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Article Summary: The initial attempt to bring Christianity and "civilization" to the Pawnees ended in failure. Members of the white missionary group, who disagreed about proselytizing methods, converted no Pawnees.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Samuel Parker, Samuel Allis, John Dunbar, John Dougherty, Big Ax, Benedict Satterlee, George B Gaston, Daniel Miller, Lester W Platt, James Mathers, Carolan Mathers, Marcellus Mathers, James Cleghorn, Thomas H Harvey, Jonathan L Bean, Falki

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Photographs / Images: Samuel Allis; Pawnee earthlodge village, 1870s; John Dunbar's 1839 sketch map of the Pawnee homeland; image of John Dunbar preaching to Pawnees (*The Christian Keepsake and Missionary Annual*, 1883 ed); trading post on the Pawnee reserve opened by Lester Platt

THE PAWNEE MISSION

1834 - 1846

By *Richard E. Jensen*

A renewal of evangelistic zeal in the early nineteenth century sent missionaries to the distant corners of the world. Among those caught up in the fervor to save souls for Christianity was Samuel Parker, a middle aged minister from Massachusetts. In 1832 he read a newspaper report about a delegation of Flathead Indians who came from their homes west of the Rocky Mountains to St. Louis for spiritual guidance.¹ The account of the delegates' arduous journey and spurious details about their cranial deformities fired Reverend Parker with missionary enthusiasm. Within a few weeks he offered his services to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions as a missionary to the Flatheads or other tribes west of the Rocky Mountains. The American Board, which had been created by the Presbyterian and Congregational churches to administer their joint missionary efforts, politely refused Parker's proposal on the grounds of his advanced age and dependent family of four.² Parker was not to be denied. He secured financial backing from the First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca, New York, and promises to accompany him from equally inexperienced younger men. With this support the American Board reversed its position and approved a mission in the Oregon country.³

One of Parker's volunteers was Samuel Allis (1805-83), who had exemplary qualifications for the position of a lay missionary. He was young, single, healthy, moderately well-educated, and most important, willing to go. The other member of the



Samuel Allis. (NSHS A438-10)

party was John Dunbar (1804-57), who also had the essential qualifications, except he was midway through his studies for the ministry at Auburn Theological Seminary. The American Board's regulations required that only an ordained minister could be a bona fide missionary. After much reflection the professors at Auburn decided they could ordain Dunbar prematurely because he would be ministering only to Indians.⁴

After hurriedly concluding their preparations the three men traveled to St. Louis, arriving on May 23, 1834. They had planned to accompany a brigade of fur traders across the mountains and were surprised and disappointed to learn the traders had left in April. They tried to hire a guide to take them, but were told that such a journey by a small and inexperienced group was too dangerous. Parker

assured the American Board that "If these statements came from Roman Catholics, or Fur Traders who disregard religion, we should not regard them, but they are from intelligent, experienced, christian men."⁵ Having explored all their options it became apparent a mission in the far west could not be realized during the current year. Rev. David Greene, the administrator of the American Board's Indian missions, was aware that problems might arise and had approved a contingency plan. In the event the party was prevented from reaching the Flatheads a mission to the Pawnees or some other nearby tribe was to be inaugurated.⁶

Parker admitted that "divine providence is pointing us to these tribes" on the plains, but he would not surrender his "strong desire of endeavouring to be instrumental of establishing a mission beyond the Rocky Mountains."⁷ Parker sent his two assistants to the Pawnees, while he returned to New York to plan for a trip to the far west the following year. In 1835 Parker would make a successful crossing of the Rocky Mountains to find a place in history as one of the more famous Oregon missionaries.⁸

The two young missionaries did not entirely support Parker's decision to return to Ithaca and begin again. Writing to Reverend Greene, Dunbar complained that "Mr. Allis and myself could not on the whole approve of this course, though we did not feel ourselves at liberty decidedly to disapprove of it. He acted on his own responsibility."⁹ Parker did not miss this mild reproof when he saw the letter a year later. He assured the American Board they had discussed the situation and everyone had agreed upon the course of

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The Pawnee earthlodge villages that John Dunbar and Samuel Allis visited were little different than this one on the reservation, photographed in the 1870s. (NSHS-1396-45)

action they had taken.¹⁰

In June 1834 Dunbar and Allis continued their westward journey as far as Fort Leavenworth. There they were to await the arrival of Indian Agent John Dougherty, who would take them to his agency at Bellevue.¹¹ They spent three months in the vicinity of the fort, where they visited with several missionaries to eastern tribes recently resettled in the area. These meetings gave Dunbar and Allis their first opportunity to observe the problems encountered by practicing missionaries. They filled their letters with descriptions of people and places, but were as yet unable or unwilling to give their own opinions of missionary endeavors.

By mid-October they were in Bellevue with Dougherty, where the agent distributed annuity goods to the Pawnees as prescribed by the Treaty of 1833. Dougherty then explained to the chiefs of the four bands the reasons for Allis's and Dunbar's presence.¹² The Pawnees immediately invited the missionaries to travel with them on the coming winter buffalo hunt. Big Ax, chief of the Loup band, told the missionaries, "I love the whiteman; the whiteman can not cry in the prairie but I will be there to assist him. I want to know something of the great religion which you have among you; and if any of those people who come to teach us about the Great Spirit, & how to write, will come to my lodge I will see that they shall be nei-

ther cold nor hungry." Then Shah-re-tah-riche, chief of the Grand band, also asked that a missionary accompany him.¹³ The missionaries were undoubtedly flattered and encouraged, but because the bands hunted in different areas they were concerned about being separated for such a long period. Dunbar also worried that "exposures incident to an Indian life would again bring on the ague, and if attacked by it while with them, I did not know how it would terminate." He finally concluded to "trust in the Lord and go forward."¹⁴ Allis was more stoic. After a talk with the agent he accepted the invitation without voicing any reservations.¹⁵ On October 19 they left Bellevue with their new guardians, Dunbar with the Grands and Allis with the Loups. For the next five months their safety and survival would depend upon people whom they categorized as savages.

Dunbar was the guest of Shon-gah-kah-he-gah, the second chief of the Grands. The place of honor went to a trader who was the guest of the first chief. This unidentified trader was fluent in French and Pawnee but unfortunately for Dunbar, he could speak only a few words of English. The Grand band went directly to their big earthlodge village on the Platte and then to the southwest to their hunting range in the Republican River basin.¹⁶ Allis was the guest of the Loup chief, Big Ax. The Loup band returned to its village on the Loup

River and then proceeded westward to hunt near the forks of the Platte River.¹⁷

During the winter Dunbar kept a detailed journal in which he recorded events ranging from everyday occurrences to sacred ceremonies. While his writings are a primary anthropological source they also reveal much about Dunbar himself. His compassion for others is abundantly evident. For example, when some men and horses were caught in a prairie fire, Dunbar's description leaves no doubt that he too felt the pain of the burns and frustration at being unable to alleviate the suffering. His empathy is equalled, however, by a disdain for any custom different from those he practiced. He was outraged when the Indian women came to unsaddle the men's horses. His horse, still skittish around these strangers, shied away from the women and Dunbar concluded that his horse had "a more just sense of propriety in that respect than the Pawnees." He unsaddled the horse himself, probably never considering the embarrassment this caused the women.¹⁸

Samuel Allis's writings reveal a more pragmatic individual. He too discussed the alien customs of the Pawnees but with little condemnation. Early in his journal he noted without comment that "the women camout to onsaddle, & take care of our horses." He was not afraid to express an opinion, however. It was at this

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time that Allis met the Arikaras, distant cousins of the Loups. Allis did not have a high regard for these traveling companions, for they dashed ahead of the Loups to hunt and scattered the buffalo. Allis had probably also been told about their recent attacks on fur traders, for he concluded the Arikaras were so treacherous that there would be "no other way to stop them than to kill them off." He also made another recommendation that must have shocked the American Board. He suggested "that a Missionary that was going among the wondering tribes, would in some cases be more useful to Marry one of their women, than to live a single life... a man married to one of there women would have many advantages over a single man, and I think would have more influence."¹⁹

At the conclusion of the winter hunt, the missionaries spent two months in Bellevue. On June 20, 1835, they left on the Pawnees' summer hunt, Dunbar going again with the Grands and Allis with the Loups. They would remain with their respective bands almost continuously for the next year. Because their assignment had been to establish a permanent mission station, the American Board expressed some concern about these extensive travels. The missionaries explained it was time well spent, for it gave them the opportunity to learn the difficult Pawnee language and gain an understanding of "Indian character."

After nearly two years with the Pawnees the missionaries felt sufficiently confident to offer their opinions on certain missionary matters, including one that had created dissension in the highest levels of the Protestant clergy. Allis concluded "that Missionaries have, and still er, by going among Indians, and commence preaching to them (without any experience or knowledge of Indian character,) thrue interpreters without knowing whether they interpret the truth or not." More important, both men believed that before Indians could acquire any more than the rudiments of Presbyterianism "they ought to be taught the art of civelization, and to cultivate the

soil."²⁰ Thus the missionaries aligned themselves squarely with those who believed that conversion to Christianity could not occur until the Indians rejected their traditional lifestyle and at least began to dress and act like solid New England farmers. Those who opposed this view argued that the first duty of the missionary was the conversion of the non-Christian because "civilization" was an outgrowth of Christianity. These differing views would become a major source of discord within the Pawnee mission when new members were added and it became a settled community in the Pawnee country.

In 1836, however, prospects for the future still seemed especially bright. Despite his early fears Dunbar wrote, "The Pawnees have treated us very kindly since we have lived with them. We feel safe under their protection." He had begun preaching the gospel but only "in a private manner without formality" because he felt he lacked a sufficient command of the language to express himself with precision.²¹ Allis expressed the excessively optimistic expectation that "Although the progress is slow I hope to see them in my day enquireing what they shall do to be saved."²²

In the spring the missionaries received good news. Dr. and Mrs. Benedict Satterlee, accompanied by Emeline Palmer, were coming to join the mission. Allis met them in Liberty, Missouri, in April 1836. Just before leaving for the West Allis had undertaken a search for a woman willing to be his wife. Miss Palmer had agreed, but they were not married until their reunion in Liberty. The happy event was marred by the death of Mrs. Satterlee a few days later.²³

The party pushed on up the Missouri River in time for Dunbar and the doctor to go on the summer hunt with the Grands. Allis and his bride remained in Bellevue and raised what crops they could to minimize the expenses of the mission. In late fall Satterlee accompanied the Pawnees on the winter hunt. Dunbar returned to New York to wed his fiance of three years, Esther Smith, and together they returned to Bellevue in the spring.²⁴

While the missionaries were able to view the future with enthusiasm, their fate depended to a large extent upon the fortunes of the Pawnees. In 1833 the Indians had signed a treaty with the government ceding rights to land south of the Platte River in exchange for annuities in the form of money and goods. They were also promised that teachers, farmers, and blacksmiths would be employed by the Office of Indian Affairs and sent to live among them so the Indians could learn the ways of the white people.²⁵ The government, as well as the missionary societies, supported this plan for it was generally believed the Indians' only chance for survival was the adoption of white ways and eventual assimilation into the dominant society. The Pawnees welcomed these whites because they could provide much valued service for the tribe, but the Indians had no intention of changing their customs or their lifestyle. The white visitors never seemed able to comprehend the tenacity with which the Pawnees would cling to their own culture.

Hopes for the religious and secular conversion of the Pawnees were thwarted for a time because the treaty stipulated that Indian office employees would not be sent "until said tribes shall locate themselves in convenient agricultural districts, and remain in these districts the whole year, so as to give protection" to the whites. For generations the Pawnees had lived in "agricultural districts" so this part of the treaty had been fulfilled. The real problem lay in the clause that required the Pawnees "to remain in these districts the whole year." Although the Pawnees cultivated extensive fields of corn and a few other crops, buffalo hunting was still necessary to their survival. The American Board used its considerable influence to have the clause loosely interpreted so government programs to "civilize" the Indians could begin immediately and augment the board's missionaries. The Indian office not only agreed with the American Board, but asked them to recommend suitable candidates for the positions.²⁶ The Office of Indian Affairs frequently looked to missionary societies to provide these

employees in the belief that those with a missionary bent would be more concerned about the “betterment” of the Indians and less about a handsome salary. Thus the office’s employees were drawn from people with a desire to Christianize the Indians who probably considered themselves missionaries first and government employees second.

During the 1830s grave changes were beginning to surface in the Pawnee world that added to the difficulties the missionaries faced. For many generations the Pawnees had sufficient military power to keep their enemies at bay, but a combination of factors began to force them into retreat. Smallpox decimated the tribe, turning their earthlodge villages into pestholes where the dead and dying were abandoned by the terrified survivors. At about this time eastern tribes were being moved to present Kansas, encroaching on the Pawnees’ traditional hunting grounds and putting great strain on the once abundant buffalo herds. Most of these newcomers would become enemies of the Pawnees.

While the Pawnee power base was shrinking, their old enemies, the Lakota, were gaining strength and soon they were making successful attacks on the Pawnee villages.²⁷ The winter of 1837-38 was especially bitter and many of the Pawnees’ horses died during the winter hunt, which resulted in failure. Early in the spring the destitute Pawnees again contracted smallpox from some Lakotas held captive in the Loup village, and the disease quickly rampaged through the other villages. In a last ditch attempt to reverse their fortunes some of the Loups staged a religious offering to the Morning Star, which centered on a human sacrifice.²⁸

In the spring of 1837 the mission received a severe blow when Dr. Satterlee disappeared. He had gone with some Pawnees to make peace with the Cheyenne and was returning to the Grand village accompanied by two Pawnees. When his horse went lame about seventy miles from the village, the doctor told the Indians to go on ahead. Satterlee was never seen again. The two Pawnees were not suspected of foul play, for Dunbar and

Indian Agent Dougherty both believed the doctor died of illness or exposure. A year later, however, Dunbar changed his mind claiming the doctor had been killed by “a big doublefisted, savage” fur trapper, whom he believed was later killed by other trappers.²⁹

Whatever the cause of Satterlee’s death, the loss of the doctor was a crippling blow to the mission, and there seemed little likelihood that it would regain its initial vigor and hope. Dunbar and Allis settled in Bellevue, where both had growing familial responsibilities that made traveling with the Pawnees impossible. Reinforcements from the American Board would have freed the men from some of the farm work necessary to support themselves, but none seemed likely to be forthcoming. A general financial depression was sweeping the East, which was probably the cause of the American Board’s shortage of funds for enlarging its missions.

The lack of money was also being felt by the missionaries already in the field. In the summer of 1836 Allis applied to Agent Dougherty for a job as a farmer for the Pawnees. The \$400 annual salary would have been welcome financial relief, but Allis was not hired. His application, however, created a temporary rift between Dunbar and Allis, which seems to have been about the only misunderstanding between them. When Dunbar learned of the request he complained that “Since that time I have not enjoyed his cordial cooperation as a missionary.”³⁰ The American Board was even less supportive for they felt such a move constituted a retirement from the mission. Allis responded with an impassioned plea that he wanted to remain with the mission and his entreaty apparently satisfied everyone.³¹

Dunbar had also been considering outside employment, but he was more circumspect in his negotiations. In 1838 he was offered, but did not accept, employment as a teacher at the Pottowatomi agency, which had just been established across the river from Bellevue. A year later Dunbar discussed a teaching position

with the agent at Bellevue. No further action was taken and Dunbar avoided the recrimination Allis had faced.³²

In May 1837 Allis expressed the increasingly disheartened attitude of the missionaries when he wrote, “There are so many difficulties, and hinderances at present, among [the] Indians, the prospect of introducing christianity among them at present is rather discouraging. . . it is a mistaken idea that many christians have at the present time, thinking that nations of Indians are to be born to God in a day. . . I believe that many years will pass first.”³³ At this time there were still many Christians who believed that the power of their God and the Bible could bring about conversions with little effort on the part of human intermediaries. Three years earlier Allis was probably of this opinion, but by 1837 he and Dunbar were beginning to realize the enormity of their undertaking.

In the spring of 1838 Dunbar received a letter from the American Board that nearly ended the Pawnee mission. Apparently the board had abandoned hope for a permanent mission and ordered Dunbar to join William Gray, who was on his way to the mission in Oregon. When the letter containing the orders finally arrived Gray was already two hundred miles or more west of Bellevue. Dunbar wrote the American Board to explain what had happened, and also expressed his wish to remain where he was. To emphasize his concerns about a possible abandonment he pointed out that Catholic, Baptist, and Methodist missionaries were lurking about and would quickly take over the Pawnees if the American Board deserted them.³⁴ This warning had the desired effect because there was no further correspondence about “abandoning” the Pawnees.

Finally, in May 1840 reinforcements did arrive. George B. Gaston, his wife, and family reached Bellevue on the twenty-sixth from Oberlin, Ohio. Within six months theological and personal differences began to drive a wedge between the Gastons and Dunbar and Allis. In a letter to Reverend Greene, Dunbar expressed his reservations about the rein-

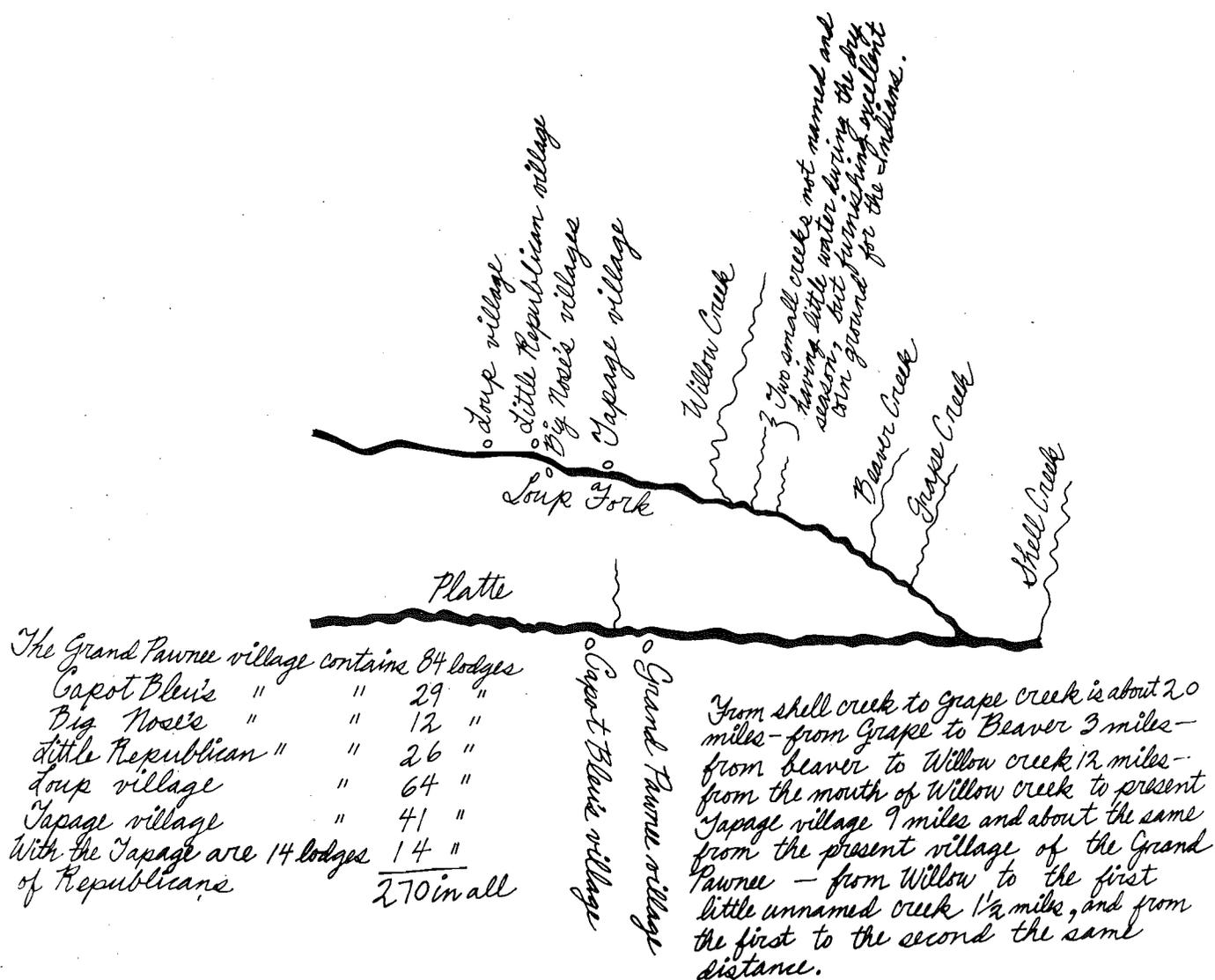
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forcements based upon their "Oberlin peculiarities," a set of religious opinions that differed from his own. Gaston, in turn, suggested to the American Board of "our need of a *Spiritual* man as a Missionary" to instruct the Indians in addition to lay missionaries. Although he mentioned no one by name, his remarks were clearly aimed at Dunbar and Allis. He also openly criticized both men for devoting time to the care of a herd of cattle that Gaston believed was unnecessarily large.³⁵ He either

ignored or was unaware that farming had been the missionaries' primary means of livelihood for the past three years.

Dunbar and Allis had now been with the Pawnees for over six years and were more than a little impatient for the Indians to show an inclination to settle permanently so the missionaries could leave Bellevue and build a mission station at one of the Pawnee villages. Finally, discussions with the Grand and Tappage chiefs led the missionaries to believe that

the Indians were ready to settle. With this encouragement, in the spring of 1841 Dunbar and Allis packed their meager belongings and moved their families to Plum Creek, a small tributary of the Loup River in the heart of Pawnee country. Although none of the Indians would build a village nearby for some time, the whites kept busy with the pressing matters of survival during the first year. The little community of fifteen people included the missionary families and two hired men. They built



John Dunbar's 1839 sketch map of the Pawnee homeland.

rude log cabins, planted crops, and tended livestock.³⁶

Under the loose interpretation of the Treaty of 1833 the Office of Indian Affairs began to initiate the promised government programs. Farmers and other personnel were sent to the Pawnees without requiring the Indians to give up hunting. A new agent, Daniel Miller, was appointed, and in May 1842 he hired his staff. George Gaston was employed as a farmer as was George W. Woodcock, one of Dunbar's hired men who had helped with the move to Plum Creek. The other two farmers were James Mathers and his son, Carolan, who had just recently arrived from Will County, Illinois, with the recommendation of the American Board. Allis was hired as a teacher; when Lester W. Platt arrived from the East some months later, he too was given a teaching job. Two blacksmiths and strikers were also employed. With these additions the white community with the Pawnees swelled to at least thirty men, women, and children.³⁷ Because of their experience the agent turned to Dunbar and Allis for assistance in guiding his new employees.³⁸

The agent made his first visit to the villages in April 1842, where he discovered a keg of whiskey belonging to Peter A. Sarpy, trader to the Pawnees. Bringing whiskey into Indian country was against the law, and Miller destroyed the contraband.³⁹ This act assured him of the initial support of the missionaries. It was not long before this early cordial relationship disappeared as the agent became embroiled in the religious politics of the white community on Plum Creek.

The differing philosophies, backgrounds, and temperaments of the people in the community naturally contained seeds of discord, but in most circumstances the disparity would not have impaired the community's working relationship. On Plum Creek, however, the differences were magnified, at least in part due to the community's isolation and the frustrations of the task its members had undertaken. The differences would ultimately divide the community into two belligerent factions.



This fanciful depiction from an 1838 edition of *The Christian Keepsake and Missionary Annual* shows Rev. John Dunbar preaching to Pawnees. It is obvious the artist had never seen a Pawnee Indian or the Loup River Valley.

In the fall of 1842 George Gaston wrote a series of letters to the American Board claiming Dunbar was ignoring his missionary duties while his time was "devoted to raising corn & potatoes [and] takeing care of his cattle."⁴⁰ When Dunbar received word of these charges, he admitted that his "time has been too much taken up with things of the world." He explained that the Indians were destitute as a result of a bad winter hunt and felt his time was better spent helping the Pawnees raise a crop to avoid starvation than in preaching the gospel.⁴¹

A more deep-seated division among the whites arose over the methods to be adopted in dealing with the Pawnees. A goal of the mission, as well as that of the agency employees, was to teach the Indians manners and customs then practiced by Christian whites. Dunbar and Allis were united in their belief that the Pawnees could not be bullied into becoming farmers and that their conversion to Christianity would require many years. As Dunbar expressed it the Indians "may be

led by a hair but they will not be... driven with a whip."⁴²

The newer members of the community, especially the Platt and Mathers families, were impatient for results. They believed forceful methods, even an occasional whipping, were justified in compelling the Pawnees to accept the white man's rules of conduct. Dunbar described this stern approach as the "driving principle."⁴³ This difference of opinion sparked accusations of brutality and incompetence until Agent Miller felt compelled to intervene. In April 1844 he came to Plum Creek to investigate and reported to the superintendent of Indian affairs in St. Louis that he "found a most ruinous state of things existing amongst the little picked community of Christians. . . . A difference of sentiment seems to have brought about irreconcilable feelings amongst the men at this unfortunate station, in which most, if not all, have taken sides."⁴⁴ The division was so pronounced even outsiders noticed it. Not long after the agent's visit an army expedition under

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Major Clifton Wharton passed through the Pawnee towns and the minister accompanying the troop wrote, "We found an unhappy state of affairs among the missionaries at this village. Small as their number is, they are divided into two factions, as are the Indians also."⁴⁵ If anyone ever bothered to consult the Pawnees on the "ruinous state of things" their thoughts were never recorded.

Agent Miller also took sides, for he would become an outspoken advocate of the "driving principle." In the fall he returned again to assess the situation. Miller placed much of the blame for the division in the community on Dunbar because of the missionary's reluctance to pressure the Indians into adopting white ways. The agent called a meeting with his employees and the Pawnees. He told them that a white person should whip an Indian for certain offenses and if the Indian complained he should be whipped again by the chiefs. Although Miller gave his employees a great deal of latitude for inflicting the whippings, he said he would tolerate this kind of punishment "only in cases where it may have a tendency to improve the Indians."⁴⁶ Again no one bothered to record the Pawnees' opinions on this matter.

In mid-December Miller returned once again to the settlement with orders from the superintendent of Indian affairs, Thomas H. Harvey, to take testimony from everyone "touching on unhappy state of things as existing at the Pawnee mission."⁴⁷ This investigation precipitated a new flood of accusations from both factions of the now irrevocably divided camp. Each group naturally claimed to have the best interests of the Indians at heart and lashed out against the other in the most derogatory terms. Charges included flogging Indians, buying sexual favors, shooting Indians' dogs, and shooting at the Indians themselves. One nearly fatal incident occurred in late summer, when Carolan Mathers shot and seriously wounded an Indian who was taking corn from the Mathers's field. The most common accusation the two factions hurled at one another was threatening Indians in

some manner. Even Reverend Dunbar was accused of shooting over the heads of Indians who were in his fields supposedly stealing corn. He neither affirmed nor denied the charges, preferring instead to remain entirely aloof from the proceedings.⁴⁸ Allis was similarly accused and lashed out with his own denials and accusations. If the charges against the two were true, the Indians seemed to have forgiven them because Dunbar was able to get sixteen chiefs to sign a statement supportive of their old friends, Dunbar and Allis.⁴⁹

To strengthen his position Agent Miller fired some of Dunbar's supporters. The government's interpreter, James Cleghorn, was dismissed and ordered to leave the country. Cleghorn had lived with the Pawnees for years and Miller viewed him with additional contempt because Cleghorn had an Indian family. As a replacement Miller tried to hire eighteen-year-old Marcellus Mathers, who had been with the Pawnees for only two years. Young Mathers was not approved by the Indian office because he could speak only a few words of Pawnee. Samuel Allis was fired as schoolteacher in October 1844 and was not replaced. His lack of education was given as the reason for his dismissal. Lester W. Platt, a supporter of the agent's principles, kept his job as teacher. When Gaston resigned to return to Oberlin he was replaced as farmer by an employee sympathetic to the agent.⁵⁰

These wholesale changes prompted Superintendent Harvey to visit the Pawnees on his own fact-finding mission. Harvey admitted he had been very suspicious of the missionaries' work. However, after his investigation he decided "their character for piety and general prudence" was above reproach. He ordered that Cleghorn be allowed to return to his Pawnee family. He concluded there was "a total inefficiency in the management of the farming operations" under the direction of the elder Mathers and staffed by Miller appointees.⁵¹ This damning assessment ended Miller's career, and a new agent, Jonathan L. Bean, was named to replace him in mid-August. The pro-Miller faction

was incensed, claiming that Sarpy and the traders had conspired to have him removed in retaliation for his campaign to abolish alcohol in the Pawnee country.⁵²

In addition to these problems an incident in the fall of 1845 could well have ended the mission in a bloodbath had it not been for the level-headed action of some Pawnee leaders. Agent Bean had given some gunpowder to James Mathers to deliver to the Pawnees as required by the 1833 treaty. When the Pawnees asked for the powder, Mathers said the Oto had stolen it from him on the trip from Bellevue. Some of the Pawnees were convinced he still had it, for they had seen several powder horns hanging on the wall of his house. When Falki, a Loup chief, tried to take this powder the two men fought. Mathers struck the chief with an ax and nearly amputated Falki's hand. Despite the wound Falki disarmed Mathers and then used the ax to kill Marcellus Mathers, who had come to help his father. When Falki died a short time later, the Loup band was ready to wipe out all the whites. Some of the other band chiefs convinced the Loups to abandon the idea and leave on their winter hunt. The Mathers family left the Pawnee country before the Loups returned, and the matter was not reopened.⁵³

Of greater concern to the Pawnees than altercations with the government employees was the escalation of the attacks by the Lakotas. Raids had once been confined to strikes against small hunting groups, but the Lakotas had grown sufficiently strong to initiate a larger offensive. On June 27, 1843, a Lakota war party estimated at 300 attacked the village near Plum Creek in full view of the nearby whites. The Lakotas massed on the hills overlooking the village and sent repeated waves of horse soldiers down the hill and through the village. After six hours the Lakotas finally withdrew, having captured nearly all of the Pawnees' horses, burned approximately one half of the earthlodges, and killed sixty-seven Pawnees including the village chief, Blue Coat, and a mixed blood interpreter, Louis LaChapelle. The whites remained



Lester and Elvira Gaston Platt were associated with the mission from 1842 to 1846. After the Pawnees were settled on a reservation in present Nance County, Nebraska, the Platts returned and Lester opened this trading post on the east edge of the reserve while his wife taught school at the villages. (NSHS-N176)

indifferent and unafraid, for they believed the enemies of the Pawnees were not a threat to them.⁵⁴

The attacks on the villages abated until the summer of 1845. This time the assault was by the Poncas, who were then loosely and briefly allied with the Lakotas. Because the Pawnees were away on the summer buffalo hunt, only one Pawnee who stayed with the blacksmith was killed. During this attack a Ponca deliberately shot at Mrs. Allis. It was the first overt action against the whites, but after the initial shock and outrage subsided, the incident was overlooked.⁵⁵

A year later the Lakotas returned, but again the Pawnees were away on a hunt. After burning many earthlodges the Lakotas briefly turned their attentions to the whites, firing a few shots in their direction. Two days later they returned and repeated the assault. Although there were no casualties, the whites now felt it necessary to assess their situation carefully. They realized that in the years they had spent with the Pawnees there had been

polite interest in Christianity, but not the slightest hint that anyone was going to convert. In more worldly matters the Pawnees were equally steadfast in retaining their traditional ways. On one occasion a Pawnee man did break with tradition and plowed a field. Beyond that there was scant evidence the Pawnees were going to become farmers.

The bleak outlook was compounded by the troubles within the white community. Those favoring the "driving principle" had not changed their views, but were more careful about voicing them. This group was probably ready to give up, and felt the mission was doomed to failure because they were not allowed to use more forceful methods. Dunbar's group must have been equally frustrated by the lack of progress and by the criticism of their co-workers. There is no question about the dedication of either group, and if there had been any cooperation or a hint of progress the whites may have stayed at their posts in spite of the Lakota attacks. Judging from the descriptions of the as-

saults they were more bluff and bluster than a serious attempt to ravage the white community. Nonetheless the whites assumed the worst and concluded it was too dangerous to remain near the Pawnee villages. They packed a few belongings and on June 18, 1846, dashed for the safety of Bellevue.⁵⁶

Most of the whites returned to the East in search of better opportunities, but a few stayed. Samuel Allis remained at Bellevue and was soon teaching some Pawnee children in a government supported school. The Gastons settled for a time across the Missouri River at Kaneshville, but returned to the Pawnees as teachers and traders in 1861. Old Cleghorn and his wife divided their time between Bellevue and the village although he was no longer a paid interpreter.⁵⁷

The Office of Indian Affairs also retreated from the Pawnees, but did not abandon them. The following spring a new system was inaugurated that would be followed for several years. Farmers

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were hired to help the Pawnees plow and plant their fields. At the end of the growing season the farmers were dismissed and returned to Bellevue.⁵⁸

The first attempt to bring Christianity and "civilization" to the Pawnees had ended disastrously. While the attacks by the Lakotas provided an acceptable excuse for the missionaries to leave, there were other factors that undoubtedly contributed to the decision. The deep division over proselytizing methods created intense animosity within the white community. This problem was compounded by an increasing feeling of futility. The missionaries had been unable to convert a single Pawnee to Christianity, nor did there seem to be any hope that conversions might occur in the foreseeable future. More than a decade would pass before whites would again live permanently among the Pawnees. By that time the tribe was so weakened it had to accept life on a reservation, where many of the traditional customs that had so frustrated Dunbar, Allis, and the others had begun to slip away.

Notes

- ¹ *Christian Advocate and Journal*, Mar. 1, 1833.
- ² S. Parker to American Board, Apr. 10, 1833; Rev. David Greene to Parker, May 4, 1833, in Archer Butler Hulbert and Dorothy Printup Hulbert, eds., *Overland to the Pacific* (Colorado Springs/Denver: The Stewart Commission of Colorado College and the Denver Public Library, 1932-24), v. 5, "The Oregon Crusade," 212, 217.
- ³ Parker to American Board, Jan. 16, 1834; Greene to Parker, Feb. 20, 1834, "Oregon Crusade," 229, 232; Parker to Greene, Mar. 17, 1834, in "Letters Concerning the Presbyterian Mission in the Pawnee Country, near Bellevue, Neb., 1831-1839," *Kansas Historical Collections* 14 (1915-19): 571-72, hereafter cited as *Kansas Collections*.
- In addition to letters, Dunbar and Allis kept journals of their travels dating from their arrival in St. Louis until their return to Bellevue a year later at the conclusion of the winter hunt with the Pawnees. See *Kansas Collections*, 578-619, 690-704.
- ⁴ Parker to Greene, Mar. 17, 1834; James Richards, M. L. R. Perrine, & Henry Mills to "Reverend Doctor" Wisner, Mar. 14, 1834; Parker to Greene, May 6, 1834, *Kansas Collections*, 571-73, 742-43.
- ⁵ Parker to Greene, May 27, 1834, *Kansas Collections*, 743-46. Greene had warned Parker to beware of traders who were "hostile to the introduction of Christianity and civilization." Greene to Parker, Feb. 20, 1834, "Oregon Crusade," 232.
- ⁶ Greene to John Dunbar, Mar. 29, 1834, "Oregon Crusade," 236; Parker to Greene, May 27, 1834, *Kansas Collections*, 743-46.
- ⁷ Parker to Greene, May 27, 1834, *Kansas Collections*, 743-46.
- ⁸ Samuel Parker, *Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains* (Ithaca, New York, 1840). On the way to Oregon he met some Flathead Indians and admitted he "was disappointed to see nothing peculiar in the Flathead Indians, to give them their name."
- ⁹ Dunbar to Greene, July 29, 1834, *Kansas Collections*, 575-77.
- ¹⁰ Parker to Greene, June 9, 1835, "Oregon Crusade," 84.
- ¹¹ Bellevue was a trading post founded in 1822 at the same location as present day Bellevue, Nebr. In 1832 it was sold to the government and became Dougherty's agency headquarters. Richard E. Jensen, "Bellevue: The First Twenty Years, 1822-1842," *Nebraska History* 56 (1975): 339-74.
- John Dougherty had been a trader for a number of years before becoming an interpreter in the Office of Indian Affairs. In 1827 he was promoted agent for the Upper Missouri, which included the Pawnee, Oto, Omaha, and several other nearby tribes. Merrill J. Mattes, "John Dougherty," Leroy Hafen, ed., *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West* (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1971), v. 8, 113-41, and Edward E. Hill, *The Office of Indian Affairs, 1824 - 1840, Historical Sketches* (New York: Clearwater Publishing Co., 1974).
- ¹² Dunbar Journal, Oct. 18, 1834, *Kansas Collections*, 596.
- In the 1830s the Pawnee tribe consisted of four autonomous bands, the Tappage, the Republican, the Grand, and the Loup or Skidi. By the Treaty of 1833 the Pawnees agreed to relinquish all claims to land south of the Platte River although they were allowed to continue to hunt there. In return they were to receive annuity goods and the government would provide teachers, farmers, and blacksmiths to assist the tribe. Charles J. Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1904), 416-18.
- ¹³ John Dougherty's transcription of addresses by the Pawnees, Oct. 18, 1834, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Upper Missouri Agency, 1824-35, National Archives, Microcopy 234, Roll 883, cited hereafter as Microcopy 234, on file at the Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.
- ¹⁴ Dunbar Journal, *Kansas Collections*, 596. Dunbar had contracted malaria, probably on the trip across Missouri.
- ¹⁵ Allis Journal, *Kansas Collections*, 696.
- ¹⁶ Dunbar Journal, *Kansas Collections*, 598, 606. Dunbar did not give the chief's name. He was probably Shon-gah-kah-he-gah, who was the second signatory to the Treaty of 1833. Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, 417. Dunbar also failed to mention the name of the trader. The Grand village was on the south side of the Platte River in present Polk County, Nebraska.
- ¹⁷ Allis Journal, *Kansas Collections*, 697-98. This was the chief's name as rendered on the Treaty of 1833. Kappler, *Indian Affairs Laws and Treaties*, 417. The Loup village was on the north bank of the Loup River in extreme eastern Howard County, Nebraska.
- ¹⁸ Dunbar Journal, *Kansas Collections*, 598-99.
- ¹⁹ Allis Journal, *Kansas Collections*, 697, 701-02. The Arikaras were considered treacherous ever since their 1823 attack on a party of fur traders near their Missouri River village.
- ²⁰ Allis to Greene, July 14, 1836, *Kansas Collections*, 709. The argument would continue for many years. At a January 1872 conference of missionary societies in Washington Rev. John C. Lowrie said, "The object of the missionaries is to give them [the Native Americans] the Gospel, and civilization will follow as the result. . . . The Gospel first, then civilization. The order should not be reversed." *Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior for the Year 1871* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 177.
- ²¹ Dunbar to Greene, Oct. 8, 1835, July 10, 1843, *Kansas Collections*, 619, 654.
- ²² Allis to Greene, July 14, 1836, *Kansas Collections*, 708.
- ²³ Allis to Greene, May 3, 1834, July 14, 1836, *Kansas Collections*, 690, 710. The cause of Mrs. Satterlee's death is uncertain, but it may have been tuberculosis.
- ²⁴ Allis to Greene, July 14, 1836; Jacob Smith to Greene, Jan. 18, 1836; Dunbar to Greene, Feb. 7, 1837, *Kansas Collections*, 712, 627-29.
- ²⁵ Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, 416-418.
- ²⁶ Greene to T. Hartley Crawford, Feb. 13, 1840, Microcopy 234, Roll 884; Crawford to Greene, Feb. 6, 1840, Records of the Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Sent January 1 - June 30, 1840, National Archives, Microcopy 21, Roll 28.
- ²⁷ Satterlee to Greene, Sept. 26, 1836, *Kansas Collections*, 749. Agent Dougherty estimated that the Lakotas had killed twenty Pawnees in recent months. Dougherty to William Clark, June 8, 1836, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, Council Bluffs Agency, 1836-43, Microcopy 234, Roll 215.
- ²⁸ Dunbar to Greene, June 8, 1838, *Kansas Collections*, 631-32. Also see Dorothy V. Jones, "John Dougherty and the Pawnee Rite of Human Sacrifice," *Missouri Historical Review*, 63 (1969): 293-316.
- ²⁹ Dunbar to Mrs. Satterlee, June 12, 1837, in John A. Clark, "The Pawnee Missionaries," *The Christian Keepsake and Missionary Annual* (Philadelphia: William Marshall & Co., 1839), 51. Dougherty to Clark,

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June 28, 1837, Microcopy 234, Roll 215; Dunbar to Greene, July 27, 1838, *Kansas Collections*, 634. The cause of Satterlee's death was never determined.

³⁰ Allis to Greene, Dec. 17, 1838; Dunbar to Greene, June 8, 1838, *Kansas Collections*, 629, 715-17. Allis was a harness maker before coming west.

³¹ Allis to Greene, Dec. 17, 1838, *Kansas Collections*, 715-17.

³² Dunbar to Greene, Oct. 1, 1839, *Kansas Collections*, 639-40. Dunbar was listed as the teacher at \$600 a year on the estimate of expenses for 1838 for the Pottawatomie Agency. Edwin James, "Estimate of Sums Required," Microcopy 234, Roll 215.

³³ Allis to Greene, May 31, 1837, *Kansas Collections*, 713.

³⁴ Dunbar to Greene, June 8, 1838, *Kansas Collections*, 632.

³⁵ George B. Gaston to Greene, Aug. 11, 1840, Jan. 13, 1842; Dunbar to Greene, Dec. 9, 1840; *Kansas Collections*, 751, 754, 645.

³⁶ Allis to Greene, Oct. 12, 1840, Sept. 1, 1841, *Kansas Collections*, 722-25. Their first settlement was near Council Creek. The Pawnees wanted the land for their gardens, so the missionaries agreed to move to Plum Creek in the fall. Since that time the names of the two creeks have been reversed. After the government employees arrived, many of them settled along Willow Creek, about four miles to the west in central Nance County on the north side of the Loup River.

³⁷ Most of Miller's nominations were enclosed with a letter from D. D. Mitchell, superintendent of Indian affairs, to T. Hartley Crawford, commissioner of Indian affairs, May 17, 1842, Microcopy 234, Roll 215. A full list of employees is "Statement of all personnel employed within the Council Bluffs Agency. . . 30th Sept. 1842." Also see the statement for September 30, 1844, Microcopy 234, Roll 216.

³⁸ Miller was hired on Feb. 15, 1842. "Statement of all persons employed within the Council Bluffs Agency in the quarter ending on the 30th Sept. 1844," Microcopy 234, Roll 216. Dunbar initially thought the agent to be "a thorough going man, and I think, intends to do his duty to the letter while he remains in office." Dunbar to Greene, Apr. 26, 1842, *Kansas Collections*, 649.

³⁹ Daniel Miller to Mitchell, Apr. 22, 1842, Microcopy 234, Roll 215.

⁴⁰ Gaston to Greene, Nov. 13, 1842, *Kansas Collections*, 757. Gaston also wrote a more unguarded letter to his father, Alexander, who passed the charges along to the American Board and thereby intensified the attack on Dunbar. A. Gaston to American Board, Dec. 26, 1842, *Kansas Collections*, 758-59.

⁴¹ Dunbar to Greene, July 10, 1843, *Kansas Collections*, 653.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Dunbar to Greene, Sept. 9, 1844, *Kansas Collections*, 666.

⁴⁴ Miller to Thomas H. Harvey, Apr. 24, 1844, Microcopy 234, Roll 216.

⁴⁵ J. Henry Carleton, *The Prairie Logbooks*, Louis Pelzer, ed. (Chicago, 1943), 98.

⁴⁶ Timothy E. Ranney to Greene, Oct. 9, 1844, *Kansas Collections*, 762-65; Miller to Harvey Oct. 18, 1844, Microcopy 234, Roll 216.

⁴⁷ Harvey to Miller, Jan. 4, 1845, Microcopy 234, Roll 216.

⁴⁸ Sworn statements of James Mathers, George Gaston, and Lester W. Platt, Dec. 28, 1844, Microcopy 234, Roll 216. For the Carolan Mathers shooting see Miller to Harvey, Oct. 18, 1844, Microcopy 234, Roll 216.

⁴⁹ Allis's sworn statement, Dec. 24, 1844, Microcopy 234, Roll 216; Dunbar to Greene, Jan. 25, 1845, *Kansas Collections*, 675.

⁵⁰ Miller to Harvey, May 1, 1845, Oct. 25, 1845; Harvey to Crawford, July 16, 1845; and Miller to Mitchell July 29, 1843, Microcopy 234, Roll 216. Allis's innovative spelling and sentence structure does suggest a minimal education.

⁵¹ Harvey to Crawford, June 19, 1845, Microcopy 234, Roll 216.

⁵² "Statement of all persons employed within the Council Bluffs Agency on the 30th September, 1845," Microcopy 234, Roll 216; Elvira Gaston Platt, "Reminiscences of a Teacher Among The Nebraska Indians, 1843-1885," *Nebraska State Historical Society Transactions and Reports* 3 (1892): 139.

The pro-Miller faction's reasoning for his removal may have been correct because he did destroy Sarpy's whiskey. If there were other reasons, they were not recorded, but he was opposed by powerful men. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Crawford wrote that "the entire Representative delegation in Congress from the State of Missouri" recommended his removal. Crawford to secretary of war, July 8, 1845, Microcopy 234, Roll 216.

⁵³ Ranney to Greene, Jan. 12, 1846, *Kansas Collections*, 774; B. S. Dunbar, "Missionary Life Among the Pawnee," *Nebraska State Historical Society Collections* 16 (1911): 284-5.

Elvira Gaston Platt called the slain chief Spotted Horse. "Reminiscences of a Teacher Among The Nebraska Indians," 132. James Mathers was dismissed as a farmer on Feb. 23, 1846. "Statement of Persons Employed...during the year 1846," Microcopy 234, Roll 216.

⁵⁴ Dunbar to Greene, July 10, Nov. 14, 1843, *Kansas Collections*, 658-59. Dunbar's revised estimates were seventy Pawnee and forty Lakota fatalities. For LaChapelle's death see Miller to Mitchell Sept. 8, 1843, Microcopy 234, Roll 215.

⁵⁵ Dunbar to Harvey, Aug. 22, 1845, Microcopy 234, Roll 216.

⁵⁶ Dunbar to Greene, June 30, 1846, *Kansas Collections*, 683-86; Dunbar to Green, July 11, 1846, Microcopy 234, Roll 216.

An Oct. 6, 1848, letter from a soldier stationed at Fort Kearny provides a contemporary assessment of the mission by a layman: "The Missionaries turned their attention to these fellows [the Pawnee] some time ago; but after laboring ten years without making a single convert, and having most of their small things stolen, they retired from the field with disgust - leaving the Pawnees to work out their own salvation." From the *Daily Missouri Republican*, Oct. 31, 1848, quoted in *Publications of the Nebraska State Historical Society* 20 (1922): 187.

⁵⁷ Charles P. Darwin diary, Huntington Library, San Marino, Cal.

⁵⁸ Microcopy 234, Roll 217 passim.