

# Historically Speaking

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## Indian Wars and Howard County

*Story and Pictures*

*Courtesy of Garry Wells of Scotia*

Howard County was never the site for any of the major battles during the Indian Wars, but it still had an influence on the early history of the county. The Skidi Tribe (one of four sub-tribes of the Pawnee) had been living along the Loup River for over two hundred years. Skidi in Pawnee translates as "wolf people". When the earliest whites, the French fur traders, encountered the Skidi, they named the river after the people who lived there. The French word for wolf is loup, so this north branch of the Platte was named Riviere De Loups or the Loup River.

The two primary tribes in central Nebraska during the 1800's were the Pawnee and the Lakota (Sioux), but they were very different. The Pawnee were a semi-sedentary or an agricultural tribe. Their food source came from the women of the tribe growing squash, beans, and corn, with meat supplied by a summer and winter buffalo hunt. They lived in permanent houses made of earth and wood, limiting their mobility. The Lakota were migratory buffalo hunters living in tipis and highly mobile.

Contact with the wasitchu (whites) had very different effects on these two tribes. European diseases

such as cholera and small pox, for which the Indians had no natural immunity, killed thousands of Pawnee because of their limited ability to move if their village became infected; whereas, the Lakota would simply pick up and leave. The introduction of the horse and the gun gave enormous power to the Lakota, in hunting and especially in fighting battles with other enemy tribes. The Pawnee, once the dominant tribe in Nebraska, with an estimated 20,000 population, was reduced to a few thousand by the 1850's, while their arch-enemy, the Lakota, gained territory and maintained a continuous campaign of raids, stealing horses, burning crops and lodges, and killing the Pawnee.

By 1857, the Pawnee were so destitute that they signed the Treaty of Table Creek, giving up rights to all of their land in Nebraska in exchange for a small reservation of thirty miles along the Loup River, fifteen miles wide (present day Nance County), small annual payments and protection from the Lakota, by the U.S. Army. The U.S.

Government did a poor job fulfilling their part of the treaty, as the Civil War diverted money and soldiers away from the west. Retaliation for the Pawnee



One of the more colorful figures from early Howard County history was Conrad "Little Buckshot" Wentworth, a scout in 1872 for the Army at Camp Vincent, located east of Cotesfield, along the river. Wentworth was so enamored with Howard County that he settled in the Cotesfield area.

# A Message From the President

*Evelyn Dvorak*

Winter is here and with this comes the closing of the Historical Village and Gruber House for the season. We are so grateful for all the volunteers who helped to keep the facilities open during the summer. We appreciate those who willingly kept the building tidy and grounds looking nice for the visitors.

We had another successful bake sale, even though the weather didn't cooperate. We had a lot of goodies brought in and many generous buyers.

At this writing, we are looking forward to the 11th annual Tour of Homes. The following opened their homes for viewing: Dave and Connie Snow, Dave and Julie Sack, Dennis and Bonnie Piontowski, Bel-Air Motel (Tom and Ginny Jankovic), Vickie McDonald and Becky Kamprath/Gary Langley. How blessed we are to have this type of community support.

We continue with the necessary arrangements to get the Agriculture Building moved. The city has given us deed to property, which was part of the park and east of the present village. The board approved one of three bids we received for the foundation and floor. We have submitted the plans to the Planning Commission for their approval and will be approving the bids for the moving of the building. Depending on the winter, we hope to have this done for the spring opening and we will appreciate any donations towards this project.

We are accepting dues for 2006 and encourage new members. They are \$10 a year and you will receive four editions of *Historically Speaking*. Send to P.O. Box, St. Paul, NE 68873.

Enclosed is a ballot for our privilege to vote for the 2006 officers and board members. Those who have paid their 2005 or 2006 dues are eligible to vote, and please read the voting instruction that is with the ballot. The ballots will be counted prior to the annual meeting, which is January 16, 2006, at 7:00 p.m. at the St. Paul Library, and the outcome will be announced then. New officers will take office immediately following this meeting.

against the Lakota finally came in 1864, when the Department of the Platte (district army headquarters) requested Pawnee volunteers to join the Army in their fight against the Sioux and Cheyenne, under the command of Frank North, as the Pawnee Scouts. Frank had worked at the Pawnee Agency for many years and spoke fluent Pawnee. He and his brother Luther North led the Pawnee Scouts on numerous engagements, including protecting the workers building the Transcontinental Railroad in Nebraska, and removing the Cheyenne from the Republican Valley in the Campaign of 1869, with General Carr commanding and Buffalo Bill Cody as scout. During this campaign, Major Frank North was credited with the killing of the Cheyenne Chief Tall Bull, at the Battle of Summit Springs, and honored by the Nebraska Legislature in

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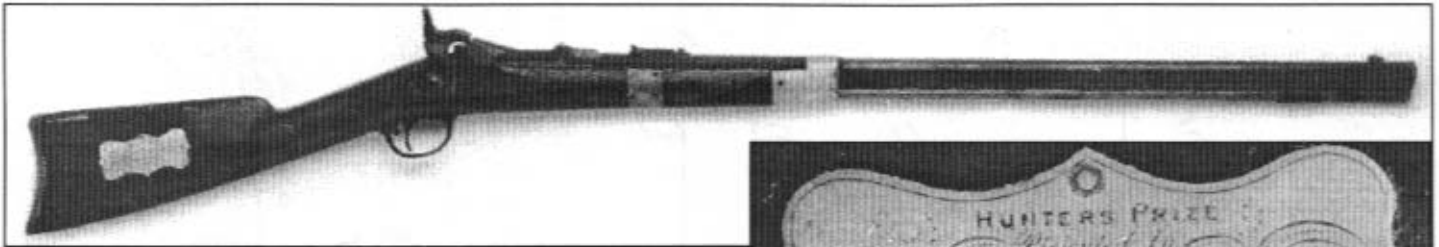
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On March 1, 1873, Capt. John Mix and Capt. Sam Munson presented a "Hunter's Prize" rifle (above) to Conrad "Little Buckshot" Wentworth. The presentation most likely was made at Camp Canby, located two miles upstream from Camp Vincent. The rifle was ornately engraved (right).



1870 for his part in the Campaign The Pawnee called him the "Great White Father".

No settlers had pushed into the Loup River Valley before 1870, probably due to the proximity of the Pawnee Reservation on the lower Loup. Even though the Pawnee were relatively harmless, it would have taken real courage for early settlers to travel through their villages to reach the rich farmland beyond. That same year, the Paul brothers (J.N. and N.J.) and the North brothers (Frank and Luther) departed from Columbus with a small group of men, and went up the Loup to the Forks on a hunting trip. That trip resulted in dreams of a cattle ranch and the determination to establish a new county called "Howard".

Once Howard County was formed, it drew new settlers into the Loup Valley for the first time, but the Lakota were still using the trail down the North Loup River Valley to raid the Pawnee on their reservation. The Norths and the Pauls knew that these new settlers would need to be protected, so a request was sent to General C. C. Augur (Christopher Columbus Augur), Commander of the Department of the Platte, in



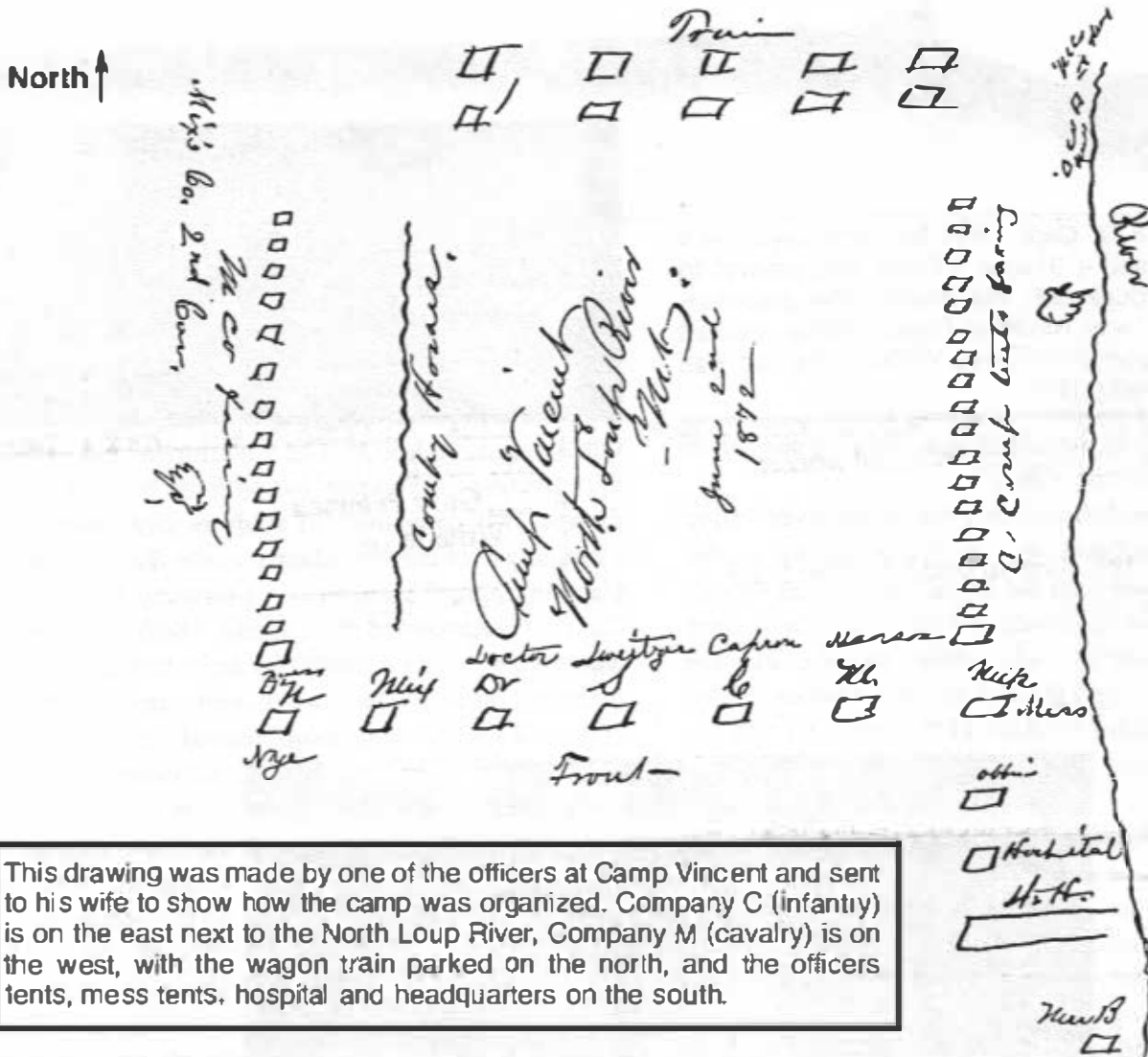
Wentworth was an early settler in Howard County. He staked a claim south of the Concrete Hotel built by Doc Beebe (east of Cotesfield) and moved his family to a dugout. He later built this small house out of stone blocks carved from the chalk-rock in the surrounding hills. Both the dugout and the stone house are still visible today.

Omaha, to send troops. The government had been lax in protecting the Pawnee, but with the white settlers in danger, two companies of soldiers were dispatched. Company C of the 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry under the command of Captain Samuel Munson and Company E of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry commanded by Captain Elijah R. Wells. In May of 1871 they traveled by train to Grand Island, marched north to Howard County and established "Camp Ruggles". The camp, named for the Assistant

Adjutant General Dept. of the Platte, Lt. Col. George D. Ruggles, was one mile southeast of present day Elba. The new camp conveniently gave Frank North a job as army scout for the cavalry and Luther North a contract to provide hay for the army's horses. The two companies of men would have included over one hundred enlisted men, five officers including General Augur's son, Lt. C. C. Augur Jr. and a surgeon, Dr.

George Washington Towar.

Dr. Towar wrote an article late in his life describing the military camps in Howard County entitled "Some Reminiscences of the Military Occupancy of the Loup Valley." Parts of those writings are reprinted in the book *Entering Howard County*. Towar relates



This drawing was made by one of the officers at Camp Vincent and sent to his wife to show how the camp was organized. Company C (infantry) is on the east next to the North Loup River, Company M (cavalry) is on the west, with the wagon train parked on the north, and the officers tents, mess tents, hospital and headquarters on the south.

that both he and Capt. Munson filed land claims in 1871, Capt. Munson filing on a creek two miles northwest of Camp Ruggles (a mile and 1/2 northwest of present day Elba). Through the summer the Captain and some volunteers built a nice log cabin on his new claim. Just as they put on the finishing touches, Camp Ruggles was visited by Gen Augur's daughter Jennie, (probably there to visit her brother) and her cousin from Chicago, a Miss. Coates. Champagne was appropriated and a party at the new log cabin to celebrate its completion was underway, as Capt. Munson raised his glass in a toast and exclaimed that in honor of Miss. Coates, this place would be named Coatesfield. The stream flowing past the cabin was named Munson Creek and the stream to the south was named Augur Creek. In late summer, Camp Ruggles was moved six miles north, up river. (1 mile southeast of present day Cotesfield) The military presence in the county had worked, as the Indians were quiet all

summer. Finally in late October, Gen. Augur sent orders to pack up camp and return to Omaha Barracks for the winter.

In the spring of 1872, a second camp, "Camp Vincent" (named after Lieut. Fredrick Vincent, who was killed in April 1872, by Indians in Texas), was established just north of the second site of Camp Ruggles. Once again this camp consisted of two companies of soldiers, Company C of the 9<sup>th</sup> Inf. under Capt. Munson, with Lt. Thaddeus Capron second in command. The cavalry company was Company M of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry, under Captain John Mix and Lt. Frank Nye, with Major Nelson Sweitzer acting as Battalion commander. Frank North had been called away to Fort Russell in Wyoming Territory, so his brother Luther was hired as scout, along with a well-known scout by the name of Conrad Wentworth, better known as "Little Buckshot". Ned Buntline, the man who had made Buffalo Bill famous with his dime





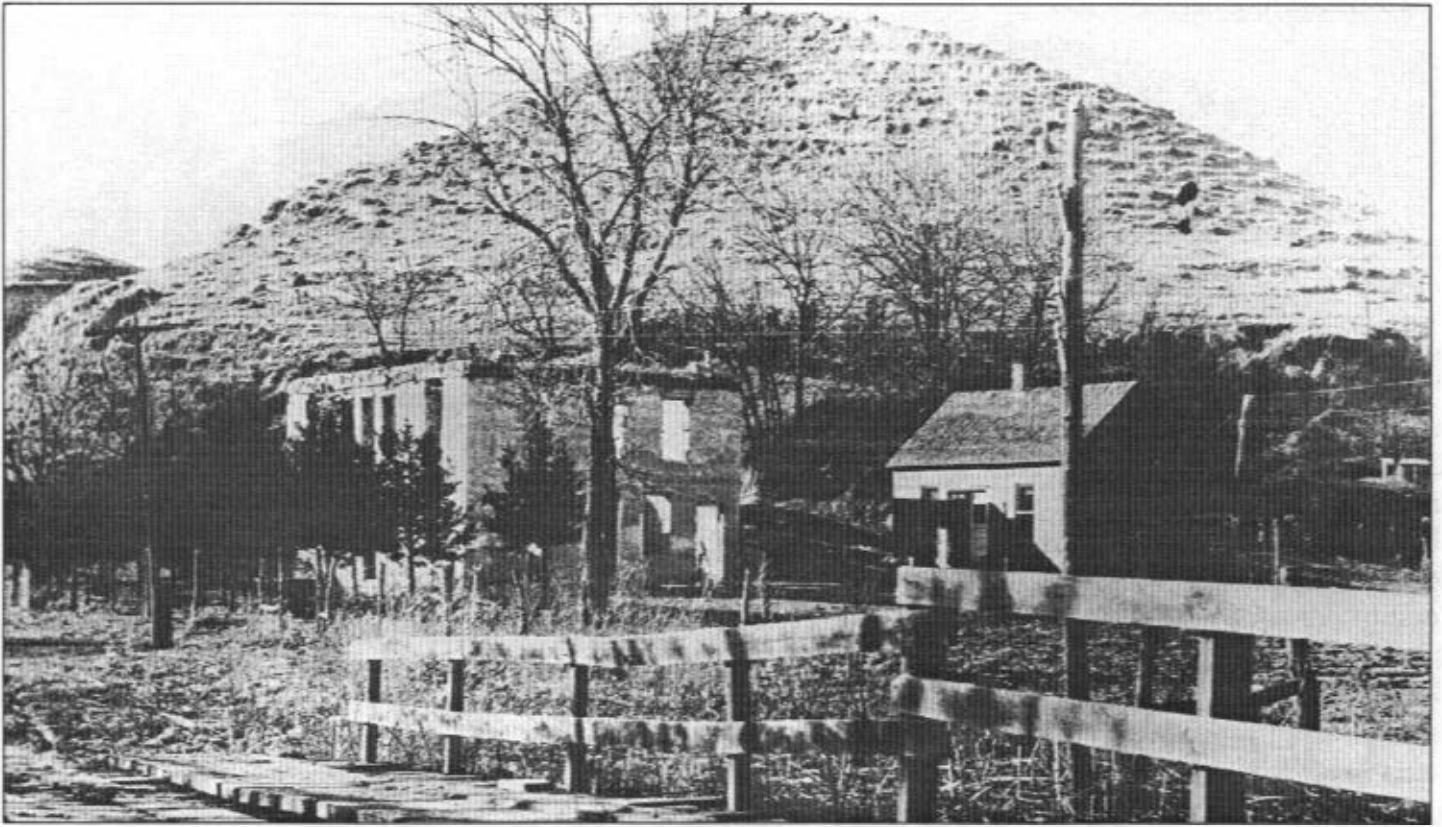
Joseph "Doc" Beebe constructed a hotel using a quick-lime product from his kilns east of Cotesfield. He used the same technique used to build the buildings at Fort Hartsuff. His hotel was known as the "Concrete Hotel" or the "Half-Way House" and was located east of Cotesfield, one mile south of the present river bridge. The couple is believed to be the Leschinskys, who had a photography studio in Grand Island.

novels, had written also about Little Buckshot calling him "the Little White Whirlwind of the Plains". When Buffalo Bill began appearing on stage back east, it was Wentworth's Indian jacket that he wore. (This jacket is on display at the Cody Museum in Wyoming.)

Luther North relates some information of this second camp in his book *Man of the Plains*. He states that the elk were so plentiful in the valley, that his and Little Buckshot's hunting expeditions were supplying meat for the whole camp. He also tells the story of a cavalry scouting expedition, in which he was the guide and Maj. Sweitzer was in command. They started out with the cavalry company of 50 men and three supply wagons, first moving a day's ride up the North Loup River and then east to the Cedar River. From this point, the commander requested that Luther guide them directly back to Camp Vincent, which was no problem until they arrived on top of the rugged hills to the northeast of camp (east of present day Cotesfield). It was no secret that Luther North and the

good Major did not see eye to eye and after the failure of several attempts to descend the hills to camp, visible in the valley below. Sweitzer recommended a different route. The hotheaded scout turned to his commander and said, "If you know so much about this country, you don't need a guide," and galloped off, arriving at camp an hour later, telling the quartermaster he was through. The rest of the cavalry company arrived a day later, having lost a wagon that rolled over the side of a steep hill, while they were looking for a way down. (That wagon is still in the hills somewhere east of Cotesfield.) In the fall, Camp Vincent was packed up and the group went back again to Omaha Barracks for the winter.

During the early spring of 1873, the settlers on the upper North Loup, led by Happy Jack Swearingen, tried to pursue some raiding Lakota, resulting in the Battle of Sioux Creek. Being heavily out-gunned by the Sioux warriors, they were lucky to escape with their lives, but a request to send troops was sent to the Department of the Platte. Captain John Mix was sent



Doc Beebe's Concrete Hotel was located near the North Loup River, on the main supply line halfway between Fort Hartsuff and the rail line in Grand Island. It was long abandoned by the time this picture was taken around 1920.

with Company M 2<sup>nd</sup> Cav. to scout the upper North Loup. After finding no new sign of Indians, the group moved south and followed the Middle Loup, arriving at a small settlement, (near present day Loup City) on April 13, just as the Easter Blizzard of 1873 hit. The men were able to get cover in the two buildings available, but they lost 25 horses and four pack mules, smothered in a canyon later named "Dead Horse Creek". After three days of cold and blinding snow, the company was forced to walk 20 miles to Coatesfield, where the locals donated food and warm blankets to ease their suffering. In Capt. Mix's final report, he commends the people of Howard County for their generosity to provide relief for the soldiers as they too were ravaged by the blizzard. Shortly after Company M returned to Omaha, Company C 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry commanded by Major James Brisbin arrived, with Co. C of the 9<sup>th</sup> Inf. under Capt. Munson and Lt. Capron, establishing "Camp Canby" two miles upstream from Camp Vincent. (Camp Canby was named after General Edward Canby, killed by the Modoc Indians in northern California, on April 11 1873, the only Army General ever killed in battle during the Indian Wars. The camp was located about two miles

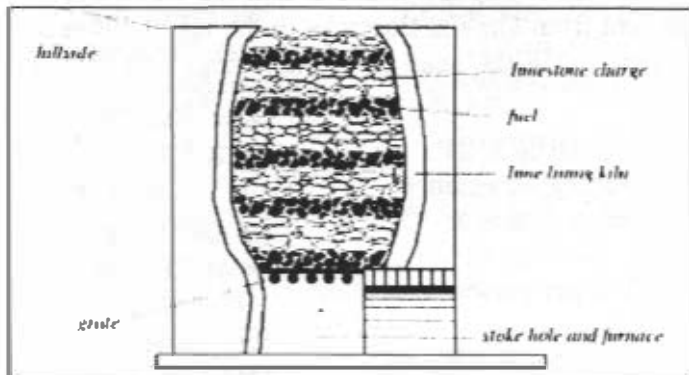
north of present day Coatesfield.) In the fall, the camp was once again packed up and moved back to Omaha ending the military's presence in Howard County.

In January of 1874, the settlers on the upper North Loup again fought with marauding Lakota, this time losing Marion Littlefield, brother-in-law to their leader Buckskin Charley White, in the Battle of Pebble Creek. Captain Munson and the Company C was sent from Omaha Barracks to the upper Loup in the spring, but the need for a permanent Fort finally persuaded Congress to approve \$50,000 funding for Fort Hartsuff. (Funding would be increased to \$75,000 and finally \$110,000 before finished.) Building finally began in September of 1874 and not any too soon as the summer of 1874 was the year of the great grasshopper plague. The settlers up and down the valley were in dire need of employment to feed their families, after the grasshoppers had devoured all of the gardens, crops, and hay in the valley. To recover from their summer's losses, many Howard County residents walked to the new construction site in search of work and were hired by the good Capt. Munson, who turned no one away. Major James Brisbin, the Battalion Commander at Camp Canby in

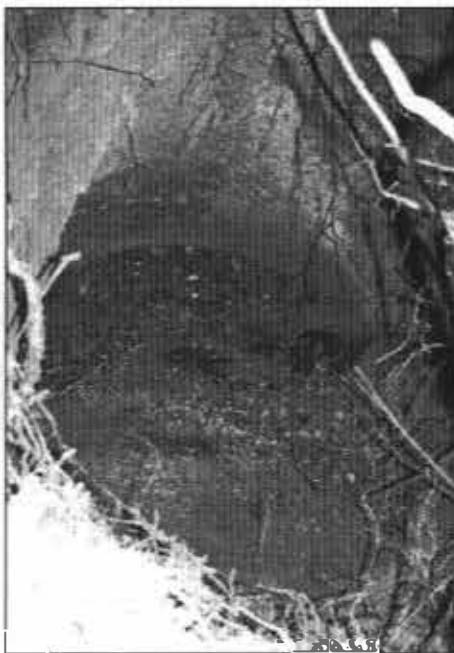
1873, would be nicknamed "Grasshopper Jim" for his effort in raising relief funds and helping the local people recover from the grasshopper disaster

This new fort was not to be made out of wood, but a lime-gravel-concrete mixture, resembling today's concrete. Rather than transport large amounts of lime from eastern Nebraska, the quartermaster advertised locally for a contractor to supply the lime. Joseph "Doc" Beebe, a close friend and neighbor of the North family in Columbus, bid and won the contract. Doc built three lime kilns in the hills east of the North Loup River in northern Howard County (east of present day Cotesfield) and burned chalk-rock, taken from the nearby sidehills, in the kilns, using wood from the surrounding canyons, to produce his quick-lime product. (All three kilns are still visible today.)

On completion of Fort Hartsuff, Doc Beebe started construction of a two-story hotel, using the same construction techniques used at the fort. The new hotel became known as the "Concrete Hotel" or the "Half Way House", as it was on the main supply road, half way between Fort Hartsuff and the rail line in Grand Island. The eighty mile trip was too long to travel in one day, so those traveling back and forth would stop at the Half-Way House to eat and spend the night.



This ink drawing is similar to the kilns built near Cotesfield by Joseph "Doc" Beebe. Chalk-rock, taken from the nearby side hills, was burned in the kilns, using wood from the surrounding canyons. A quick lime product was produced, which was used to construct the buildings at Fort Hartsuff and the Concrete Hotel near Cotesfield.



This is a recent picture from the top of one of the three kilns built in the hills east of the North Loup River in northern Howard County, east of Cotesfield.

Doc's next-door neighbor to the south was none other than Conrad Wentworth. Still being employed by the military as a scout, Little Buckshot was so impressed with Howard County, that he staked a land claim and moved his family to his new homestead. He originally built a dugout for shelter, as many did in this area, but later built a small house out of stone blocks carved from the chalk-rock in the surrounding hills. (Both the dug-out and the stone house are still visible today.)

During the Sioux Wars of 1876, Company C 9<sup>th</sup> Inf. (who spent four summers camped on the Loup) and Company E 2<sup>nd</sup> Cav. (who was at Camp Ruggles) were with General Crook, out of Fort Fettermin, fought in the Rosebud Battle prior to the engagement on the Little Bighorn. Before George Custer left on his fateful scouting expedition on the Little Big Horn, Maj. James Brisbin (Grasshopper Jim) recommended to General Terry, Custer's commander, that Custer take three additional companies from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry to accompany his 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, but Gen. Terry's offer of extra men was refused. On June 25th 1876, Custer was defeated at the Little Bighorn, but by 1880 all of the "hostile" Sioux and Cheyenne tribes had been either forced onto reservations or pushed into Canada. The Pawnee, after being denied the option to hunt buffalo by their new Indian Agent and losing their entire crop to grasshoppers in 1874, gave up their Loup reservation and moved south to Oklahoma in 1875. Just as construction on the new Union Pacific Railroad, being built from Grand Island to Fort Hartsuff, reached St. Paul in 1880, the decision was made to close and abandon the Fort. The North Brothers finally started their ranch in partnership with Buffalo Bill Cody on the Dismal River and with the closure of the Fort, Conrad Wentworth decided to move south to San Antonio Texas, to be with his old friend General Augur, who was now Commander of the Department of Texas. The closing of Fort Hartsuff in 1881, marked the end of another chapter in the history of Howard County

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## *Historically Speaking*

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**Note:** This issue contains historical information on the Indian tribes that resided in Howard County and information and pictures on the early settlers and development in the Cotesfield area. The information is courtesy of Garry Wells of Scotia

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*Check the number by your mailing address—number 05 shows your dues are paid for 2005, which will be delinquent on January 31, 2006. We are accepting 2006 dues now, which are \$10 per person. Send to Howard County Historical Society, P.O. Box 1, St. Paul, NE 68873.*

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