

## Robbery on the Santa Fe Trail in 1842

THOMAS FITZPATRICK (c1799-1854) was well-known as a trapper and guide in the year he wrote the following letter. The incident he describes occurred on the Santa Fe trail, probably in present Pawnee county, as Fitzpatrick was returning to St. Louis after two years spent in leading emigrant parties to Oregon.

The letter, and related papers, are to be found in the superintendency of Indian affairs "Records," v. 8, pp. 109-111, in the Society's manuscripts division.

ST LOUIS NOVEMBER 28, 1842

Sir:

I take the liberty of laying before you a case of robbery committed on me by the Pawnee Indians, on the the 28th ulto; about three hundred miles from Independence on the Arkansas river. I left Fort Scott (Columbia river) August 20<sup>th</sup> in company with one man for the U. S. and that I might more easily avoid the Sioux & Chiennes (who are now considered hostile) I left the usual route and came by Messr. Bent & St. Vrain's trading post on the Arkansas from which to the settlement I anticipated little or no danger; however about half way between that place and Independence I met with a war party of the Pawnees coming from the Sioux,—they at first appeared perfectly friendly, but on our attempting to leave them and continue our route, they showed symptoms of hostility and in a scuffle which ensued they got possession of my gun, in the mean time my travelling companion fled and I have not since heard from him, I was therefore left at the entire mercy of the Savages, and they made good use of the power they then possessed as they rifled me of all my travelling equipage, save my horses which they politely returned to me; they did not leave me wherewith to make a fire, which you know is very inconvenient and one of the greatest privations. I will herein enclose a bill of the articles they robbed me of, in order that I may obtain redress according to the laws existing on that subject. The loss I have sustained is very trifling, but the insult is very great to have occurred as it were on the very borders of the Settlement.

I have appeared before a magistrate of this city, as you will perceive, & have sworn to the correctness of the enclosed bill; however, I will make some remarks on the different articles for your satisfaction. They are all priced and set down at what I believe they cost me, except the Spy glass which would be worth here about fifteen dollars, but in the Indian country I could at any time get a good horse or forty dollars for it. There were many other articles amongst my losses which I could make no estimate of and therefore left out altogether, such as Indian curiosities, many curious petrafactations, mineral Specimens &c

Y Ob St.

[Signed] THOS. FITZPATRICK

D. D. MITCHELL Esq.

Supt Ind Aff

Memorandum of articles taken from the undersigned Oct 20, 1842 by Pawnee Indians, Arkansas river, viz:—

One double barrel & twist gun	\$50.00	Five cotton & Gingham sheets	
One spy glass	25.00	at \$1.50 ea	\$7.50
One Super broad cloth dress		Powder lead & percussion caps	8.00
coat	34.00	Shot pouch, belt &c	3.00
One french Merino frock coat	18.00	One Spanish riding saddle	10.00
Two vests \$4.50 & \$7.00	11.00	One Razor case with four	
Two pr. pantaloons at \$5.00		blades fitting into one	
ea	10.00	handle	5.00
Three linen shirts at \$3.50 ea	10.50	Blankets, bear skin &c for	
		bedding	15.00

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\$207.50

Fitzpatrick's affidavit, which has not been published here, adds only two items of information, that his companion was named "Vandusen," and that the Pawnees numbered "about twenty." When the Indians met their agent at Council Bluffs on June 2, 1843, they admitted taking all the items except the shot pouch and belt. The matter was finally settled by reimbursing Fitzpatrick from the Pawnee annuities.