

CHAPTER 2

BRADBURY AND COONS

Grandma Calloley was an interesting person and she came from some interesting grandparents. Her mother's maiden name was Eliza Bradbury. Her father's name was John Coons. The Bradburys and Coons were interesting people.¹

John Bradbury was a Scotchman by birth, a botanist and traveler by profession. He lived in England and was, in 1809, commissioned by the Botanical Society of Liverpool to research plant life in the United States. He arrived in United States with a letter of introduction to President Jefferson, and was invited to Monticello where he visited for ten days. He was then given another letter of introduction (August 16, 1809) from President Jefferson to General Meriwether Lewis, Governor of the Louisiana Territory. The President remarked:

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.

Bradbury arrived in St. Louis, December 31, 1809. During the spring and summer of 1810, he explored the territory around St. Louis, collecting plants for his research. He then learned that the American Fur Company founded by John Jacob Astor was sending an expedition up the Missouri River and then west to Astoria, in what is now Northwest Oregon. Bradbury was given permission to travel with the company as far as he desired. He traveled as far as the junction of the Missouri and Knife River in North Dakota. He then left the Fur Company and returned 1,800 miles back to St. Louis. From there he embarked for New Orleans, where he arrived January 13, 1812. From there he set sail for New York--a first leg in his return to England. But before in New York he could complete preparations for the second leg of the trip the War of 1812 broke out. While detained in New York he became acquainted with Governor DeWitt Clinton and acquired membership in the Literary and Philosophical Society of New York. Then before the treaty of peace between England and the United States was finally signed, Bradbury crossed the Alleghenies and traveled to Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Tennessee, and Illinois. Finally he got back to England where his journals were published in 1817 and again in 1819. Shortly after the second publication, Bradbury packed up his family and moved back to America. The Bradburys became permanent residents of St. Louis.

¹The basic information in this chapter is from M. K. Hobb's journal *John and Sarah Bradbury Coons and Their Descendants*, published in 1939; and from John Bradbury's *Travels in the Interior of America* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966).

BRADBURY'S JOURNALS

Reuben Gold Thwaites, of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, in his republishing of the Bradbury journals in 1904, stated that "Next to the Lewis and Clark's journals we have no better ethnological authority for the Western Indians of this period, than Bradbury."²

Bradbury's book was over three hundred and fifty pages long. The following are a few excerpts of little ethnological importance, but fun:

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

April 7 - Pursued by a bear.

April 19 - Nearly bitten by a rattlesnake.

April 28 - Reached the Platte River.

May 23 - Captured by Ponca Indians...amused them with pocket compass and escaped.

June 8 - Passed the Cheyenne River.

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

June 14 - A Ponca brave [wanted me] to marry his sister.

June 22 - Saw seventeen herds of buffalo, estimated their number at over 10,000.

June 28 - On crossing the Knife River [North Dakota] in a canoe, was splashed by Indian girl swimmers...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 me for planting and preserving] species of plant life.

July 29 - Arrived back in St. Louis on Sunday.

Now for a few excerpts of real ethnological importance. First, just three of the extensive reports he made concerning American Indians:

April 8, 1810:
The Osages are
so tall and
robust as
almost to
warrant the
application of
the term
gigantic: few of
them appear to
be under six
feet... Their

²R. G. Thwaites published, *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, Volume V of which is entitled *Bradbury's Travels in the Interior of America, 1809-1811*. Also, Washington Irving used and refers to Bradbury's Travels in his *Astoria: Anecdotes of an Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains*. See Hobbs, *Ibid.*, p.8.

shoulders and
visages are
broad which
t e n d s t o
strengthen the
idea of their
being giants.³

In his May 13, 1810 account, Bradbury reports on meeting the Sioux chief Big Elk. Bradbury then quotes funeral oration made by this chief at the death of another Missouri territory chief named Black Buffalo who had been killed by American soldiers. The following are a few of Chief Big Elk's words that suggest not only the capacity of the speaker, but the sensitivity of the Scotch-English-American botanist who carefully preserved them.

Do not grieve--misfortunes will happen to the wisest and best men. Death will come, and always comes out of season--it is the command of the Great Spirit, and all nations and people must obey. What is past, and cannot be prevented, should not be grieved for. Be not discouraged or displeased then, that in visiting your father here, you have lost your chief...Misfortunes do not flourish particularly in our path--they grow everywhere...

Bradbury, out of an Anglo-saxon, Christian world, admittedly did not understand the Indian religion, but he spoke respectfully regarding that different religion. In his July 11, 1810, report he said:

They have a sacred lodge in the center of the largest village. This is called the Medicine lodge . . . no blood is on any account whatsoever to be spilled within it, not even that of an enemy; nor is any one having taken refuge there, to be forced from it. This lodge is also the general place of deposit for such things as they devote to the Father of life...

There is nothing relative to the Indians so difficult to understand as their religion. They believe in a Supreme Being, in a future state, and in supernatural agency. Of the Great Spirit they do not pretend to give any account, but believe him to be the author and giver of all good. They believe in bad spirits, but seem to consider them rather as little wicked beings, who can only gratify their malignity by driving away the game, preventing the efficacy of medicine, or such petty mischief.

It Just So Happened that Bradbury, wherever he went among the Indians, was identified by the religious medicine men as being a medicine man, after all he was forever collecting plants--the basic ingredients in medicine man profession. Thousands of Bradbury's plants, we are informed, got to England

³John Bradbury, *Travels...*, University Microfilms, Inc. publication, p. 42.

and flourished there--just as plants, not medicine. Oh, well.

It was not just Indians that Bradbury observed with appreciation, but ordinary everyday Americans also. In a section of his book entitled "Remarks on The States of Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana" he writes:

The Americans in general are accused by travelers of being inquisitive. If this be a crime, the western people are guilty; but for my part I must say that it is a practice that I never was disposed to complain of, because I always found them as ready to answer a question as to ask one, and therefore I always came off a gainer by this kind of barter...I feel myself bound by gratitude and regard to truth to speak of their hospitality. My travels through the inhabited parts of the United States, not less than 2000 miles, were through parts where there were no taverns, and where a traveller is under the necessity of appealing to the hospitality of the inhabitants. In no one instance has my appeal been fruitless, although in many cases the furnishing of a bed has been evidently attended with inconvenience, and in a great many instances no remuneration would be received...In respect to their moral character, my experience reaches chiefly to the western, middle, and some of the southern states. In the western states, I noticed that very few houses in which I slept had either locks or bolts on the doors, and that the jails were in general without a single tenant.

Unfortunately times do change, John. You can get a motel every place now, but you had better lock the door, and question which parts of town, if any, are safe to visit.

THE BRADBURY-COONS CONNECTION

Among the family that Bradbury moved to America in 1819 was a daughter named Sarah, born in Macclesfield, England, November 25, 1800. Concerning Sarah, Hobbs writes,⁴ "Sarah was a remarkable woman. Her pioneer spirit, her courage, and her vigor have been made apparent. She was an artist of no mean ability; and even after her marriage executed commissions in painting and in guild for friends in St. Louis."

Sarah was nineteen years old when the family moved to St. Louis, and It Just So Happened that in St. Louis she met a young man. His name was John R. Coons. He too was nineteen years old, born in Lexington, Kentucky, June 24, 1800. His family moved him to St. Louis when he was eight years old [which was just two years before John Bradbury made his first visit to St. Louis.] Now Sarah was in St. Louis and it was time to get married. Sarah Bradbury and John Coons did so August 30, 1821.

John is reported to have been a bright young man who could speak fluently both English and French. His life with Sarah demonstrated that he was a person of frontier vigor and business acumen. In 1927, he accepted

⁴Op. cit., M.K.Hobbs, p.35.

employment as a branch manager of a St. Louis trading company which had recently established a branch in what was called The Upper Lead Mining Region, which was actually in the lower southwest corner of Wisconsin. The business of the company was smelting lead, selling equipment and provisions, and trading with Indians for furs. For the rest of their lives, John and Sarah lived in several places in that mining area of Wisconsin. The mining business was fine. The baby business was also fine. Eventually John and Sarah had ten children. [The last child, named Eliza, was born January 16, 1836. She was Eva Gibson Calloley's mother.] But the Indian relations were not so fine. In 1832, the Sauk and Fox tribes went on the war path in what came to be known as the Black Hawk War. John volunteered his services and before the affair was over he was Major John R. Coons.

Immediately following the Indian affair, John made a move to be financially on his own. In 1833, he applied for a United States mining and smelting grant, put up the \$10,000 bond, and was on his way in private business. As time went by John and Sarah, but especially Sarah, speculated in land. John also opened a department store in a place called Old Belmont, which was the first territorial capital of Wisconsin. In 1836, John was appointed postmaster. The Coons were set up in a growing town, but a legislative decision changed the territorial capital to Madison and Belmont faded. John and Sarah moved again--this time to a town called LaFayette at the mouth of the valley down which ran Potosi Creek. Here they built the first frame house in the Potosi Hollow, "shipping the material from Cincinnati by way of the Ohio, Mississippi and Grant Rivers."⁵ Again, John set up a business: the firm of Coons, Wooley & Company where were sold groceries, dry goods, and liquor.

Things went well until the years 1846-47 when the economy went foul in the United States. The country was devastated with depreciated currency and flooded with "wildcat" bank notes. John and Sarah went broke. Also, life was running out for the two of them. Sarah died March 18, 1851, at age 51. John died July 25, 1852, at age 52.

FROM GREAT-GREAT-GREAT GRANDFATHER BRADBURY TO ME:

John Bradbury had a daughter Sarah.
Sarah married John R. Coons. They had a child named Eliza.
Eliza married William Gibson. They had a child named Eva Sarah.⁶
Eva S. married Theodore Calloley. They had a child named Eva Ruth.
Eva Ruth married William A. Tremmel. They had me.

⁵Ibid., p.33

⁶Born in Potosi, Wisconsin, November 5, 1858.