
The Diaries of
John Gregory Bourke

VOLUME 3

June 1, 1878–June 22, 1880

Edited and Annotated by
Charles M. Robinson III

University of North Texas Press
Denton, Texas

©2007 Charles M. Robinson III

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Permissions:

University of North Texas Press

P.O. Box 311336

Denton, TX 76203-1336

The paper used in this book meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, z39.48.1984. Binding materials have been chosen for durability.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bourke, John Gregory, 1846–1896.

The diaries of John Gregory Bourke / edited and annotated by Charles M. Robinson III.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-10 1-57441-196-9 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN-13 978-1-57441-196-6 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Bourke, John Gregory, 1846–1896—Diaries. 2. Soldiers—West (U.S.)—Diaries. 3. Indians of North America—Wars—1866–1895—Personal Narratives. I. Robinson, Charles M., 1949– II. Title.

E83.866 .B75 2003

978'.02'092—de21

2002152293

All illustrations are held by the United States Military Academy Library, West Point, NY. Cover and frontispiece photo of John Gregory Bourke is courtesy of the National Park Service, Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument.

To Paul L. Hedren

[I]t matters not whether the grievances of our Indians be true or false, exaggerated or under-estimated, the fact that the word of our Government is mistrusted by every tribe on the continent cannot be denied and is a black blot upon our national escutcheon.

—John Gregory Bourke, *Diary*, 26:19

It seems to me to be an odd feature of our judicial system that the only people in this country who have no rights under the law are the original owners of the soil: an Irishman, German, Chinaman, Turk or Tartar will be protected in life and property, but the Indian commands respect for his rights only so long as he inspires terror for his rifle.

—Brigadier General George Crook,
Letter copied in Bourke, *Diary*, 29:34–35

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction to Volume 3.....	1
Part 1. The Life of a General's Aide	
Background	15
1. Nostalgia, a Society Wedding, a Day at the Races, and a Parting.....	19
2. The Bannock Uprising.....	35
3. Retrospective on the Sioux War and Crazy Horse	53
4. The Death of Crazy Horse	65
5. The Developing Frontier	79
6. Sojourn in the Mountains and a Visit to Denver	97
Part 2. The Cheyennes and the Poncas	
Background	113
7. Cheyenne Life	117
8. Hunting the Refugees	144
9. Misery on the Trail	160
10. The Ponca Affair.....	177
Part 3. Americanizing the Frontier	
Background	205
11. Of Irish Lords and Irish Soldiers.....	208
12. "It Is of Such Stuff that Good Commonwealths Are Made"	225
13. Fort Craig to Camp Grant	249
14. Back to the Present	276
Part 4. The White River Ute Uprising	
Background	291
15. Merritt's Ride.....	294
16. Camp Under Fire.....	317
17. From Field to Staff.....	338
Part 5. Staff Duties and Nostalgia	
Background	364
18. Procuring Mules and Mounts	366
19. Phil Reade and Old Jerry	388
20. More Horses, More Nostalgia, and Miscellaneous Rambling	400

Appendix 1: Persons Mentioned in the Diary..... 420

Appendix 2: Authorities. Personal notes of the Campaigns
Conducted by Brig. General George Crook..... 503

Bibliography 518

Index 529

Introduction to Volume 3

Volume 3 of this series covers John Gregory Bourke's diaries from June 1, 1878, through June 22, 1880, and manuscript volume 23 to half-way through volume 34. During this period, the notebooks progressively deviate from the standard daily journal to a "stream-of-consciousness." Increasingly, Bourke is aware that he is writing for posterity. He shifts from the word "journal," referring more to his "note-books" and "scrapbooks." This, in part, reflects more time on his hands. For almost the first time in the ten years since he graduated from West Point, Bourke was neither in the field nor preparing for a new field expedition. He could look back on events so far, which gives several interesting retrospectives on his early days in Arizona. He also was able to enjoy the amenities of the East and the urban Midwest, and when he did accompany General Crook, it was in the capacity of administrative inspection, as in the Bannock uprising and site selection for what became Fort Niobrara, Nebraska.¹ In fact, Crook rarely appears in this volume; more often, Bourke is on his own.

1. Fort Niobrara was established in 1880 on the Niobrara River, to protect cattlemen and settlers from whatever roaming bands of Indians might remain, and as an additional control over the Indians at the Spotted Tail Agency. It was abandoned in 1906 and is now a national wildlife refuge. Frazer, *Forts of the West*, 89.

He found time to dedicate all of manuscript volume 24 to a retrospective on the Sioux War, which includes a long dissertation on Crazy Horse, whose death he called “an event of such importance, and with its attendant circumstances pregnant with so much of good or evil for the settlement between the Union Pacific Rail Road and the Yellowstone River that I do not feel that it would be proper for me to pass it over with the condensed account given in my notes of July and August last year [1877].”²

Throughout the narrative, Bourke refers to various letters and telegrams which he included at the end of this volume under the heading:

Authorities.

Personal notes of the Campaigns conducted by Brig. General George Crook, U.S. Army, against the Sioux Indians in Nebraska, Wyoming, Montana, Dakota—1876–1877.

This includes correspondence surrounding the surrender and death of Crazy Horse as well as an account provided by Billy Hunter, one of the mixed-blood interpreters, of the chief’s death. Because of the continuing interest, as well as the controversy, surrounding Crazy Horse, I have deviated from my usual practice of deleting all but the most relevant correspondence, and have included Bourke’s “Authorities” as Appendix 2.³

Bourke betrays a grudging admiration for Crazy Horse, calling him a “truly great man,”⁴ and in his summation, he unintentionally contributes to the modern Crazy Horse mystique.

A dead lion is of no account in the regard of those who lately were wont to trouble at his faintest roar; thus, Crazy Horse being dead, an exaggerated importance has attached to the war with the Nez-Percés, but how much more costly in blood, treasure, time and material would have been that war had

2. Bourke, *Diary*, 24:1; Bourke’s account of these months is published in Robinson, *Diaries*, Vol. 1, Chapters 18–19, and Vol. 2, Chapters 1–4. Crazy Horse had become a sort of symbolic “boogey man,” whose actions—real and imagined—during the Great Sioux War had unnerved both Crook and his counterpart in the Department of Dakota, Brig. Gen. Alfred H. Terry. The surrender of Crazy Horse’s band, in May 1877, was considered to be more or less the end of significant Lakota resistance. See Robinson, *General Crook*.

3. Bourke, *Diary*, 24:1; Bourke’s account of Crazy Horse’s surrender is in Robinson, *Diaries*, Vol. 2, Chapter 14.

4. Bourke, *Diary*, 24:49.

Crazy Horse broken away and rallied around him the disaffected elements of the Dakotas and obliged us to fight 3000 or 4.000 skilled warriors instead of 3 or 400.⁵

The comment is absurd. There is no real evidence that Crazy Horse planned to go to war, and it is doubtful that he could have, even if he had wanted. Only a few pages earlier, Bourke had noted that the Northern Plains tribes were thoroughly beaten and divided into too many quarreling factions to offer any further resistance, as Crazy Horse himself was aware.⁶ Meanwhile, the flight of the Nez Percés under Joseph garnered national attention—and sympathy—and Joseph himself emerged as a heroic figure.⁷

Three other key events during this period were the Cheyenne Outbreak of 1878–79, the Ponca Affair, and the White River Ute Uprising, both in 1879. The Cheyennes and Poncas will be discussed in the introduction to Part 2 of this volume, and the Utes in the introduction to Part 4.

The Cheyenne and Ute crises contain the most action in this volume. For those accustomed to the nearly continuous scouting expeditions and Indian fights of Volumes 1 and 2 of this series, at least half of Volume 3 will appear almost mundane. Bourke spends a great deal of time in Omaha, Kansas City, and St. Louis. He visits factories and foundries. He is a member of a remount board that buys horses in Kentucky for the cavalry. And he takes advantage of every opportunity to enjoy local society.

Bourke visiting factories and horse farms does not correspond to the image of Bourke the soldier and the ethnologist. For that reason, readers might wonder why I bothered to include these sections; indeed, I initially considered omitting them. Bourke, however, realized—and commented—that he was witnessing a transformation. The United States now fronted two oceans. The North-South sectional conflicts that for so long had hindered national development were resolved. There was a feeling of unbridled optimism as the

5. *Ibid.*, 24:39.

6. *Ibid.*, 24:34–36.

7. The Nez Percé War began in the spring of 1877 when a band of young warriors, resentful of relocation to a reservation, attacked and killed several white settlers. Fearing retaliation, Joseph, Looking Glass, and several other chiefs led their bands in a trek of a thousand miles across Idaho and Montana, seeking refuge in Canada. Pursued by troops, Joseph finally surrendered on October 5, 1877, less than a hundred miles from the border. See Beal, “*I Will Fight No More Forever*,” and Greene, *Nez Perce Summer, 1877*.

nation rapidly grew into a major industrial and economic power. Noting the shipment of California wine to Germany, he writes, “This new and important demand will stimulate our wine-growers to new energy and beyond question American wine will within the next twenty years assume a high place in the list of our staple resources.” He even went so far as to predict that the American West would be ideal for ratite culture.⁸ In the case of wine, his foresight was correct, the disaster of Prohibition notwithstanding. As for ostriches and emus, the attempt made almost a century after Bourke’s death never lived up to expectations.

The horse-buying visits give a better view of Bourke’s racial attitudes. Until this point, most of his references to blacks have involved soldiers, and he has been favorably impressed. Here, however, he ventures to parts of the country where there are large numbers of black civilians, and his impressions are less positive. In Kentucky, he writes:

The blacks flock to the towns like Lexington whose streets they *throng*, either as downright idlers or pursuing such apologies for labor as polishing boots, waiting on hotel tables or running errands. It disgusted me greatly to be accosted half a dozen times to the block with the question, “shine yer butes, Boss?”⁹

He has made many previous references to restaurants, and no doubt his orderly regularly polished his boots. But as he has never referred to these as “apologies for labor,” he seems to feel that there is something particularly menial about it if blacks do it. That, together with appellations like “niggers” and “darkies,” shed light on his views, which were in line with most whites of his era, regardless of his Union Army service.

Likewise, he is completely unsympathetic over the problems of Johnson Whittaker, who became West Point’s only black cadet following the graduation of Henry Flipper in 1878. Whittaker contended that he had received a threatening note, and, on the night of April 5–6, 1880, he was bound, beaten, and slashed. A hastily

8. Bourke, *Diary*, 33:529–30.

9. *Ibid.*, 33:499.

convened board of inquiry determined Whittaker had written the note and inflicted the injuries on himself as a means of avoiding the examinations. Following the story, Bourke commented, “[A]s the injuries of which he made so much ado are now found to have been too trivial for mention, the burden of proof in the whole business is thrown upon Whittaker & such sympathizers as may still adhere to him.”¹⁰ Whittaker, however, demanded a court-martial to clear his name. He was found guilty, but in 1882, President Chester A. Arthur threw out the verdict on the grounds that a court-martial was not legally applicable to the case. By then, however, Whittaker had been dismissed from the academy for failing his examinations.¹¹

Bourke’s view of the Whittaker Affair no doubt is based in part on his racial attitudes, and also because he was what might be called “all West Point.” References to the academy and to classmates abound in the narrative. In fact, on April 25, 1880, he was offered an appointment as assistant professor of Spanish at West Point. Although he initially accepted, eventually he opted to remain with Crook.¹²

This volume not only covers the Plains and Midwest, but also digresses to Bourke’s time as a young junior officer, fresh out of West Point, and experiencing his first introduction to the Southwest. Recalling a march from his first post, Fort Craig, New Mexico, to Camp Grant,¹³ Arizona, he writes:

I wish I could remember as vividly and in proper sequence the general features of the topography of the line of march. My memory is constituted in such a way that I retain for a

10. *Ibid.*, 34:572.

11. The Whittaker Affair is described in John F. Marszalek, *Court-Martial: A Black Man in America*.

12. Once before, in 1872, Bourke had been called to West Point, as an instructor in French and Spanish. Crook, however, had blocked it, saying his services were needed in Arizona. In this instance, Bourke noted in his entry for July 26, 1880, that he asked the War Department to revoke the appointment to the academy, although he did not give a reason. Porter, *Paper Medicine Man*, 20–21; Bourke, *Diary*, 34:639.

13. Fort Craig was established on the Rio Grande, to provide protection against Apaches and guard the road along the Rio Grande in New Mexico. It was abandoned and transferred to the Interior Department in 1885. Camp Grant was established in 1865 on the San Pedro River near its confluence with Aravaipa Creek. Located on the site of the abandoned post of Fort Breckenridge, it guarded the road between Tucson and Sacaton. An Indian reservation was established briefly at Grant in 1872, but after the Indians were reconcentrated at San Carlos later that year, the post no longer was necessary. It was abandoned in 1873, a new Camp Grant having been established at the head of Sulphur Springs Valley. Frazer, *Forts of the West*, 4–6, 8, 98; Altshuler, *Starting With Defiance*, 28–30.

long time the impressions made upon me by individuals, but in a sense of locality I am lacking in details but always capable of describing the character of a district with an approach to correctness; even if my account of the lesser meanderings of roads and streams be somewhat at fault.¹⁴

Yet this period of Bourke's life gets only three paragraphs in *On the Border With Crook*,¹⁵ and without the lengthy diary entries of New Mexico and Arizona, we would know little about this early part of his career.

Here, and elsewhere throughout the diaries, Bourke pokes fun at the quirks and foibles of the Irish soldiers who made up such a large part of the frontier army. Both his parents were from Ireland, but they were well-to-do, and not refugees from famine or clearances that so often made up the Irish immigrant class. He expresses sympathy with the Irish country people caught up in the famine of the late 1870s, and resents the apparent indifference of the British government to their suffering.¹⁶ Nevertheless, he was thoroughly Americanized, apparently devoid of any romantic fantasies of an ancient, heroic Ireland that so often permeate Irish-American mythology; he seems to view immigrant and home-country Irish as a species that was interesting, and perhaps a little odd. His parodies come to full fruition as he recollects an encounter between Sir Rose Price, an Irish baronet, and two Irish officers in the U.S. Army, Col. John Joseph Coppinger, and "Old Jemmie" Henton, blistering (in his own humorous way) their accents, vanities, and mannerisms.

Yet there was no malice in his accounts. Lengthy descriptions of Capt. Gerald Russell, 3rd Cavalry, whom he first met as a new lieutenant fresh from the academy, show a young officer's admiration for a crusty, vain, but extremely competent old soldier who ruled his troops with just the right balance of terror and paternal affection. A shrewd Irish peasant who, in his own view, has done well in his adopted country, Russell boasts of his background to emphasize his achievements. In the "Jerry Russellisms," the Western movie fan

14. Bourke, *Diary*, 30:189.

15. Bourke, *On the Border*, 3.

16. This famine was in no way as severe as the one of the 1840s, but served to point up the abuses in Irish land law that kept the country people impoverished and on the verge of starvation. No British government seemed capable of arriving at a solution. Churchill, *Great Democracies*, 343.

can easily hear Victor McLaglen. Bourke describes a drinking bout the night before a scouting expedition against Apaches, in which Russell and other senior captains had to be carried to their cots by the junior officers. It is a humorous scene that portrays these battle-hardened veterans as human beings, capable of kindness and sentimentality.

The second half of this volume contains frequent references to General U.S. Grant, who seemed to be a major news topic as the 1880 election approached. After completing his second term in March 1877, Grant and his wife, Julia, departed for Great Britain to visit their daughter, Nellie, who had married into the English gentry. The vacation turned into a two-and-a-half-year, round-the-world tour, with the Grants feted from London to Tokyo. There being no constitutional prohibition on a third term at the time, Grant was considered a contender in 1880, and his biographer, William S. McFeely, calls the trip “a campaign tour unlike that of any previous candidate for the presidency.” The world tour was followed by a tour throughout the United States, along with Cuba and Mexico. Through 1879 and the first half of 1880, Bourke has little doubt that Grant would make a political comeback and become the nation’s first three-term president. Indeed, when the Republicans held their convention, he was the strongest candidate, but failed to get a clear majority. The convention delegates deadlocked, and the compromise ticket of James A. Garfield and Chester A. Arthur was chosen, one that Bourke calls “essentially weak.” The Democrats nominated Maj. Gen. Winfield S. Hancock, another Civil War hero, for president and William Hayden English for vice president. “This ticket,” Bourke writes, “will be a formidable one and, beyond reasonable doubt, will carry success.”¹⁷ He was mistaken. Garfield won the election, although with a fractional margin. Taking office in 1881, he was assassinated a few months into his administration, and Arthur assumed the presidency.

Throughout the diaries, Bourke inadvertently dispels the image of the frontier army as being somewhere in what the British might call “the back of beyond.” Certainly this was the case in the antebellum army, entering the Great Plains and Southwestern deserts for the first time. By the time Bourke went West, however,

17. Bourke, *Diary*, 34:583–84. Grant’s tour and third term ambitions are discussed in McFeely, *Grant: A Biography*, Chapters 26 and 27. The quote is from page 478.

the situation was rapidly changing. Although reading material was limited, and army officers as a general rule were not well informed, neither did they live in a vacuum. The post libraries of frontier forts might not have had a wide variety of books, but newspapers and magazines, while slightly dated, were available. Opportunities for self-improvement did exist if the officers and soldiers chose to utilize them.¹⁸ Arizona was in the midst of development, and was adjacent to already-cosmopolitan California. The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 began to open the most remote regions of the frontier. Even at Fort Laramie, Wyoming, which in 1876 neared the furthest extension of what Easterners might term “civilization,” the officers and ladies performed theatricals that Bourke called “capitally interpreted.”¹⁹

Field service was more isolated, but even then, railroad, telegraph, and regular courier service kept the soldiers informed. In camp at Goose Creek, Wyoming, following the near disastrous Rosebud Fight of June 17, 1876, the mail brought regular contact with the outside world. “Our newspaper files were very complete,” Bourke noted, “representing prominent New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Washington, Chicago, Omaha and Cheyenne publications.” Besides American political news (1876 was an election year), there even was the report of a palace revolt in Constantinople, half-way around the world.²⁰ In various places in this volume, Bourke comments about the Zulu wars in South Africa, including the British disaster at Isandhlwana on January 22, 1879, and the death of Prince Louis Napoleon, who was killed in action while serving in the British Army in the Natal.

Format of the Edited Diaries

Editing a work like the Bourke diaries is not necessarily confined to transcription, but also to rendering the text into a readable form while preserving the author’s original flavor and intent. Purists, such as Wayne R. Kime, who achieved the monumental task of preparing the Richard Irving Dodge journals for publication, adhere strictly to the original text, including cross-outs and insertions. On the opposite side of the coin, Lt. Col. Thomas T. Smith, former assistant

18. Knight, *Life and Manners*, 57, 83.

19. Robinson, *Diaries*, 1:208.

20. *Ibid.*, 344.

professor of military history at West Point, took Cpl. Emil Bode's German syntax, fractured spelling, and erratic punctuation and rendered them more easily understood by the casual reader.²¹

With Bourke's diaries, I have chosen the middle ground between these two positions, and have undertaken a basic format to preserve as much as possible the flavor of the manuscript, while making it intelligible to the reader and without being cumbersome.

Beyond the exceptions listed in the introduction, I have followed the format of the first two volumes of this series, which is to say:

Orders and Clippings. By and large, clippings are simply correspondents' versions of events that Bourke himself recounted in detail. Because of the enormity of this material, and its availability elsewhere, it has been deleted in favor of Bourke's own manuscript text. In some instances, this includes entire volumes that are nothing more than collections of clippings and copies of orders.

Abbreviations, Spelling, and Grammar. Bourke used many abbreviations. The @ symbol often appears as a substitute for the word "or." While I have tried to remain as faithful as possible to the original text, for the sake of clarity I have spelled out the more common abbreviations, such as cardinal directions, "left," "right," "miles," and "road," as well as those he used frequently, such as "good grass and water," and "creek." For those that are less common or obvious, I have inserted the missing letters in [brackets], except when the abbreviations are scattered, requiring several sets of brackets within one word; in such cases, I have spelled out the word in brackets. When a word is illegible, but the meaning can be inferred, I have placed the probable word with a question mark in [brackets?]. If the meaning cannot be inferred, I have written it as [illegible]. Otherwise, I have transcribed the text as is, with all its inconsistencies, such as "tipi," "teepee," and sometimes even "tépi," all of which he used to designate the conical Indian lodge. Names of individuals suffered in the same fashion. All such instances have been noted in the biographical sketches in Appendix 1.

Interestingly enough, as the years progressed, Bourke tended to pay more attention to spelling out words, as well as to punctuation and capitalization. Consequently these become less of an issue in this volume than in Volumes 1 and 2. Nevertheless,

21. See Smith, *A Dose of Frontier Soldiering*.

differences exist, and words that Bourke commonly misspelled, or were spelled differently in the nineteenth century, such as “accomodation” and “Mississippi” have been copied without any particular notation.

Punctuation and Capitalization. Bourke tended to use periods and commas *outside* quotation marks rather than within. I lean toward leaving Bourke’s punctuation intact except for cases where it renders the text absolutely confusing. Capitalization was erratic. For example, in giving times of day, he might use a.m./p.m., A.M./P.M., or am./pm. I have preserved his capitalization as much as possible. Paragraphing was also erratic, with new paragraphs sometimes indented, but often flush with the left margin.

Emphasis. Bourke emphasized words by underlining them. Most of the time (but not always), he underlined names of people and places, dates, and geographical features of interest. Yet some of his emphasis seems little more than whimsy and, more than a century later, appears to have had no practical reason. In an effort to make it more readable, I have deleted the emphasis except where it enhances the impression he was trying to convey. Bourke occasionally annotated the entries after the fact, as new information came to hand. His notes are indicated by an asterisk (*) while mine are numbered. I have replaced Bourke’s brackets with parentheses, to avoid confusing his texts with mine.

Personalities, etc. Often individuals are named with no explanation as to who they were. Bourke was, after all, writing for his own future reference and knew the people in question. I have attempted, in Appendix 1, to identify as many as possible, and in the case of army officers, have been relatively successful. After more than a century, however, it has not always been possible to identify Indians, enlisted soldiers, or civilians.

The basic intent of the biographical sketches essentially is to explain who these people were, and why they went west. The criteria for the extent of the sketches are based on three factors: their importance in history, their importance to the narrative, and the availability of material on them. In many cases Bourke might make only a passing reference, such as, “I encountered Lieut. X,” this being the only reference to Lieutenant X in the entire narrative. Because of that, and because many such officers did not attain historical prominence, the sketch is minimal. Others, mentioned

frequently, and/or historically important in their own right, receive more detailed treatment.

Where Bourke uses the local name for plants, or names that might not be widely known, I have attempted to identify them and put the botanical name in the notes; I did not do so for commonly known plants. Bourke's designations of the territories have been preserved, and when they do not reflect the modern name of the state, I have inserted the state in [brackets]. In my own commentaries, I have used the modern state names.

Military Ranks. Bourke tended to use brevet ranks for officers who had attained them in the Union Army. Thus we see a reference to "General John H. King, Col. 9th Infantry," the former being his brevet rank and the latter being his active rank at the time of writing. The biographical sketches of officers in Appendix 1 include both active and brevet ranks.

◆ Part 1 ◆

The Life of a
General's Aide

Background

This section covers a period of relative peace on the frontier. Concerned mainly with office work, and inspection and procurement assignments, Bourke offers more detail on daily life in the Midwest and along the frontier. Little, if any, of this material appears in *On the Border With Crook*, or in his other writings, so this is a fresh view of his activities, attitudes, and opinions.

Among other things, he attended the wedding of Lucy McFarland, a second cousin of First Lady Lucy Hayes,¹ to his old classmate, Eric Bergland. This event, which occurred in June 1878, appears to have been written in retrospect, although not necessarily by any great length of time. The prenuptials were written after the fact, because, in discussing a courtesy call to her home, he commented, “Miss Lucy McFarland, at the time of this writing Mrs. E. Bergland, pleased me very much as a talented, refined and good-hearted lady of great personal attractions.”² Yet it was close enough to the event to paste in a newspaper clipping describing the wedding.

1. The term “first lady,” which has no legal or constitutional standing, was used for the first time with Lucy Hayes, the first presidential wife with a college education, which she used to promote social causes. See Appendix 1.

2. Bourke, *Diary*, 23:12.

Bourke, still a bachelor at the time, appreciated the young women at the celebration: "During all my travels and experience, I have never seen so many beautiful young women together as there were at this wedding. Nothing but my diffidence prevented my falling in love with some one of them: to being able to tune my nerves up to making a particular choice, I fell in love with them all."³

Bourke recorded a frontier in transition. He attended cultural events in theaters filled with gun-toting rowdies. He listened to a post commander's plans for lining his fort's parade ground with shade trees and building an artificial lake. He described a modern mill where heavy machinery extracted silver from ore. He also came to know cattlemen in the rapidly developing Territory of Wyoming, observing that only three years earlier, hostile Indians traversed the region at will. Now, however, one saw "thousands and thousands of fine fat cattle peaceably grazing and increasing in value to the undisguised satisfaction of their owners."⁴

This development did not always extend to the military. On a visit to Rock Island Arsenal, he marveled at officers quarters, and thought how much better frontier officers might live "if only the tenth part of the moneys wasted on these palatial structures had been properly applied to the legitimate purpose of maintaining an Army."⁵ Like many people, then and now, he blamed the army's problems—and by extension those of the nation—on self-interested "professional politicians . . . the grandest lot of 'dead beats', thieves and scoundrels outside of jail."⁶

Many of the people mentioned in this volume were companions from expeditions during the Great Sioux War. One person, however, is noticeably missing from the bulk of this, and subsequent volumes: Azor Nickerson, Crook's senior aide-de-camp, with whom Bourke had worked closely since 1872. At Crook's behest, Nickerson was promoted to major and assistant adjutant general on June 16, 1878, which led to his assignment in Washington and separation from Crook's staff. During their last meeting, in Wyoming in late July, Bourke wrote, "We could only stammer out the stereotyped phrases of kindly feeling, but knew that no empty conventional expressions

3. *Ibid.*, 23:17.

4. *Ibid.*, 25:3–4.

5. *Ibid.*, 23:31.

6. *Ibid.*, 23:15.

could adequately convey the regard and esteem in which we mutually held each other.”⁷

Bourke also followed Col. Ranald Mackenzie’s incursions into Mexico. Previously, in 1873, Mackenzie had led a substantial raid some sixty miles into the Mexican interior, smashing Kickapoo and Lipan camps at Remolino, in order to stop their depredations in Texas. The attack, unauthorized but tacitly encouraged by General Sheridan, created a furor but had the desired effect. After serving with Crook in the Department of the Platte during the Great Sioux War, Mackenzie had been transferred back to Texas, where Indians and bandits again were raiding back and forth across the border with relative impunity. As commander of the Subdistrict of the Nueces, at Fort Clark, Texas, he sent or led several expeditions into Mexico. By now, however, Mexico was capable of military retaliation, and for awhile it appeared the two countries might go to war. Like many Americans of his era, Mackenzie believed that Mexico would be better off if completely absorbed into the United States, and so did Bourke.⁸ Commenting on Mackenzie’s exploits on the Mexican border, he noted:

With (3) or four strong columns of invasion, aggregating a greater of a million of men, we could within two years be able to plant *strong colonies*, at eligible points, connected together and with our Rio Grande and Rio Gila systems by Rail Road and telegraphs and with these fortified colonies as foci we could easily establish such relations of commerce and manufactures with the Mexicans as would make our possession of their Territory not alone tolerant but agreeable. Intercourse with these colonies would make the Mexicans see the necessity of having their children taught our language and with a knowledge of our language would naturally come to desire to learn more of our customs. By strictly respecting the religious convictions of the people, by encouraging marriages between *American* men and *Mexican* women and above all by establishing a secure and remunerative market for all Mexican supplies, we could it seems to me,

7. *Ibid.*, 23:67.

8. Mackenzie’s activities are covered in Robinson, *Bad Hand*, Chapter 16, and Pierce, *Most Promising Young Officer*, 196–201.

soon reduce and pacify and even do much to *Americanize* our *Spanish-Indian* neighbors.⁹

Typically, he expressed the viewpoint that American men would marry Mexican women, and not the reverse.

9. Bourke, Diary, 25:19–20.

Chapter 1



Nostalgia, a Society Wedding, a Day at the Races, and a Parting

[June 1, 1878]

The present year, 1878, has been rendered illustrious in its century, by the discoveries of the celebrated scientific electrician, Mr. [Thomas] Edison: in other note-books, allusion occurs to the telephone, one of the emanations of his inventive genius.¹ This one must chronicle the “phonograph”, or sound-writer, which has for its singular office the preservation and reproduction of all sounds, confided to its cylinder.² What with our improvements in machinery, rail-roading, hotel-keeping, telegraphy, printing and photography, it would seem as if but little more was needed to make good man’s boast that he is the lord of creation.

June 1st. Left Omaha, and Council Bluffs, by the Kansas City, St. Joe and Council Bluffs R.R. for St. Louis, where a quick connection

1. Bourke is mistaken. The telephone was invented by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876.

2. Edison patented the phonograph in 1878, by embossing the groove on tinfoil. Although it did reproduce sound, it was not commercially viable, and Edison did little work on it for another ten years, until Alexander Graham Bell, his cousin Chidchester Bell, and Charles Sumner Tainter patented the Gramophone, which used an engraved wax cylinder. Faced with the competition, Edison improved his invention, and introduced the “Perfected” phonograph to market. Reiss, *Compleat Talking Machine*, 154–56.

was made in the Grand Union dépôt with the Ohio and Mississippi R.R. for Cincinnati. On the latter train was pained to find my old friend, Lieut. E. L. Keyes, 5th Cavy., and mother, travelling from Texas to Washington. Keyes, a bright intellect ruined by addiction to liquor, promised at one time to be an ornament to the service, but dissipation brought about his dismissal and, to my unfeigned regret, I saw that he was still a victim to his degrading passion and steadily running down hill.

In 1872, Keyes and myself, formed part of the detachment, which, under command of Col. Coppinger, 23d Inf., sailed from San Francisco, in the good steamer, "Newbern", to the mouth of the Colorado river, in the Gulf of California. The voyage of some 2,000 miles occupied 13 days, a period long enough to enable us to become pretty thoroughly acquainted with each other, outside of the pleasant comradeship of the occasion, not much can be said of the journey. The arid cliffs of Baja California, Sinaloa, and Sonora,³ gave us a very unfavorable idea of Mexico; a school of dolphins, glistening in the sun, a long shark, or, semi-periodically, a whale, or what we land-lubbers thought must be whales or sea-serpents, helped to kill time pretty well; then at meridian, we used to "haul the log" or "take the sun" with Captain McDonough, an odd genius, (since drowned at sea.) The astronomical part of business didn't interest us very much; strictly speaking, I never thought that our worthy skipper knew how to handle a sextant; he preferred running his ship along the coast, of which every promontory and indentation was perfectly well-known to him; but, if he couldn't manage a sextant, he could make a very acceptable toddy, and every day, just as soon as the log had been read and the bearing determined, proofs of his skill in his favorite line were in eager demand by a throng of thirsty young officers. As McDonough was a perfect skinflint about his whiskey, strategy had to be brought into play whenever we felt like having more than one round of the enticing beverage; there was only one vulnerable point in the skipper's character; it was his Achilles' heel, but we found it out almost intuitively and assailed him there every time with success. He was very fond of telling us about his "viges";

3. States in northwestern Mexico. Baja California (now partitioned into two states—North and South) is the peninsula on the west shore of the Gulf of California, while Sonora and Sinaloa are on the east shore. Sonora borders Arizona, and Sinaloa is immediately to the south of Sonora.

his “vige” to Callao,⁴ his “first vige” out from Liverpool, his “second vige” to Puget Sound, and so on.

To these we listened with intense gravity and interest, more or less simulated. Our patience never went without its reward. The Captain’s throat was certain to become parched and we shared in the toddy, brewed for its refreshment.

Peace be to his Ashes. Softly let the waves of the Gulf of Cortez sing his requiem. He was the biggest liar I ever met, and some of his stories of adventure were masterpieces of mendacity.

Colonel Coppinger, our worthy commander, was one of the neatest men in his dress I ever knew: the one apprehension that clouded upon his mind was that one large batch of recruits would not keep themselves clean. To insure absolute cleanliness among them became almost a mania with him: every fine morning, he would have large squads stand out on the forecastle [of the ship], while water was thrown over them from the force pumps.

This seemed to tickle the soldiers amazingly: the voyage was made very pleasantly, only one man lost and he drowned through his own cursed carelessness and disobedience of orders, while we were steaming into the mouth of the muddy Colorado.

Then as we got upon the river steamboat, “Cocopah”, Jack Mellon, Master,⁵ and steamed up the channel to Ehrenburg, (400) and odd miles, it seemed as if our troubles had, only commenced.⁶ We couldn’t make more than (60) miles a day against the swift current, and, while the sun lasted, groaned on account of the heat and at night suffered a little from the mosquitoes, but not much, for it was then in the month of November (1872).

When we could come to a “wood-landing”,⁷ everybody rushed ashore. Our “roustabouts” were Cocopah Indians and Mexicans,

4. In Peru.

5. Mellon was a renowned Colorado River pilot who, in 1874, was master of the steamer *Gila*, carrying Lt. John W. Summerhayes and his wife, Martha, to Fort Mojave. Martha Summerhayes remembered Mellon as “then the most famous pilot on the Colorado, and he was very skilful [sic] in steering clear of the sand-bars, skimming over them, or working his boat off, when once fast upon them.” Bourke mentions the *Gila* in the next paragraph. Summerhayes, *Vanished Arizona*, 36ff.

6. The first attempt at steam navigation on the lower Colorado appears to have been in 1852, when the steamer *Uncle Sam*, delivered in pieces by schooner, and assembled at the mouth of the river, reached Fort Yuma in December of that year. She ran aground and sank after a year or two of service. After another false start, in 1854, steam service finally began on a regular basis in the fall of 1855, and continued throughout most of the remainder of the century. Bancroft, *Arizona and New Mexico*, 490.

7. A depot where the steamer would put into shore to take on more wood for fuel.

who worked to my unpracticed eye very faithfully: this wasn't the first mate's opinion and the way that man poured out profanity and tobacco juice from his mouth was a caution. The "roustabouts" never seemed to mind him in the least, and probably fancied he was praising their good looks whenever he "damned their eyes". About half way up from Point Isabel, (the miserable collection of hovels at the mouth of the river,)⁸ to Fort Yuma, Cal.,⁹ (the first point inside of the American lines,) we met the steamboat "Gila", commanded by Captain Mellon's friend and comrade of years, Captain Steve Thorn.

The meeting was very funny: the two men were of the same general type—red-faced, broad-shouldered, warty-knuckled, deep-chested, profane, good-hearted, honest old fresh water mariners, who could out-drink, out-smoke, out-chew, or out-swear any two men in Arizona—and that's saying a good deal. Each was very proud of his boat, and as this periodical meeting was always looked forward to with fond anticipation—the respective commanders were arrayed sumptuously in their "nobbier" apparel. Each wore black doe-skin pantaloons, and a white linen shirt which would have been very presentable, if it had not been disfigured with so much jewelry. Neither wore a collar, but Mellon's garment was buttoned at the neck, while Thorn's lay open carelessly, exposing a red-flannel undershirt beneath. In the matter of jewelry, Thorn completely eclipsed our more unpretentious commander, but either could have equipped a Jew pedlar with the amount carried on his person. Thorn had, besides the usual studs, and cuff-buttons, not far from half a dozen breast-pins, all of them bounteous in material and one or two of good workmanship. He had a good-sized gold anchor, held by a small cable to a gold cross, and, if I remember correctly, he also wore a gold anvil, almost big enough for the uses of a blacksmith. But, he didn't have any hat, at least not at that moment, while Captain Mellon,

8. Not to be confused with Point Isabel, Texas, near the mouth of the Rio Grande, which gave access by steamer to Fort Brown and Fort Ringgold.

9. Fort Yuma was established as Camp Independence in 1850 on the Colorado River about half a mile below the mouth of the Gila. A few months later, in March 1851, it was relocated to a low hill on the west bank of the Colorado, opposite the present city of Yuma, Arizona. The post subsequently was abandoned, but reoccupied and renamed Fort Yuma in 1852. Initially established to protect the emigrant routes and control local Indians, it later became a supply depot for military posts in Arizona. It was abandoned in 1883, when the railroads rendered it redundant, and was transferred to the Interior Department the following year. An Indian school and mission now occupy the site. Frazer, *Fortes of the West*, 34–35; Altshuler, *Starting With Defiance*, 67–72.

in a brand new, black silk “plug”, presented by admiring friends in San Francisco, fairly obscured the glories of Solomon.

As the steamboats, bumped their prows together and the gang of “roustabouts” were, under the jealous supervision of two screaming and swearing first mates, actively fastening cables and running gangway planks between them, two streams of simultaneous objurgation burst from the lips of our rival skippers.

“Easy thar with your blank, blank, blank, old canal-boat, you horny-handed, land-lubber”.

“Avast you bilious-eyed, blabbering mouthed mud-turtle—don’t talk to your boss, your master, you dash, dash, dash, dash, son of a sea-cook”. I didn’t hear all the conversation; about the time, I descended to the lower deck, the air was blue and hot and sulphureous [*sic*] with profanity, but our gallant Captain was already silencing his less accomplished adversary. At Fort Yuma, our party broke up; myself, under orders to rejoin General Crook, at Prescott and the others, under Colonel Coppinger, to proceed, by easy marches, to their proper stations.

Fort Yuma fully merited all the bad reputation given it in the camp-talk of the Army, as the hottest and most dreary post in our country. During the time of our stay, there wasn’t much to be seen, except now and then a squad of Cocopah, Yuma or Mojave, Indians lazily floating in the water which appeared to all intents and purposes to be their native element:

Give one of those Indians enough blue mud with which to plaster his hair as a shield against the sun and a cottonwood log to support him partially in the water, and he will be happy as any king and float on the turbid bosom of the Colorado, until he meets an upcoming steamer, whereon he knows he is always welcome to ride back to his little patch of squashes and melons, with which he will surfeit himself until the humor take him for another float in the river, or until some other Indian challenge him to a game of cards—the ruling passion of all these tribes. I am wandering away from my text—seemingly, but not in reality, as Keyes^o has been in my mind all this time. He was a most jovial companion, one fitted for better things than the life of a drunkard.

^o[*Bourke’s footnote*] Lt. Keyes, 5th Cavalry, dismissed for drunkenness, April 1877.