liverpool by way of New Orleans. In the fall of 1810 Bradbury learned that the American Fur Company was sending an expedition up the Missouri River and thence overland to Astoria on the west coast. He applied to Wilson P. Hunt, chief agent of John Jacob Astor, for passage, which was accorded him.

The transcontinental journey of Lewis and Clark in 1804-1806 had gone up the Missouri. Since this exploration there had been no observations in the newly-purchased Louisiana Territory, except the casual ones of hunters and trappers.

Washington Irving, who in "Astoria" recounted the history of the Astorian expedition, states:

"Among the various persons who were about to pro-

ceed up the Missouri with Mr. Hunt, were two scientific gentlemen: one Mr. John Bradbury, a man of mature age, but great enterprise and personal activity, who had been sent out by the Linnean Society of Liverpool to make a collection of American plants; the other, a Mr. Nuttall, likewise an Englishman, younger in years, who has since made himself known as the author of * * * 'Genera of American Plants'." ("Astoria", p. 204.)

Another companion on the voyage was Henry Marie Brackenridge, who later became United States District Judge in Florida.

The journey of the Astorian expedition began from St. Louis on March 12, 1811. The trip up the river was accomplished in three boats: a 30 or 40 foot birch canoe; capable of carrying a four ton load, yet light enough to be carried on men's shoulders; a larger barge; and a keel boat. Canadian boatmen pulled the oars. Dorion, a half-breed Sioux, was engaged as interpreter.

The Missouri was ascended beyond its juncture with the Knife River in North Dakota. On July 17 Bradbury left his friends, who had exchanged their boats with a party of traders from the Missouri Fur Company for the horses of the latter, and returned to St. Louis with the Missouri Company traders. The eighteen hundred mile trip down river was accomplished in less than two weeks.

The sequel to the hardships of the Missouri River expedition of Bradbury was an attack of fever lasting four months. Bradbury then embarked for New Orleans. After a perilous voyage of ten days, New Madrid was reached on December 14, 1811. Here an earthquake nearly destroyed an island on which encampment had been made. The town was destroyed. On January 13, 1812 New Orleans was reached; and on the 20th Bradbury and his friend Brackenridge set sail for New York.

Before completing preparations for the trip to England, the War of 1812 broke out. For some time Bradbury remained in New York. There he improved his time by making the acquaintance of Governor DeWitt Clinton, and acquiring honorary membership in the Literary and Philosophical Society of New York. Before the treaty of peace, Bradbury had crossed the Alleghanies and traveled in Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Tennessee, and Illinois. These territories are described in an appendix to his "Travels".

Bradbury was in England when his account was first published in 1817. Shortly after the publication, Bradbury returned to America and in 1819 was permanently residing in St. Louis.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BRADBURY'S JOURNALS.

Bradbury was a well-selected agent of the Botanical Society of Liverpool. In natural history he was a trained observer. He portrayed the Indian as he found him. He gave accurate descriptions of the habitations, weapons, ceremonies, tribal affinities and hostilities of the aborigines. His enthusiasm was not shaken by danger from hostile Indians, fatigue, and even hunger. Roast dog was not a stranger to his palate. His calmness secured his party's safety during the earthquake on the Mississippi. During a tornado on the Missouri he was collected enough to note the species of shrub to which the boat was moored, and upon whose rooted tenacity the lives of all depended.

This was the character of man to whom Washington Irving acknowledged his indebtedness for information for the book, "Astoria". Of Bradbury, Thwaites says:

"Next to Lewis and Clark's journals we have no better ethnological authority for the Western Indians of this period, than Bradbury."

From the time of the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804-1806, no description of the Missouri Valley had been given to the world. Bradbury's account was so favorably received that a second edition was necessary within two years; and he was even accused in England of a design to encourage emigration to America.

GLEANINGS FROM BRADBURY'S JOURNAL.

By all who are interested in a vivid account of a journey beyond the pale of American settlement, Bradbury's "Travels in the Interior of America" should be read. The book is over three hundred pages in length. But little of it can be abstracted here. That which is repeated is not of historical importance. Rather it is of personal interest to those who have heard from generation to generation some of the tales recited in the book:

March 12, 1811—The start from St. Louis, Bradbury waiting until the last minute for mail from home, saying, "I must here observe, that the post to St. Louis is dispatched from Louisville, in Kentucky, a distance of more than 300 miles, through a wilderness".

March 17—Met Daniel Boone, then eighty-four years of age, coming to St. Louis with his spring catch of sixty beaver skins.

April 1—Shot a skunk not knowing what it was. The boatmen considered its meat a delicacy.

April 7—Pursued by a bear.

April 10—Observed a scalp dance of the Osage Indians.

April 18—First saw passenger pigeons. In a few hours shot 271 of them for food.

April 19—Nearly bitten by a rattlesnake.

April 28—Reached the Platt River.

May 14—Learned that the Sioux were assembling to stop the journey. Thereafter great precautions were taken.

May 23—Bradbury was captured by the Ponca Indians. He amused them with his pocket compass, and escaped.*

May 31—Attack by 600 Sioux, who perceiving that the party was armed with swivel howitzers, asked for a truce, smoked the peace pipe, accepted a bribe of tobacco, and allowed the travelers to proceed.

June 8—Passed the Cheyenne River.

June 12—Ate sweet corn for the first time. Found it very palatable.

June 14—A Ponca brave desired Bradbury to marry his sister.

June 15—Indian dogs purchased, shot, and cooked for breakfast.

June 19—Excursion on horse back to the Mandan tribe.

June 22—Saw seventeen herds of buffalo, estimating their number at over 10,000.

June 28—On crossing the Knife River in a canoe, Bradbury was splashed by Indian girl swimmers, and retaliated by rowing to shore and seizing their clothes, much to the amusement of the onlookers.

July 7—The boatmen, being unable to take their trunks overland to Astoria, sold seventeen of them to Bradbury for his specimens of plant life.

July 17—Started return trip with party of Missouri Fur Company, his up-river companions continuing overland to Astoria.

July 20—Encountered a tornado. Bradbury records that the boat was moored to a false indigo shrub.

* This compass for many years was in the possession of J. Henry Coons of Potosi.

July 29—Arrived back at St. Louis on Sunday.

July 30—Called at the post-office early to find letters telling of the welfare of his family. Transplanted his living specimens of plants on land bought at \$1.65 cents an acre.*

In an appendix to the journal proper, Bradbury gives advice to travelers, particularly immigrants. One paragraph is still good advice, it is hoped, even after the lapse of more than a century. It reads:

“In traveling this man ought not to be sparing of his enquiries; he is not in the least danger of receiving a rude or uncivil answer, even if he should address himself to a *squire*, (so justices are called.) It is expected in America that every man shall attend to his own concerns; and if a man who is out of work ask for employment, it is considered as a very natural thing.”

Prices of the times in the Western Country (Ohio, Kentucky, Illinois) are interesting. Examples follow:

Flour, per barrel.....	\$4.00
Potatoes, per bushel.....	.31
Beef, per lb.....	.05
Bacon, per do.....	.08
Fowls, each.....	.12½
Turkeys, do.....	.75
Butter, per lb.....	.14
Whiskey, per gallon.....	.40

Wages per day given in food purchasing power are:

“An ordinary workman can procure for a day’s work, fifty pounds of flour,—or twenty pounds of beef,—or three bushels of potatoes,— * * * one very large turkey.”

* Neither Thwaites nor Bradbury makes it clear how the latter’s plant collection reached England. Presumably Bradbury sent it from New York before he was himself ready to depart. In any event it reached England, and was inspected and described by a man named Purse.