

# The Missouri: River of Time and Memory

The Sioux City Boy Scouts were there to lead the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance. And the school band from Central High offered some fitting selections. The *Sioux City Journal* claims there were 300 folks in attendance at the dedication that Sunday afternoon, a goodly crowd of citizenry in 1929.

The whole enterprise, the dedication of a brass plaque on a monument marking the old Missouri River Trail, was undertaken by the local Martha Washington Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. It was a community-wide event; everyone was welcome to celebrate the history of region, a time long before white men came north up the river or west from across the state. Two great-granddaughters of pioneer Sioux City families had the distinguished honor of unveiling the monument.

Sioux City celebrated its own history. In 1929, the city's western hills still wore the visible memory of that ancient trail, a passage up and through tall grass prairie that ran over the river's massive shoulders, a roadway laid down there by innumerable moccasins and hundreds, maybe thousands of travois pulled along by dogs and horses.

Sioux City's old Missouri River Trail was more ancient than anything left behind by the Corps of Discovery, centuries older than Sgt. Floyd's grave. Once upon a time it was a thoroughfare for First Nations from the entire region, Omaha and Yankton, Osage and Ioway, all of whom at one time or another had moved north or south beside the Missouri.

And part of that long trail was right here. You could still see it on Sunday, May 26, 1929, when people climbed the hill close to what was then War Eagle Park, and circled up around "a large granite boulder of irregular shape being six feet through at the widest part," or so that stone was described in that year's DAR minutes, a boulder that's still there today.

And now, the big story. The plaque, the stone, the celebration, and that trail, the Missouri River Trail, were totally forgotten, not by a few but by all. The whole event and what it celebrated, the ancient, storied thoroughfare through Sioux City's hills, the whole business was gone from the city's collective memory until Marta Nelson, vice regent of today's DAR, happened to page through the old minutes and discovered a dedicatory program dated May 26, 1929 for something neither she nor anyone else had ever heard of, something called "The Missouri River Trail."

Through almost endless detective work, and with the help of the city's most dedicated historians, all of that story--save the trail itself--came slowly back into focus. The *Journal* had chronicled the event; and their stories were easily accessible. Still, no one knew anything about a six-foot wide granite rock somewhere in the neighborhood of War Eagle Monument.

The hunt began. A note went out in the paper, and just a day later someone responded, someone who thought he walked past that big old stone daily when he walked his dog. Didn't know for sure if it was the same one, but it was an anomaly where it sat, up on the hill, all alone. No plaque on it though, he said, at least nothing he'd ever seen.

That stone wasn't hard to find, and there on its northern side were four drilled holes that matched the exact size of the plaque the committee had created for the 1929 commemoration.

You can find it yourself if you'd like. Just follow the gravel path off the road to the War Eagle monument. There's a sign. In truth, that big rock is not much to see, but the drilled holes are clearly visible.

It's in the woods, woods that wouldn't have been there 200 years ago when prairie fires had a mean habit of burning down pretty much everything in

sight. Try as I might when I was out there, I couldn't see a path or trail through the trees.

But don't let that stop you. That stone is well off the beaten path. Likely as not you'll be alone if you go out there. Just stand there for a while and imagine. Think of processional of Native people, whole families, coming up through the trees, smiling and laughing, an occasional whinny or nicker from all those splendid horses. Maybe a dog will bark--don't mind him. A whole troop, dozens, maybe fifty men and women, old and young, probably on the way to a hunt.

Just watch. Stand there at the rock marking the spot. Just stand there and listen to them in the silence.