

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH  
OF

JAMES BRIDGER

MOUNTAINEER  
TRAPPER  
AND  
GUIDE

BY

GEN'L GRENVILLE M. DODGE

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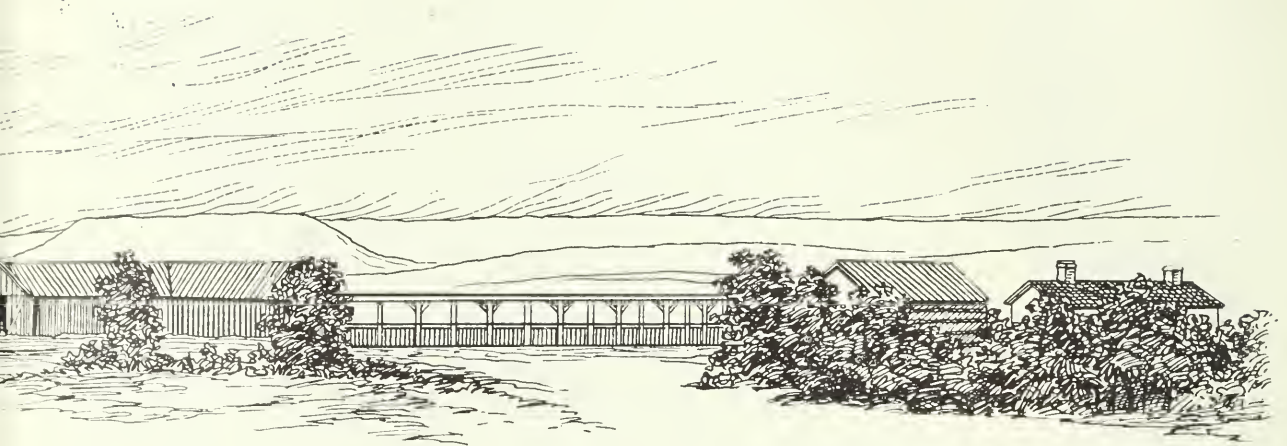
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MAJ. GEN'L GRENVILLE M. DODGE

NEW YORK  
UNZ & COMPANY  
1905



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JAMES BRIDGER







MONUMENT TO JAMES BRIDGER, ERECTED  
AT MOUNT WASHINGTON CEMETARY, KANSAS CITY, MO.  
UNVEILED DEC. 11TH, 1904.



## PREFACE

I was induced to erect this monument to James Bridger, and write a brief biographical sketch of his life from the fact that most of the noted mountain men of his day have had their lives written up, while he, the most distinguished of them all, seems to have been neglected. I have waited a long time thinking that some of the noted writers who have made a study of the history of the country west of the Missouri River, and who have necessarily found much data relating to Bridger, would write a full history of his life, but I learned two or three years ago that after he returned from the Plains he had died and been buried on his farm, and that his grave was neglected and almost forgotten. Through the efforts of Captain John B. Colton, the Mount Washington Cemetery Company of Kansas City donated a beautiful and prominent burial site, and Captain Colton moved Bridger's remains to it. During the last year the monument was constructed under my direction by Mr. M. H. Rice, of Kansas City, Mo., and on December 11, 1904 it was unveiled by Bridger's great-granddaughter, Marie Louise Lightle, and my sketch was read at the unveiling by my secretary, Mr. W. N. Jones. I still trust somebody will take up the matter and give us a complete history of Bridger and his mountain comrades, and the remarkable and stirring events of their time. It would be not only interesting reading, but it would add valuable data to the history of our country. Captain Henry M. Chittenden, Corps of Engineers, U. S. Army, in his books entitled "The Yellowstone Park" and "The American Fur Trade" and other United States officers and explorers in their reports upon their explorations in the mountains and on the plains have gathered a great deal of valuable information in relation to Bridger, and this has been of much aid to me in fixing dates and events of which I had no personal knowledge.

Only persons having met these mountain pioneers, and seen their work, can appreciate what they have done for this country, with what ability and industry they pursued their work, and the record of it should be preserved for future generations.

GRENVILLE M. DODGE.



## JAMES BRIDGER

AT this late day it is a very difficult undertaking to attempt to write a connected history of a man who spent a long life on the plains and in the mountains, performing deeds and rendering services of inestimable value to this country, but who, withal, was so modest that he has not bequeathed to his descendants one written word concerning the stirring events which filled his active and useful life.

It is both a duty and pleasure to make public such information as I possess and have been able to gather concerning James Bridger, and it is eminently proper and appropriate that this information should be published at the time when his remains are removed to the beautiful spot where they will forever rest, and a simple monument erected that posterity may know something of the remarkable man whose body lies beside it.

James Bridger was born in Richmond, Virginia, March 17, 1804. He was the son of James and Schloe Bridger. The father at one time kept a hotel in Richmond, and also had a large farm in Virginia. In 1812 he migrated to St. Louis and settled on Six Mile Prairie. He was a surveyor, working in St. Louis and Illinois. His business kept him continually from home, and when his wife died in 1816 he was away from home at the time, and three little children were left alone. One, a son, soon died, the second—a daughter, and the third—the subject of this sketch. The father had a sister, who took charge of the children and farm. In the fall of 1817 the father died leaving the two children entirely alone with their aunt on the farm. They were of Scotch descent. Their father's sister married John Tyler, who was afterwards President of the United States, and was, therefore, uncle by marriage to James Bridger.

After the death of his father and mother Bridger had to support himself and sister. He got together money enough to buy a flatboat ferry, and when ten years of age made a living by

running that ferry to St. Louis. When he was thirteen years old he was apprenticed to Phil Cromer to learn the blacksmith's trade. Becoming tired of this, in 1822 he hired out to a party of trappers under General Ashley, who were en route to the mountains. As a boy he was shrewd, had keen faculties of observation, and said when he went with the trappers that the money he earned would go to his sister.

The Rocky Mountain Fur Company was organized by General W. H. Ashley in 1822, and commanded by Andrew Henry. It left St. Louis in April 1822, and it was with this party that Bridger enlisted.

Andrew Henry moved to the mouth of the Yellowstone, going by the Missouri River. They lost one of their boats which was loaded with goods worth \$10,000, and while his land force was moving up parallel with his boats the Indians, under the guise of friendship, obtained his horses. This forced him to halt and build a fort for the winter at the mouth of the Yellowstone, and they trapped and explored in this locality until the spring of 1823.

Ashley, having returned to St. Louis in the fall of 1822, arrived with his second expedition in front of the Aricara villages on May 10, 1823, where he was defeated in battle by the Indians, losing one-half his men, his horses and baggage. He then sent a courier across country to Henry, who went down the Missouri River with his force, and joined Ashley near the mouth of the Cheyenne. The United States forces under General Atkinson were then coming up the Missouri Valley to quell the Indian troubles, and Ashley and Henry expected to remain and meet them, and their party joined this force under Colonel Leavenworth.

After this campaign was over, Henry, with eighty men, including Bridger, moved in August, 1823, to his fort at the mouth of the Yellowstone, and in crossing the country lost two men in a fight with the Indians. He arrived at the fort, August 23, 1823, and found that 22 of his horses had been stolen by the Indians. He abandoned the fort, and moved by the Yellowstone to near the Mouth of the Powder River. Meeting a band of Crows, he purchased 47 horses. He then divided his party, placing one part under Etienne Prevost, a noted trapper and trader. In the autumn of 1823 they moved by the Big Horn and Wind

Rivers to Green River. With this party was Bridger, and no doubt it was this party that late in the fall 1823 discovered the South Pass. The South Pass is the southern end of the Wind River mountains, and all the country there gives down into a level valley until the Medicine Bow range is reached, some one hundred and fifty miles southeast. It forms a natural depression in the divide of the continent, and it is through this depression that the Union Pacific Railroad was built. This depression is a basin, smaller than Salt Lake, but has no water in it. It is known as the Red Desert, and extends about one hundred miles east and west, and sixty or seventy miles north and south. The east and west rims of this basin make two divides of the continent. In those days the South Pass was known to the trappers in the Wind River valley as the southern route.

This party trapped on Wind, Green and other rivers, and in 1823-24 wintered in Cache Valley on Bear River. So far as we have any proof, Bridger was the first man positively known to see Salt Lake. It is claimed that a Spanish Missionary, Friar Escalante, of Santa Fe, visited the lake in 1776. To settle a wager as to the course of Bear River, Bridger followed the stream to Great Salt Lake and found the water salt. He returned to this party and reported what he had learned, and they concluded it was an arm of the Pacific Ocean. In the spring of 1825 four men in skin boats explored the shore line, and found it had no outlet.

Andrew Henry was in charge of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company until the fall of 1824, when Jedediah S. Smith took his place, and remained Ashley's partner until 1826. Ashley sold the Rocky Mountain Fur Company to Smith, Jackson and Sublette in July, 1826. Bridger trapped in the interest of these men until 1829, Christopher Carson being with him this year. The winter of 1829-30 Bridger spent on Powder River with Smith and Jackson, and in April, 1830, went with Smith by the way of Yellowstone to the upper Missouri and to the Judith Basin, and then to yearly rendezvous on Wind River, near the mouth of the Porporgie.

Sublette left St. Louis April 10, 1830, with eighty-one men and ten wagons, with five mules to each wagon, and these were the first wagons to be used over what was known as the Oregon

trail. They reached the Wind River rendezvous on July 16.

On August 4, 1830, Smith, Jackson and Sublette sold out the company to Milton G. Sublette, Henry Frack, John B. Gervais and James Bridger. The new firm was called the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, and under these people was the only time the company operated under its own name. The trappers divided and occupied different sections of the country. Bridger, with Fitzpatrick and Sublette, took two hundred men, went into the Big Horn Basin, crossed the Yellowstone, then north to the great falls of the Missouri, ascended the Missouri to the three forks, went by the Jefferson to the divide, then south several hundred miles to Salt Lake. Here they obtained the furs collected by Peter Skeen Ogden, of the Hudson Bay Company. They then covered the country to the eastward, and reached the valley of Powder River by the first of winter, traveling in all about 1,200 miles. Here they spent the winter. It is probable that during this trip Bridger first saw Yellowstone Lake and Geysers, and he was probably the first fur trader to make known the wonders of Yellowstone Park. He talked to me a great deal about it in the fifties, and his description of it was of such a nature that it was considered to be a great exaggeration, but the development of the park in later years shows that he did not exaggerate its beauties and wonders. Bridger was evidently well acquainted with its wonderful features. Captain Chittenden, in his "The Yellowstone National Park," quotes from Gunnison's "History of the Mormons," giving Bridger's description of the park as follows: "A lake, sixty miles long, cold and pelucid, lies embosomed among high precipitous mountains. On the west side is a sloping plain, several miles wide, with clumps of trees and groves of pines. The ground resounds with the tread of horses. Geysers spout up seventy feet high, with a terrific, hissing noise, at regular intervals. Water falls are sparkling, leaping and thundering down the precipices, and collect in the pools below. The river issues from this lake, and for fifteen miles roars through the perpendicular canon at the outlet. In this section are the 'Great Springs,' so hot that meat is readily cooked in them, and, as they descend on the successive terraces, afford at length delightful baths. On the other side is an acid spring, which gushes out in a river torrent; and below is a cave, which supplies vermilion for the savages in abundance. In this



admirable summary we readily discover the Yellowstone Lake, the Grand Canon, the falls, the geyser basins, the mammoth springs and Cinnebar Mountain.''

Bridger talked about the Yellowstone Lake and its surroundings to everyone he met, and it was not his fault that the country was not explored and better known until in the sixties.

A small lake near the headwaters of the Yellowstone has been named Bridger Lake.

In the spring of 1831 Bridger and Sublette started for the Blackfoot country, where they met a band of the Crows who stole all their horses. Bridger led a party of his men in pursuit and recaptured all these horses as well as taking all the ponies of the Crows.

Fitzpatrick had gone to St. Louis to bring out the winter supplies. Bridger and Sublette followed nearly their previous year's route in their hunting, and in the fall reached the rendezvous on Green River, where they met Gervais and Frack, who were at the head of another party of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company.

After leaving St. Louis Fitzpatrick came out with his supplies by the way of Santa Fe, and was so long in reaching the rendezvous on Green River that Sublette and Bridger returned to the Powder River to winter, and here they first met the competition of the American Fur Company, which finally drove the Rocky Mountain Fur Company out of the business. Fitzpatrick and Frack joined Bridger here on Powder River, but becoming disgusted with the movements of the American Fur Company, under Vandenburg and Dripps, Fitzpatrick and Bridger, with their entire outfit, moved west some four hundred miles to Pierre's Hole, near the forks of the Snake River. In the spring of 1832 they moved up Snake to Salt, up that stream and across to John Day River, up that river to its head, and across to Bear River in the Great Salt Lake Basin. Here they again met the American Fur Company, with Vandenburg and Dripps. They struck off into a different country, and finally rendezvoused again at Pierre's Hole, waiting for the supplies from the States being brought out by William L. Sublette. At their rendezvous concentrated this summer the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, the American Fur Company, under Vandenburg and Dripps: Arthur J. Wyeth with a new party coming mostly from the New

England States, a large number of free traders and trappers and numerous bands of Indians, and here occurred the celebrated battle of Pierre's Hole, with the Gros Ventre Indians, which was one of the hardest battles fought in an early day on the plains, the losses being very heavy.

The battle of Pierre's Hole, or the Teton Basin was fought July 13, 1832. Of the different fur companies and free traders there were present some three hundred men and several hundred Indians of the Nez Perces and Flathead tribes. The Gros Ventres, about one hundred and fifty strong, always hostile to the whites, were returning from a visit to their kindred, the Arapahoes. They carried a British flag captured from Hudson Bay Company trappers.

When the Indians saw the band of trappers, who were some eight miles from the main rendezvous at Pierre's Hole, the Indians made signs of peace, but they were known to be so treacherous that no confidence was placed in their signs. However, Antoine Godin, whose father had been killed by this tribe, and a Flathead chief, whose nation had suffered untold wrongs from them, advanced to meet them. The Gros Ventre chief came forward, and when Godin grasped his hand in friendship the Flathead shot him dead. The Gros Ventres immediately retired to a grove of timber, and commenced piling up logs and intrenching. The trappers sent word to the rendezvous, and when Sublette and Campbell brought reinforcements the battle opened, the trappers charging the Indians and finally tried to burn them out, but did not succeed. The Gros Ventres, through their interpreter, made the trappers believe that a large portion of their tribe, some 800, were attacking their rendezvous. Upon learning this the trappers immediately left for its defense and found the story was a lie, but by this ruse the Indians were able to escape. The whites lost five killed and six wounded. The loss of the Gros Ventres was never fully known. They left nine killed, with twenty-five horses and all their baggage, and admitted a loss of twenty-six warriors. The Indians escaped during the night and effected a junction with their tribe.

In 1832 the American Fur Company, operated by Vandenburg and Dripps, came into the territory of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, which was under Fitzpatrick and Bridger, and undertook to follow their parties, knowing that their trapping

grounds yielded a great many furs. They followed them to the headwaters of the Missouri and down the Jefferson. Frack, Fitzpatrick and Bridger thought they would get rid of them by going right into the Blackfoot nation, which was very hostile. Finally Vandenburg and Dripps located on the Madison Fork on October 14, 1832, and near this place the Blackfeet killed Vandenburg and two of his men, and drove his party out. The Blackfeet also attacked Bridger and his party, and in his "American Fur Traders" Chittenden gives this account of the wounding of Bridger:

"One day they saw a body of Blackfeet in the open plain, though near some rocks which could be resorted to in case of need. They made pacific overtures, which were reciprocated by the whites. A few men advanced from each party, a circle was formed and the pipe of peace was smoked. It is related by Irving that while the ceremony was going on a young Mexican named Loretto, a free trapper accompanying Bridger's band, who had previously ransomed from the Crows a beautiful Blackfoot girl, and made her his wife, was then present looking on. The girl recognized her brother among the Indians. Instantly leaving her infant with Loretto she rushed into her brother's arms, and was recognized with the greatest warmth and affection.

"Bridger now rode forward to where the peace ceremonies were enacting. His rifle lay across his saddle. The Blackfoot chief came forward to meet him. Through some apparent distrust Bridger cocked his rifle as if about to fire. The chief seized the barrel and pushed it downward so that its contents were discharged into the ground. This precipitated a melee. Bridger received two arrow shots in the back, and the chief felled him to the earth with a blow from the gun, which he had wrenched from Bridger's hand. The chief then leaped into Bridger's saddle, and the whole party made for the cover of the rocks, where a desultory fire was kept up for some time. The Indian girl had been carried along with her people, and in spite of her pitiful entreaties was not allowed to return. Loretto, witnessing her grief, seized the child and ran to her, greatly to the amazement of the Indians. He was cautioned to depart if he wanted to save his life, and at his wife's earnest insistence he did so. Sometime afterwards he closed his account with the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and rejoined his wife among her

own people. It is said that he was later employed as an interpreter at the fort below the falls of the Missouri.

One of the arrow heads which Bridger received in his back on this occasion remained there for nearly three years, or until the middle of August, 1835.

At that time Dr. Marcus Whitman was at the rendezvous on Green River en route to Oregon. Bridger was also there, and Dr. Whitman extracted the arrow from his back. The operation was a difficult one, because the arrow was hooked at the point by striking a large bone, and a cartilaginous substance had grown around it. The doctor pursued the operation with great self-possession and perseverance, and his patient manifested equal firmness. The Indians looked on meantime with countenances indicating wonder, and in their own peculiar manner expressed great astonishment when it was extracted. The arrow was of iron and about three inches long."

In the early thirties Bridger discovered "Two Oceans Pass," the most remarkable pass, probably, in the world. It is 8,150 feet above the level of the sea. Its length about one mile, and width nearly the same. From the north a stream comes from the canon and divides in the pass, part following to the Atlantic waters by the Yellowstone and part to the Pacific by the Snake River, the two minor streams bearing the names of Atlantic and Pacific Creeks. A stream also comes from the south and makes the same divergence. Fish by these streams pass from one water to the other. Bridger used to tell the story of this river and fish passing through it, but no one believed it until in later years it was discovered to be true, and it is now one of the curiosities of Yellowstone Park.

The first great highway across the plains was no doubt developed by Bridger, and his trappers and traders, in their travels, as the most feasible route to obtain wood, water and grass. Its avoidance of mountains and difficult streams to cross was soon made patent to them. It was known in an early day as the Overland Trail, and later on as the Oregon Trail. It was established by the natural formation of the country. It was first used by the wild animals, who followed the present trail very closely in their wanderings, especially the buffalo. Next came the Indians, who in their travels followed it as being the most feasible method of crossing from the Missouri River to the mountains. Following

them came the trappers and hunters, then their supply trains, first by pack and later by wagons. The first wheeled vehicle known to have passed over the trail was a six pound cannon taken out by General Ashley to his posts on Utah Lake in the summer of 1826, and the first carts to pass over it were those taken out by Bonneville. Then came the immigration to Oregon, which gave the route the name of the Oregon Trail. Next came the Mormons, and following them the great immigration to California from 1849 on.

In his "American Fur Trade" Captain Chittenden gives this description of the Overland Trail:

"As a highway of travel the Oregon Trail is the most remarkable known to history. Considering that it originated with the spontaneous use of the travelers; that no transit ever located a foot of it; that no level established its grades; that no engineer sought out the fords or built any bridges, or surveyed the mountain passes; that there was no grading to speak of, nor any attempt at metalling the roadbed, and the general good quality of this two thousand miles of highway will seem most extraordinary. Father DeSmet, who was born in Belgium, the home of good roads, pronounced the Oregon Trail one of the finest highways in the world. At the proper season of the year this was undoubtedly true. Before the prairies became too dry, the natural turf formed the best roadway for horses to travel on that has probably ever been known. It was amply hard to sustain traffic, yet soft enough to be easier to the feet even than the most perfect asphalt pavement. Over such a road, winding ribbon-like through the verdant prairies amid the profusion of spring flowers, with grass so plentiful that the animal revelled on its abundance, and game everywhere greeted the hunter's rifle, and, finally, with pure water in the streams, the traveler sped his way with a feeling of joy and exhilaration. But not so when the prairies became dry and parched, the road filled with stifling dust, the stream beds mere dry ravines, or carrying only alkaline waters which could not be used, the game all gone to more hospitable sections, and the summer sun pouring down its heat with torrid intensity. It was then that the Trail became a highway of desolation, strewn with abandoned property, the skeletons of horses, mules and oxen, and, alas! too often, with freshly made mounds and head-boards that told the pitiful tale of sufferings

too great to be endured. If the Trail was the scene of romance, adventure, pleasure and excitement, so it was marked in every mile of its course by human misery, tragedy and death."

The immense travel which in later years passed over the Trail carved it into a deep furrow, often with several wide parallel tracks, making a total width of a hundred feet or more. It was an astonishing spectacle even to white men when seen for the first time.

Captain Reynolds, of the Corps of Engineers, United States Army, tells a good story on himself in this connection.

In the fall of 1859 he came south from the Yellowstone River along the eastern base of the Bighorn Mountains and struck the trail somewhere above the first ford of the North Platte. Before reaching it he innocently asked his guide, Bridger, if there was any danger of their crossing the trail "without seeing it." Bridger answered him only with a look of contemptuous amazement.

It may be easily imagined how great an impression the sight of this road must have made upon the minds of the Indians.

Father DeSmet has recorded some interesting observations upon this point.

In 1851 he traveled in company with a large number of Indians from the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers to Fort Laramie, where a great council was held in that year to form treaties with the several tribes. Most of these Indians had not been in that section before, and were quite unprepared for what they saw. "Our Indian companions," says Father DeSmet, "who had never seen but the narrow hunting paths by which they transport themselves and their lodges, were filled with admiration on seeing this noble highway, which is as smooth as a bare floor swept by the winds, and not a blade of grass can shoot up on it on account of the continual passing. They conceived a high idea of the 'Countless White Nation,' as they express it. They fancied that all had gone over that road, and that an immense void must exist in the land of the rising sun. Their countenances testified evident incredulity when I told them that their exit was in no wise perceived in the land of the whites. They styled the route the 'Great Medicine Road of the Whites.'"

From 1833 to 1840 Bridger conducted trapping parties in the interest of the American Fur Company through the country

west of the Big Horn River, reaching to the Snake, and had many fights with and hairbreadth escapes from hostile Indians.

In 1840 he was associated with Benito Vasquez in charge of an extensive outfit, which they conducted in person until 1843, when Bridger and Vasquez built Fort Bridger, which seems to have terminated Bridger's individual trapping, and his experience as the head of trapping outfits.

In 1842 the Cheyennes and other Indians attacked the Shoshones near the site of Bridger's Fort and got away with the stock. Bridger at the head of the trappers and Snakes followed them, killing many of the Indians, and recapturing part of the stock. However, the Indians got away with several of the horses. On July 8, Mr. Preuss, of Fremont's expedition, met Bridger's party on the North Platte, near the mouth of the Medicine Bow. Writing of this meeting, he says :

"July 8th. Our road to-day was a solitary one. No game made its appearance—not even a buffalo or stray antelope; and nothing occurred to break the monotony until about 5 o'clock, when the caravan made a sudden halt. There was a galloping in of scouts and horsemen from every side—a hurrying to and fro in noisy confusion; rifles were taken from their cover; bullet-pouches examined; in short, there was a cry of 'Indians' heard again. I had become so accustomed to these alarms that now they made but little impression on me; and before I had time to become excited the newcomers were ascertained to be whites. It was a large party of traders and trappers, conducted by Mr. Bridger, a man well known in the history of the country. As the sun was low, and there was a fine grass patch not far ahead, they turned back and encamped for the night with us.

"Mr. Bridger was invited to supper, and, after the tablecloth was removed, we listened with eager interest to an account of their adventures. What they had met we would be likely to encounter; the chances which had befallen them would likely happen to us; and we looked upon their life as a picture of our own. He informed us that the condition of the country had become exceedingly dangerous. The Sioux, who had been badly disposed, had broken out into open hostility, and in the preceding autumn his party had encountered them in a severe engagement, in which a number of lives had been lost on both sides. United with the Cheyenne and Gros Ventre Indians, they were scouring

the upper country in war parties of great force, and were at this time in the neighborhood of the Red Buttes, a famous landmark, which was directly in our path. They had declared war on every living thing which should be found westward of that point, though their main object was to attack a large camp of whites and Snake Indians who had a rendezvous in the Sweet Water Valley. Availing himself of his intimate knowledge of the country, he had reached Laramie by an unusual route through the Black Hills, and avoided coming in contact with any of the scattered parties.

“This gentleman offered his services to accompany us so far as the head of the Sweet Water, but in the absence of our leader, which was deeply regretted by us all, it was impossible for us to enter upon such an arrangement.

Fort Bridger, located in latitude 41 degrees 18 minutes 12 seconds and longitude 110 degrees 18 minutes 38 seconds, is 1,070 miles west of the Missouri River by wagon road, and 886 miles by railroad. Bridger selected this spot on account of its being on the overland emigrant and Mormon trail, whether by the North or South Platte routes, as both come together at or near Bridger

The land on which Fort Bridger is located was obtained by Bridger from the Mexican Government before any of the country was ceded by Mexico to the United States. He lived there in undisputed possession until he leased the property in 1857 to the United States by formal written lease signed by Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston's quartermaster. The rental value was \$600 per year, which was never paid by the Government. After thirty years the Government finally paid Bridger \$6,000 for the improvements on the land, but nothing for the land. A bill is now pending in Congress to pay his estate for the value of the land. The improvements were worth a great deal more money, but after the government took possession it seemed to have virtually ignored the rights of Bridger, building a Military Post known as Fort Bridger on the leased ground.

Bridger's fort occupied a space of perhaps two acres surrounded by a stockade. Timbers were set in the ground and elevated eight or ten feet above the surface. Inside this stockade Bridger had his residence on one side, and his trading post in the corner directly across from it. It had swinging gates in



the centre of the front, through which teams and cattle could be driven safe from Indians and renegade white thieves. He owned a large number of cattle, horses and mules, and his place was so situated that he enjoyed a large trade with the Mormons, gold hunters, mountaineers and Indians.

In a letter Bridger wrote to Pierre Chotau, of St. Louis, on December 10, 1843, he says: "I have established a small fort, with blacksmith shop and a supply of iron, in the road of the immigrants on Black Fork and Green River, which promises fairly. In coming out here they are generally well supplied with money, but by the time they get here they are in need of all kinds of supplies, horses, provisions, smith-work, etc. They bring ready cash from the States, and should I receive the goods ordered will have considerable business in that way with them, and establish trade with the Indians in the neighborhood, who have a good number of beaver among them. The fort is a beautiful location on the Black Fork of Green River, receiving fine, fresh water from the snow on the Uintah range. The streams are alive with mountain trout. It passes the fork in several channels, each lined with trees, kept alive by the moisture of the soil."

It was a veritable oasis in the desert, and its selection showed good judgment on the part of the founder.

In 1856 Bridger had trouble with the Mormons. They threatened him with death and the confiscation of all his property at Fort Bridger, and he was robbed of all his stock, merchandise, and, in fact, of everything he possessed, which he claimed was worth \$100,000. The buildings at the fort were destroyed by fire, and Bridger barely escaped with his life. This brought on what was known as the Utah Expedition, under Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston. Bridger piloted the army out there, taking it through by what is known as the Southern Route, which he had discovered, which runs by the South Platte, up the Lodge Pole, over Cheyenne Pass, by old Fort Halleck, and across the continental divide at Bridger's Pass at the head of the Muddy, follows down Bitter Creek to Green River, crosses that river, and then up Black Fork to Fort Bridger.

As the troops had made no arrangements for winter, and shelter for the stock was not to be found in the vicinity of Salt Lake, Bridger tendered to them the use of Fort Bridger and the adjoining property, which offer was accepted by Johnston, who

wintered his army there. It was at this time that the Government purchased from Bridger his Mexican Grant of Fort Bridger, but, as heretofore mentioned, never paid him for the property, merely agreeing to pay the rental, and claiming that Bridger's title was not perfect. This was a great injustice to Bridger. His title was one of possession. He had established here a trading post that had been of great benefit to the Government and the overland immigration, and he was entitled to all he claimed. The Fort was the rendezvous of all the trade and travel, of the Indians, trappers and voyagers of all that section of the country.

Concerning his claim against the Government, under date of October 27, 1873, Bridger wrote to General B. F. Butler, U. S. Senator as follows:

“ \* \* \* You are probably aware that I am one of the earliest and oldest explorers and trappers of the Great West now alive. Many years prior to the Mexican War, the time Fort Bridger and adjoining territories became the property of the United States, and for ten years thereafter (1857) I was in peaceful possession of my trading post, Fort Bridger, occupied it as such, and resided thereat, a fact well known to the Government, as well as the public in general.

“ Shortly before the so-called Utah Expedition, and before the Government troops under General A. S. Johnston arrived near Salt Lake City, I was robbed and threatened with death by the Mormons, by the direction of Brigham Young, of all my merchandise, stock—in fact everything I possessed amounting to more than \$100,000 worth—the buildings in the fort practically destroyed by fire, and I barely escaped with my life.

“ I was with and piloted the army under said General Johnston out there, and since the approach of winter no convenient shelter for the troops and stock could be found in the vicinity of Salt Lake, I tendered to them my so-called fort (Fort Bridger), with the adjoining shelter, affording rally for winter quarters. My offer being accepted, a written contract was entered into between myself and Captain Dickerson, of the quartermaster's Department, in behalf of the United States, approved by General A. S. Johnston, and more, so signed by various officers on the general's staff such as Major Fitz-John Porter, Drs. Madison, Mills and Bailey, Lieutenant Rich, Colonel Weigh, and others, a copy of which is now on file in the War Department at Washington. I

also was furnished with a copy thereof, which was unfortunately destroyed during the war.

\* \* \* \* \*

“I am now getting old and feeble and am a poor man, and consequently unable to prosecute my claim as it probably should be done. For that reason I respectfully apply to you with the desire of entrusting the matter into your hands, authorizing you, for me, to use such means as you may deem proper for the successful prosecution of this claim. I would further state that I have been strictly loyal during the later rebellion, and during the most of the time in the war in the employ of the Government.

“Trusting confidently that you will do me the favor of taking the matter in hand or furnish me with your advice in the matter, I have the honor, etc.”

On July 4, 1849, Bridger's second wife, a Ute, died. He had been for some time considering the movement of his family to the States, where his children could be educated, intending to devote his own time to the trading post at Fort Bridger. He went to the States in 1850, taking with him his third wife, a Snake woman, and settled upon a little farm near Little Santa Fe, Jackson County, Mo. Bridger usually spent the summers on the plains and went home winters.

In the spring of 1862 Bridger was at his home in Little Santa Fe, when the government called him onto the plains to guide the troops in the Indian campaigns. I found him there when I took command of that country in January, 1865, and placed him as guide of the Eleventh Ohio Cavalry in its march from Fort Riley to Fort Laramie. Bridger remained with them at Fort Laramie as their guide, and took part with them in the many encounters they had with the Indians, and his services to them were invaluable.

In the Indian campaign of 1865-6 Bridger guided General Conner's column that marched from Fort Laramie to Tongue River, and took part in the battle on Tongue River.

Captain H. E. Palmer, Eleventh Kansas Cavalry, Acting Asst. Adjt. Genl. to General P. E. Conner, gives this description of the Indian Camp on Tongue River, August 26, 1865.

“Left Piney Fork at 6.45 a. m. Traveled north over a beautiful country until about 8 a. m., when our advance reached the top of the ridge dividing the waters of the Powder from that of

the Tongue River. I was riding in the extreme advance in company with Major Bridger. We were 2,000 yards at least ahead of the General and his staff; our Pawnee scouts were on each flank and a little in advance; at that time there was no advance guard immediately in front. As the Major and myself reached the top of the hill we voluntarily halted our steeds. I raised my field glass to my eyes and took in the grandest view that I had ever seen. I could see the north end of the Big Horn range, and away beyond the faint outline of the mountains beyond the Yellowstone. Away to the northeast the Wolf Mountain range was distinctly visible. Immediately before us lay the valley of Peneau creek, now called Prairie Dog creek, and beyond the Little Goose, Big Goose and Tongue River valleys, and many other tributary streams. The morning was clear and bright, with not a breath of air stirring. The old Major, sitting upon his horse with his eyes shaded with his hands, had been telling me for an hour or more about his Indian life—his forty years experience on the plains, telling me how to trail Indians and distinguish the tracks of different tribes; how every spear of grass, every tree and shrub and stone was a compass to the experienced trapper and hunter—a subject that I had discussed with him nearly every day. During the winter of 1863 I had contributed to help Mrs. Bridger and the rest of the family, all of which facts the Major had been acquainted with, which induced him to treat me as an old-time friend.

As I lowered my glass the Major said: 'Do you see those ere columns of smoke over yonder?' I replied: 'Where, Major?' to which he answered: 'Over there by that ere saddle,' meaning a depression in the hills not unlike the shape of a saddle, pointing at the same time to a point nearly fifty miles away. I again raised my glasses to my eyes and took a long, earnest look, and for the life of me could not see any column of smoke, even with a strong field glass. The Major was looking without any artificial help. The atmosphere seemed to be slightly hazy in the long distance like smoke, but there was no distinct columns of smoke in sight. As soon as the General and his staff arrived I called his attention to Major Bridger's discovery. The General raised his field glass and scanned the horizon closely. After a long look, he remarked that there were no columns of smoke to be seen. The Major quietly mounted his horse and rode on. I

asked the General to look again as the Major was very confident that he could see columns of smoke, which of course indicated an Indian village. The General made another examination and again asserted that there was no column of smoke. However, to satisfy curiosity and to give our guides no chance to claim that they had shown us an Indian village and we would not attack it, he suggested to Captain Frank North, who was riding with his staff, that he go with seven of his Indians in the direction indicated to reconnoitre and report to us at Peneau Creek or Tongue River, down which we were to march. I galloped on and overtook the Major, and as I came up to him overheard him remark about 'these damn paper collar soldiers telling him there was no columns of smoke. The old man was very indignant at our doubting his ability to outsee us, with the aid of field glasses even. Just after sunset on August 27 two of the Pawnees who went out with Captain North towards Bridger's column of smoke two days previous came into camp with the information that Captain North had discovered an Indian village.'

It was this village that Connor captured the next day, the fight being known as the Battle of Tongue River.

In May, 1869, Captain Reynolds was assigned to the exploration of the country surrounding Yellowstone Park, and I have no doubt it was from hearing of Bridger's knowledge of that park and its surroundings that caused him to engage Bridger for his guide. Bridger was with him about a year and a half, but they failed on this trip to enter the park, being stopped by the heavy snows in the passes, but they explored and mapped the country surrounding the park.

In 1860 Ned Buntline, the great short story romance writer, hunted up Bridger at his home in Weston, and Bridger gave him enough adventures to keep him writing the balance of his life. Bridger took a liking to Buntline, and took him across the plains with him on a scouting trip. After a while Buntline returned to the East, and not long afterwards the Jim Bridger stories commenced to be published. One of these was printed every week and Bridger's companions used to save them up and read them to him. Buntline made Bridger famous, and carried him through more hairbreadth escapes than any man ever had.

Bridger's first wife was the daughter of a Flathead chief. She died in 1846. Her children were Felix and Josephine, both

of whom were sent to school at St. Louis. Felix enlisted in the spring of 1863 in Company I, Second Missouri Artillery, under General Totten. He served throughout the Civil War, and later was with Custer in his Indian campaigns in Texas and Indian Territory. He died in 1876 on the farm near little Santa Fe, Mo., having returned there from Dallas, Texas.

Bridger's second wife was a Ute, who died July 4, 1849, at the birth of her first child, now Mrs. Virginia K. Waschman. Bridger brought this child up on buffalo's milk. When she was 5 years old she was sent to Robert Campbell in St. Louis, and two years later joined her sister Josephine in the convent,

When Virginia was about ten years old she obtained from Mrs. Robert Campbell a daguerreotype of her father which was taken in 1843. She colored or painted this picture, and in 1902 presented it to me, saying: "I am most sure you will be pleased with it as a gift from me, and it will remind you of the great old times that you and father had when you were out in the mountains among the wild Indians. I have often heard my father speak of you, and have wanted to see you and tell you a great many things that happened when I was a child at Fort Bridger. Before my father's death he was very anxious to see you regarding old Fort Bridger, but could not find you."

In 1850 Bridger took as his third wife a Snake woman. He bought a little farm near Santa Fe, Mo., and moved his family there from Fort Bridger that year. Mary was born in 1853. She married and now lives in the Indian Territory. William was born in 1857, and died from consumption in 1892. In 1858 his wife died and was buried in Boone cemetery, near Waldo Station, Mo. Bridger was on the plains at the time of her death, but returned to Missouri in the spring of 1859, soon after he heard of her death, and remained on the farm until 1862. This year he rented the farm to a man named Brooks, and bought the Colonel A. G. Boone house in Westport. He left his family there in charge of a Mr. London and his wife, and on the call of the Government in the spring of 1862 he left for the mountains to guide the troops on the plains. He remained on the plains until late in 1869 or 1870. In the spring of 1871 he moved back to his farm near the little Santa Fe.

Of his life from this time until his death, his daughter, Mrs. Waschman, writes me the following:

“In 1873 father’s health began to fail him, and his eyes were very bad, so that he could not see good, and the only way that father could distinguish any person was by the sound of their voices, but all who had the privilege of knowing him were aware of his wonderful state of health at that time, but later, in 1874, father’s eyesight was leaving him very fast, and this worried him so much. He has often-times wished that he could see you. At times father would get very nervous, and wanted to be on the go. I had to watch after him and lead him around to please him, never still one moment.

“I got father a good old gentle horse, so that he could ride around and to have something to pass away time, so one day he named his old horse ‘Ruff.’ We also had a dog that went with father; he named this old, faithful dog ‘Sultan.’ Sometimes father would call me and say: ‘I wish you would go and saddle old Ruff for me; I feel like riding around the farm,’ and the faithful old dog would go along. Father could not see very well, but the old faithful horse would guide him along, but at times father would draw the lines wrong, and the horse would go wrong, and then they would get lost in the woods. The strange part of it was the old, faithful dog, Sultan, would come home and let us know that father was lost. The dog would bark and whine until I would go out and look for him, and lead him and the old horse home on the main road. Sometimes father wanted to take a walk out to the fields with old Sultan by his side, and cane in hand to guide his way out to the wheat field, would want to know how high the wheat was, and then father would go down on his knees and reach out his hands to feel for the wheat, and that was the way he passed away his time.

“Father at times wished that he could see, and only have his eyesight back again, so that he could go back out to see the mountains. I know he at times would feel lonesome, and long to see some of his old mountain friends to have a good chat of olden times away back in the fifties.

“Father often spoke of you, and would say, ‘I wonder if General Dodge is alive or not; I would give anything in the world if I could see some of the old army officers once more to have a talk with them of olden times, but I know I will not be able to see any of my old-time mountain friends any more. I know that

my time is near. I feel that my health is failing me very fast, and see that I am not the same man I used to be.'''

Bridger was 77 years old when he died, and was buried on the Stubbins Watts farm, a mile north of Dallas, not far south of Westport. His two sons, William and Felix, were buried beside him.

On Bridger's grave-stone is the following:

''James Bridger, born March 17, 1804; died July 17, 1881.

We miss thee in the circle around the fireside,  
We miss thee in devotion at peaceful eventide,  
The memory of your nature so full of truth and love,  
Shall lead our thoughts to seek thee among the blest above.'''

At the time of his death Bridger's home was a long, two story house, not far from where he is buried, with big chimneys at each end. It is now abandoned and dilapidated, with windows all broken. It is about one mile south of Dallas. He had 160 acres of land. No one has lived in the house for years. The neighbors say it is haunted, and will not go near it.

One of his wives is buried in a grave-yard several miles east of his grave.

I found Bridger a very companionable man. In person he was over six feet tall, spare, straight as an arrow, agile, rawboned and of powerful frame, eyes gray, hair brown and abundant even in old age, expression mild and manners agreeable. He was hospitable and generous, and was always trusted and respected. He possessed in a high degree the confidence of the Indians. He was one of the most noted hunters and trappers on the plains. Naturally shrewd, and possessing keen faculties of observation, he carefully studied the habits of all the animals, especially the beaver, and, profiting from the knowledge obtained from the Indians, with whom he chiefly associated, and with whom he became a great favorite, he soon became one of the most expert hunters and trappers in the mountains. The beaver at first abounded in every mountain stream in the country, but, at length, by being constantly pursued, they began to grow more wary and diminish in numbers, until it became necessary for trappers to extend their researches to more distant streams. Eager to gratify his curiosity, and with a natural fondness for



mountain scenery, he traversed the country in every direction, sometimes accompanied by an Indian, but oftener alone. He familiarized himself with every mountain peak, every deep gorge, every hill and every landmark in the country. Having arrived upon the banks of some before undiscovered stream, and finding signs of his favorite game, he would immediately proceed to his traps, and then take his gun and wander over the hills in quest of game, the meat of which formed the only diet of the trapper at that early day. When a stream afforded game it was trapped to its source, and never left as long as beaver could be caught.

While engaged in this thorough system of trapping, no object of interest escaped his scrutiny, and when once known it was ever after remembered. He could describe with the minutest accuracy places that perhaps he had visited but once, and that many years before, and he could travel in almost a direct line from one point to another in the greatest distances, with certainty of always making his goal. He pursued his trapping expeditions north to the British possessions, south far into New Mexico and west to the Pacific Ocean, and in this way became acquainted with all the Indian tribes in the country, and by long intercourse with them learned their languages, and became familiar with all their signs. He adopted their habits, conformed to their customs, became imbued with all their superstitions, and at length excelled them in strategy.

He was great favorite with the Crow nation, and was at one time elected and became their chief.

Bridger was also a great Indian fighter, and I have heard two things said of him by the best plainsmen of this time; that he did not know what fear was, and that he never once lost his bearings, either on the plains or in the mountains.

In those days Bridger was rich. He was at the head of great trapping parties, and two great fur companies—the Rocky Mountain Fur Company and Northwestern Fur Company. When he became older he spent his winters in Westport, and in the summer was a scout and guide for Government troops, getting ten dollars a day in gold.

Unquestionably Bridger's claims to remembrance rest upon the extraordinary part he bore in the explorations of the West. As a guide he was without an equal, and this is the testimony of

everyone who ever employed him. He was a born topographer; the whole West was mapped out in his mind, and such was his instinctive sense of locality and direction that it used to be said of him that he could smell his way where he could not see it. He was a complete master of plains and woodcraft, equal to any emergency, full of resources to overcome any obstacle, and I came to learn gradually how it was that for months such men could live without food except what the country afforded in that wild region. In a few hours they would put together a bull-boat and put us across any stream. Nothing escaped their vision, the dropping of a stick or breaking of a twig, the turning of the growing grass, all brought knowledge to them, and they could tell who or what had done it. A single horse or Indian could not cross the trail but that they discovered it, and could tell how long since they passed. Their methods of hunting game were perfect, and we were never out of meat. Herbs, roots, berries, bark of trees and everything that was edible they knew. They could minister to the sick, dress wounds—in fact in all my experience I never saw Bridger or the other voyagers of the plains and mountains meet any obstacle they could not overcome.

While Bridger was not an educated man, still any country that he had ever seen he could fully and intelligently describe, and could make a very correct estimate of the country surrounding it. He could make a map of any country he had ever traveled over, mark out its streams and mountains and the obstacles in it correctly, so that there was no trouble in following it and fully understanding it. He never claimed knowledge that he did not have of the country, or its history and surroundings, and was positive in his statements in relation to it. He was a good judge of human nature. His comments upon people that he had met and been with were always intelligent and seldom critical. He always spoke of their good parts, and was universally respected by the mountain men, and looked upon as a leader, also by all the Indians. He was careful to never give his word without fulfilling it. He understood thoroughly the Indian character, their peculiarities and superstitions. He felt very keenly any loss of confidence in him or his judgment, especially when acting as guide, and when he struck a country or trail he was not familiar with he would frankly say so, but would often say he could take our party up to the point we wanted to reach.

As a guide I do not think he had his equal upon the plains.

So remarkable a man should not be lost to history and the country, and his work allowed to be forgotten, and for this reason I have compiled this sketch and raised a simple monument to his memory, reciting upon it briefly the principal facts of his life and work. It bears this inscription:

1804—JAMES BRIDGER—1881.

Celebrated as a hunter, trapper, fur trader and guide. Discovered Great Salt Lake 1824, the South Pass 1827. Visited Yellowstone Lake and Geysers 1830. Founded Fort Bridger 1843.

Opened Overland Route by Bridger's Pass to Great Salt Lake. Was guide for U. S. exploring expeditions, Albert Sidney Johnston's army in 1857, and G. M. Dodge in U. P. surveys and Indian campaigns 1865-66.

This monument is erected as a tribute to his pioneer work by Maj. Gen. G. M. Dodge..





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