THEY CAME TO THE MOUNTAIN

The Story of Flagstaff's Beginnings

CHAPTER II

The American Expeditions

THE FIRST AMERICAN of whom we have a record who thoroughly explored our area was Antoine Leroux of Taos, a companion of Kit Carson, friend of Old Bill Williams, and an outstanding figure in the ranks of the twelve to fifteen hundred mountain men who trapped, fought Indians and explored the West in the half-century preceding the Civil War. He was to guide several of the major expeditions through the San Francisco Mountain country, and was rightfully acclaimed as one of the most reliable, skilled and experienced scouts and advisors.

Leroux was born about 1801, and grew to manhood in Saint Louis, Missouri. We are told by Forbes Parkhill that he was predominantly of French blood, with a trace of Spanish, and probably of Indian. With other young men in Saint Louis at that time, he heeded the call of the distant west, and went to Taos, where he married Juana Catarina Vigil and made his home. Leroux was not one of the improvident trappers who consistently blew their earnings in a big annual spree at Taos.

Hs was a Mountain Man and a scout; but he was also comparatively well educated. He spoke French and English fluently, wrote well, and had a working knowledge of Spanish. He must also have had a knowledge of some Indian dialects. A good businessman, he managed to accumulate a substantial estate. During the 1820s and 1830s, he ranged far and wide over the great unknown area lying between Santa Fe and California. While trapping on a northwestern Arizona stream in 1837, he came upon Old Bill Williams, the famed trapper and Mountain Man. Leroux named the stream Bill Williams Fork, and the mountain northeast of it Bill Williams Mountain, in honor of his friend.

In 1846, he was guide for Col. P. St. George Cooke, who led the Mormon Battalion from Santa Fe to California; served with Lt. J. H. Whittlesley in a campaign against the Utes in 1849; worked with the U.S. Boundary Commission in 1849–51; in 1849–50, he and Kit Carson accompanied Maj. William N.

Grier in pursuit of Indians who had abducted a woman and her daughter; and he is given as source of data appearing on a map of the Southwest prepared in 1851 by Col. John Monroe.

In 1851, he guided Capt. Lorenzo Sitgreaves on a survey for a road from Zuñi to the Colorado River, the first official expedition to visit the San Francisco Mountain area; in early 1853, he guided Capt. J. W. Gunnison through Colorado seeking a railroad route; in 1853–54, he was guide for A. W. Whipple in his explorations for a railway route from Fort Smith, Arkansas, to Los Angeles, another group which visited our area. In 1854, on his way home from California, he discovered the prehistoric ruins in the Verde Valley now known as Montezuma's Castle and Montezuma's Well, locating them on what he called the San Francisco River, erroneously supposing that it originated in our mountain. It was really the Verde River.

Edward F. Beale, who made four journeys through this area, had the highest regard for Leroux. When Beale was traveling cross-country to assume his duties as superintendent of Indian affairs in California and Nevada in 1853, his party overtook Leroux on the trail, and Beale wrote: "We considered ourselves fortunate in receiving the services of so experienced a guide." Only a spell of illness at one time, and his commitments to the Whipple expedition at another, prevented him from becoming Beale's guide, but he assisted Beale in securing supplies in Taos for one journey. Leroux died June 30, 1861, at his hacienda, we learn from Parkhill. He was buried a month later, August 1, in the nave of the parish church, evidence of the esteem with which he was regarded.

Leroux could be described as father, perhaps grandfather, of Flagstaff, because he was first to become intimately acquainted with this area, and it was on his advice that the expeditions followed the general routing through here which they did. A street in Flagstaff is named for him. The finest spring at the foot of the San Francisco Peaks was named in his honor, and no doubt he joyed in that recognition. An exposed layer of sandstone in the Painted Desert also bears his name, and a wash or fork just west of Holbrook also has the name Leroux.

He deserves recognition beyond what he has received, and it would have been justice to name a major landmark for him. As we proceed with this narrative, his qualities and primacy in exploring and guiding in this immediate area will become apparent. The people of our city today know little about him, and this is their lack; and they might well devise some adequate means of commemorating him, and this they owe the memory of the first white man to claim this area as his province.

In compliance with a resolution of the United States Senate, an expedition

under the leadership of Captain Sitgreaves, Corps of Topographical Engineers, U.S. Army, was sent out in 1851 to explore the Zuñi and Colorado Rivers. He was to go down the Zuñi to its junction with the Colorado, determining its course and character, "particularly with reference to its navigable properties, and to the character of its adjacent land and productions."

The party was organized at Santa Fe, and included in addition to Sitgreaves, Lt. J. G. Parke, also of the Topographical Engineers; S. W. Woodhouse, M.D., physician and naturalist; R. H. Kern, draftsman; Leroux, the guide, plus five Americans and ten Mexicans as packers. Sitgreaves bought as many mules for the trip as he could, but not securing a sufficient number, requisitioned from the assistant quartermaster at Santa Fe forty additional with pack saddles and other accouterments. He also obtained some provisions from army stores. His start was delayed waiting for an expedition against the Navajos to be launched, the plan being to take advantage of the protection afforded by this force part way on the journey.

Bvt. Maj. H. L. Kendrick, of the Second Artillery, was detailed with thirty men as an escort for the Sitgreaves party. Sitgreaves finally launched his expedition September 24, consuming, as he reported, in the meantime part of the limited supplies available for the expedition. "The mules likewise suffered from the delay, for there was scarcely any grazing in the immediate vicinity . . ." he wrote. "The mules of Major Kendrick's command were still more unfit to undertake a difficult march, many of them having been taken out of wagons after a journey of several weeks' duration." Sitgreaves' party numbered fifty.

He quickly determined that the Zuñi is not a river but a rivulet. On the fourth day of march they came to the Little Colorado. They followed roughly along the thirty-fifth parallel, passing near the site of present-day Holbrook; then on to Sunset Crossing, close to the site of present-day Winslow. They there turned northwestward and followed down the Little Colorado. They passed a number of ruins of prehistoric Indian dwellings. On their fifteenth day of march from Zuñi they came to the precipitous falls which eliminated any idea that the Little Colorado could ever be navigable down to where it joins the Colorado River. Sitgreaves wrote "the river falls over a succession of horizontal ledges . . . forming a beautiful cascade of one hundred to one hundred and twenty feet in vertical height." He named it Grand Falls.

Here, after a discussion with his guide, Leroux, which dealt not only with the roughness of the terrain and the precipitous canyon ahead, but also the condition of the animals and state of supplies, the group turned off toward San Francisco Mountain with the idea of striking the Colorado River below the

great canyon and then exploring upward as far as practicable. As they moved toward the mountain, they came on ruins of many stone houses; they had discovered what today are known as the Wupatki ruins, now a national monument. As they moved away from the stream, they had a serious problem of finding water for the animals. They came upon an encampment of Indians, presumably Ko-ho-ninas. After having traveled two days without water, they sent the mules back to the river to drink, and returned with every possible container filled. Two more days of marching and they were again in dire need of water. They saw many antelope and other game, and Sitgreaves was impressed by the beauty of the area. They were moving around the north and northwesterly sides of the mountain. At camp No. 17 they came to the brow of a cliff overlooking a green vale five or six miles in extent, and they were certainly seeing what is known today as Fort Valley. Descending, their guide took them to a spring, which a couple of years later was named Leroux Spring in his honor by Whipple. After resting, they moved on westward, passed near Bill Williams Mountain, and on to the Colorado River. Their closest approach to present-day Flagstaff was Leroux Spring, seven miles northwest of the city. However, members of the party, particularly the guide, Leroux, might very well have ridden down the valley to take a look to the south and southeast.

The most interesting part of the Sitgreaves account is Dr. Woodhouse's two reports, one on the natural history of the country, in which he describes the flora and fauna, and the other his medical report. Those interested in the plants and animals of our area acknowledge a great debt to Dr. Woodhouse for his pioneering observations. As to the medical report, there are a number of interesting entries worthy of inclusion in this narrative. First, Dr. Woodhouse was bitten by a rattlesnake early on the journey. Purely in the spirit of scientific research, he decided to try the western remedy for snake bite, namely potent spirits, so he imbibed a half-pint of whisky, then followed up with a quart of brandy! He was intoxicated, became ill, but recovered his senses in five or six hours. He then continued proper medical treatment, but during the rest of the trip was handicapped by having one hand of little use due to the bite. Nearing the Colorado River and the end of the expedition, Woodhouse was shot through the leg with a Yavapai arrow.

His summary of illnesses and accidents on the trip is most interesting. Nearly all of the party at one period became ill from an exclusive diet of mule meat "without condiments of any kind." Many had influenza. Diarrhea was common. One man was treated for cholera, and others had minor ailments. Three were treated for gonorrhea, five for syphilis, two for secondary syphilis. One man

died from concussion after being hit on the head with a rock by another member of the party. One was crippled by an arrow wound, then beaten to death with clubs in the hands of Yuma Indians. Most interesting was that Leroux was seriously wounded by arrows launched at him by a group of "Cojninos" Indians. One struck him behind the ear and broke some bones. Another, also armed with a stone point, entered his forearm near the wrist joint, and the head became firmly embedded in the bone. The doctor finally had to cut down to the bone, then use dental forceps to remove the arrowhead. Leroux suffered great pain for many weeks, but recovered.

Leroux's own account of this scrape is interesting. It appears in the diary of Baldwin Mollhausen, who accompanied the Whipple expedition two years later, and is too lengthy for full inclusion here. Leroux kept his rifle swinging in the direction of the hiding Indians, and called for his companions, who came to his rescue. He told Mollhausen, "I could not use my arm again during the whole journey, for wounds made with sharp stones are more difficult to heal than when made with iron."

One of the most extraordinary figures to appear in northern Arizona during the nineteenth century period of exploration was Francois Xavier Aubry, a Santa Fe merchant of French-Canadian descent. Aubry was born in Quebec in 1824. When he was eighteen, he traveled to Saint Louis, supply point for emigrants and others traveling west. Here he gained valuable experience working in a store operated by two other French-Canadians. Using his credit with his former employers, he struck out for himself, freighting merchandise to Santa Fe, quickly selling it, and returning to Saint Louis for more. His trips were made in record-breaking time. While his freight moved slowly by wagon, he traveled on ahead by horseback, frequently averaging seventy-five miles a day.

Aubry had a gift for what today would be called public relations. He would announce that he was about to start for Santa Fe and would take mail for any and all; in Santa Fe he would announce in the papers that he was enroute to Saint Louis, and would do the same. Pleased at the stir he had created by his quick journeys, he declared that he would go from Santa Fe to Independence in eighteen days, and bets were placed. On the way he was attacked by a gang of Mexican bandits, was held up a half-day by hostile Indians, and four days by extreme cold weather, lost a half-day because of a snow storm, killed three mules by hard riding—and galloped into Independence just fourteen days from Santa Fe, four ahead of his schedule. Some time later he announced that he would make the same journey in ten days. He was attacked by Indians, had to walk thirty or forty miles, killed five horses by hard riding, and was without