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Article Summary: In 1870 Grinnell joined a Yale professor on a summer expedition to collect fossils in the West. He returned to Nebraska repeatedly over sixty years, recording his experiences in many books and articles.

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“Broad Are Nebraska’s Rolling Plains”

The Early Writings of George Bird Grinnell

By Richard Vaughan

Early in July of 1870, twenty-year-old George Bird Grinnell crossed the Missouri River on a stern-wheel steamer, stepped ashore, and left his first footprints in the young state of Nebraska. It was to be an experience that marked him for life. Although a lifelong resident of New York City, few years passed between 1870 and 1930 when Grinnell did not find time to spend a month or two west of the Missouri River.

A man of many interests and vocations, Grinnell is probably best known today as the author of several classic ethnographic studies of the Plains Indians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In addition, his name will forever be associated with the establishment of Glacier National Park, and he will be remembered as one of the founding fathers of the American conservation movement, and as an influential advocate for the protection and welfare of American Indians.¹

As author or editor of more than thirty books (and a contributor to a dozen more), of more than one hundred signed articles, and of thousands of unsigned editorials and shorter pieces in *Forest and Stream*, the weekly sporting publication he owned and edited, Grinnell’s travels and experiences are well documented in the pages of Western American history. Readers of *Nebraska History* may be most familiar with Grinnell’s work from his first and last books, *Pawnee Hero Stories and Folk-*



In 1870, George Bird Grinnell, finished his undergraduate studies at Yale and joined a summer expedition to collect fossils in Nebraska and elsewhere in the West. That pivotal first visit to the Great Plains directed him on a course of life dedicated to preserving the culture, history, and environment of the American West. Images of Yale Individuals, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library

tales (1889) and *Two Great Scouts and Their Pawnee Battalion* (1928).²

Grinnell’s earliest Western experiences and writings were the result of his first trip to Nebraska, experiences that many readers know of through Grinnell’s 1923 article “An Old-Time Bone Hunt,” or through the description found in his

Memoirs. Less well known are several other accounts of his 1870 trip, accounts that were never published. These documents, along with a poem that young Grinnell penned about the plains of Nebraska, help demonstrate just how pivotal the 1870 trip was in directing him on course for a life dedicated to preserving the culture, history, and environment of the American West.³

A few months before his 1870 Missouri River traverse, while completing his undergraduate studies at Yale College, Grinnell heard a rumor that Professor Othniel Charles Marsh would be leading a summer expedition to the West to collect fossils.⁴ Although not one of Marsh’s students, Grinnell quickly determined that he wanted to be part of the expedition. Writing in 1915, he recalled:

This rumor greatly interested me, for I had been brought up, so to speak, on the writings of Captain Mayne Reid, which dealt with travel on the plains, and among the mountains, between 1840 and 1850. His stories had appealed to my imagination, and I had always been eager to visit the scenes he described, but had supposed that they were far beyond my reach. When, however, I heard of this proposed expedition, and learned too that the party would perhaps be made up from recent graduates of the college, I determined that I must try to be one of these. After several days consideration, I at last summoned up courage to call on Professor Marsh, and tell him what I desired. He discouraged me at our first interview, but said that he would inquire about me and at a second meeting seemed more favorably disposed. A little later he accepted me as a volunteer.⁵

While it may have taken Marsh a few days to decide if the young Grinnell was really cut out for a Western trip, the decision proved to be a wise one.

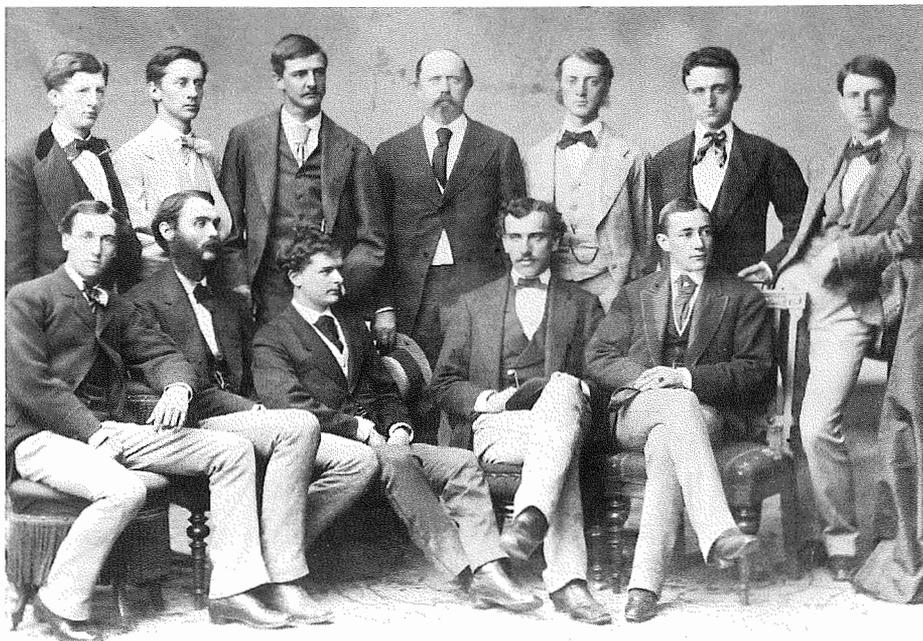
Richard Vaughn, a librarian at the Indiana University-Bloomington School of Law Library, has been researching the life of George Bird Grinnell since 1979.

Early Writings of George Bird Grinnell



Yale professor Othniel Charles Marsh, leader of the 1870 expedition, was a pioneering paleontologist who later engaged in a highly publicized competition, sometimes called “the Great Bone War,” with rival paleontologist Edward Cope of the University of Pennsylvania. Images of Yale Individuals, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library

Grinnell and Marsh developed a strong relationship, remaining friends and colleagues until Marsh’s death in 1899. Not only was Marsh later able to offer Grinnell an assistantship at Yale’s Peabody Museum, but had Grinnell not served under Marsh’s tutelage, the opportunity to become a member of the scientific parties of Custer’s Black Hills Expedition (1874) and the army’s Yellowstone Reconnaissance (1875) would never have arisen. For his part, Grinnell would go on to write several profiles of Marsh and would be a public supporter of “The Professor,” when the long running feud with rival paleontologist Edward Cope exploded onto the pages of East Coast newspapers in the winter of 1889–90. The 1870 trip was, in fact, the first of many fossil hunting trips Marsh led as part of his intense, and often public, competition with Cope to acquire the nation’s best and largest collection of fossils.⁶



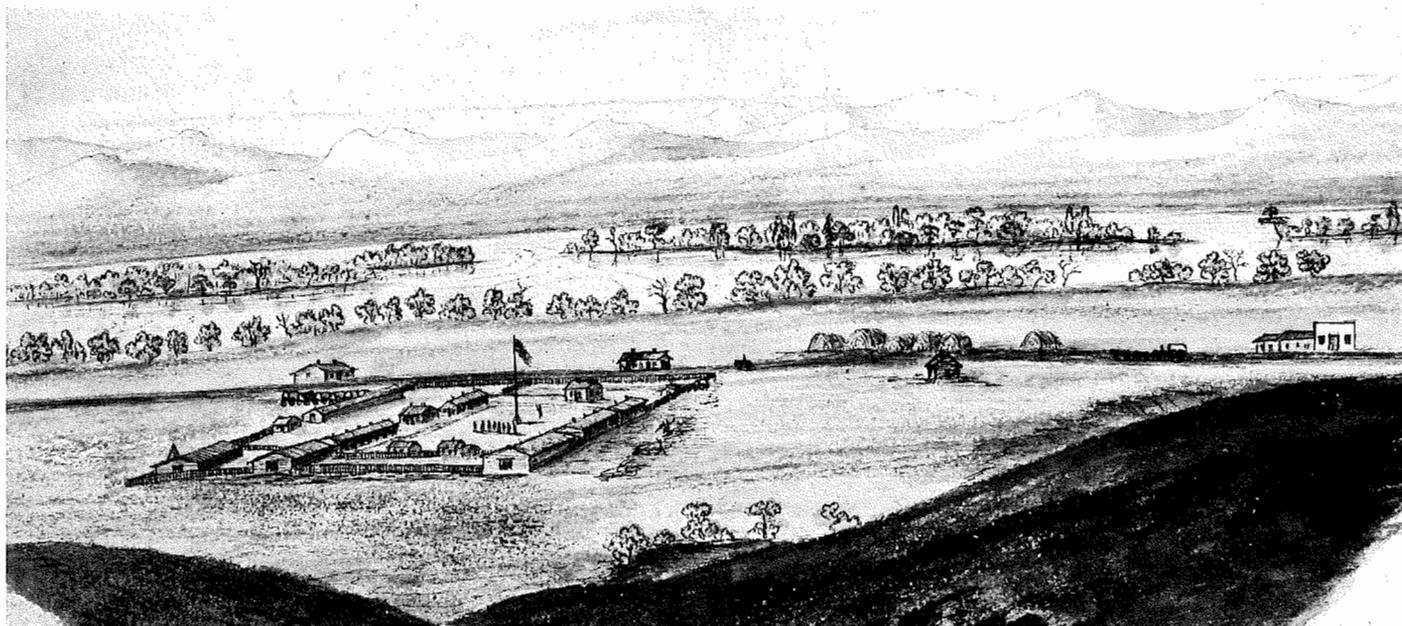
Grinnell called the student scientists of the Marsh expedition an “innocent party of ‘pilgrims’ starting out to face dangers of which they were wholly ignorant.” Standing, left to right: John Nicholson, Grinnell, James Wadsworth, Marsh, Charles Betts, Harry Ziegler, Henry Sargent. Seated: John W. Griswold, Alexander Ewing, Eli Whitney, Charles Reeve, James Russell. Images of Yale Individuals, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library

Marsh, the nephew of the American-born financier and philanthropist George Peabody, often used social and financial connections to advance his interests. Though the exact details of how the 1870 trip was financed are unclear, it seems likely that Marsh’s acquaintance with Union Pacific Railroad executives helped reduce, if not eliminate, transportation costs. It is clear that his friendships with many military leaders resulted in a letter from the commanding general of the army William Tecumseh Sherman, which “proved an open sesame to all army posts.”⁷

The Marsh entourage left New York on June 30. In an undated manuscript (hereafter the “Party of Twelve” manuscript), Grinnell recorded the group’s brief stay in Omaha and their trip west to Fort McPherson:

We were a party of twelve college students just starting out on a scientific expedition. Leaving New York at the end of the college

year and stopping for a few days in Chicago and again at Omaha, we had at last reached Fort McPherson on the North branch of the Platte river from which point our first expedition was to be made and where we were to gain our first experience of frontier life. We had waited in Omaha while the Professor our stout and gallant leader had gone on to the Fort to make arrangements about a guide and on receiving a telegram from him we started on the two o’clock train for McPherson Station. On reaching the station at one o’clock A.M. we were met by the Prof and two of the officers who drove us over to the Fort. Crossing the river on a rough corduroy bridge the road passed along bold bluffs intersected at short intervals by side gullies affording excellent lurking places for the Indians within easy range of the road. This fact with the reasoned remark of an officer such as: “That ranch was attacked last fall by Indians and all the stock driven off and the herders scalped,” combined to lower our spirits and the calm moonlight and the melancholy cry of the killdeer plover (*Charadrius melodus*) lent an added sadness to the scene. A drive of eight miles brought us to the post where we were kindly rec’d.⁸



Fort McPherson (earlier called Fort Cottonwood) on the Platte River east of present North Platte, Nebraska, was the Marsh expedition's jumping-off point into the relatively uncharted territory of the West. Troops from the fort served as escorts for the group. NSHS-RG0951:1a

Although he incorrectly identified the fort's location, and today the kill-deer is known as *Charadrius vociferus* (*Charadrius melodus* is the piping plover), Grinnell's observations of the topography, wildlife, and potential for contact with Native Americans are themes that would reappear in his writings for the next sixty years. In addition, whenever Grinnell wrote about the 1870 trip, he never failed to comment on the naiveté of the group of Easterners. In his 1923 article he described them as, "an entirely innocent party of 'pilgrims' starting out to face dangers of which they were wholly ignorant," and in his *Memoirs* noted that, "the members of the party were innocent of any knowledge of the western country, but its members pinned their faith to Prof. Marsh, who had done more or less traveling over eastern North America."⁹

Innocent as they were in 1870, the group was an impressive example of the sons of America's ruling class, and many of them would grow up to continue that family tradition. Among the twelve students were John Reed

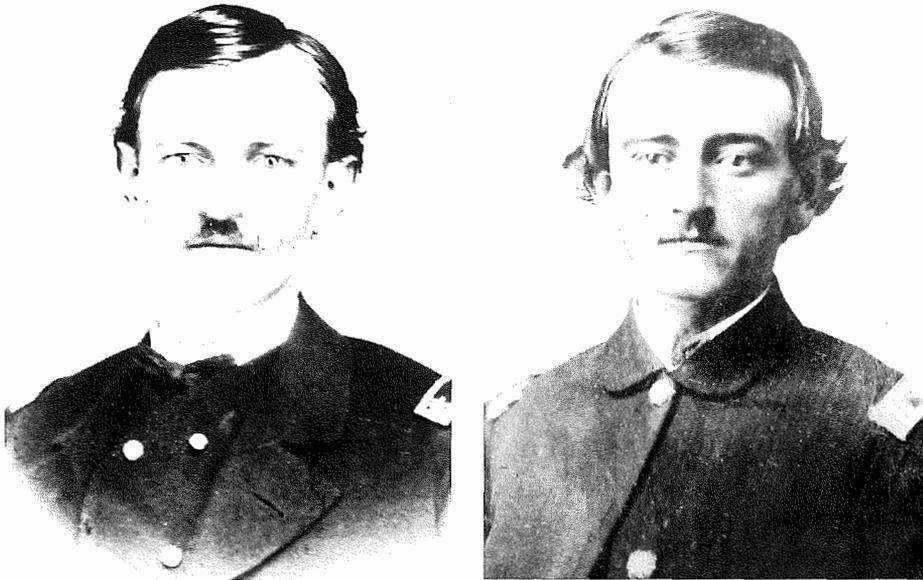
Nicholson, the future state attorney general and chancellor of Delaware; Charles McCormick Reeve, a decorated U.S. Army brigadier general who rose to prominence in the Spanish-American War and then served as the first American provost marshal of Manila; Henry Bradford Sargent, a successful hardware manufacturer, bank director, and member of the Yale Corporation; James W. Wadsworth, a nine-term member of Congress from New York; and Eli Whitney, the grandson of the famous inventor, who became a prominent New Haven financier and president of the New Haven Water Company. Grinnell, Nicholson, Reeve, and Kentuckian Jim Russell, all from the class of 1870, would remain close friends until their deaths. Two other members of the expedition, Charles Wyllys Betts and Harry Degen Ziegler, served as the trip's unofficial historians and documented it for two leading eastern publications.¹⁰

Fort McPherson, which had been established as Cantonment McKean in 1863, sat on the south side of the Platte River near the mouth of Cottonwood

Canyon (south of present day Maxwell in Lincoln County). While it is often remembered as the base camp for several extravagant government-sanctioned buffalo hunts for wealthy businessmen and dignitaries (including Russia's Grand Duke Alexis), Fort McPherson was for many years the only major military post between Fort Kearny and Fort Laramie. As the tracks of the Union Pacific Railroad crept westward, muscling out the area's indigenous population, McPherson served not only as a military presence, but also as an important supply depot. In the summer of 1870, it was also the home base of Frank North and his famed Pawnee Scouts, who patrolled the U.P. tracks as they snaked across the Plains.¹¹

By the time the Marsh convoy rolled into camp, the fort was the headquarters of the Fifth U.S. Cavalry, under the command of Col. (Bvt. Maj. Gen.) William Hemsley Emory. The summer of 1870 was a relatively quiet one by military standards, with only an occasional confrontation with the Native population. While, no doubt, the Marsh group was

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At Fort McPherson, Grinnell met Maj. Frank North (left), commander of the famed Pawnee Scouts. Two years later he met Frank's younger brother, Luther (right), who guided Grinnell on a Nebraska hunting trip. Grinnell considered Frank one of the West's "heroic men," and remained close friends with Luther for more than sixty years. NSHS-RG2320-3; NSHS-RG2320-9

excited about its sojourn in this strange new world, it is not clear how the post population felt about serving as escorts to a group of young scientists. Marsh's fame was growing in academic circles, but he certainly was not a celebrity to the soldiers. In fact, an order issuing the Easterners their supplies, "with the understanding that any loss or damage will be paid for by him," refers to Marsh as "Professor O. C. Morse."¹²

Grinnell recalls those first days, as the "Party of Twelve" manuscript continues:

The next morning we wandered about examining all the (to us) curiosities of the place. The sun dial (the work of surgeon W.) the troops quarters, and the corral were all duly inspected and admired. The corral was the most attractive place to such as were horse men. In it were two hundred indian ponies which had been captured from the Sioux during the past winter and which were used in war time for mounting Major Frank Norths celebrated Pawnee Scouts. Here too we saw for the first time the process of lassoing or as it is more commonly called "throwing the lariat." Mr. Oaks the corral Master was an adept in this art, for art it

certainly is, and was in no wise loathe to display his skill to the admiring crowd of students. On the eve of our departure for our destination (the head waters of the Loup Fork) the ladies of the fort gave us a hop which we attending [sic] dressing in corduroy pants, shooting coats and high boots, sans cravats, sans collars and sans white shirts. We were a hard looking party.¹³

Grinnell's introduction to Maj. Frank North marked the beginning of a friendship with the North family that would last until Grinnell's death in 1938. Two years after the 1870 trip, North would be unable to act as Grinnell's guide on a Nebraska hunting trip, but he quickly recommended his younger brother, Luther. "Lute" North and Grinnell became fast friends and remained so for the next sixty-three years. Although Frank North died in 1885, he remained one of the men Grinnell most admired. Four years after the elder North's death, Grinnell published his first book with the dedication, "To the Memory of Major Frank North—'Pa-ni Le-shar'—

This Record of His People is Inscribed." In a gesture fitting Grinnell's sense of honor and family, he presented the very first copy to Frank and Lute's mother, with the inscription, "To Mrs. Jane A. North, with love from Geo. Bird Grinnell, November 13, 1889. First copy from press."¹⁴

In meeting Frank North, Grinnell began a relationship with one of the "heroic men" who lived through the times and adventures about which he had only read. In the years to come, Grinnell would meet and write about other notable westerners "whose courage, skill, and endurance led to the discovery, exploration, and settlement of that vast territory which we now call the Empire of the West," but he would hold none in higher esteem than Frank North.¹⁵

Perhaps nowhere is this more obvious than in the obituary of North that Grinnell wrote for *Forest and Stream*:

The secret of Major North's success in commanding the Pawnees, who loved him as much as they respected him, lay in the unvarying firmness, justice, patience and kindness with which he treated them. He never demanded anything unreasonable of them, but when he gave an order, even though obedience involved great peril or perhaps appeared to mean certain death, the command must be carried out. He was their commander, but at the same time their brother and friend. Above all, he was their leader. In going into battle he never said "Go," but always "Come." It is little wonder, then, that the devotion felt for him by all the Pawnee Nation, and especially by the men who had served under him in battle, was as steadfast as it was touching. . . . His was a singularly lovable nature. If the stronger manly points of his character inspired respect and admiration, not less did his gentleness and consideration for others win the deepest affection. He was modest, almost to diffidence, and it was with difficulty that he could be induced to speak of his own heroic achievements. And yet his face told the story of the power within the man. One who is accustomed to command men, and is so a judge of character, after seeing him for the first time, made the homely remark: "There is a man with grit in his face; one you could 'tie to.'"¹⁶

After a few days at the fort, outfitting, learning the intricacies of riding Indian

ponies, and exploring the surrounding country, the expedition headed north on July 14. The “Party of Twelve” manuscript continues:

The escort of fifty men filed out of the post at about nine a.m. and we followed more leisurely about an hour afterwards. Reaching the station we loaded up our stores and proceeded. For about five miles our course passed through circular prairie the tall grass of which reached to our horses withers. Birds of different species sprang up from beneath our horses feet or followed us as we marched along. Among the latter the yellow headed blackbirds [w]ere conspicuous by their orange heads and necks and their shining black bodies. Doves of several kind whirred by us continually and were not considered worth a shot. The sun shone fiercely down upon us but our broad brimmed hats afforded us ample protection and we thought of nothing but the picturesqueness of the scene.

First in the column rode Major Frank North a scout justly celebrated throughout the west as the organizer and leader of the Pawnee scouts, by his side was Bill Cody better known as Buffalo Bill, the most celebrated frontiersman of modern times and the best buffalo hunter on the plains. Sixty nine buffalo has he killed in a single day and thirty six of them in a single run and from a single horse. He is the very picture of a bold and hardy prairie man. Six feet two inches in height yet so well proportioned that he looks only about the average stature when standing alone, with his long fair hair streaming over his shoulders and his mild blue eyes gleaming under a high forehead he is the type of physical beauty [H]e is clad in buckskin through out and over his hunting shirt he wears another shirt of scarlet flannel highly ornamented. His mount is a little cream colored pony called Little Buckskin.¹⁷

Grinnell’s 1870 meeting with Cody was brief, as he only traveled with the Yale group for the first day. Although his real fame was a few years away, Cody was already gaining a reputation for his “plains showmanship,” as well as for his abilities as a scout. Grinnell’s mention of Cody’s skills as a hunter is a reference to the fabled buffalo hunting contest between Cody and William “Billy” Comstock in the late 1860s. It is unclear just how much Grinnell knew about Cody in 1870. The July 14 entry in his trip diary includes an added note, at the



Described by Grinnell as “the very picture of a bold and hardy prairie man,” William F. Cody, already becoming well known as Buffalo Bill, rode with the Marsh party for a day. NSHS-RG3004-150

top of the page (as if an afterthought, perhaps prompted upon learning who Cody was), which reads: “Bill Cody, alias Buffalo Bill, the most celebrated prairie man alive, accompanied us as far as Pawnee Springs.”¹⁸

Later Grinnell and Cody often crossed paths; usually as Cody and his famed Wild West show toured the East. In fact, during Cody’s first visit to New York City in 1872, the two former Nebraska expedition mates were astonished when they met as Grinnell was leisurely “riding before breakfast in Central Park.”¹⁹ Grinnell never placed Cody in

the same league as the two scouts he knew best, Frank North and Charley Reynolds, usually noting his reputation more as showman than pathfinder. In an undated manuscript, probably written after Cody’s death, Grinnell recalled his skill as a marksman, perhaps exaggerating, as well as his theatrical career:

Shooting from the ground with a rifle, Cody was a very ordinary shot, and perhaps he never shot with a pistol at all; but he was the finest horseback rifle shot ever known, I think. His skill in killing buffalo, on the run, no doubt gave him his common name, Buffalo Bill. The Indians called him Long Hair. In the year 1870 he performed a most remarkable feat, when in riding after buffalo, he killed sixteen in sixteen shots. Yet, as already suggested, he was, when shooting at a mark or at game on foot, a very ordinary shot. . .

I have said that Cody was not a Scout in the old sense, yet no doubt he did some good. In his theatrical career and generally in the show business, he offered to a large public many things that actually existed, or had existed, and showed in the flesh, to people who knew nothing of such matters, something that resembled, or suggested, the old-time Scout. In the Wild West Show were depicted many current features of a stage of western development which proved to be very fleeting. It was certainly worth while that a public, remote from that life and ignorant of it, should have had an opportunity to witness its scenes. There was some slight exaggeration about it all, yet on the whole things were represented quite closely as they actually were at the time.

Cody was an agreeable fellow and pleasant to get along with; but it was necessary to make much allowance for the statements he made about himself — his tales of what he had seen and done. Nevertheless, because of his friendly manners and his apparent kindness, he was liked by most of those with whom he came in contact.²⁰

Following Cody in the expedition train came two Pawnee scouts:

Tuckee-tre-lous and La Hoora-sac the former a celebrated warrior of the Pawnee Loups and the latter, on account of his youth, as yet only known as a skillful trailer and successful hunter. They both wear cavalry uniforms and are very proud of them. Their scalp lock are neatly braided tied with red and yellow ribands and ornamented at the end with one or two small feathers. They are very proud of their equipments and turn around occa-

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sionally to ejaculate to those who ride behind them "Heap o' good." Next comes the two officers Lieuts. R. and T. followed by our own party then fifty soldiers and after them six wagons each with its high white tilt shining in the sun sharply outlined against the dark green of the prairie and it's six mules straining as the driver cracks his black snake and urges them on with loud cries.

We march along slowly averaging about four miles an hour. All our party are charmed by the novelty of the scene. The professor turns out of the line now and then to examine a plant that is new to him or to look at the skeleton of a buffalo with which the plain is strewn. Others delight in the new forms of animal life which we see on every hand. Antelope on the distant bluffs, the new birds which we see continually, an occasional "Jackass Rabbit" loping slowly away and the sharp "skirr" of the terrible rattle snake all combine to interest and amuse us.

So we go on for about fifteen miles at length there is a stir at the head of the command. Horses are urged to a gallop and as we round the point of a low bluff we see a small pool of water and know that we have reached our first camping ground. As we come in sight of it about a hundred yards distant an antelope springs up from the edge of the water and gazes curiously at the strange creatures that move toward it. It turns to flee but on the instant a number of rifles crack and the gentle animal falls dying and pays the penalty of its curiosity.²¹

The two lieutenants were Bernard Reilly, Jr. and Earl Dennison Thomas. Little is known of Reilly, but Thomas, a Civil War veteran and West Point graduate, would rise through the ranks and ultimately retire as a brigadier general. The expedition named the small pool of water Pawnee Springs (the headwaters of today's Pawnee Creek in northeastern Lincoln County) and it was here that the first day ended, as does the "Party of Twelve" manuscript.²²

In the years to come, Grinnell typically kept small, pocket-size, trip diaries of his journeys, and used them to refresh his memory as he wrote accounts for *Forest and Stream*. The "Party of Twelve" manuscript was probably compiled in that manner. In fact, Grinnell's diary of the 1870 trip contains accounts of the events described in the manuscript.



A camp scene near Fort Bridger, Wyoming, suggests that it did not take long for the "innocent party of pilgrims" to become a considerably rougher lot than they appeared in the group photo taken as the journey began. The reclining man second from the left is tentatively identified as Grinnell. From *The Passing of the Great West: Selected Papers of George Bird Grinnell*, edited and with introduction and commentary by John F. Reiger. Copyright 1972 by John F. Reiger, assigned 1984 to the University of Oklahoma Press

Although brief, Grinnell's diary provides personal detail not present in his published and unpublished accounts, almost as if the entries were for a letter to his family. For example, he wrote that the group often spent their evenings singing and playing pitch and that each campsite (beginning on the eighth day) was named after one of the expedition members. The July 27 campsite, for example, was named "Camp Birdie Grinnell."²³

The diary also provides glimpses of Grinnell's subtle sense of humor, such as when he records his excitement on seeing what he thought was a new species of great blue heron, "but upon examina-

tion I found it was only one of the mosquitos of the country."²⁴ On a more serious side, the diary records the budding naturalist's sightings of dozens of birds and mammals; the man who eventually organized the first Audubon Society, helped Theodore Roosevelt create the Boone and Crockett Club, and later was called the "Grandfather of American Conservation" was recording everything he saw.²⁵

After the group left the Pawnee Springs campsite, they continued northward, spending seventeen days exploring the region between the Platte and Dismal rivers. In addition to their days of travel, their time was filled with successful

fossil hunting forays (“fossilizing” in Grinnell’s diary) and not-so-successful antelope-hunting side trips. Although they saw signs of the Native residents of the region, the only Indians they encountered in Nebraska were the two Pawnee Scouts who accompanied them.

Upon their return to Fort McPherson, Marsh and his brood boarded a west-bound train for Fort D. A. Russell in Wyoming Territory, where their next adventures began. After that, it was on to Fort Bridger and a trip south into the Uinta Mountains before heading to Salt Lake City and finally San Francisco. The expedition began breaking up as winter approached, and Grinnell returned home in November.²⁶

Like many of his contemporaries who ventured westward, Grinnell’s first trip West was an extremely influential event in his young life. In five short months he saw the landscapes he had read about as a child, met the men he credited with “taming” the West, and encountered the Native peoples who would dominate the rest of his life. Unlike many of those of many contemporaries, however, Grinnell’s 1870 trip was much more than a coming-of-age journey into the wilds of North America. He returned time and time again over the next sixty years. His views and opinions of the people and environment of the West evolved as his influence as a writer and advocate grew, but his memories of the 1870 trip always expressed fondness for the people he met and awe for the country he encountered.

Upon his return East, Grinnell spent the next three years in New York City learning the ropes of the family brokerage house. Despite business commitments, he found time for two quick trips to Nebraska in the years following the Yale expedition. In 1872 he and Jim Russell joined Lute North for a two-week excursion hunting buffalo with the Pawnee along the Republican River, and in 1873 Grinnell and Lute hunted elk in the Loup Rivers region.

Within a few years, Grinnell’s father, George Blake Grinnell, retired and

renamed the business, “George Bird Grinnell & Co.” Honoring his father’s wishes, Grinnell did his best to step into George Sr.’s shoes; still, one can only wonder if his relatives really believed he would succeed, especially with his penchant to spend his free hours in the city’s markets and menageries collecting specimens for Professor Marsh.

Grinnell’s tenure in the world of high finance was quickly punctuated by a national financial crisis, the Panic of 1873. As it turned out, the panic propelled Grinnell to take up his pen and begin writing. Grinnell explained this motivation in an undated manuscript:

During the business panic of 1873 I was working in an office in Wall Street and was greatly concerned over the situation. All business there had practically stopped and people generally could neither pay nor collect their debts. I worried over this for days, and one evening, in order to get my thoughts from the matter, I began to set down a little story—the events of a hunting experience in the west. When I finished this, I began another similar story and recalling these memories, I gradually became so interested as almost to forget my troubles.

I knew slightly Charles Hallock, who had just established the *Forest and Stream* newspaper, and showed him the stories and later he printed them and asked me to write others for him. I continued to write. Later, after the immediate occasion of this first writing had passed, I still set down other accounts of western adventure, and as the time went by the work grew easier. This was the beginning of my making copy for the printer.²⁷

In all, there were five “little stories” published in *Forest and Stream* between October 1873 and February 1874.²⁸ All were published under the pseudonym “Ornis,” Greek for bird. Grinnell’s writings appeared in *Forest and Stream* for the next fifty years, but usually under the pseudonym “Yo;” Ornis made only one appearance after 1874.²⁹

A seventh Ornis article, never published, also describes the early days of the 1870 trip. More polished than the “Party of Twelve,” the account consists of a draft and a final version incorporating the edited remarks of the draft. The draft version is titled “Western Sketches;” the

final signed manuscript is titled “Camp Life West of the Missouri: Among the Sand Hills of Nebraska.” Almost 2,500 words long (“Party of Twelve” is 1,200), “Camp Life” is clearly written with an audience in mind. “Camp Life” takes the expedition past Pawnee Springs, giving readers a glimpse of the second day’s march that ended just before reaching the South Loup River near today’s Stapleton in Logan County.³⁰

Best described as a travelogue, the essay attempts to transport the reader from the comfort of his armchair to the beautiful and mysterious world west of the Missouri. “Camp Life” is one of Grinnell’s early attempts at what one critic has termed, his “successful use of narrative to create a sense of presence. . . storytelling which conveys the intensity of closely observed personal experience.”³¹ In fact, Grinnell becomes so intent on describing the days of yesteryear that he does not inform the reader about the 1870 trip until midway through the article, and then without reference to names or dates. More than 130 years later, “Camp Life” remains a wonderful example of a young author experimenting with a new writing style, while at the same time providing us with another glimpse of the 1870 expedition’s first few days (see page 47).

It seems probable that both the “Party of Twelve” manuscript and the “Camp Life” manuscript were two of the “other accounts of western adventure” that Grinnell composed as a result of his meeting with Hallock.³² Ornis offers a hint about when “Camp Life” was written in the first paragraph, when he notes that a surveying party had recently reported the discovering of a “vast forest of pines” at the headwaters of the Niobrara River. It is not clear who the surveyors were, and thus the date cannot be pinpointed, but it may simply be a broad reference to one of the many mid-1870s expeditions (including Marsh’s 1873 trip) that passed through the area that today is the tri-state region of Nebraska, Wyoming, and South Dakota.

Why the “Party of Twelve” and

Early Writings of George Bird Grinnell



Grinnell (left) and Luther North, shown here at Crow Agency, Montana, in 1926, became fast friends and remained so for more than sixty years. Grinnell's last book, *Two Great Scouts and Their Pawnee Battalion* (1928), a biography of the North brothers and their lives in the West, was based on Luther's recollections. Courtesy The Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

"Camp Life" manuscripts were never published also remains unanswered. Since both deal with the same trip, it is possible that one was written as a replacement for the other. And, since "Camp Life" is signed, it seems likely that it was the final version. Perhaps the article's reflectiveness and lack of action kept it from appearing in print; it really cannot be considered a true "hunting" story. Regardless of the reason, the manuscripts found their way into a personal archive that ultimately grew to mammoth proportions.

The Panic of 1873 not only stimulated Grinnell to start writing, but it also seemed to be the catalyst for his decision to leave the family business. When calm returned to the brokerage (largely due to George Sr.'s return), Grinnell declared that there was nothing more to hold him in New York as "I had always had a settled dislike for the business."³³ In March 1874 the brokerage was dissolved and its namesake headed north to New

Haven, where he served as one of Marsh's assistants, often unpaid, until 1880.

Grinnell's reunion with Marsh was quickly rewarded, as the professor asked him to go on an upcoming government expedition to the Black Hills. Grinnell recruited Lute North as his assistant. A year later Grinnell traveled to the recently established Yellowstone National Park, again as a government scientist. After 1875 Grinnell's Nebraska trips revolved around hunting trips with the North brothers, visits to the Dismal River ranch they co-owned with Cody, and in later years, short stops in Columbus to visit Lute or pick him up and head west.

Grinnell's association with *Forest and Stream* lasted more than forty-five years. In 1876, while still in New Haven, he became the paper's natural history editor. Four years later, after he and his father had purchased "over one-third of the capital stock," he moved back to New York to become president and editor-in-chief. Grinnell sold the paper

in 1911, but continued to write for it until 1921, the year his name stopped appearing on the masthead as a member of the advisory board. Grinnell became a prolific writer who seemed never at a loss for a topic. In addition to his work for *Forest and Stream* he published on topics ranging literally from A (anthropology) to Z (zoology), and his writing helped shape America's impressions of the turn-of-the century West.³⁴

Although he spent less and less time in Nebraska, Grinnell's relationships and memories bound him to the state for the rest of his life. References to Nebraska friends and places often crop up in his writings.³⁵ Ironically, by the time he began to publish his ethnographic studies, the Pawnee had been relocated to the Indian Territory. Still, the die had been cast; Grinnell's love affair with the American West began to blossom and, as pointed out by Nebraska's own Mari Sandoz, "[f]or more than sixty-five years George Bird Grinnell's energies, concern



A prolific writer, Grinnell was the author or editor of more than thirty books, contributed to a dozen more, and produced hundreds of articles for *Forest and Stream*, a weekly sporting magazine. An influential cultural and environmental preservationist, his writing helped shape America's impressions of the turn-of-the-century West. NSHS- RG2411-1989

and scholarship were all centered upon the native life of the Great Plains and the bordering mountains." Echoing those sentiments, upon his death, a Nebraska

State Historical Society resolution noted that Grinnell "left imperishable evidence of his love for the Nebraska region and the people who dwell therein."³⁶

Grinnell returned to Nebraska metaphorically in his last book, *Two Great Scouts*. For years, Grinnell had encouraged Lute North to write the story of his life, and finally, in the 1920s, Lute began recording his recollections and sending them to Grinnell to edit. Grinnell would work on them for a few weeks and then return them to Lute with a few questions and suggestions. In 1925 and 1926 Grinnell sent the completed manuscript to several of his publishers. Correspondence among Grinnell, North, and the publishers indicates that at least two publishers (Scribner's and Arthur H. Clark) turned the manuscript down, primarily because it was not detailed enough. In a letter dated December 12, 1926, Grinnell suggested to North that while he would prefer Lute be the author, Grinnell would be willing to step in if Lute approved, implying that it would be easier to publish the work if Grinnell were listed as author. Lute apparently approved, and Grinnell began work on the manuscript that became *Two Great Scouts*.³⁷

Unfortunately, Grinnell's skills as a biographer never matched his other writing skills and *Two Great Scouts* has been criticized for leaning too heavily on Lute's questionable memory. That, combined with his close relationship with Lute and his near hero worship of Frank, did not allow him to view the North Brothers through the objective and critical eyes their lives deserved.³⁸

One final Nebraska manuscript—a short poem that begins, "Broad are Nebraska's Rolling Plains"—has remained confined to the acid-free folders of an archive for more than one hundred years. Classically educated, Grinnell was no doubt more familiar with poetry than are today's youth. Many periodicals of the day, including *Forest and Stream*, featured a poem or two in each issue. Still, no other piece of poetry has ever been credited to Grinnell. Like the other Nebraska manuscripts, there is no sure way to date the poem's composition, but it seems safe to say that the poem, found in a small collection of his earliest

Early Writings of George Bird Grinnell

papers, was written shortly after his return from one of his first Nebraska trips. Handwritten, with a draft on the verso, the poem is hardly a literary ode for the ages. Still, it highlights the wonder and romance that Grinnell found in those first trips:

Broad are Nebraska's rolling plains
Fertile her meadowed bottoms lie
Mighty the rivers that roll along
Fed by the snows of mountains high

Land of the watchful antelope
Land where the mighty bison roam
Where the great Elk and the timid
Deer and the turkey make their homes

Beats neath the buckskin hunting shirt
Many a brave and noble heart
In many a deed of chivalry
The stalwart hunters take their part

Where crafty Sioux in war paint grim
Menace the lives of those they love
With whoop and yell a murderous horde
Dashing down from the bluffs above³⁹

Grinnell often noted that he had missed the true "Far West," and Nebraska in the early 1870s was as close as he ever got to the days he read about as a boy in New York. Rather than dwelling on what might have been, however, the realization that he had missed those early days seemed to inspire him to try to preserve what remained and record what had passed. Grinnell's days among "Nebraska's rolling plains," were key to that inspiration and ultimately helped him become one of the West's most influential cultural and environmental preservationists.⁴⁰

Notes

¹ There is no comprehensive biography of Grinnell, but more than fifty profiles have been published. Since the early 1970s, John F. Reiger has led the way in documenting Grinnell's life and work. Most important is his edited collection of Grinnell letters and memoirs, *The Passing of the Great West: Selected Papers of George Bird Grinnell* (New York: Winchester Press, 1972). Another book-length study is Edward Day Harris, "Preserving a Vision of the American West: The Life of George Bird Grinnell" (Ph. D. diss., Yale University, 1995). Among the dozens of shorter profiles, the best include Sherry L. Smith, "George Bird Grinnell, and the 'Vanishing' Plains Indians," *Montana, The*

Magazine of Western History 50 (2000): 18–31; John G. Mitchell, "A Man Called Bird," *Audubon* 89 (1987): 81–104; Albert Kenrick Fisher, "In Memoriam: George Bird Grinnell," *Auk* 56, (1939): 1–13. For a rare critical view of Grinnell's role in the establishment of Glacier National Park see Mark David Spence, "Crown of the Continent, Backbone of the World: The American Wilderness Ideal and Blackfeet Exclusion from Glacier National Park," *Environmental History* 1 (July 1996): 29–49.

² George Bird Grinnell, *Pawnee Hero Stories and Folk-tales: With Notes on the Origin, Customs and Character of the Pawnee People* (New York: Forest and Stream Publishing Co., 1889); George Bird Grinnell, *Two Great Scouts and Their Pawnee Battalion: The Experiences of Frank J. North and Luther H. North, Pioneers in the Great West, 1856–1882, and Their Defense of the Building of the Union Pacific Railroad* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1928).

The most complete published bibliography of Grinnell's works is Thomas R. Wessel, "George Bird Grinnell," in *Historians of the American Frontier: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. John R. Wunder (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 279–94. Grinnell compiled a 126-page bibliography of his own writings, which includes many of his unsigned *Forest and Stream* contributions. It is with the George Bird Grinnell Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library. A microfilm version of the Yale collection was published by Scholarly Resources, Inc., in 1999, and will be cited hereafter as Grinnell papers, with the appropriate reel and frame numbers. See *Grinnell Bibliography*, R45:383–543.

³ George Bird Grinnell, "An Old-Time Bone Hunt: An Account of the Expedition Undertaken by Prof. O. C. Marsh in 1870 to the then Wild West," *Natural History* 23 (July–August 1923): 329–36. For the accounts found in his Memoirs and letters, see Reiger, *Passing of the Great West*.

⁴ Although somewhat dated, the standard biography of Marsh is Charles Schuchert and Clara Mae LeVene, *O. C. Marsh, Pioneer in Paleontology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940).

⁵ *Memoirs*, Manuscript Group Number 1388, f. 214, 215, pp. 36–37, Grinnell Papers. British born Mayne Reid was the author of numerous adventure stories set in the Southwest and Mexico. See Joan Steele, *Captain Mayne Reid* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978).

⁶ Grinnell's contributions to these expeditions can be found in the official records. For the 1874 trip, see George Bird Grinnell, "Paleontological Report" and "Zoological Report," in *Report of a Reconnaissance of the Black Hills of Dakota, Made in the Summer of 1874*, by William Ludlow (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1875). For the 1875 trip, see George Bird Grinnell, "Zoological Report," in *Report of a Reconnaissance from Carroll, Montana Territory, on the Upper Missouri, to the Yellowstone National Park, and Return, Made in the Summer of 1875*, by William Ludlow (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1876).

For Grinnell's published profiles of Marsh see

George Bird Grinnell, "Sketch of Professor O. C. Marsh," *Popular Science Monthly* 13 (September 1878): 612–15; Grinnell, "Othniel Charles Marsh: Paleontologist, 1831–1899," in *Leading American Men of Science*, ed. David Starr Jordan (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1910). See also Grinnell's obituary of Marsh, *Forest and Stream* 52 (Mar. 25, 1899): 221. See, as well, Grinnell's letter of support released by Marsh to the press, *New York Herald*, Jan. 19, 1890. For descriptions of Marsh's other "Yale Student Expeditions," as well as profiles of some of the collectors he later employed, see Mary Faith Pankin, "The Yale Scientific Expedition of 1871: A Student's-Eye-View," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 99 (Winter 1998–99): 374–435; Michael F. Kohl and John S. McIntosh, *Discovering Dinosaurs in the Old West: The Field Journals of Arthur Lakes* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997); Charles Lindsay, "The Diary of Dr. Thomas G. Maghee," *Nebraska History Magazine* 12 (July–September 1929): 247–304. Two recent publications detailing the Marsh-Cope competition are Mark Jaffe, *The Gilded Dinosaur: The Fossil War Between E. D. Cope and O. C. Marsh and the Rise of American Science* (New York: Crown Books, 2000); David Rains Wallace, *Bonehunter's Revenge: Dinosaurs, Greed, and the Greatest Scientific Feud of the Gilded Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

⁷ Schuchert, *O. C. Marsh*, 102.

⁸ Untitled manuscript, R37: 661–62, Grinnell papers.

⁹ Grinnell, "An Old-Time Bone Hunt," 330; Grinnell, *Memoirs*, 37.

¹⁰ Other members of the expedition, all graduates of or current students at Yale or Yale's Sheffield Scientific School, included Charles Ballard, Alexander H. Ewing, and John W. Griswold. For the Betts and Zeigler articles, see C. W. Betts, "The Yale College Expedition of 1870," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 43 (October 1871): 663–71; "Results of the Yale College Expedition to the Far West," *New York Herald*, Dec. 24, 1870.

¹¹ For a history of Fort McPherson, see Louis A. Holmes, *Fort McPherson, Nebraska, Fort Cottonwood N.T., Guardian of the Tracks and Trails* (Lincoln, Nebr.: Johnsen Publishing Co., 1963). There are many profiles of the Pawnee Scouts, including those written by Grinnell. Perhaps the most accessible and succinct is Donald F. Danker, "The North Brothers and the Pawnee Scouts," in *The Nebraska Indian Wars Reader, 1865–1877*, ed. R. Eli Paul (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).

¹² Special Order 91, July 12, 1870, Fort McPherson, Nebraska, Special Orders, v. 22, Record Group 393, Records of the U.S. Army Continental Commands, National Archives and Records Administration.

¹³ Untitled manuscript, R37:662, Grinnell papers. The surgeon mentioned was probably Assistant Surgeon A. D. Wilson. See Holmes, *Fort McPherson, Nebraska*, 95.

¹⁴ Grinnell, *Pawnee Hero Stories*, dedication page; Bayard Paine, *Pioneers, Indians and Buffaloes*

(Curtis, Nebr.: Curtis Enterprise, 1935), 132.

¹⁵ For a discussion of Grinnell's admiration of frontiersmen, as well as a profile of Grinnell the writer, see Robley Evans, *George Bird Grinnell*, Western Writers Series 123 (Boise: Boise State University, 1996). Grinnell's quote on westerners is from his *Beyond the Old Frontier: Adventures of Indian-Fighters, Hunters and Fur-Traders* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 325.

¹⁶ "Frank North," *Forest and Stream* 24 (Mar. 19, 1885): 141. Much of the wording in the obituary would later appear in Grinnell's other profiles of North. See Grinnell, *Pawnee Hero Stories*, 323–35, and *Two Great Scouts*, 20.

¹⁷ Untitled manuscript, R37: 662–64, Grinnell papers.

¹⁸ Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000). The Cody-Comstock contest is discussed in most Cody profiles. Grinnell's account is similar to most, although he credits Cody with shooting thirty-six buffalo during one run, while most other accounts mention thirty-eight. Additionally, Grinnell refers to Cody's horse as "Little Buckskin," while other profiles call him "Buckskin Joe." The quote is from Grinnell's Diary, July 14–30, 1870, MS 5, George Bird Grinnell Manuscript Collection, Braun Research Library, Southwest Museum (hereafter cited as Grinnell manuscript collection).

¹⁹ *William F. Cody*, R46: 999–1003, Grinnell papers.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, R46: 1001–1003.

²¹ Untitled manuscript, R37: 664–66, Grinnell papers.

²² Reilly apparently remained in the army until 1878, while Thomas's decorated career did not end until his retirement in 1911. For details on Reilly see Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1903) 1:822. For Thomas, see George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1891) 3:97, 142, 160–61, 190, 399.

²³ Diary, July 17, 18, 27, 1870, Grinnell manuscript collection. "Birdie" was Grinnell's nickname among his expedition mates, and one that Jim Russell would use in his letters to Grinnell for the next fifty years.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, July 15, 1870.

²⁵ For Grinnell's role in the establishment of the Audubon Society, see Mitchell, "A Man Called

Bird." For Grinnell's role in establishing the Boone and Crockett Club, see John F. Reiger, "Boone and Crockett Club" in *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation*, 3rd. ed. (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2001), 146–74. For Grinnell's role in the American conservation movement, see Michael Frome, "George Bird Grinnell: Grandfather of American Conservation," *Field and Stream* 75 (June 1970): 171–72.

²⁶ For a complete and thorough description of the expedition's route in the Nebraska Sandhills, see C. Barron McIntosh, "The Route of a Sand Hills Bone Hunt: The Yale College Expedition of 1870," *Nebraska History* 69 (Summer 1988): 84–94. Besides describing some of the events of the trip, McIntosh meticulously maps the route, hypothesizing that the group never reached the Middle Loup River, as all the members thought, but rather ascended the Dismal River.

²⁷ Untitled manuscript, R46: 880–81, Grinnell papers.

²⁸ The five articles by Ornis, all from *Forest and Stream*, vols. 1 and 2, are "Elk Hunting in Nebraska" (Oct. 2, 1873): 116; "A Day with the Sage Grouse" (Nov. 6, 1873): 196; "The Green River Country" (Nov. 13, 1873): 212; "Buffalo Hunt with the Pawnees" (Dec. 25, 1873): 305–6; and "Albinos" (Feb. 19, 1874): 22.

²⁹ George Bird Grinnell [Ornis, pseud.], "With Goats and Sheep in British Columbia," *Forest and Stream* 72 (Apr. 10, 1909): 574–755; (Apr. 17, 1909): 613–14; (Apr. 24, 1909): 653–54; (May 1, 1909): 695–96.

³⁰ *Western Sketches*, R46: 609–28, Grinnell papers; George Bird Grinnell [Ornis, pseud.], *Camp Life West of the Missouri: Among the Sand Hills of Nebraska*, R44: 731–42, *ibid.*

³¹ Evans, *George Bird Grinnell*, 11.

³² Grinnell's relationship with Hallock was often strained. In 1877 Hallock published *The Sportsman's Gazetteer and General Guide* (New York: Forest and Stream Publishing Co.), offering Grinnell and several other contributors minimal credit for their work, a slight Grinnell mentioned in his *Memoirs* thirty-eight years later. Not long afterwards Hallock was asked to step down as president of *Forest and Stream* and Grinnell was asked to replace him. Despite all this, the two corresponded for years and often spoke well of one another. For an example of a Grinnell profile of Hallock, see his unsigned editorial celebrating *Forest and Stream's*

twentieth anniversary in *Forest and Stream*, June 29, 1893: 559. For Hallock's comments regarding Grinnell, see Charles Hallock, *An Angler's Reminiscences* (Cincinnati: Sportsman's Review Publishing Co., 1913), 46.

³³ *Memoirs*, 52.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

³⁵ In the years to come Luther North would often appear in Grinnell's accounts of their hunting trips, sometimes identified by name, but more often by pseudonyms "Small Chief" or "Skeede Chief." For examples see Grinnell [Yo, pseud.] "The Rock Climbers," *Forest and Stream* 29 (Dec. 29, 1887): 442–43; "The Misfortunes of Pani Puk'koats," *Forest and Stream* 31 (Dec. 6, 1888): 382–83. Grinnell's recollections of Frank North (identified as "The Chief") appeared less frequently. For one example, a recollection of an event at the Cody-North ranch, see "After Stolen Horses," *Forest and Stream* 21 (Jan. 10, 1889): 494–95. For a wonderful example of a Grinnell reference to Nebraska, when writing about other parts of the West, see the concluding paragraphs of his "Rocky Mountain Wanderings," *Forest and Stream* 11 (Aug. 22, 1878): 55.

³⁶ Mari Sandoz, "Introduction" in George Bird Grinnell, *The Cheyenne Indians: Their History and Ways of Life* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1962), v; "Dr. George Bird Grinnell," *Nebraska History* 19 (Jan.–Mar. 1938): 52.

³⁷ Grinnell to North, Dec. 12, 1926, R29: 574–75, Grinnell papers. Luther's original manuscript was finally published, with Grinnell's introduction, as *Man of the Plains: The Recollections of Luther North*, Donald F. Danker, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961).

³⁸ James B. Hedges, review of *Two Great Scouts and Their Pawnee Battalion* in *American Historical Review* 31 (July 1929): 890–91; Leo E. Oliva, review of *Two Great Scouts* in *American Indian Quarterly* 1 (Winter 1974–75): 293–94; *The New Encyclopedia of the American West*, s.v., "Grinnell, George Bird."

³⁹ Untitled manuscript, AHC#09657, George Bird Grinnell Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁴⁰ For examples of Grinnell's descriptions of the "Far West" that preceded his arrival in 1870, see Grinnell [Yo, pseud.] "The Old West," *Forest and Stream* 50 (June 25, 1898): 508–9; Grinnell, *Beyond the Old Frontier*; and Grinnell, *When Buffalo Ran* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920).