

THE FORT KEOGH TO BISMARCK STAGE ROUTE

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The settling of the West in the United States depended to a great extent on the means of communication and the modes of travel available. The transcontinental railroads were the greatest single factor in the development of the lands beyond the Mississippi. Yet often there would not have been any railroads had it not been for the more primitive modes of travel that preceded them. Wagon roads and the pony express brought immigrants and mail to the frontier and to the West Coast many years before the railroads ventured into the wilderness. We are all acquainted with the famous Oregon Trail; but few are aware that a highway of national importance went through North Dakota before the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad. In 1878 a mail and freight stage line was established between Bismarck, the end of the railway at that time, and Fort Keogh near Miles City. It closed the gap between coast to coast communications over the northern route, and shortened the time several days.

Daily mail service was maintained over the route for four years. The road was known by several names. "Tongue River Road", "Fort Keogh Trail", "Bismarck and Fort Keogh Stage Road", and "Government Trail" were all used to designate the mail and freight route.¹ The United States Government had contemplated such a road long before the first mail-carrying stages linked East with West in 1878. The plea for a means of communication over a northern route went unheeded in the decade preceding the Civil War, because Southern Congressmen blocked government aid to an overland route in the northern territories.² The outbreak of the War between the States and the discovery of gold in Montana and Idaho in 1860-61 changed this. Gold-hunters on the upper Mississippi wanted a northern, direct route to the gold fields; and Congress, faced by the economic problems of war and anxious to stimulate the production of gold, agreed to furnish military escorts for the emigrant trains.³ In 1862 Captain James

¹Maps from the Surveyor General's Office, 1878-1900. These maps are on file in the Capital Building, Bismarck, North Dakota, in the Highway Department. In future footnotes they will be referred to as: SGO.

²W. G. Ghent, *The Road to Oregon*, pp. 187-189.

³*Minnesota Historical Bulletin*, vol. V, p. 270.

L. Fisk was given a meagre appropriation for providing an escort for an emigrant train from St. Paul to Walla Walla. This was a semi-official operation, called the Northern Overland Expedition⁴, and it was supposed to test the feasibility of a wagon route from Fort Abercrombie on the Red River to Forts Union, Benton, and Walla Walla. It was intended that he should follow the route surveyed by Governor Isaac I. Stevens in 1853, and meet the Mullen or Military Road which had been opened between Walla Walla and Fort Benton in 1858-1862.⁵

Captain Fisk was eminently successful in his expedition of 1862. The year following he escorted another group of gold-hungry people by the same route. He laid out a trail which he hoped would rival the Oregon Trail. Pending the pacification of the Sioux, promoters envisioned not only chains of military posts, but also mail, express, and telegraph communications with the West over the northern part of the United States. Emigrants had a choice of three routes—by way of the Oregon Trail, by steamer up the Missouri to Fort Union or Fort Benton, or by way of Fisk's northern route. The last mentioned was the shortest, and it was preferred by many.⁶

Although Fisk's expedition of 1864 did not succeed, his opportunely successful trip of 1866 stirred Minnesota businessmen to press for the establishment of a fort-protected wagon road. Chief among the men interested were J. C. and H. C. Burbank who proposed to start a mail and freight route. Early in 1866 the business men of St. Cloud sent a petition to Congress for a mail route from their city to Walla Walla. When the firm of J. P. Wilson of St. Louis announced that it would send one thousand tons of freight from St. Louis to Montana by way of St. Cloud, interest mounted. In March, 1866, the Northern Pacific Railroad Company secured a charter, by which it pledged that as soon as possible a stage and mail line would be opened from St. Cloud to Montana and that the line would be kept in operation until the railroad was completed.

⁴N. P. Langford, *Vigilante Days and Ways*, vol. I, p. 280.

⁵*The Montana Magazine of History*, vol. I, No. 2, p. 13.

⁶Edna L. Waldo, *Dakota*, p. 270. A map of the route from St. Paul to Walla Walla appears in Volume IV of Seymour Dunbar's *A History of Travel in America*. It was 1,685 3/4 miles long. (P. 1128 and p. 1426)

In June, 1866, J. C. Burbank reported that the prospect of establishing a regular line of mail coaches from St. Cloud to Walla Walla in the spring of 1867 was very favorable. Captain Fisk, elated by his fourth successful expedition, wrote to Governor Marshall of Minnesota on September 29, 1866:

Everyone here in Montana seems elated over the cheering prospect of a northern stage line from Minnesota via the route I hope I have by this time fully demonstrated to be the safest, the best and one-half shorter than any other now or heretofore used . . . Say to Messrs. Burbank, Blakely and Co. that just as soon as I get a day's leisure I will complete a detailed report and itinerary of my trips and the route of this season, and forward the same to them by mail.⁷

Fisk believed that the stage line would be entirely feasible and easily protected against the attacks of Indians, and he planned to develop a mountain headquarters for the large firm in the Sun River Valley of Montana.⁸

The stage line conceived by Fisk and Burbank did not materialize. Burbank became interested in other projects. Though the government built a string of forts to protect the route, emigrants used it seldom. Most of them took Missouri River steamboats to Forts Union and Benton, and thus avoided most of the hostile Indians.⁹ A government contract was let to Major Charles A. Ruffee for a pony express from Fort Abercrombie to Forts Totten, Stevenson, Buford, and Benton. His hardy carriers operated the mail service regularly in the summer of 1867, but in the following winter they were robbed, beaten and threatened with death.¹⁰ The Indians, seeing the line of forts as the coils of the military

⁷Arthur J. Larson, "The Northwest Express and Transportation Company", *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 54-55. "Expeditions of Captain Jas. L. Fisk to the Gold Mines of Idaho and Montana, 1864-66", *North Dakota Historical Collections*, vol. 2, part 1, pp. 421-461.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹Lewis Crawford, *Rekindling Camp Fires*, pp. 96-101. David Hilger, "Overland Trail", *Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana*, vol. VII, pp. 257-270.

¹⁰Lucile M. Kane (trans.) *Military Life in Dakota, The Journal of Philippe Regis de Trobriand*, p. 240. Joseph Henry Taylor, *Frontier and Indian Life and Kaleidoscopic Lives*, pp. 169-176. M. M. Quaife, (ed.) *Yellowstone Kelly*, pp. 40-50.

anaconda, sought to isolate the coils by hampering communications between them.¹¹

This situation prompted the following report from the Postmaster General:

In the last Annual Report, allusion was made to the route from Fort Abercrombie, Dakota, to Helena, Montana . . . intended to provide direct mail communication to the Territories of Montana, Idaho, and Washington. It was stated that, in consequence of Indian hostilities on nearly the whole of the line, the service was unreliable, of no value to the department, and would be discontinued in the spring, unless a marked improvement occurred. As there was no improvement, the service was discontinued from March 30, 1868; but at the last session of Congress a Resolution was adopted as follows:

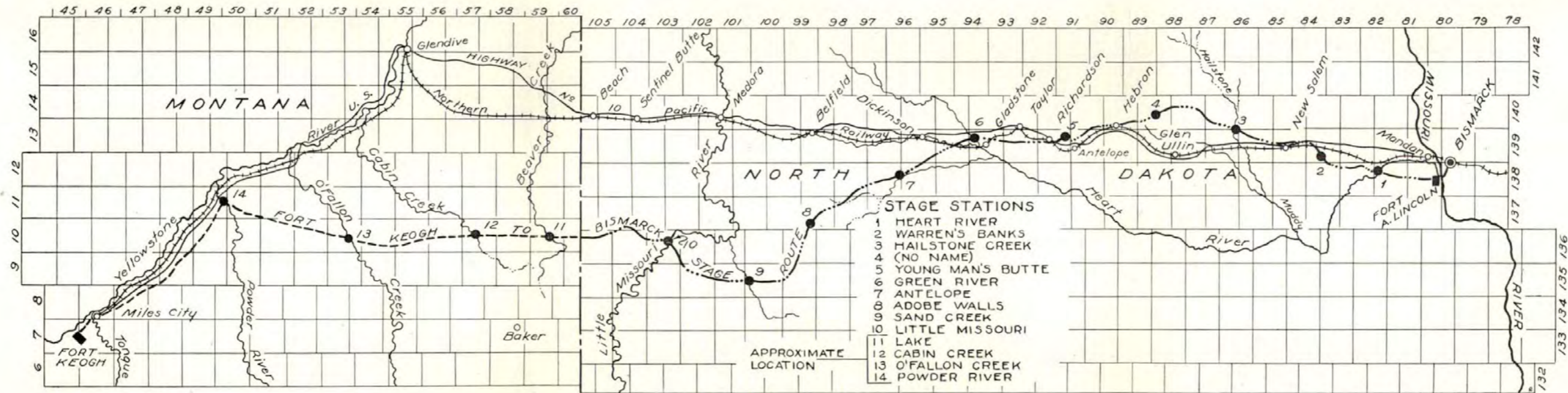
Resolved, etc, That the Postmaster General is hereby authorized to change the character of the mail service from Fort Abercrombie, Dakota Territory, to Helena, Montana Territory, to post-coach service.

No service existed on the route at the date of this resolution, and the resolution is not mandatory in its terms; but, considering it as indicating that the legislative will required that the mail should be carried, and on post-coaches, and acting on the supposition that a special appropriation would be made to meet the expense, an advertisement was issued July 28, 1868, inviting proposals for service from January 1, 1869, to June 30, 1872, three times a week, in four-horse post-coaches. The lowest bid received was that of Teech, Piper & Montgomery, of Kittaning, Pennsylvania, October 2, 1868, and contracts have since been executed.¹²

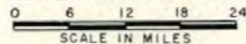
The treaty of 1868 was intended to quiet the apprehensive Indians. The Bozeman Trail, a branch of the Oregon Trail, was abandoned because it encroached on lands guaranteed to the In-

¹¹There were battles at Fort Buford December 24 and 25, 1866, November 6, 1867, May 13 and August 20, 1868, January 3, 1870 and January 9, 1891. There were battles at Fort Rice September 11 to 30, April 26 and June 2, 1865, July 31, 1866 and September 26, 1868. There were battles at Fort Totten May 15 and August 23, 1868, and at Fort Stevenson July 9, August 8 and October 10, 1867, and May 15 and August 31, 1868. Clement A. Lounsberry, "Popular History of North Dakota," *North Dakota Magazine*, vol. III, no. 2, p. 7.

¹²*Message of the President of the United States with Reports of Heads of Departments*, 1869, pp. 1081-1082.



**FORT KEOGH TO BISMARCK
STAGE MAIL ROUTE 1878-1882**



REDRAWN FROM MAP PREPARED BY
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1954

dians in 1851. But the treaty afforded a loophole for the railroad builders; it failed to define the northern boundary of the Indian lands. When surveyors for the Northern Pacific, protected by a military escort, selected a route north of the Heart River to the right bank of the Yellowstone River, the Sioux made a vigorous protest of this violation of their territory, and resumed hostilities.¹³

Fort Abraham Lincoln was built near the Missouri River crossing in 1872-73 mostly to furnish protection for the surveyors. The Northern Pacific reached Bismarck in 1873. It did not cross the Missouri River for six years, partly because of financial distress, and partly because of the hostility of the Indians. The attempt to remove the obstructing Indians to reservations led to the famous battle of the Little Big Horn, in which George A. Custer was killed.

General Phil Sheridan had recommended for several years the erection of a fort at the confluence of the Tongue and Yellowstone Rivers, to prevent further Indian hostilities and to protect a road to Montana. Soon after the Custer disaster, Congress appropriated \$200,000 for this purpose.¹⁴ In August, 1876, Colonel Nelson A. Miles commenced the construction of the fort which he hoped to use as his headquarters for his winter campaign against the Sioux. A temporary cantonment was built that fall, and in the spring of 1877 Captain Heintzelmann, with a crew of men and materials, arrived at the site and commenced construction. General Miles was the first commanding officer of this new post and the Fifth United States Infantry was the first force stationed there.¹⁵ The Fort was named after Captain Myles Walter Keogh, who had died with Custer on the Little Big Horn.

With the establishment of a permanent post so far up the Yellowstone, the problem of supply became one of prime importance. Early in September, 1876, General Terry's troops had been dispersed to garrison the various posts along the Yellowstone. All land transportation was devoted to supplying these cantonments.¹⁶

¹³*South Dakota Historical Collections*, vol. XV, pp. 256-257.

¹⁴*Report of the Secretary of War*, 1876 I, 37, 442, 467; General Nelson A. Miles, *Personal Recollections*, p. 218; Edward S. Luce, *Keogh, Comanche, and Custer*, p. 117; Charles Francis Koe, *Custer's Last Battle*, p. 35.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*

Reliance could not be put on the river traffic for supplies and mail, for the Missouri was navigable less than half of the year, and the Yellowstone still less. A direct overland route was necessary to insure year-around service. And so was born the Fort Keogh Trail.

Donald Stevenson, a big-time freighter at that time, claimed the distinction of blazing the overland route. Said Stevenson:

In 1877 I went to Fort Keogh, where I had a hay contract. I put in 3,800 tons of hay at \$28 per ton, in 64 working days. I went across the plains from Fort Abraham Lincoln, making the first freight trail from the Missouri River to Fort Keogh. I had 95 wagons, 20 mowing machines and 10 horse rakes. There were 125 men in my party.¹⁷

Besides the heavy freight service to the forts, there was need of a rapid and dependable mail service, both for the military posts and for the settlers on the West Coast. With powerful forts at either end, it was hoped that a direct route from Fort Abraham Lincoln to Fort Keogh could be protected from Indian attacks.

Various sources give 1876 and 1877 as the beginning of the mail service, but the records in the National Archives give 1878 as the earliest date. In that year the contract for Post Office Route No. 35,051 was awarded to John R. Miner.¹⁸ The records for the year 1880 show that the contractor received \$70,000 a year for six trips a week both ways over the 310-mile route. Mail from the west came to Miles City by stage coach; west-bound mail came to Bismarck over the Northern Pacific, or by stage from Fargo in the winter months.¹⁹

The general course of the mail road was that which Custer had followed in 1876, roughly paralleling the United States Highway 10. The road was not a highway in the modern sense of the term. It was merely a wagon track on the virgin prairie which avoided the lowlands and streams as much as possible, and forded the rivers and creeks, there being no bridges. In some places the wagon ruts were nearly a foot deep, and in wet weather became almost impassable. New tracks were then started beside the old,

¹⁷Letter of Don Stevenson to Colonel Lounsberry in 1897—Colonel Clement A. Lounsberry, *Early History of North Dakota*, p. 520.

¹⁸Letter to writer from The National Archives, June 27, 1949.

¹⁹*Executive Documents, House of Representatives*, XXVII, No. 55, 1881, p. 1583.

and in places the parallel tracks were sixty to a hundred feet wide. The prairie grass posed a problem in the winter months, when snow lodged in it and blocked the road. To prevent this, fire breaks were plowed on each side of the trail, about a hundred feet apart, and the grass between was burned out in the fall of the year.²⁰

The mail was not carried in the conventional Concord coaches, but in light wagons, built for speed. They were merely a set of four wheels, a few planks for the floor, and a seat for the driver. Under the seat was a box for the mail.²¹ Passengers, except for an occasional government official, there were none. The rigs were expected to cover the route at top speed, and the horses and mules were always driven at a run. Four horses were used ordinarily, and six in bad weather.²² Every seventeen or eighteen miles the rigs stopped briefly at a relay station to change horses. The goal of each driver was to cover at least seventy-five miles each day.

The typical stage driver was a hardy sort of fellow. Summer and winter, day and night, sunshine and rain, reckless of danger, these "tough cusses", as the knights of the whip delighted to style themselves, were always ready for the road. The science of mule-skinning is thus described by a contemporary observer:

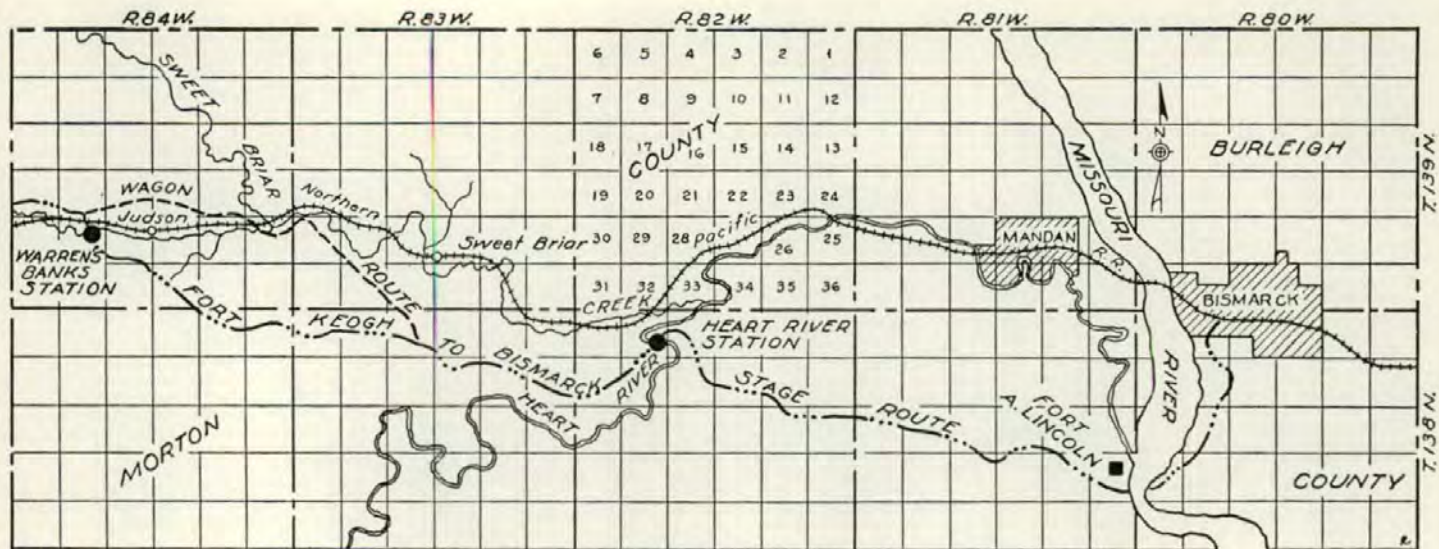
. . . . While the stock-tenders are harnessing the team, the driver fills the front boot with a supply of small stones or "rocks", as they are technically termed. The six mules are then attached; the driver gathers up the reins, and with a yell, off they start on a run, which soon settles down to a very sober trot. Now the science of mule-driving is manifested. With an accuracy only attained by long practice, Jehu throws stones at his leaders, rarely failing to hit them exactly where he wants to, applies the whip vigorously to the "swings" or middle span, and then belabors the wheelers with a *chain-whip*, an instrument of torture composed of a short handle and a few links of chain for a lash. By the active exercise of these combined efforts the team is worried over the road at an astonishing pace.²³

²⁰Historical notes of P. S. Jungers of Hebron, November 19, 1953. These notes will be referred to hereafter as: Jungers' Notes.

²¹Eloise Wade Hackett, *On Creeking Wheels*, p. 71.

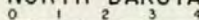
²²Frank T. Roberts—Letter to writer from Mrs. Ted D. Pope, Bowman, N. D., February 14, 1954.

²³Henry A. Boller, *Among the Indians*, p. 408-409.



FORT KEOGH TO BISMARCK STAGE ROUTE
BURLEIGH AND MORTON COUNTIES

NORTH DAKOTA



SCALE IN MILES

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1954

The names of but a few of the drivers on the Keogh Trail have been preserved. One of these was George McCone.²⁴ Another teamster was Henry Friese, killed in Montana by the Indians while carrying the mail in the summer of 1880.²⁵ A third driver whose name is known, was Charles Armstrong, a well-known pioneer who later settled in North Dakota and died at Grassy Butte in 1942.

When the first stage wagons rattled over the prairie to Fort Keogh, there were no settlements in the whole vast area. It was quite a risk and an adventure, therefore, for the stocktenders to accept employment at the lonely relay stations along the route, where a band of marauding Indians might attack at any time. Their job was to have fresh teams ready twice a day, when drivers from the East and the West galloped up with a jaded team.

The mail route started at Bismarck, going south three miles to the ferry near Fort Abraham Lincoln. The first relay station was the Heart River Station, ten miles northwest of the fort in Section 5 T. 138 R. 82. The second station was called Warren's Coal Banks, because John Warren had a large coal mine near the railroad. The mine, exploited for many years, is about a mile west of Judson, in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of S. 29 T. 129 R. 84. Warren used to furnish gravel for the railroad in the construction period, and he also had a contract to supply the workers with meat—mostly buffalo.²⁶

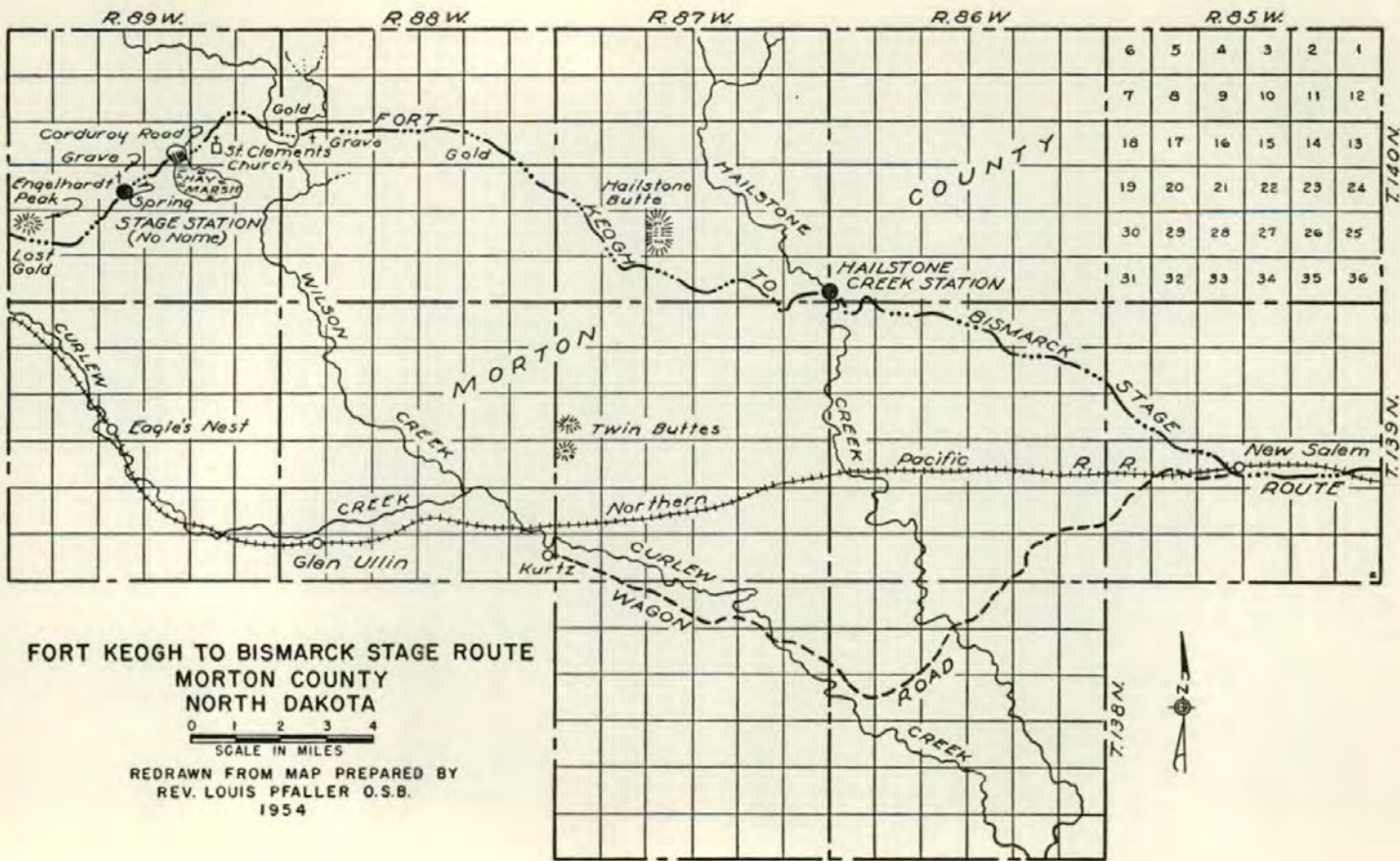
After passing through the site of New Salem, the road turned northwest to the station in S. 36 T. 140 R. 87. It seems to have had no special name. It is located on the Hailstone Creek, about ten or eleven miles from New Salem.²⁷ From this locale the trail swung still farther north, presumably to stay on the high ground between the tributaries of the Knife and the Heart Rivers. The surveyors for the route intended also to circumvent the boggy land north of present Glen Ullin, known as Haymarsh. Ruts from the wagons can be seen north of St. Clement's Church at Haymarsh. A mile west of the church, in S. 15 T. 140 R. 89, the

²⁴P. S. Jungers in the *Hebron Herald*, June 23, 1932.

²⁵Hackett, *On Creaking Wheels*, p. 78.

²⁶SGO, Yankton, D. T., August 19, 1879. John Christiansen of New Salem to writer, February 4, 1954. Interview with Ed Dettmann of Judson, April 18, 1954.

²⁷SGO, Yankton, D. T., October 20, 1880.



government built a "corduroy road" across the swampy land. The logs must have been hauled for several miles, since there were no trees nearby.²⁸ A mile southwest, in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 21, the old Simon Gietzen farm, was the next relay station.²⁹ There seems to have been no name for this stockade, which was located near a spring. The site of the old dug-out fort, north of the spring, is hardly recognizable today. The "fort" is said to have been made of earth, poles, and a thatched roof. Nearby, a barn and a corral for the horses stood. A few rods north of the station was the site of a grave. In early years some one came along the trail with a wagon and marked the grave with a flag. The people of the vicinity judged from this that the grave was that of a soldier.³⁰

In the SW $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 29 the Keogh Trail merged with the Custer Trail of 1876, and followed it for a little over a mile. There is an interesting legend connected with the trail at this point. The story goes that a party of gold seekers returning from Montana became hard pressed by a band of Indians and buried their gold near the Engelhardt peak about three miles east of Hebron, in S. 30 T. 140 R. 89. Early settlers and travelers used to search for the gold, but failed to find it. It seems that none of the survivors was ever able to return and recover the hidden treasure.³¹

Another story says that it was a matter of record in Bismarck that a man was once carrying the pay for the soldiers at Fort Keogh or some other fort, and that it amounted to \$2,000 in gold coin. When approximately sixty miles west of Bismarck the man saw signs of Indians and resolved that they would not get the money. And so he got out of sight in the valley south of the Engelhardt hill and hid the package in some convenient hole. He made a few simple notes in his note book describing the place, and then went for his life. It seems that the Indians got him and that later other government men recovered the note book, but could not find the money because the papers had been badly mutilated.³²

²⁸Jungers' Notes.

²⁹Letter from W. H. Mormann of Glen Ullin to writer, April 3, 1949.

³⁰Jungers' Notes, November 19, 1953.

³¹P. S. Jungers in *Hebron Herald*, February 16, 1933.

³²Jungers' Notes, November 20, 1953. Gold was supposed to have been cached east of Haymarsh in sections 7 and 14 of T. 140 R. 88.

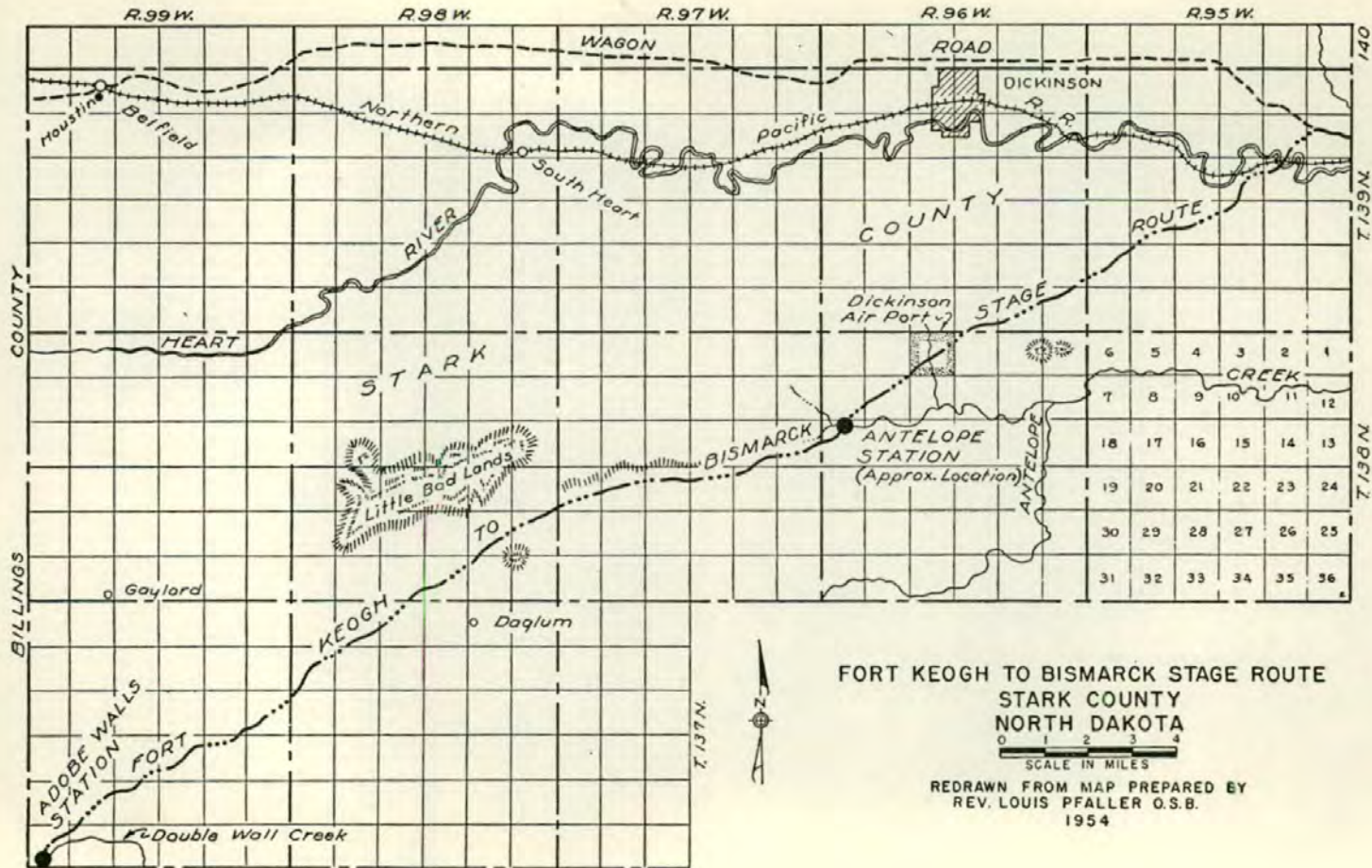
Less than a mile east of Hebron, E. E. H. Chase in 1883 found abundant evidence that a great many people had camped along the trail. The campsite, later almost completely obliterated by road-builders, lay on the section line between SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 27 and NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of S. 34 T. 140 R. 90. Orderly rows of drainage ditches had been dug around the tents, about a hundred yards from the south fork of the Knife River, called the Thin Faced Woman Creek by Custer's scouts. South of the campsite, in a plowed field are the graves of six to eight people. North of campsite, near the stream was a lone grave which had a wooden fence about it in 1883. There was also a cluster of graves farther north from the camp, in a bend of the river. One of the bodies was later exhumed, and the open grave is clearly visible today.

Nearby, just southwest of the bridge on the section line, are the remains of three dugouts on the riverbank, and the site of a blacksmith shop, which had been abandoned before the first settlers came to Hebron in 1883.³³ Who made this camp, or when, or why, we do not know. Several military expeditions had passed near there in the Seventies. It is very probable, however, that a detachment of railroad builders camped there in 1879 and 1880, while grading for the Northern Pacific, less than a mile away. Similar dug-out shelters were made near Gladstone by workers who wintered there. But that so many people should have died at that place in so short a time is hard to explain. Violent deaths must have been the cause of the high mortality rate. Drowning, freezing, Indian attacks, construction mishaps, epidemics, bad food or water—may have been causes.

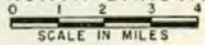
After crossing the stream a few rods south of the bridge, the trail swung back into section 27, then went through the north end of Hebron in section 33. It angled gradually toward Young Man's Butte, running close to the railroad for seven miles. Four miles west of Hebron, in the east part of S. 34 T. 140 R. 91, the enterprising merchants Krauth and Leutz built a trading post in July, 1883. They hoped to establish a lucrative business with travelers on the Keogh Trail, "the National Parks highway of those days."³⁴ They named their establishment "Moltke" after

³³P. S. Jungers in the *Hebron Herald*, June 9, 1932.

³⁴P. S. Jungers in *Hebron Herald*, June 23, 1932.



FORT KEOGH TO BISMARCK STAGE ROUTE
STARK COUNTY
NORTH DAKOTA



REDRAWN FROM MAP PREPARED BY
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 1954

the German general, hoping to attract German settlers to the nucleus of a city. Lightning destroyed the store soon after, and the proprietors moved to the site of Hebron.

Five miles southwest of Moltke lay Young Man's Butte, a famous landmark teeming with history. Around its southern shoulder rolled the freight wagons and stage coaches on the Keogh Trail, cutting deep ruts, clearly visible to this day. The butte may excite the interest of geologists who would tell you that it is "a freak formation of unstratified boulder clay and interglacial deposits left in this form during the Glacial Period";⁵⁵ or that the cropping of stones near the top of the hill are the remnants of the White River formation of rocks of the Oligocene Age, deposited on the bottom of a fresh water lake some forty or fifty million years ago.⁵⁶ To the Indians, the soldiers, the stage drivers and travelers it meant something different.

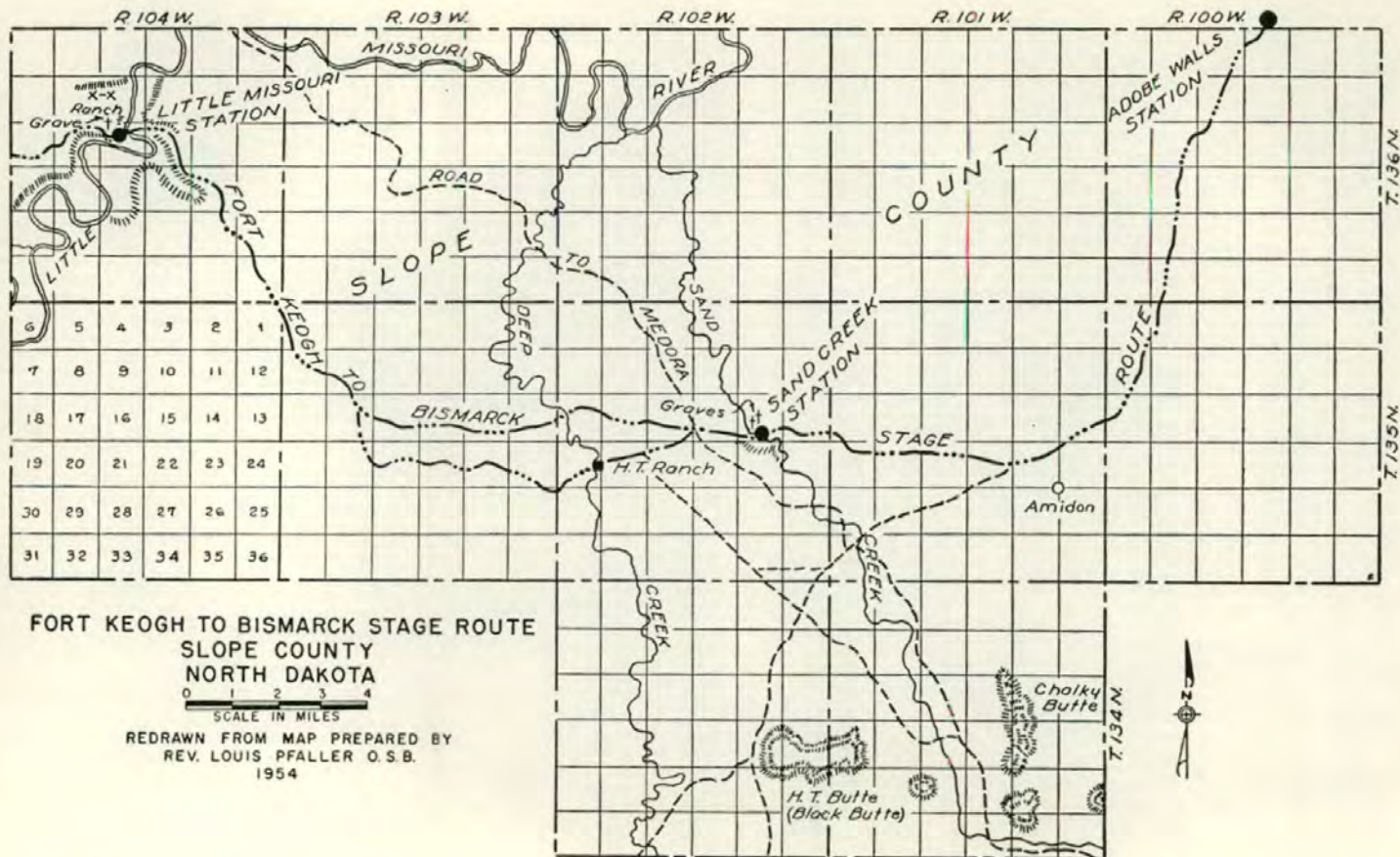
There are a number of legends about the origin of the name, Young Man's Butte. The one most widely known is the story told by the Arikara Indians. According to their narrative, a band of their tribe left their homes on the Grand River after a quarrel. They journeyed north, hoping to join another band of Arikara farther up the Missouri. When they came to the butte, several of the young braves, overcome by loneliness for sweethearts left behind, turned about and sped back to their loved ones. It was for these young men, some think, the butte was named.⁵⁷

Even more interesting is another version, which seems closer to the truth. In the Nineties, Rain-in-the-Face, of Custer Battle fame, used to come up to Mandan from Standing Rock. To humor him, railroad men gave him free rides to Dickinson. He would look out of the windows attentively, noting familiar landmarks along the route. Every time they passed Young Man's Butte he would dance around and excitedly tell about a fight his Sioux once had there with the Crow Indians. A party of 106 Crows came there to hunt. This the Sioux regarded as trespassing. Gathering in force, they surrounded the interlopers and drove them toward the butte. They killed all of them but one, a young man. The lone

⁵⁵Dorothy de St. Clement, *White Gumbo*, p. 41.

⁵⁶Letter from Wilson M. Laird, State Geologist, to writer, April 25, 1949.

⁵⁷Federal Writers' Project, *North Dakota*, p. 294.



survivor managed to get to the top and began to dance and sing, calling out that he would never be captured or killed by a Sioux. As he appeared to be in their grasp, the Sioux held back respectfully and listened while he chanted his death song. The young man then quickly stabbed himself, so as not to fall alive into the hands of the Sioux. According to their pagan ideas, this was an act of supreme courage, and the Sioux, impressed by the act, built a mound of rocks about seven feet high on top of the butte. Upon this they placed the body of the warrior, wrapped in a buffalo robe and fastened to a platform of poles. Old Rain-in-the-Face used to point to the monument when the train neared the butte, and say over and over: "Brave Indian, Brave Indian."³⁸

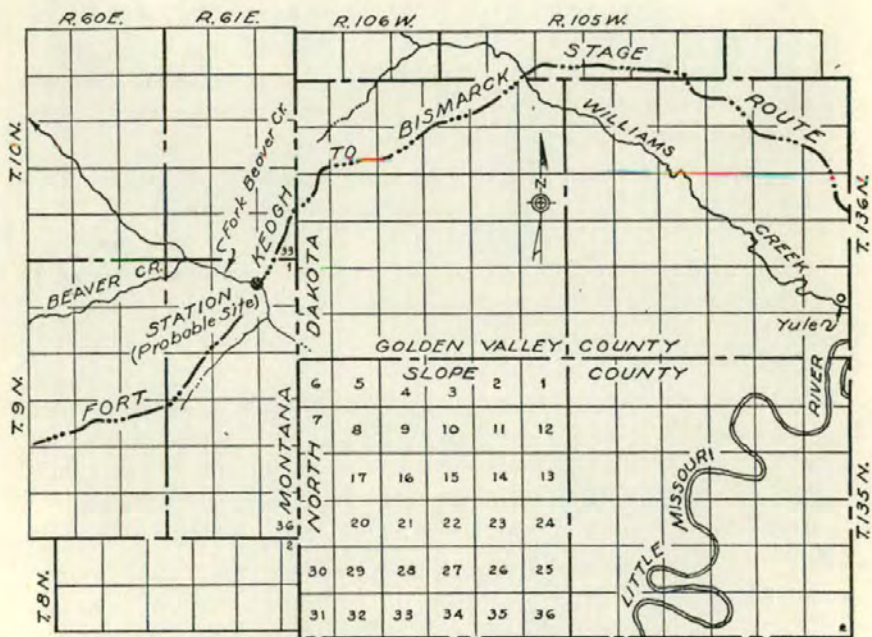
This story is corroborated by other pioneers. Layton George, formerly of Hebron, remembers the mound of rocks on the hill-top, and Joe Garecht of Richardton recalls several rock piles on and near the top of the butte, in which there were human bones.³⁹ What happened to all of these skeletons could probably be explained by the American Antiquarian Society. Two of its representatives, Professors Michael Tooley and Eugene Sarpy, came to Taylor in the early days and collected Indian relics. One of the skeletons which they unearthed at Young Man's Butte was in a sitting position, having never been disturbed since internment, and having become partly petrified.⁴⁰ They may have taken the skeleton of the young Crow warrior, after whom the butte was named.

Indian guides and army scouts led many military expeditions to Young Man's Butte, not only for the superb 20-30-mile view of the vicinity which the elevation afforded, but also and chiefly for the excellent camping grounds a mile northwest of the summit. There, in a ravine beside a grassy flat, water gushed from several springs and ran north through oak-filled coulees. It is probable that General Sully stopped briefly at the springs in 1864, on his way to the Killdeer Mountains. In 1873 General Stanley and Custer stopped at the campsite; and in 1874, on his return trip from the Black Hills, Custer again stayed overnight by the springs. It was on this occasion that the Seventh Cavalry buried

³⁸P. S. Jungers' interview with Warren Chase, June 14, 1947.

³⁹Interview with Layton George by writer, December 28, 1953. Jungers' Notes, November 29, 1939.

⁴⁰Dorothy de St. Clement, *White Gumbo*, p. 41.



**FORT KEOGH TO BISMARCK STAGE ROUTE
GOLDEN VALLEY COUNTY-NORTH DAKOTA
FALLON COUNTY-MONTANA**

0 1 2 3 4
SCALE IN MILES

REDRAWN FROM MAP PREPARED BY
REV. LOUIS PFALLER O.S.B.
1954

a soldier on or near the butte. He was Sgt. Henry C. Stempker, who had enlisted at Pittsburgh in 1871, and who died of typhoid dysentery on August 25, 1874.⁴¹ When Custer camped for the last time on this spot, in May, 1876, Mark Kellogg, a reporter for the *Bismarck Tribune*, noted in his diary that the headboard on Sgt. Stempker's grave was still undisturbed.

Many people have tried to locate the grave. Major Frank Anders of Fargo carried on a careful search of the area. He says in his monograph on the Custer Trail that he excavated a grave between the butte and the campsite, and found proof that a soldier had been buried there. He felt sure that it was the grave of Sgt. Stempker. On the other hand, Mr. Herman Breum of Taylor recalls that some people came from the East in 1884 and removed a body buried at the top of the butte, using his father's wagon to transport the exhumed body to the depot.⁴² They may have been Professors Tooley and Sarpy, however.

When the Fort Keogh Mail Route was established in 1878, the Custer campsite by the springs became a natural location for a relay station. The stocktenders, Sherman and W. A. Slater had a dug-out deep down in the ravine among the oak-trees in SE¼ of S. 3-T. 139 R. 92. Later the government built a big log house and a long log barn and a blacksmith shop a few rods south.⁴³ It seems that this was one of the more important relay stations. It was probably a "home station" where travelers could find lodging, and where drivers could terminate their runs. A surveyor for the railroad, R. S. Brookings, later acquired the government buildings, and used them for ranch purposes.

An early settler of 1883 recalls that there were once from fifty to sixty cabins made of oak logs near the station, where soldiers, drivers, stocktenders and travelers lodged.⁴⁴ The encampment may have been that of railroad workers, who graded and laid tracks nearby in 1879-1880. It may have been a detach-

⁴¹Letter from Adjutant General of the U. S. Army to Major Frank Anders: A. G. 201, Henry Stempker, Henry C. (11-21-35), ORD 1st Ind. CL-ARB War Dept., AGO, Nov. 30, 1935.

⁴²Interview with Herman Breum, September 27, 1953.

⁴³SGO, Yankton, Dakota Territory, August 21, 1882. Interview with Milton Bobb of Taylor, December 13, 1953.

⁴⁴Interview with Robert Hunke of Richardton, October 30, 1953. Settlers later dismantled the cabins and used the oak logs, says Hunke.

ment of soldiers protecting the workers. A visitor there in 1883 saw enough army clothes scattered about the premises to fill a wagon.⁴⁵ There is no doubt that protection was needed. Milton Bobb remembers seeing rifle pits near the station and many arrows scattered about, evidence enough that the encampment was subject to Indian attacks. Brookings pointed out to Bobb the graves of two men killed by the Indians and buried in the corral. Another man was buried farther north in the ravine.⁴⁶ The present owner of Brookings' "Oakdale Farm", Roy Gress, once found an empty trunk buried near the springs—probably a treasure buried in haste and later reclaimed.

The trail from the Young Man's Butte Station went nearly due west for ten miles, passing about a half a mile south of the Richardton site, and a mile south of Taylor. The Green River Station was located on the east bank of the river, in the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of S. 7 T. 139 R. 94. It is on the Anton Feiler farm a mile northwest of Gladstone. When the trail was first used, it went north of present Dickinson, and had a relay station on the site of Belfield, called Houstin.⁴⁷ Ascending Davis Creek in the Bad Lands, the trail continued to the mouth of the Gladstone Creek, and followed the Yellowstone River to Fort Keogh. The stage station at the present Custer Trail Ranch, five miles south of Medora, was called Pennel Station after the freighter who had erected the stockade and buildings.⁴⁸

The rough terrain encountered by way of Camp Houstin and Pennel Station slowed the mail service considerably and afforded lurking Indians too many opportunities to ambush the drivers or run off the horses and mules. To speed the service and to avoid the more hazardous route, the mail contractors sought another crossing of the Bad Lands. E. G. "Gerry" Paddock, who had served as a guide for Custer as well as for the Northern Pacific surveying parties,⁴⁹ helped the mail men select a route farther south. Swinging southwest from the Green River Station, the new

⁴⁵Interview with Herman Breum, September 27, 1953.

⁴⁶Interview with Milton Bobb of Taylor by writer, December 13, 1953.

⁴⁷SGO, Yankton, D. T., November 11, 1882.

⁴⁸Interview of Chester Brooks with T. F. Roberts, March 18, 1953.

⁴⁹Olaf T. Hagen and Ray H. Mattison, *Pyramid Park*, p. 13.

route went about forty miles south of Medora and crossed the Bad Lands where the country was more open and the grass more plentiful.⁶⁰ According to T. F. Roberts, another reason for selecting the longer southern route to the Amidon country was the consideration that it would enable the contractor to claim it as a Star Route.⁶¹

The method used by the surveyors to establish a new route is recorded by G. S. Cryne of Gladstone, who wrote that the trail "was traced and marked with mounds, on slightly eminences with a substantial cedar post set in the midst of the mound, and on it was a strip of canvas nailed securely, which was expected to last until the trail would become well marked by the travel of wagon trains."⁶²

The trail-blazers crossed the Heart River about three miles from the Green River Station and passed four miles south of Dickinson, crossing the present airport. The location of the Antelope Station and the course of the trail through T. 138 R. 97 are uncertain. It ran south of the Little Bad Lands, north of Daglum, and headed for the Double Wall Creek in the extreme southwest corner of Stark County. There, in S. 31 T. 137 R. 99, was the Adobe Walls Station, evidently so called from the sod or adobe house in which the stable boys lived.⁶³ It was also known as Dooby Walls and Doby Wells, obvious corruptions of Adobe Walls.

An interesting incident happened near the Adobe Walls Station. It seems that Indian attacks on the post-coaches became so frequent that soldiers were sent along to protect them. Mischievous whites took advantage of the prevailing fear and had fun at others' expense. Arthur C. Huidekoper relates that in 1881 he and a group of Bad Lands ranchers, while on a hunt, came upon the Adobe Walls Station. They sighted a stage transporting some soldiers. Gerry Paddock and Howard Eaton could not resist the temptation to shake out a red blanket from a hill top and fire a few shots. "The way that driver played his whip," writes Huide-

⁶⁰Wallis Huidekoper, *Land of the Dakotahs*, p. 8.

⁶¹Interview of Chester Brooks with T. F. Roberts, March 18, 1953.

⁶²Manuscript of G. S. Cryne, "Highways of Nations."

⁶³Letter of Harry Roberts of Medora to writer, March 24, 1949.

koper, "and the way those soldiers shouldered their guns was a caution."⁵⁴

In Slope County the trail goes almost straight south for about ten miles and turns west less than a mile from the Amidon site. Six miles west of Amidon, on the Aus Brothers Ranch, was the Sand Creek Station, in the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of S. 14 T. 135 R. 102. This was six miles north of North Dakota's highest point, H. T. or Black Butte.

The Sand Creek Station had few dull moments. Located as it was at the cross-roads of several trails, it became the meeting place of not a few adventurers. Trappers and hunters from the upper Cannonball and Little Missouri Rivers joined their trails to the mail route near there. Professional buffalo hunters brought their loads of hides to Dickinson over the Keogh Trail, between 1880 and 1882. Their branch trail, going south to Black Butte and Post Office Butte was known as the "Foote and Becket Trail."⁵⁵

Another road that joined the Keogh Trail near Sand Creek Station was E. H. Bly's "Tie Road", which went south to the Short Pine Hills near Ekalaka, Montana. Bly had accepted a contract to supply the Northern Pacific with ties for the railroad track. Some of these he hauled over the Keogh Trail to points along the railroad; others he attempted to float down the Little Missouri to Medora, putting them in the river eight or nine miles north of Sand Creek Station. The tie contract proved more than Bly had bargained for.⁵⁶ He had great difficulty in floating the logs; but his greatest worry was the Indians. On one occasion, the lumberjacks, harassed by the hostiles, fled from their logging camp and came to Sand Creek Station to warn the caretaker. Not long after, the Indians raided the station, shot it up and cleaned it out, while the stocktender hid in the hills.⁵⁷

The Bad Lands at this time afforded hiding for the notorious Alexby and other organized gangs of horse thieves, who

⁵⁴A. C. Huidekoper, *My Experience and Investment in the Bad Lands of Dakota*, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁵Wallis Huidekoper, *Land of the Dakotas*, p. 8.

⁵⁶Bly had a saw mill on Apple Creek south of Bismarck, a coal mine near Sims, and hotels in Bismarck and Medora.

⁵⁷*North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, XII, p. 142.

swept the ranches and the corrals bare, even invading military posts and running off their herds of freighting and ambulance mules. Sioux warriors, on their way to visit Sitting Bull in Canada, at times helped themselves to horses and mules. It was for this reason that some freighters on the Keogh Trail preferred to use oxen, for which the Indians cared little.

Also on the prowl were a number of renegade Sioux under the leadership of Low Dog. They kept things rather lively by stealing horses, killing hunters and an occasional station keeper on the Keogh Trail.⁵⁸ One day a band of Indians came to Sand Creek Station and proceeded to drive off a herd of horses that had been turned out to graze. The stocktender and a stage driver ran out of the station unarmed and tried to stop the raiders. Both of them were killed.⁵⁹ A buffalo hunter, Charley Mason, who had spent the night at the station, hitched up a team that had been stabled close by and rode to the Little Missouri Station, where he reported the incident.⁶⁰ One of the men was buried about 300 yards east of the station, and the other about a quarter of a mile, in the rim of the hills that border Sand Creek. In 1881 A. C. Huidekoper had W. H. Hanson place boulders on the graves to mark them and to prevent coyotes from digging out the bodies.

The mail route went west for about nine miles before turning northwest toward the crossing of the Little Missouri River, in NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of S. 16 T. 136 R. 104. The Little Missouri Station is about four or five miles north of Yule, and less than a mile south of the X—X Ranch, owned by Karnes Johnson of Sentinel Butte. The first station buildings here were located on the right bank of the river. Later the station was changed to the opposite bank, and substantial structures were erected out of cottonwood logs, daubed with mud and covered with earth. The stocktenders' cabin contained two rooms, a fireplace and chimney of stone and mud, and a few articles of furniture made from cottonwood. There was a log shed or barn for horses, and the whole was surrounded by a stockade fence with portholes for defense.⁶¹

⁵⁸Zdena Trinka, *Medora*, p. 118.

⁵⁹Letter from Mrs. Ted D. Pope to writer, December 27, 1953.

⁶⁰Interview of Chester Brooks with T. F. and Harry Roberts, May 18, 1953.

⁶¹Zdena Trinka, *Out Where the West Begins*, p. 206, Hackett, *On Creaking Wheels*, p. 75.

Fifteen miles west of Little Missouri Station, the trail entered Montana. Our information about the trail in Montana is scant. Some of the stations were: Lake, O'Fallon Creek (near Ismay), Cabin Creek and Powder River.⁶²

There is no doubt that traveling on this trail was as dangerous and exciting as that on the more publicized mail routes and immigrant highways in other parts of the American frontier. Little has been recorded about the Keogh trail, but that little tells us that soldiers, mail carriers, hunters, freighters, immigrants and railroad builders found plenty of excitement, and sometimes even death, along the trail through Indian country.

A cross-cut picture of activity along the route is given in Ellen Brant Glaum's account of her trip over the Keogh Trail with her family in 1880.⁶³ Mr. and Mrs. John Brant and their five children left their farm home in Otter Tail County, Minnesota in June, 1880, and headed for the West. Ellen was the oldest child, being 13, and she was followed by Florinda, 11, John, 8, Charles, 4, and Eva, just four weeks old. They traveled in a covered wagon and drove along their four cows. At Jamestown they acquired a traveling companion, a bachelor named Charley Brockaway, who was making the trip to the West Coast alone in an open wagon. He was to be their companion for five hundred miles, clear across the Indian country.

They arrived at Bismarck at the end of June, and stayed there for nearly a week figuring out which way to continue their journey to Montana. Bismarck was a bustling river town of 2,400. The railroad had come there in 1873, and since it was the end of the line, freight for points west, north and south was transferred to one of the score of staunch steamers that plied the river above and below Bismarck. Over the railroad came supplies for the military posts on the Missouri and the Yellowstone. During the season of 1880 a total of 21,590 tons of private and military freight, 1,300 white passengers, 2,400 Indians, 1,800 head of horses and cattle and 600 head of sheep were moved from Bismarck. On the return

⁶²Letter from Harry Roberts to writer, March 18, 1949.

⁶³*On Creaking Wheels*—The memoirs of Ellen Brant Glaum as told to Eloise Wade Hackett. Copyright 1947 by William J. Glaum. This book was privately published and only a few copies are available. The writer obtained a copy through the kindness of Prudence Geary Sand of Fargo.

trips the steamers brought to the docks at Bismarck 160,000 buffalo hides and 180 tons of wool.⁶⁴

When Mr. Brant talked to men around town and down at the wharf, they warned him that it was risky to drive out across the Indian country, even though a current issue of the *Bismarck Weekly Tribune* scornfully stated that there "hadn't been a hostile within two hundred miles of Bismarck in five years."⁶⁵ This, they were to find out at first hand, was not true. The territory west of the Missouri River in 1880 was a vast, howling wilderness, where the only settlements were the miserable stage stations along the Keogh Trail, and a few cantonments of the crews constructing the Northern Pacific Railroad. Most of the freight bound for Montana went by riverboats, though some went over the Keogh Trail, hauled in long wagons, sometimes several of them hitched together and drawn by from three to twenty yoke of oxen.

Travelers who could afford it gladly paid fare on the steamers to avoid the dangerous country between Bismarck and Miles City. The Brants could have obtained enough money by the sale of their horses, but they would need them for farming later. Mr. Brant tried several times to get his wife to take the children by boat while he would drive the team across the Indian country, but he was unsuccessful. If her husband was going to be scalped, she wanted to be with him, and not be a widow in a strange land with five small children.

In preparation for the formidable journey, they sold the cows, so as to be unencumbered in case they had to flee from the Indians. They greased the wagon, for, as Mr. Brant said, there was "no need to advertise our coming."⁶⁶ A heavy stove which Mrs. Brant bought in Bismarck was put on board the steamer "The Batchelor" to be delivered at Pease Bottom in Montana.

Charley Brockaway and the Brants crossed the Missouri by the ferry across from Fort Abraham Lincoln, several miles south of Bismarck. Horses on shore pulled a pole around a circle, wind-

⁶⁴*Press and Dakotian*, March 9, 1881, quoted in *South Dakota Historical Collections*, XXVI, 208-209; Henry J. Winser, *The Great Northwest*, pp. 110-111; L. P. Brockett, *Our Western Empire*, pp. 738-739; G. W. Baird, "General Miles' Indian Campaigns," *The Century Magazine*, XLII (July, 1891) p. 360.

⁶⁵Hackett, *On Creaking Wheels*, p. 65.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 66.

ing the cable attached to the ferry around a drum. On the afternoon of the first day they were forced to camp early. A thunderstorm overtook them not far from the fort. Each night, except the first, they camped beside a stage station. Ellen recalls:

The design of these stations brought home to us the peril in which we traveled. Most of the stations were dug-outs—one room dug into the side of a hill, with a single window and a door in front. This left only one approach in case of an Indian attack. A lone man, with no danger of a rear attack, or of having his house burned over him, might thus be able to stand off the hostiles till help could arrive.⁶⁷

Stage drivers and stock tenders were about the only human beings they saw after passing the grading crews of the Northern Pacific just west of Bismarck. A few days out from Bismarck they passed a freighter with his slow-moving oxen. They saw plenty of game along the way, which would have gone well with their monotonous menu of beans, pancakes and syrup; but neither Brant nor Brockaway ventured to shoot the game lest they attract the attention of roving bands of Indians intent on plunder.

Mrs. Glauam relates:

We tried to make two stations a day, but sometimes were even able to reach the third by nightfall. Except for our emergency camp that first night we camped beside a stage station every night of the trip. The stocktenders were glad to see us, and small wonder. Twice a day the mail came through, one team going east, one west. There was a few minutes' halt, a little chance for conversation while the fresh team was being hitched in, and then the stocktender was left watching a cloud of dust till it melted into the horizon. Travelers who spent the night gave the only variation from monotony at these solitary outposts. The men were always solicitous for our welfare. I don't believe we ever set up the tent that we weren't warned to bank it well to keep rattlesnakes out. We never did see a rattlesnake in Dakota, but we were careful, nevertheless to bank the tent after we'd seen Ma and the three little ones tucked into the wagon, and pulled the tent flap shut after ourselves. The tent banked, we settled down

. . . .⁶⁸

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 73.

One of the stations beside which they camped was "Antelope", south of present Dickinson, and another at the "Lake" station across the Montana border. When they entered the Bad Lands their anxieties grew. Each butte that they approached seemed a potential hiding place for a band of hostiles lying in wait for them. After many miles of this eery experience they came to the Little Missouri. The station located on a flat on the west bank of the river was the first log cabin they had seen since leaving Bismarck.

That evening the station men—there were two at this station—told us about a boy, fourteen or fifteen years old, who had come through there on a freighter a short time before. He was feeling poorly when he arrived, and grew worse. He became so ill that they were sure he was dying and questioned him about his home and parents. He shook his head, refusing to tell them even his name, and died without revealing anything of his past. They decided he must be a fugitive, either from an unhappy home or from the law. He was buried on a knoll back of the station, and the next morning we all climbed up and looked at the heap of stones that marked his grave, before we started on again.

"Poor boy," Ma said, "I hope his mother ain't watching the road for him. I wish she would know he's lying in a tended grave and not out alone on the prairie."

"Like those graves we saw yesterday, of freighters the Indians had killed," I put in.⁶⁶

The grave of the "nameless" boy is well marked to this day, and at its head is a slab of sandstone on which is carved this inscription: "R. I. P. In MEMORY OF CHAS. SACHEM. DIED SEPT 17, 1879."⁶⁷ The boy, according to one story, died of pneumonia while driving a herd of cavalry horses over the trail. Another account states that he was a freighter, and that after his burial his partner took his team and continued the journey.⁷

The trail from Little Missouri Station wound up the steep bank of the river, through huge sandstone rocks and trees, and reached the rolling prairie once more. Crossing into Montana to the head-

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 75-76.

⁷⁰Visit to the site by writer, June 6, 1954.

⁷¹Letter of Karnes Johnson, Sentinel Butte to writer, February 4, 1954; Interview with Andrew Johnston, Dickinson, January 22, 1954. A man surnamed SACHEM once told Mr. Johnston that an uncle of his had disappeared in the West, and that this was probably his grave.

waters of the Beaver Creek, they arrived at the next station and found the stocktender in a state of concern.

"Don't look so good," he said. "The stage due here last night never got here. I hope them danged hostiles ain't on the rampage again."⁷²

Until some word should come of the fate of Henry Friese, the missing driver, the Brants and Brockaway waited apprehensively at the station. Ellen remembers that:

Ma baked the bread and she washed clothes again in the nearby creek. Flo and I helped spread the clothes on the bushes to dry. Johnny spent the day watching for Indians. Several times he had Pa running to look, only to see an antelope's white "flag" disappearing in a dust flurry, or a bit of dried weed scudding along in a gust of wind. None of us dared venture far from the station. The hours passed slowly without a word of the missing man. I have seldom lived through a longer day.⁷³

On the second day they ventured out cautiously on the trail, hoping that the Indians had fled after their attack to escape soldiers who would come in search of the mail. Three of the children rode in Charley Brockaway's open wagon, wearing their straw hats like men to give the appearance of bristling defense to hostile eyes.

After a day of travel spent in anxious alertness, they stopped at the next station. Suddenly to the south they caught sight of a great cloud of dust. Their scalps were creeping as they peered feverishly through the station keeper's field glasses. With bated breath they waited until Mr. Brant heaved a sigh of relief and announced the welcome news: "Soldiers!"

In a few minutes twenty-five or thirty soldiers rode up to the station and reported that they had found the mail driver, Henry Friese, shot through the head and scalped by the Indians, near a steep bluff two or three miles west of Pennel Creek. The body lay half a mile from the road, the mules were gone, and the mail was scattered all over the prairie. Packages had been ripped open and the contents pilfered. Some of the young bucks had evidently

⁷²Hackett, *On Creaking Wheels*, p. 76.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 77.

tried on a hoop-skirt, for it was daubed with red war-paint. The soldiers thought that the band of Indian hunters had made a good getaway.

Mrs. Glaum closes the incident with the statement that the soldiers gave up the search and returned to Fort Keogh.⁷⁴ There was a sequel to the story, however. The bands of prowling Sioux hunters gave the troops no end of trouble. They were all provided with horses, knew the country thoroughly, and were skillful in misleading the troops and in concealing their own trail. The pursuit of such people was hard, but fascinating work. Hunting always fascinates people, but when the hunter and the hunted are equally intelligent, acute, watchful and brave, the game is extremely interesting. To match the cunning Sioux hostiles, the Army employed some of the Northern Cheyennes who had surrendered to General N. A. Miles. In the summer of 1880, at the time the Brants passed over the Keogh Trail, four of these prisoners of war—Shell, Howling Wolf, Big-Footed Bull and Willis Rowland—were assigned to Captain Bell's camp on the Beaver Creek, thirty-five miles from Glendive (near Sentinel Butte, North Dakota).

When the news of Henry Friese's murder reached Captain Bell's camp, two or three parties were sent out to scout the country, and, if possible, to capture the offenders. Eight soldiers and the four Cheyennes scouted around until they met a detachment of twelve soldiers and two Sioux scouts from Fort Keogh. The latter group reported that they had found the body of the stage driver; but that it was a hopeless task to try to track down the murderers. The Cheyenne scout, Howling Wolf, replied: "... these Sioux are lying. They are hiding the trail. We ought to keep on further, and ourselves try to find it and follow it up."⁷⁵

They found the trail and followed the tracks eastward to the Bad Lands near Rattlesnake Butte, where they were sure the Sioux were hiding. Cautiously they skirted a herd of buffalo on a creek which ran into the Little Missouri, and stalked their human prey. They spied at a distance four Sioux with a herd of

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁷⁵George Bird Grinnell, *The Fighting Cheyennes*, p. 413.

horses and a mule, and moved up on the unsuspecting thieves. At a signal they charged, killed the Sioux in a running battle, and captured the herd of horses. Four of the horses carried packs in which there were bundles of letters and newspapers—clear proof that these were the robbers and murderers of the stage driver. The hunting game was over, and the Cheyennes went home to have a scalp dance.⁷⁶

The Brants knew nothing of this episode. Though they kept on the alert all the next day, they saw no signs of Indians. At O'Fallon Creek they waited for an hour for a herd of about three thousand buffaloes to cross the trail. The immigrants finally arrived at Fort Keogh, which was then "in 1880, a large fort, and continued to be for many years one of the largest cavalry posts in the country."⁷⁷ They reached Pease Bottom in Montana, seven weeks after leaving their home in Minnesota.

The Keogh Trail, as a highway for freight, jumped into prominence in 1879, when the Northern Pacific resumed construction west of Bismarck. Caravans of workers, supplies and heavy construction equipment poured over the mail route to the construction sites. For a hundred miles the trail ran near the path of the railroad. Where the trail did not run close enough, branch trails were commenced. These ramifications have confused historical investigators trying to map out the old trail. One of the branch routes ran to Sweet Briar and returned to the Keogh Trail at Sedalia, east of New Salem. At New Salem a new branch followed the tracks to Sims, and continued on to Kurtz, east of Glen Ullin. At Gladstone, where the trail turned southwest, a branch was started westward toward Dickinson.⁷⁸

By the fall of 1879 the grading of the railroad extended as far west as present Gladstone and the tracks had been laid as far west as Kurtz. Two young men, Peter Larson and Litton E. Shields, had the contract to grade at Green River. They planned to work all winter, and so they dug shelters on the banks of the Heart River, near the present town of Gladstone. The dugouts

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 416.

⁷⁷Hackett, *On Creaking Wheels*, p. 81.

⁷⁸*Andreas Historical Atlas of Dakota*, pp. 33, 72, 73. SGO, 1878-1900.

protected seventy-five men and sixty horses and mules.⁷⁹ About the middle of December the weather turned extremely cold and Shields realized that operations would have to be suspended until Spring. Before taking action, however, he decided to consult his partner, Peter Larson, who was at Mandan, and discuss plans for the removal of the stock. The tale of his hectic trip over the Keogh Trail he recounted in his "Recollections of a Railroad Builder":

I started for Mandan on December 23rd about 2 P. M. expecting to reach Sherman's ranch at Young Man's Butte, 25 miles, before night; but before I was far on the way a regular blizzard came up which made it almost impossible to head against the storm, so that in a short time I missed the trail and after considerable effort to locate it, I found myself lost in the storm.

I did not get excited as I knew I could not be far from the trail but decided to get into some low ground protected as much as possible and stay there until the storm abated. It was now dark so I got off the horse and kept moving around to keep warm, leading the horse after me. The poor animal seemed to realize the situation and followed docilely behind. I found one of the many ravines which run through the prairie, with a little timber growing on the sides. It was in one of these I spent the night.

The prospect was anything but a pleasant one as it was intensely cold; the snow was about two feet deep but as I was warmly dressed I did not suffer much. Occasionally I was forced to sit down and rest from weariness and then found it difficult to avoid going to sleep which I knew would be fatal. I kept this up all night and I hope I shall never put in as long a night again. About daybreak the storm began to moderate and in a little while I could see the top of Young Man's Butte looming up over the clouds at no great distance away.⁸⁰ It was a beautiful sight to me and in a few minutes I was in the saddle happy in the thought of a good break-

⁷⁹*North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, vol. I, No. 3., p. 51. Seven or eight of these dugouts are clearly discernable a half mile from Gladstone in the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of S. 17 T. 139 R. 94. There was a huge dugout farther west on the Heart, near the mouth of the Green River.

⁸⁰It happens on occasion that a low-lying fog envelopes the base of the butte, giving it the appearance of floating above the clouds. The landmark was so well known that an eastern paper at the time of the opening of the Northern Pacific Railroad made this prediction: "That the future seat of empire lies in the great Northwest is an acknowledged fact, and it is only a question of time when the Capital of the United States, yea, the source and residence of the world's power and wisdom will sit on the top of Young Man's Butte . . ." (Quoted in *Dickinson Press*, September 15, 1883)

fast and a warm place to sit down and rest, after the vigils of the night.

I had just ridden up to the Sherman and Slater ranch and dismounted when Sherman came out of the door, the noise of the horse having wakened him and greeted me with the exclamation "For God's sake, where did you come from, I didn't think any human being could live out in that storm." I told him of my mishap and he soon had some hot coffee and breakfast ready for me, which made me forget the rigors of the past night.⁸¹

After a day's rest, he rode on to the end of the tracks, thirty-five miles east. He found no train at Kurtz, the end of the line, and so he continued on horseback to Mandan, following what he called the "Star Route Mail Trail", apparently the wagon trail that branches off from the Keogh Trail at New Salem. At Mandan, Larson told Shields of the plight of crews of workers out in the Bad Lands, who were reported to be starving.⁸² Some lightweight freighters were supposed to haul provisions to the camps, but they were frightened by the storm. Shields volunteered to transport the precious supplies with the idle men and horses waiting in the dugouts near the Green River Station. Fourteen men from his camp, with ten four-horse teams came to Kurtz to pick up the cargo, one day in early January. They set out at 2 P. M.

Before we were out far a storm from the north struck us with a fall of temperature of about 80° and before we reached Billy Preston's ranch at Knife river, every man in the outfit was frostbitten somewhere on face, hands, or feet.⁸³

That night the fourteen teamsters slept in the 14x16 dugout owned by Billy Preston (or Wm. W. Priest) a former section hand who quit railroad work to stake a land claim.⁸⁴ At daybreak, as the caravan was preparing to go on to the next stop at Young Man's Butte, a team of horses became unmanageable and broke an axle on one of the wagons. Shields stayed behind to repair

⁸¹*North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 51-52.

⁸²*The Bismarck Tribune*, reported on December 26, 1879 that the men in the Bad Lands were reduced to beans and water.

⁸³*North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, Vol. I, No. 3, p. 53.

⁸⁴Billy (Wm. W.) Priest had been a section foreman at Eagles' Nest. His dugout was located in S. 2 T. 139 R. 90, east of Hebron. P. S. Jungers in *Hebron Herald*, Sept. 29, 1932.

the damage. By afternoon he was ready to set out for Young Man's Butte, where he expected to catch up with the others sometime during the night. The horses were so anxious to overtake the others that they arrived at the Sherman ranch at the butte at 1 A. M., sixteen miles from Billy Priest's dugout. They stayed at the Young Man's Butte Station the next day in order to haul some hay for the horses. The fodder had been put up the previous summer by a former Government wagonmaster, Gus Plummer, who knew all that country and put up hay all along the line on speculation.

The next day Shields learned how fortunate he had been during the recent snow storms. Before reaching the Green River they picked up three bodies of unknown men frozen to death. They had started to walk out from the camps to the end of the track and perished in the storm. East of the Dickinson site, at Washburn's ranch, they found another victim, Tom Halpin, who had worked for Shields the previous summer. The expedition of mercy finally reached the Bad Lands cantonment without mishap, and found conditions there not as serious as had been reported. So successful was the undertaking that Larson and Shields were engaged to haul freight the rest of the winter.

L. E. Shields married at Bismarck in April, 1880, and after his honeymoon brought his wife to his headquarters at Green River. On their arrival in camp they had several exciting experiences. One of these was a nocturnal raid by some Indians, who stampeded and stole a herd of horses. The other was the care of two men attacked by Indians. They were former employees of Shields', whose names he gives as Douglas Grover and Ed Donnivan. G. S. Cryne, an early settler at Gladstone calls them Jerold Douglas and Donavan. He records that the two men started over the Keogh Trail toward Bly's Logging Camp on the Little Missouri River.

When nearing their destination they were ambushed by Indians and both were shot; Donavan's right leg was broken below the knee, and Douglas received a wound in the abdomen that afterward proved fatal.

The two men somehow were able to unhitch their team from the wagon and then crawled into the thicket

of brush where the Indians were afraid to follow. During the following night the two men made quite a distance toward the point from which they had come and were picked up the following morning by a Government outfit and conveyed during the day to Green River where at that time there was U. S. troops and a Surgeon.⁸⁵

Mrs. Shields nursed the stricken men; Donovan recovered after a time, but Douglas' wound became gangrenous and he succumbed. He was buried with military honors on the Fourth of July.⁸⁶ Cryne adds:

Douglas was a honorably discharged soldier of the U. S. Regulars and had not left the army but a few days before this episode happened that resulted in his death. Jerold Douglas's remains lie where they were buried, a little ways northwest of the N. P. Depot in Gladstone.

Some kind hand erected a substantial wooden head-board at the time of his burial and burned into the board with a hot iron the simple fact of his name and when he was killed, and stated the fact that he met his death at the hands of Indians.⁸⁷

The year 1882 marked a sharp decline in the use of the Keogh Trail. Since the Northern Pacific had reached Miles City by that time, the construction crews left, and freighting went by rail. The United States entrusted the mail transportation to the railroad, and the stage coaches rattled over the Keogh Trail no more. Some of the stations were converted into ranch buildings, but most of them tumbled down and decayed. The trail had served its purpose in bringing communications, trade, and settlers to the frontier.

Though it waned in importance with the completion of the railroad, it did not cease to be an important highway. Caravans of covered wagons continued to travel it to the new settlements along the railroad.⁸⁸ Gold-seekers bound for the Black Hills and the Montana diggings, passed west on the road, full of hope,

⁸⁵"The story of the first person buried at (Green-River) Gladstone, N. Dak." a typed manuscript by G. S. Cryne, Historian of Old-Settlers Association of Stark Co., North Dakota.

⁸⁶G. S. Cryne places this event in 1881, but it seems that it was rather 1880, according to Shields' account. Captain Nolan with a detachment of the Seventh Cavalry was camped nearby.

⁸⁷Mr. Anders Hagburg of Gladstone says that the grave is on a knoll in the pasture northwest of Gladstone.

⁸⁸P. S. Jungers in the *Hebron Herald*, June 23, 1932, March 16, 1933.

but often returning "busted."⁸⁰ Trappers who had spent the winter months in remote hunting grounds, and hide hunters who slaughtered the buffaloes and deer, brought thousands of pelts and hides over the trail to some railroad depot.⁸¹ Collectors of buffalo bones brought hundreds of tons of bones over the Foote and Becket trail to Dickinson via the Keogh Trail. Herds of cattle and horses churned up the dusty trail and swarmed about the watering places. For many years it was used by all sorts of picturesque people—Indians gaily decked in colored blankets, bewiskered hunters, prospectors, horsethieves, cowboys, immigrants. Gradually the country was fenced off and plowed up, obliterating much of the trail. Thus passed the famous Keogh Trail.

⁸⁰Mr. John Christiansen of New Salem recalls one outfit that went through in the spring of the year bearing the sign "Black Hills or Bust". It came back in the fall with a second sign, "Busted by gosh". (Letter of February 4, 1954.)

⁸¹*Dickinson Press*, May 6, June 2, June 9, July 7, 1883; April 5, 1884.