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Article Summary: Better known as a Wild West showman and partner of Buffalo Bill Cody, DF Powell served as contract surgeon at Fort McPherson from 1873 to 1874. Letters that he wrote for newspaper publication at the time provide colorful details about military expeditions.

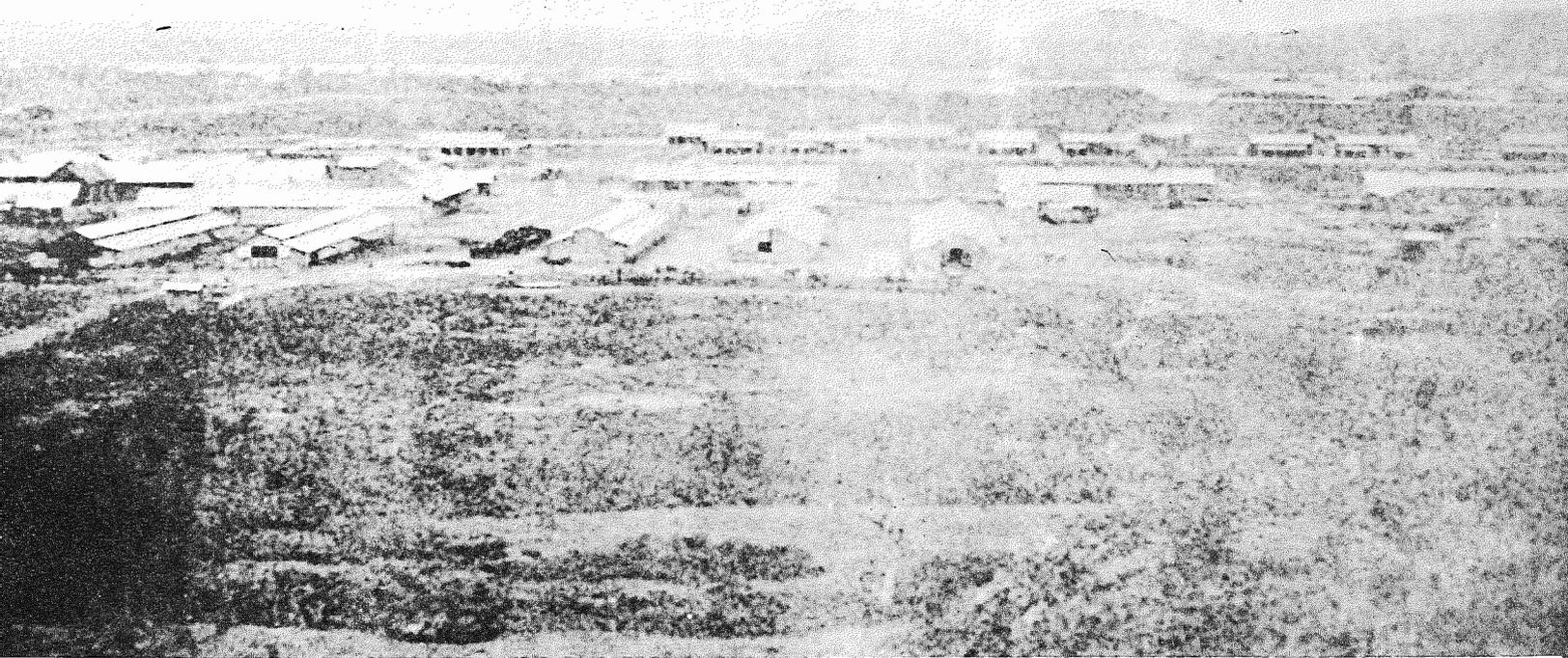
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Photographs / Images: Fort McPherson in the early 1870s (photo by Charles Hendry, a soldier at the fort); Dr David Franklin Powell with William F Cody; Cody in showman's garb about 1873; Scout Leon F Pallardie in 1868



Charles Hendry of North Platte, a soldier at Fort McPherson, photographed the frontier post in the early 1870's.

Dr. David Franklin Powell and Fort McPherson

By PAUL D. RILEY

ONE OF THE MOST noted military posts on the Great Plains was Fort McPherson, Nebraska, located approximately fifteen miles east of North Platte on the south bank of the Platte River. During the years it was in operation, Fort McPherson, like other frontier military posts, attracted an interesting assortment of frontiersmen. Among them were such notable figures as William Frederick (Buffalo Bill) Cody, John Burwell (Texas Jack) Omohundro, Leon Francois (The Wolf) Pallardie, Edward (Iron Legs) Morin, Charles (Dashing Charlie) Emmett, Richard (Bloody Dick) Seymour, William Frank (Doc) Carver and David Franklin (White Beaver) Powell. As far as is known, only Seymour, Morin and Pallardie did not become the heroes of at least one popular dime novel.

Although Dr. David Franklin Powell's later years as a popular Wisconsin doctor, Wild West showman and sometimes speculating partner of Cody are known, his own frontier years are virtually forgotten. Due to dime novels and his own tall tales, all of which have only the vaguest relationship to the truth, Powell's genuine and interesting frontier experiences have been ignored. The only reliable information on his life are two articles written by Mary Hardgrove Heberd, and, unless otherwise noted, the general facts of his life are taken from those articles.¹

David Franklin Powell was born in Kentucky in 1847, the son of Dr. and Mrs. C. H. Powell. The father died in 1855, at which time the mother took her children to live in the East for several years. In the 1860's Mrs. Powell and her children moved to Nebraska Territory, first to Omaha and later to Lone Tree (Central City), Merrick County.

Paul D. Riley, a native of Trenton, is Research Associate at the Nebraska State Historical Society.

The *Omaha City Directory* of July 4, 1868, lists Powell as a druggist with J. K. Ish. In the directory of 1870, however, he is listed as only a clerk with Ish, living at the southeast corner of Jackson and Thirteenth streets. His name is found in no other Omaha city directories, and he could not be found in the Second Ward of Omaha in the 1870 Federal Census.²

Possibly as early as 1869, Powell was awarded a medical scholarship, available to Nebraskans, to the University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky. While earning his degree, he made at least two visits to Nebraska. In January 1871 he was visiting at Fort McPherson, at which time he wrote a letter, published in the *Omaha Daily Herald*, telling of activities at the fort.

During the last week of December 1870, eighty-three head of stock strayed or were stolen from Reuben Wood, post trader at Fort Sedgwick, Colorado Territory, near present Julesburg, Colorado. Wood, with a sergeant and eight enlisted men along with several of his employees, tracked them southwest to Frenchman's Fork of the Republican River. There they were surrounded by seventy-five to one hundred Sioux. They treated with the Indians, gave them a few gifts, and were allowed to leave without having found the stock. The Sioux were probably Spotted Tail's Brule or Whistler's Cut-off Oglala.³ Powell's letter then takes up the story:

Ft. McPherson,

[Wednesday,] Jan. 11, 1871⁴

Reuben Wood, post trader at [Fort] Sedgwick, reached here a few days ago with a telegram from General [Christopher Colon] Augur, asking the commandant of this post to send an escort with him (Wood) into the Indian country to search for eighty-three head of stock which the Sioux had driven off, and Company I [Fifth Cavalry], in command of Major [Gustavus] Urban, was to have started after them this morning, but just after reveille had been sounded the post was thrown into a startle of great excitement by the report that Major Urban had committed suicide, and upon examination the report was found to be true. His wife [Annie] states that he arose as usual at about half past six this morning and soon afterwards she heard the report of a pistol; upon rushing into the parlor she found her husband dead. The deed seemed to have been deliberate, for he had first placed a newspaper under his head, apparently for the purpose of keeping the blood from staining the carpet, and then inserting the muzzle of a Colt's revolver into his mouth, pulled the trigger, and in an instant was dead. The ball entered the roof of his mouth and passed out through

the top of his head. The expedition will probably be delayed until orders can be received from Omaha.

Captain [Alfred Bronaugh] Taylor, will, it is thought, be placed in command, General [Eugene Asa] Carr being sick and he [Captain Taylor] being the senior officer at this post. Buffalo Bill, Rube Wood, Will Greenbrow [or possibly Greenham] and your humble servant, will probably be of great help to the troops (in keeping their extra rations from spoiling). Should anything of importance occur I will report, from the nearest mail or telegraph station, and if, on our return, I can find a fat buffalo calf, I will send you the "hind" quarters.

I killed my first buffalo yesterday, and at once secured his "caudle appendage" as a trophy. Heap big hunter.

P. S. The report has just reached here that John Weister, the Indian hunter, has met with a very serious accident. It seems that while snipe hunting, this morning, his horse threw him and fractured his media-externo-superficial fascia. Doctor Homer Worden is doing all in his power to relieve the sufferer.

The expedition to find Wood's cattle did not leave Fort McPherson until January 24, returning unsuccessfully on February 2. It consisted of Companies H and I, Fifth Cavalry, commanded by Captain William Henry Brown. It is not known if Cody and Powell accompanied it.⁵ Powell returned to Kentucky to continue his education. The following year Powell made another visit to Nebraska, and the following item appeared in the *Omaha Daily Bee* of Friday, July 19, 1872:

Mr. Frank Powell, so well and favorably known in this city, returned last evening from Louisville, where he has been attending the Medical College. His many friends, the number of whom is without limit, will find him at his old place, in Dr. Ish's drug store. He will remain here till September, when he returns to Louisville to graduate at the next term of the Medical College.

Upon his graduation Powell became a "contract" surgeon for the U. S. Army — a civilian who contracted with the government to serve as a military doctor for a specified length of time. Though quartered with the officers, contract surgeons had no military rank, unlike regular army doctors, and they had to give precedence to second lieutenants when it came to such matters as living quarters. As well as serving in post hospitals, army doctors accompanied military expeditions, and Powell wrote at least three letters to the *Omaha Daily Herald* giving account of those he accompanied.

According to Fort McPherson records, Acting Assistant Surgeon Powell arrived there on March 20, 1873, where he took up his duties under the post surgeon, J. H. T. King, Assistant Surgeon U. S. Army. Three weeks later he accompanied his first military expedition to the Upper Republican country of southwestern Nebraska. Indians had stolen one hundred and seventy-one head of horses and mules from the post herd, and they had been unsuccessfully pursued by a small command of soldiers.⁶ Powell accompanied a second expedition, larger and more thorough, commanded by Captain Charles Meinhold with Leon Pallardie as guide. Shortly after leaving the post the command was caught in the famous Easter blizzard of 1873, and Powell's account is a graphic description of the hardships of military life on the Great Plains.

As various bands of Indians made regular hunting trips into the Upper Republican country, troops from Fort McPherson made regular tours through the region to keep track of the Indians and to reassure the settlers who were already taking up land as far west as Red Willow and Hitchcock counties. The frontiersmen were particularly worried at this time, for in December 1872 Whistler, chief of the Cut-off Oglala Sioux, along with Fat Badger and Handsmeller, had been cold-bloodedly murdered by white hunters and trappers—probably Jack Ralston and Mortimer N. (Wild Bill) Kress. Though it was unlikely the Indians would attack settlers at this late a date, the band was still demanding reparation from the government.⁷

An unidentified North Platte resident prefaced Powell's account of the expedition:

North Platte,
[Tuesday,] May 6, 1873⁸

I paid a flying visit to Fort McPherson. Among the officers of the garrison I found many hospitable faces familiar to Omaha eyes. Capt. Meinhold's command had just returned from a twenty days' march up the Republican and Stinking Water rivers. The object of the expedition appears to have been to learn the attitude of the [Cut-off Oglala Sioux] bands of Whistler and Fat Badger toward the whites, consequent upon the murder of those chiefs by renegades last winter. The subjoined account is from the graphic pen of Dr. Frank Powell, [Acting] Post Surgeon of Fort McPherson, who accompanied the expedition, and which that gentleman kindly furnished me for the consumption of HERALD readers.

POWELL'S ACCOUNT.

A detachment [Company B] of the 3rd U.S. Cavalry under the command of Capt. Meinhold, left Fort McPherson, Neb., on Sunday, April 13th for the purpose of recovering, if possible, a number of horses which had been stolen [April 5th] from the settlers in the vicinity of the post, and also to visit the camps of Two Lance and No Flesh, friendly chiefs of the "cut off" [Oglala] band of Sioux. After marching about fifteen miles [east down the Platte], the troops were obliged to halt and seek shelter from a wind and snow storm which suddenly sprang up from the northeast [the Easter Blizzard of 1873]. The troops and horses suffered severely with the cold during the night, and on the following morning resumed their march with the storm [now] beating furiously against their backs, in hopes that shelter might be found further East.

At about 3 o'clock the tents were pitched amidst the ruins of [Benjamin] Gallagher's Ranche on the old California trail, the crumbling adobe walls of the once famous relay station afforded the soldiers some protection from the fierce and cutting blasts which came howling through the camp like a legion of demons.⁹ The tents, though firmly secured to the ground by lariats in addition to the tent cords, when struck by a gale, would crouch like hounds to the earth and then suddenly spring back to place with a force that would cause the canvas to creak and groan as if in agony. For three days the command was obliged to lie in close, covered with blankets to keep from freezing, taking advantage of each lull in the storm to restrap the blankets upon the noble horses which neighed with pleasure at each visit of the troopers. Capt. Meinhold named the place (very appropriately) Camp Damnation.

The storm having ceased, on the morning of [Thursday] the 17th the troops were called to "boots and saddles", and at 3 o'clock Plum Creek was reached, where good grass, water, wood and tenting grounds were found. This place was for years the battle field of the Sioux and Pawnee Indians, and many traces of their ancient wars can still be seen upon the plains and in the ravines for miles around. The grave of Spotted Horse, a once famous Pawnee war chief, is upon the very summit of a high hill, which stands like a sentinel to guard the mouth of the creek.¹⁰

From this place the troops marched in a southwesterly direction over the "divide" which separates the Platte from the Republican river, and camped upon Turkey creek [in present Gosper County], about midway between the two valleys.

This camp, called by the Indians *Wey wesla evah*, is still the summer rendezvous of the Pawnees, and the ground is covered with elk and buffalo skulls, and the Indian delicacy marrow bones which make the place a very Golgotha. An artist would go wild with pride if he could but transfer the wild, beautiful and picturesque scene to canvas which is presented to view when standing upon the hill overhanging the old Tee-pee ground. Two hundred Pawnee warriors under Texas Jack [Omohundro] camped here last summer and the lodge poles are still standing to mark their camping ground.¹¹

The command marched into the valley of the Republican, one of the most beautiful and fertile in America. The bluffs slope gradually down to the waters edge, and even at this early season, are covered with thick green and nutritious grass. The banks of the river are thickly covered with cottonwood, which affords material for the frontier cabins, which stud the green valley from end to end. Noble elms spread wide their branches, as if offering shelter to those who leave their homes in the East for the hardships and perils of the border; and the groves which were but a few years ago the scene of the victorious scalp-dance, now peacefully listen to the prattle of the borderman's babes. After a pleasant trip of several days' duration, the valley was left behind, and with it all vestiges of civilization.¹²

Thousands of buffalo were daily seen, and these fierce yet noble looking animals would allow the troops to come within a few hundred yards of the herd, gazing with wonder upon the intruders, and then, suddenly turning, would dash away at a speed truly wonderful for so bulky an animal. Being in want of fresh meat, a few men were detailed as hunters, and during the first day's march along the White Man's [or Frenchman's] Fork (the north branch of the Republican river), eight of those free bees were killed and thrown into the wagons.

As the command was at this time in the Indian country, and as signal fires were seen further west, the Captain doubled the guard during the night, and every precaution was taken to prevent the redskins from stampeding the stock, in case such an attempt should be made. At [the mouth of] Stinking Water [in Hitchcock County], a bridge was built, in order to shorten the route. While the men were at work upon the bridge, Lieut. [Joseph] Lawson and Pallerday, the scout, accompanied by an escort, went up the stream to the old camp of No Flesh in order to see if the Indians were still there. After a lapse of nearly six hours the party returned with the pleasing information that they had found the Indians.¹³

At five o'clock on the following morning, after hastily breakfasting, the troops were on their way to the Indian village, which was reached in a few hours.

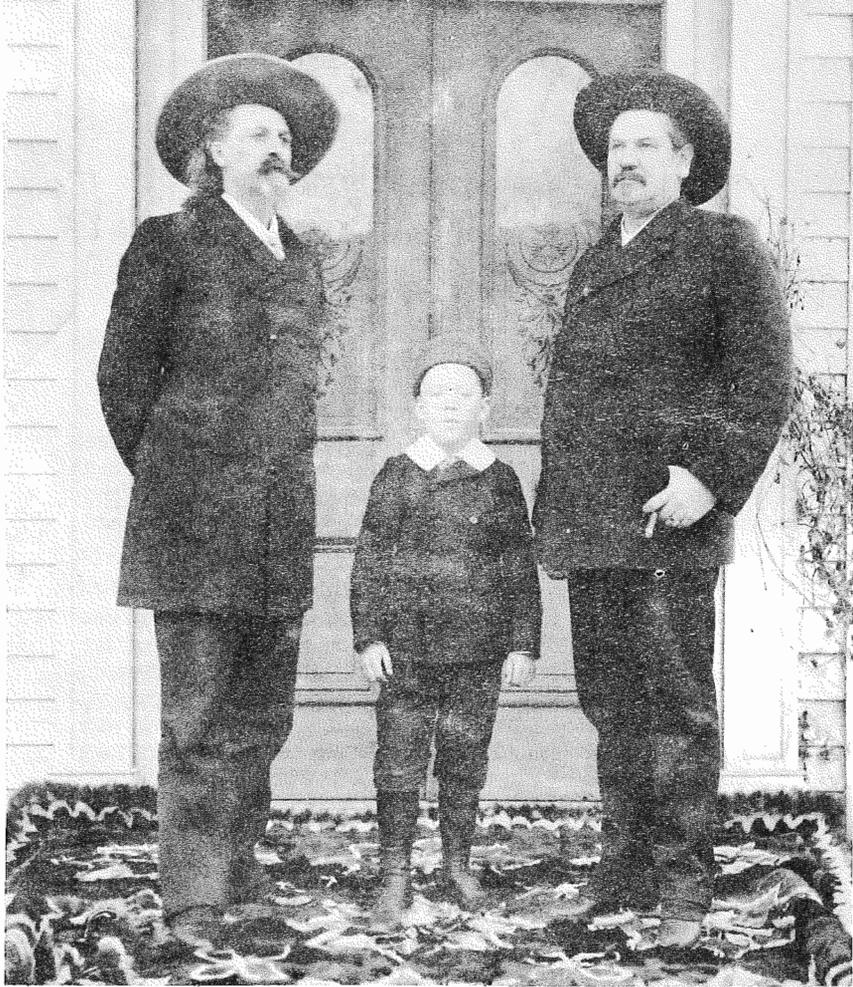
As the soldiers neared the Sioux, a brave, the nephew of "Whistler", the murdered Sioux chief, came within a few hundred yards from the troops and fired a shot from his revolver into the ground as a sign for the whites to halt until their business could be made known. Soon a dozen or more braves came galloping up mounted upon scrawny but tough ponies, and Captain Meinhold told them that he wanted them to send their chiefs to his tent which would soon be pitched upon the "Stinking", near their village.

As soon as they were informed that the officer was ready to talk, Two Lance and a score of braves came into camp in line of battle, and, after dismounting, entered the tent of the commanding officer, where Capt. Meinhold, Lieut. Lawson, Dr. Powell, and Leon Pallarday, the interpreter, were awaiting them. The Indians squatted around the sides of the large wall tent, looking savage and seeming eager to know what the "long knives" wanted of them. In a few terse words Capt. Meinhold informed them that horses had been stolen from the fort by Indians, and asked to be shown all the animals in their possession.

Mr. Pallarday speaks the language as fluently as a red skin, and after interpreting the officer's messages to Two Lance was informed by him that they had stolen no stock from the whites, and would not [in the future] if Gen. [Joseph Jones] Reynolds would give them fifty ponies and two wagon-loads of rations as payment for their murdered chief. After a long talk the troops resumed their march homeward, and reached the fort on the afternoon of [Friday,] May 2d.

Five days later on the 7th, Powell became Acting Post Surgeon at Fort McPherson, due to the reassignment of Assistant Surgeon King. He served in this position until relieved by Acting Assistant Surgeon A. L. Flint on June 30.¹⁴

In the *Omaha Daily Herald* of Thursday, May 15, 1873, there appeared an account of a visit of the Cut-off Oglala chiefs to Fort McPherson, as written by "an accomplished officer in the Army". Though unsigned, it seems likely that Powell was the writer rather than a regular officer, for the account praises the post officers for "the manner in which they discharge their duties". His interest in the cleanliness of the post is also a clue, for as acting post surgeon this would be Powell's responsibility.



About 1890 Dr. David Franklin Powell (right) posed with William F. Cody (left) The boy is unidentified. (Courtesy, Mary H. Heberd)

[May 1873] ¹⁵

No Flesh, Two Lance, Pawnee Killer, and a party of braves visited Fort McPherson Saturday last [May 10th] for the purpose of learning the decision of the government in regard to the fifty ponies they demand in atonement for Whistler, the Sioux chief who was killed last winter by Jack Ralston and a fellow who calls himself Wild Bill [Mortimer N. Kress] — a pair of rascals who deserve the gallows, if one-half said about them be true. Gen. Reynolds, the officer who has charge of this business, is now absent, being a member of the visiting board at the Annapolis Naval School (where he has a son), and no satisfaction could be given the Indians.

There were about one hundred warriors and squaws in the party, all fine-looking, well-dressed, and clean. The Indians

brought a great many buffalo robes with them, which they sold to the traders at North Platte.¹⁶ Pallardy (The Wolf) and [Edward] Moran [correctly Morin] (Iron Legs) the scouts and interpreters, acted as agents for the Indians, and the influence which they have with the Sioux is truly surprising; a word from The Wolf will instantly quell a disturbance among them, and Moran's word is law.¹⁷

The "reds" seemed anxious to procure arms and ammunition, and many an old navy [revolver] was swapped for a robe. Two Lance was attired in an officer's coat, with a pair of old style epaulettes, and strutted about with his blanket down, so as to display them to the best advantage. No Flesh sported a Colonel's shoulder straps, and Eagle Hawk, the adviser to the cut off chief, flourished in a red striped lady's shawl.

The Indians seemed peaceably disposed, and say that they desire to remain at Red Willow [creek] and will not do any mischief if let alone.

Fort McPherson is now being thoroughly policed and [Brevet] Col. [John Van Deusen] DuBois is determined to make it the cleanest post in the department. [Brevet] Major [Alexander] Moore and Lieut. [John Charles] Thompson have just returned to the Fort, and upon their arrival were treated to a choice serenade by the regimental band, at the quarters of the commandant, Col. DuBois.

Capt. [Gerald] Russell and company left on the 12th for a scout through the Republican Valley, and upon their return another company will leave. The government is doing all that it can for the protection of the settlers about here, and the officers deserve credit for the manner in which they discharge their duties.

For this period a personal glimpse of Dr. Powell can be found in the diary of young Acting Assistant Surgeon Thomas G. Maghee, who spent the summer of 1873 in Nebraska, including a short time at Fort McPherson. In an undated late July entry, Dr. Maghee wrote, "Got good Quarters already furnished board with Dr. D. F. Powell. I like him very much only he teases his wife too much. . . . I will attend sick call this morning as Dr. Powell has gone to N[orth]. P[latte]." A few days later, Maghee had changed his opinion of Powell, for he wrote on July 24, "Buffalo Bill & Texas Jack have been here and are now on a Buffalo hunt on the Republican. Dr. Powell is with them I don't think very much of him."¹⁸ At the end of August, Maghee was glad to leave both Dr. Powell and Fort McPherson.

In August, Powell had his major adventure in Nebraska, which was described for and published by the *Omaha Daily Herald* on August 21, 1873. Upon his return to the fort, he quickly dashed off his account. It is closely based on Captain Meinhold's official report, but Powell has added data which makes for more dramatic reading than does the report.

Fort McPherson,
[Sunday,] Aug. 17, '73¹⁹

Company B, 3rd United States Cavalry, under command of Captain Charles Meinhold, left this post on [Wednesday,] July 30 for the purpose of scouting along the Republican river and its tributaries.

Nothing of particular of public interest occurred until [Tuesday,] August 5th, when a party of Pawnees came galloping up to the command near Blackwood [Creek, Hitchcock County], and informed Captain Meinhold that about fifteen hundred well armed and mounted Sioux warriors had attacked the Pawnees between the Republican river and Frenchman's Fork, and had killed about sixty of their braves, women and children. A white man named John Williamson was with them, and also a nephew of [Lester W.] Platt, the Indian trader, but the Sioux did not attempt to injure them, although they had them both in their power.

The Indians seemed completely demoralized and panic stricken for a short time, but, after a brief consultation among themselves, informed the Captain that they would rally their warriors and die with him if necessary if he would help them pursue and fight their enemies.

The officer informed them that he could not do so, but advised them to retreat to Red Willow, twelve miles below, and promised to prevent the Sioux from pursuing them, if possible. The south bank [of the Republican] was by this time covered with the Indians who had made their escape, all anxiously awaiting the result of the conference between the officers and chiefs. Capt. Meinhold's words rapidly crossed the river, and soon the body began to move down as he had suggested. Fighting Bear and Pe-te-lah-sharrow²⁰ remained with the troops, and after the tents had been pitched urgently requested permission to go to the scene of the conflict with the scouting party. Knowing that it would lead to bloodshed in case the Sioux were still there, the Captain judiciously refused, but allowed Mr. [L. B.] Platt to accompany him. We marched nearly twenty miles before reaching the dead.

The canon, where the first object that attracted our attention was the dead body of a squaw, which was the last

killed by the Sioux. We advanced from the mouth of the ravine to its head and found fifty-nine dead Pawnees lying as they had fallen when shot.

It was a horrible sight. Dead braves with bows still tightly grasped in dead and stiffened fingers; suckling infants pinned to their mothers' breasts with arrows; bowels protruding from openings made by fiendish knives; heads scalped with the red blood glazed upon them—a stinking mass, many already fly-blown and scorched with heat.

Not content with their bloody butchery, the devils had outraged the dying squaws, and then killed them with a brutality not to be mentioned in print. A squaw and papoose, still alive, were found in a weed-hidden pool of water, where they crawled after being wounded. They were placed in comfortable positions while the canyon was being examined, but when I returned a short time afterwards I found the child dead with fresh marks upon its head, showing that the squaw had killed it—to save it from pain probably.²¹

Thousands of pounds of jerked beef [dried buffalo meat], hundreds of buffalo, elk, beaver, otter and other furs, saddles, blankets, in fact everything that the band possessed except the few ponies that they were fortunate to save from their foes, was scattered along the canon, showing that the panic caused by the rapid and murderous fire of the Sioux must have been very great.

Upon our return to camp we found the two chiefs still there, anxious to know if any of their party had been saved by the troops. They were furnished with food and blankets, and told to mount their ponies and return as soon as they could with men and pack horses enough to carry away the most valuable goods left in the canon. They did so, promising to return early the next day. They did not do so, however, and after waiting until ten o'clock on the next morning we moved up the Frenchman, and camped upon its north bank about twenty miles distant.²²

From this point Lieut. Lawson with a small party scouted along the stream as far as Stinking Water, where Pallarday, the guide, found signs showing that a war party had recently passed northward towards Ogalalla. Captain Meinhold's scout visited places during this trip over which troops have never before passed, and there are hundreds of acres of good land with living springs, abundant grass and timber which are awaiting the advent of pioneer families.

After his dramatic visit to the battlefield of Massacre Canyon, Powell's last known expedition probably seemed something of an anti-climax, even though it too was described for the press.

Camp on the Beaver [Creek]
[Wednesday,] Sept. 27, 1873²³

Company K [Third Cavalry], Capt. Gerald Russell commanding, left Fort McPherson on [Friday,] the 12th inst., and marched southwest to the rapids of White Man's Fork [present Wauneta, Chase County], where the command camped on a well wooded and grassy bottom. Spotted Tail and his [Brule] Sioux warriors wintered here in 1870. Lodge poles, marrow bones and strips of raw hide are scattered over a large area of ground where the Indian teepees stood, and if civilization advances westward along the Republican Valley with as rapid strides as it did last year this favorite Indian camping ground will soon be covered with wheat and corn, and the frontiersman's children will play under the trees where many Indian braves have been placed after their spirits have gone to the happy land where game is plenty (?) and jerked meat a drug in the market.²⁴

The tree in which Tall Black Bear (who was thirty years ago a powerful Sioux chief) found sepulcher is still standing; a few rotten shreds of red blanket in which he was wrapped is all that remains of *Sappa skee-ree*.

The White Man is the most important branch of the Republican; at this point the stream flows over a rock bed for several miles until it reaches the rapids where it has a perpendicular fall of about eight feet, and would furnish sufficient power for a dozen saw and flour mills. The stream is heavily timbered with elm and cottonwood. The bottom land is wide and very rich from the drainings of the table lands where the buffalo have grazed for centuries. This valley is now deserted by the Indians, and a thousand settlers can find good homes along this ever running stream.

The troops were next marched to the south side of the Republican river, near the mouth of Indian creek [in present Dundy County]; a party of men sent out to hunt returned in a few hours laden with game, nearly all of which was salted or jerked for winter use. A recruit who went among the hills for his first hunt, returned in great trepidation, and informed his companions that he had seen Indians. The commandant sent for the man and requested him to state what he had seen. The excited and trembling trooper informed the captain that while stalking an antelope he had seen two Indians silently moving southward with a horse-buffalo *tan dem*; and that a large body

of horsemen were a few miles in the rear following this mysterious team. Of course this absurd story was not credited, and when an old and well informed soldier, Corporal Heath, returned with the information that he had met and talked with two skirmishers—of whom more will be said presently—the case of John Raw's fright was explained. The tandem was a *shung-ka-wa-kong* [travois], a pack horse dragging two poles loaded with hides; the horsemen were a herd of buffalo. Poor recruit! It will be a long time before his comrades will allow him to forget his first Indian scare.

From the Republican we moved south to a beautiful stream which empties into the Beaver. This stream was named Reynolds' Fork, in honor of Lieutenant [Bainbridge] Reynolds, son of the General of that name, who began his military experience with this expedition. We then moved into Kansas, and on Sunday, the 23, laid over on the Beaver.

Lieut. Reynolds and myself crossed the creek and found some beautiful petrifications and sardonox among the limestone rocks. The Lieutenant, who is a good amateur geologist, is positive there is a fine quality of hard building stone on the south bank of the Beaver, and we found, in many places, indications of coal.

This valley is being fast settled up. The sugar cane grows rank upon the side hills, and many of the settlers have mills and are now making sugar and sorghum syrup.

We followed the Beaver downwards from our Sunday camp, and at about 11 o'clock on Monday [the 25th] passed Cody's Bend, where the Sioux and Pawnees had a fight in 1869. Highland Lisle, our wagon master, was riding beside me humming "Highland Mary", and knowing that he had seen the battle, I asked him to give me an account of it. "Wasn't you along, doctor?" Lisle asked. No, I replied. "Well, you see that clump of timber there? That is where Cody was shot at; Bill was way ahead of the column and old Charlie was well nigh fagged out (Charlie was Cody's favorite horse that was drowned when Major Moore's camp was flooded [on Blackwood Creek, Hitchcock County, May 31, 1873]), for Bill is hard on horse flesh, you know, and I think that Gen. [William Helmsley] Emory was about right when he said that after Bill rode a horse for a month no one but a naturalist or a quartermaster would call it an animal. But, as I was saying, Bill stopped at that time to water old Charlie, and was keeping his "cavallo" company from a flask of tarantala that he always carried along—for snake bites, Bill said—when, *whiz!* a bullet went past Cody's head and struck a tree behind him. Buffalo [Bill] hauled up old Lucretia—that's what he called his gun,



Cody was photographed in showman's garb in New York about 1873 at the beginning of his theatrical career.

you know—fired into a handful of bucks that came yelling down the canyon at full tilt. Bill saw that they were too many for him and he skinned out, you bet. Old Charley made good time and when Cody came within sight of Major [Frank Joshua] North and his Pawnees he yelled *se ree-stocker*, and the way they peeled themselves for a tussel was a caution to the Dutch; saddles, blankets, breech clout—everything goes when an Indian makes a charge, and the Pawnees just went for them Sioux in their natural nakedness, and they cleaned them out too, you're whistling." Did you do any fighting, Lisle? I asked. "No, doctor, I had important business to attend in the wagon train, and besides, I have not lost any Indians myself."²⁵

About a half mile below here we met a party of [buffalo] skinners from Fossil Station on the K[ansas]. P[acific]. road, who were going on a grand buffalo murdering expedition along the Kansas and Nebraska borders. They had good horses and arms, plenty of ammunition, and will undoubtedly make several hundred dollars each and drive out of the country all the game that they do not kill.

The country is swarming with these fellows, and we have seen hundreds of carcasses from which not an ounce of meat

has been taken, all along our trail for the past six days. Two men whom we met stated that they had killed and skinned four hundred buffalo on the two small creeks not twenty miles long, and the divides are marked by the trails of these scamps.

Just think! over a thousand pounds of meat left to rot upon the prairies for every animal skinner, while thousands are meat-hungry or starving, and the price paid for each raw hide is from one dollar to one dollar and a quarter *only*.

I earnestly beg Drs. McClelland and Peabody, Geo. Hoagland, and other gentlemen sportsmen to use their influence in enforcing the game laws of this State, or if none exists, see to it at once that some measure be taken to prevent such slaughter, or every buffalo will be killed or driven from our State. If no more humane plan can be adopted, I would suggest that a party of Pawnees be sent among the skinners with instructions to serve them as they do the buffalo.

Near Wild Turkey we met an old man and his son who had been hunting for nineteen days for enough meat to feed their families upon during the coming winter; but the rascally skinners had been before them wherever they went and they may have to travel over the country for weeks to secure as much meat for their hungry families as the skinning scamps will leave to decay after an hour's run on their trained horses. The old man was out of flour and bread. Capt. Russell kindly supplied him with all the hard bread that he could spare, and the men, after earnestly thanking him, continued their lonely march.

We are now within a day's march of the old stockade [a regularly mentioned but unidentified ruin on the Republican, near the mouth of Medicine Creek], and thus far have seen no Indians. The supposition is that both Sioux and Pawnee will keep away from the scene of the late massacre for a while. If settlers would now move into these beautiful valleys they would be able to fortify themselves against the Indians before they come again, if they ever do—which is doubtful.

On January 30, 1874, Powell received orders relieving him of duty at Fort McPherson, ordering him to report to the post hospital at Camp Stambaugh, Wyoming Territory. Here, in March, he was visited by his old critic, Dr. Maghee, stationed at nearby Camp Brown. On March 12, Maghee wrote, "We found Dr. Powell in Old Keims playing 'Pitch' with a great crowd of roughs. He was rude in not going over with us to his quarters. I wish I had not gone . . . Powell tried to apologize [later] by talking of the corpse he was trying to get at. He and his wife have separated, he accusing her of Crim. Con[duct]. with that young Tyler and



*Scout Leon F. Pallardie
was photographed at
Fort Laramie in 1868.
(Courtesy, Smithsonian
Institution)*

in the same breath tells of his connection with Modoc Lucy prior to his wife's fault. . . . I hear today that Powell is bumming with those bilks at Miners Delight." To the young, refined Dr. Maghee, a strong temperance advocate, Powell was obviously a great libertine and scoundrel.²⁶

Powell remained as contract surgeon for several more years, serving at various posts throughout the Department of the Platte, including Fort Robinson, Nebraska. No other Powell letters have been located, so little is known of his final army years. Returning to civilian life, Powell moved to Wisconsin, which was his home throughout the major portion of his remaining years, though at one time he was living at Cody, Wyoming. For at least one season, he traveled with Buffalo Bill's theatrical company, and later the two men were involved in several real estate developments. He died Monday, May 7, 1906, on a train near El Paso, Texas, where he was going to look after business matters. Though a minor frontier figure, Dr. David Franklin Powell was a colorful one.

NOTES

1. Mary Hardgrove Heberd, "Notes on Dr. David Franklin Powell, Known as 'White Beaver,'" *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, XXXV, No. 4 (Summer 1952), 306-09; "Notes on the Medical Practice of Dr. David Franklin Powell," *Ibid.*, XXXVI, No. 4 (Summer 1953), 188-91.

2. *Collins' Omaha City Directory* (Omaha: Omaha Daily Herald, 1868), 148; J. M. Wolfe, *Omaha Directory* (Omaha: Omaha Daily Herald, 1870), 194; *U. S. Federal Census, 1870 and 1880*. No members of the Powell family are found in the 1870 census for Merrick County, and Dr. Powell is not listed in the Omaha Second Ward, the location of his residence. No members of the Powell family were living in Central City or the immediate outlying precincts in 1880.

3. J. Burgess letter, *Omaha Weekly Herald*, January 11, 1871.

4. *Omaha Weekly Herald*, January 18, 1871.

5. *Post Returns of Fort McPherson, 1863-1880* (National Archives, microfilm), copy on file Nebraska State Historical Society; hereafter cited as *Post Returns*.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Paul D. Riley, editor, "The Red Willow County Letters of Royal Buck, 1872-1873," *Nebraska History*, 47, No. 4 (December 1966), 382. Buck's letters give some additional data on the fears of the settlers regarding the nearness of the Indians.

8. *Omaha Daily Herald*, May 13, 1873.

9. Benjamin Gallagher, as well as having a road ranche, served as post sutler at Fort McPherson during the 1860's for three years. With the foundings of a fortune, he moved to Omaha and became a leading businessman. Paxton & Gallagher for many years was one of the leading wholesale houses in the trans-Missouri west.

10. Spotted Horse, one of several prominent Pawnee by that name, was head chief of the Skidi Pawnee. He was killed by Brule Sioux near Elm Creek on Wood River on August 14, 1862; he was buried two days later at Fort Kearny. In November, 1873, his body was moved to Fort McPherson National Cemetery. To whom Powell is here referring is not clear. RG666, Fort McPherson Records, Nebraska State Historical Society.

11. The exact location of this site in Gosper County has not been located. Omohundro served as trail agent for the Pawnee and Omaha during their summer hunt of 1872, there being over one thousand Indians on this hunt. Herschel C. Logan, *Buckskin and Satin: The True Drama of Texas Jack* (Harrisburg: Stackpole Co., 1954), 59-63; Riley, *op. cit.*, 378-79.

12. The settlement of the Upper Republican country of southwestern Nebraska advanced rapidly in 1872 and 1873. For graphic accounts of this frontier, see Riley, *op. cit.*, 371-79.

13. During the early months of 1873, Pallardie had lived with these Indians on the Stinking Water, trading for furs and buffalo robes, as he had been doing for many years. Born in Missouri in 1831, Pallardie (usually incorrectly spelled Pallardy) reached what is now western Nebraska as early as 1849, where he was employed as a fur trader. He had been a scout, interpreter and free trader at Fort McPherson since 1864. Present Bob Tail Creek, which enters the Frenchman near Palisade, was known as Pallardie Creek in the 1860's and 1870's. Except for the two years that Cody was scout at the post, Pallardie was the main scout and guide. His last years were spent living with the Oglala Sioux on their reservation; he died prior to 1893.

14. *Post Returns*.

15. *Omaha Daily Herald*, May 15, 1873.

16. "For the past few days our streets have been crowded with Indians – members of Whistler's band – who are returning from their annual hunt, on the Republican. They brought many buffalo robes with them, which they immediately traded off at the several stores in town. The red 'cayusses' have the same dirty appearance which has characterized them always, and many of them 'hanker' after whisky as much as ever. . . ." "Cud" letter, North Platte, May 11, *Omaha Daily Republican*, May 15, 1873.

17. Edward Morin (usually incorrectly spelled and pronounced Moran), a native of Canada, was fur trader as early as 1850; he came to the vicinity of what became Fort McPherson in the early 1860's from St. Joseph, Missouri. He worked as a free trader among the Sioux as late as 1875. His daughter, Valentine, was the wife of Pallardie, though they were later divorced, after which she married Joseph F. Fillion of North Platte.

18. Charles Lindsey, editor, "The Diary of Dr. Thomas G. Maghee," *Nebraska History*, XII, No. 3 (July 1929), 264. Cody and Omohundro were in Nebraska for a short visit and buffalo hunt after having spent the winter on the stage in the East. They soon returned to continue their careers as showmen.

19. *Omaha Daily Herald*, August 21, 1873.

20. Powell is in error, as Petalasharo did not go on the hunt. The Pawnee chiefs were Sky Chief (who was killed), Sun Chief, and Fighting Bear. The Sioux chiefs were Little Wound, Two Strikes, and possibly Spotted Tail. For another contemporary description of the battlefield, see Riley, *op. cit.*, 389-91. Buck's letter, written shortly after the battle, is the first known use of the name by which it is still known, the Battle of Massacre Canyon.

21. From other sources it would appear that this is the squaw who was taken by hunters to Indianola, where she died and was buried by settlers. The grave is located on the west edge of town.

22. Samuel Longshore was sent out by the Pawnee Agent in September to recover as much of the goods as possible. He succeeded in bringing back several wagonloads, out the frontiersman of Red Willow and Hitchcock counties collected a great deal for their own use, some of which Longshore recovered. Riley, *op. cit.*, 393.

23. *Omaha Daily Herald*, October 5, 1873.

24. In 1875, George Rowley settled at the Falls of the Frenchman, where he lived with his wife and children until the fall of 1878, when he was killed by the Cheyenne on their way north after escaping from their agency. Except for a few pioneer ranchers, few other whites lived in the area until the middle 1880's.

25. This encounter took place on September 26, 1869; Lisle is somewhat incorrect in his account, as Major North was with Cody at the time of the attack. For an account of that expedition and fight see John R. Fisher, "The Royal and Duncan Pursuits: Aftermath of the Battle of Summit Springs, 1869," *Nebraska History*, 50, No. 3 (Fall 1969), 300-01.

26. Lindsay, *op. cit.*, 286.