



## POTTAWATOMIE COUNTY, KANSAS

### RED VERMILLION CROSSING

**William Marshall Anderson**

**1834 May 10**

“May 10, 1834...Four hundred miles from St. Louis.... In spite of my suffering, I have admired exceedingly, the very beautiful and fertile country around us. Grass, grass, grass, everywhere, but not a deer or buffalo in sight. We are tented to-night on the Vermillion, which sends its waters to the Kaw. The sight of timber begins to be a wish unsatisfied. ‘Tourjour prairie’ I feel will be tiresome after a while. The pain in my side had continued all day. I believe the pleurisy is really coming. ...”

\*\*\*\*\* Anderson was traveling with William Sublette on the way to a fur traders’ rendezvous. He mentions the campsite is at the Vermillion that flows into the Kaw. Two Vermillion rivers are located in north central Kansas. The Red, or Little, Vermillion flows into the Kansas River, and the Black, or Big, Vermillion flows into the Blue River. **Source:** Burgess, Barbara. “The Vermillion Crossing”, *Overland Journal*, 9(3): (fall 1991), 26-32, quote on p. 27.

**John Townsend**

**1834 May 20**

“May 20, 1834. We encamped in the evening on a small stream called the Little Vermillion Creek where we found an abundance of excellent catfish, exactly similar to those of the Schuylkill River. Our people caught them in great numbers. Here we first saw the large ravens (*Corvus corax*). They hopped about the ground all around our camp, and as we left it, they came in pell-mell croaking, fighting and scrambling for the few fragments that remained.”

\*\*\*\*\*The Red Vermillion also was called the Little Vermillion. John Townsend, a trained zoologist, was attached to a company of ten men and 250 horses, headed by Captain Wyeth and Milton Sublette. This entourage was headed to a fur traders’ rendezvous. **Source:** Burgess, Barbara. “The Vermillion Crossing”, *Overland Journal*, 9(3): (fall 1991), 26-32, quote on pp. 27-28.

**Bernard J. Reid**

**1848 May 26 & 27**

“Saturday, May 26. Rode the pony. At 9:30 came to a creek beautifully set off with fine oak trees. Kentucky company passed before us. Repaired the road. Cut down trees. Threw in bushes. Crossed in 2 or 3 hours. Mounds. Monumental pile. Deep ravines. Camp on the sloping



bank of Little Vermillion, swift, deep, muddy. Timber bottom on west side half a mile wide. Deserted cabin. Graves,--indian and white: Capt. Ashley, Chariton County, Mo. Hagin. Some nameless. Pontoon wagons. Hard work unloading. Carrying baggage. Pulling empty wagons over. Two float off and overturn. The first with Tom Turner inside with a quart of whiskey,--both safe. The next was carried off by the current. Lamalfa in boat after it. Two men swam to the wagon—in the drift [pile of tangled tree tops]. Danger of their drowning. Jumped in. gained the boat. The men got out on the drift. Lamalfa frightened. Wagon lost. At last, just at dark I find it. They throw me a rope and I secure it to a tree till morning. Clothes all wet. Dry clothes sent over. Pass over. Borrow dry clothes. Change. Stand guard over the baggage on the west side of the creek. Encampment remains on the east side. Lamalfa and two others relieve us at half past one. Lie down on my arms in my cloak by the fire. Another sleeping beside me. The guard takes us to be Pawnees; call to us, and receiving no answer aim their rifles at us! and call again, threatening to fire if not answered. At last I awoke in time, probably to avoid being shot! Fine business! Now in Pawnee limits. Guard duty in such a scene. Reflections.

Sunday, May 27. Took all day to cross balance over. Hands too sore to help. Three or four companies encamped here awaiting the fall of the water. Kent County, Md. Chariton, Mo. Kentucky. Tennessee. N. Carolina. St. Louis County. We encamped in woods on west side. Slept out at fire.”

\*\*\*\*\*The Reid party had left home in central Missouri by steamboat and had landed at Wayne City Landing (Upper Independence Landing). After outfitting in Independence, Missouri, this party hurried to meet up with a California-bound wagon train. At the Red Vermillion Crossing, also called Little Vermillion Crossing, this wagon train had to empty wagons to cross. The incident involving a guard wanting to shoot possible Pawnees showed that at least some were quite concerned about Pawnee presence in Pawnee land. The spelling of “Indian” as a non-capitalized word now would be capitalized. **Source:** Reid, Bernard J. *Overland to California with the Pioneer Line: The Gold Rush Diary of Bernard J. Reid*. Edited by Mary McDougall Gordon. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1983, excerpt on pp. 40-41.

**David Dewolf**  
**1849 May 31**

“May 31, 1849. We next crossed the little Vermillion which has very steep banks and rapid current. On the bank of this stream were 6 graves, all died with colery [sic] and out of a company of seven for [four?] Tennessee.”

\*\*\*\*\*Dewolf was headed to California. The Red Vermillion also was called the Little Vermillion. **Source:** Burgess, Barbara. “The Vermillion Crossing”, *Overland Journal*, 9(3:) (fall 1991), 26-32, quote on p. 29.



**Dr. John Synder**

**1850**

“Ten miles farther [from St. Marys mission] we camped at the Little Vermillion. I have found a Frenchman [possibly Louis Vieux] with his family living in a small log house and was called in by him ‘professionally’ to see a sick child—I prescribed for it, and the next morning had the satisfaction of finding it much better. We met many Indians here in a tolerable state of civilization, being able to read and write. This nation [the Potawatomi] number about 4,000.”

\*\*\*\*The Red Vermillion also was known as the Little Vermillion. The doctor describes the sick Indian child as “it”. Would this have been the case if the child had been European American? The doctor should not have been surprised that many Potawatomi could read and write. The Potawatomi first became associated with the French around the Great Lakes in the 1600s.

**Source:** Burgess, Barbara. “The Vermillion Crossing”, *Overland Journal*, 9(3): (fall 1991), 26-32, quote on p. 31.