
John Lewis Thomas, Jr.'s Visit to Fort Wingate in 1885

Rick Hendricks

Biographical Sketch

John Lewis Thomas, Jr. was born in Maryland on 20 May 1835. Little is known of Thomas's youth other than that he grew up in Cumberland, Maryland, and the trajectory of his career is quickly related. Lewis read law and was admitted to the Maryland bar in 1856. That year he became city counselor of Cumberland, a position he held for two years. Lewis became Baltimore city solicitor in 1860 and served in that capacity until 1862. In 1863 he was a delegate to the Maryland state constitutional convention. He also became Maryland state attorney in 1863, holding that post until 1865.¹

Thomas was elected as an Unconditional Unionist to Thirty-ninth Congress in 1865 to complete the interrupted term of the sitting representative, Edwin H. Webster, who resigned. His career as a congressman was short lived. After filling the one-year term, Lewis ran unsuccessfully as a Republican candidate for reelection in 1866 to Fortieth Congress. He became Collector of the Port of Baltimore in 1869 and held the post until 1873 when he was removed for political considerations. Lewis returned as collector in 1877 and remained until 1882. He died in Baltimore on 15 October 1893.

Train Travel Writer

Beginning in 1857, Thomas began to travel on the nation's expanding railroad system and write about his experiences. Fancying himself a raconteur of the first

order, Thomas wrote about his train travel and sent dispatches to Baltimore where his columns were published in city newspapers. Along the way, he obtained photographs, which he pasted into large scrapbooks of his trips along with clippings of his columns. His first trip was on the Union Pacific and took Thomas from Philadelphia to Fort Harker, Kansas, in 1857. The Civil War interrupted Thomas's travels, but he took a trip through the war-torn South in 1866. He returned to the region in 1882 when he rode the rails through the Carolinas, Virginia, and Maryland in 1882. Later in 1882, Thomas headed west on a journey to Chicago and on to California. On his return he passed through Colorado on his way back to Baltimore.



John Lewis Thomas, Jr.

Thomas was one of numerous individuals who chronicled the Northern Pacific Transcontinental trip of 1883, although he drew a clear distinction between himself and professional newspapermen. This trip, organized and funded by Northern Pacific owner Henry Villard, was one of the most expensive boondoggles in United States history. This trip took Thomas to the Pacific Northwest and again to California before heading back east.

His last trip was the most extensive. It took Thomas from Baltimore to Mexico City and California in 1885. Thomas was in New Orleans when he penned the first dispatch to *The American* in Baltimore on 18 January 1885. His last dispatch was from Kansas City on 3 April. On this long trip, Thomas went to Mexico City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, and

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Denver. After returning from his trip to Mexico City and an audience with Porfirio Díaz, Thomas traveled from El Paso to Santa Fe and on to Fort Wingate on the way to Southern California.

Thomas's Fellow Travelers



J. L. Thomas, F. C. Goldsborough, Samuel Spencer, W. H. Bull, and Isaiah Scott outside car Number 705

Thomas rode the rails through the United States in style in a special car, Number 705, provided by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. He was also in company. His traveling companions were four: F. C. Goldsborough, Samuel Spencer, W. H. Bull, and Isaiah Scott.²

Francis Carroll Goldsborough was born in Talbot County, Maryland around 1849. He was a gentleman farmer, an Eastern Shore planter, who lived on his estate called Ellenborough in Easton, where he raised, among other things, award-winning Oxford Downs sheep. He attended Maryland Agricultural College and graduated from the University of Virginia in 1869.³ Colonel Goldsborough was President of the National Oxford Downs Association.⁴ He also served on the Board of Trustees of the Maryland Experiment Station and Maryland Agricultural College.⁵



Francis Carroll Goldsborough

The train trip may have been something of an extended bachelor's party for Goldsborough. He married his cousin, Mary Hill

Goldsborough after he returned to Maryland.⁶

Born in Georgia on 2 March 1847, Samuel Spencer became president of six railroads, including the Baltimore and Ohio, from 1887-1888 and the Southern from 1894-1906. He was director of at least ten railroads and several banks and companies and is gen-



Samuel Spencer

erally considered to have been one of the most important men in United States railroad history. He died when the private car he was sleeping in was struck by another train on 29 November 1906.⁷



William Henry Bull

William Henry Bull was born in January 1864 in Maryland.⁸ In 1920 he was still employed as a clerk by the Baltimore and Ohio.⁹ It is not known whether any of the sketches he made on the 1885 trip. Only a drawing of Thomas in which he appears to be wearing the same clothing as in the photograph included in the



Isaiah Scott

scrapbook can surely be attributed to Bull. In 1895 he married Minnie L.¹⁰

Isaiah Scott was a native of Washington, D. C. Apparently he was an African American who had been a cook in the Navy and Army. He was described by Thomas as “And last, but not least, our porter, our cook, our doctor, our almost everything.”¹¹ He went to say that

Isaiah was a careful and frugal man. He never wasted anything, and somehow or other nothing ever got stale, and we are satisfied that if we go to Mexico ten years from to-day, and Isaiah is along, he will produce a lot of tomatoes and chile, to say nothing of the tortillas, that had been salted away for future use. But with all this we commend him for his honesty, his temperance, his strict attention to his duties, his success in supplying our comforts.

Fort Wingate

The travelers arrived at Wingate Station on 18 February 1885 after riding on the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad line. This road was known as the 35th parallel road and ran through the central part of New Mexico for more than 200 miles. Thomas described the route from Santa Fe to Wingate Station.

High buttes or mesas of red sand-stone are to the right of us all along the road, presenting the most grotesque, and, in many places, the most finished specimens of nature’s architectural designs. They appear in all forms and shapes, as cathedral spires, round towers and square forts, and reminded me very much of similar formations in the Yellowstone Valley, on the Northern Pacific Railroad. The land along the route looked good for grazing purposes, and is the best we have thus far seen in New Mexico. There are no large towns along the road, and the country is very sparsely settled.

Thomas found Wingate Station rather underwhelming town. He reported that it consisted of one main track and one side track, a station house, the station agent’s house, and a good-sized chicken coop. The object of their stop was to make an expedition to Zuni Pueblo.

The travelers sent their calling cards to Fort Wingate three mile distant to Colonel James Biddle.¹² After taking a hike to Pyramid Mesa and returning to Wingate Station, Thomas and company were met by Richard Lancaster, a Baltimorean and former employee of the Baltimore and Ohio. Lancaster, who was in the Eighth Cavalry, was driving an ambulance pulled by four mules to transport the travelers to Fort Wingate.

When we arrived at Fort Wingate we found the fort was located directly at the head of the Rio Puerco of the West and in a beautiful sloping valley, so high as to overlook the stretch of ground that lies between it and the station, and away beyond this to the red mesas beyond. South of it rises a rugged spine of the Sierra Madre, from which Ojo del Oso, or Bear Spring, sends forth a cold, clear stream of sweet water. This is conducted to the fort by means of pipes where are bath-houses is for the use of the soldiers. The water is also conducted through an acequia to all parts of the post grounds to a field on the plains below, where there are gardens that grow the finest vegetables. It is about 7,300 feet above sea level, and has about the same climate as Santa Fe. It is evidently the perfection of good climate from June to October; but after that deponent sayeth not, aside from the fact that in the month of February I would rather be any where else, were it not for the officers and their families, who are able to make the snows and frosts of winter as genial as the sun of Southern California, or the bright skies of Italy—at least, such is the impression we carry with us. The atmosphere is very clear, and distance very deceptive. The country around is not good for agriculture, except where there is plenty of water to irrigate it. Then the land is rich and produces wonderfully.

Just outside the post enclosure is the post trader’s establishment, where everything is sold, and where everything is bought from the Indians. Grouped around the front porch were a number of Navajoes on their Indian ponies, dressed up in their native costume, and looking as wild as untamed bears. We noticed one squaw who rode her pony like a man. She wore buckskin leggings and a red Navajo blanket, and had a big, dirty-faced papoose sitting on her back. The baby was done up in a bark box, with an aperture big enough for its head to peep out. She deigned to cast a glance at us, but that was all, and we felt hurt.

The first person to greet us as we passed the

traders store was Mr. W. S. Woodside, the son of William G. Woodside, of Baltimore, who is post trader.¹³ It goes without saying that he was glad to see us, and we were not only glad to see him, but to learn, as we subsequently did, of the high esteem and regard entertained for him by the officers and soldiers of the post.

The first thing that struck us on entering the post enclosure was the fine, large parade ground, on three sides of which are located the officers' quarters, hospital and quarter master's office, and on the fourth the barracks for the men. The officers' quarters are neat cottages, with porticos, and yards in front. They are built of adobe but of the color of bright light gray, and the handsomest I ever saw. I had no idea that sun-dried mud could make so handsome a brick, but, after all, it depends on that kind of mud, and the mud here is certainly the best we have yet seen.

Our ambulance stopped in front of the commandant's quarters, and Col. James Biddle gave us a reception so kind and so cordial that we were at once made to feel at home. His cozy little sitting-room became our headquarters, and here we discussed our trip to the Zuni villages. The Colonel took a military map and showed us the country to which we were to travel, and, sending for Quartermaster Gilman, gave orders to that officer for immediate preparations for our departure the next morning.¹⁴ He told Lieutenant Gilman that he intended to put us under his charge and hold him responsible for our safe return. The lieutenant undertook this fearful responsibility with about the same degree of hilarity that a thirsty cowboy takes up a bottle of whiskey. He did not look a bit concerned, and appeared to feel as though we were going on a picnic.

The next day Thomas and company set out for Zuni.

Our train of wagons and escort made quite a picture. Ahead of us was a large army wagon, drawn by six fine mules, containing our tents and provisions and forage. Behind this was an ambulance, drawn by an equal number of mules, containing our escort of five men and our baggage. We brought up the rear in the Colonel's ambulance, drawn by eight mules, driven by Lancaster, who proved himself as a good a driver as he was an engineer when on the B. & O. Lieutenant Gilman, who had us in charge, rode in our ambulance. We had our guns and pistols, and any amount of fixed ammunition, to kill or shoot at anything and everything

that came in our way. Our progress up the ridge was very slow, and we had not proceeded over a mile from the post when we discovered that the roads were so bad that it seemed as if an earthquake had lately been at work, and had endeavored to make them as bad as possible. The ruts were so deep that it was with difficulty that we could hold on or keep in. The thumps and jolts that we received disclosed the facts that we were fearfully and wonderfully made. The snow increased in depth as we continued to ascend the steep mountain. One ridge succeeded another, and these were followed by wide plateaus of scrubby pine and thick undergrowth. On one of these we looked back and had a grand view of the red mesas and the buttes to the north and east of us. We were over 8,500 feet high, and the panorama widened out for over one hundred miles at our feet. Mount Taylor was in full view, towering away above the buttes, mesas and mountain ranges that lay between. It was very cold and the snow very deep, but the panorama was so magnificent that our only words were expressions of admiration.

And as we continued on up, the snow became deeper, and the wheels of our ambulance sunk down above the axles. The mules tugged and pulled as though they had Caesar's fortunes behind them. Lancaster every now and then swore at the mules, and the mules seemed to understand exactly what he was swearing about, and strained every muscle. We soon left the wagon and ambulance, with our escort, behind, and were descending the mountain on our own hook. We passed through a forest of as fine timber as can be found in North Carolina. The bark had been peeled off many of the trees by the Indians, to make dyes for their faces and blankets. At one point we came near going over, the rut being very deep and so covered with snow that it was impossible to see it. At about five o'clock we came to the last plateau, that overlooks the valley of the Nutria river, which is inside of the Zuni reservation. The descent to this valley was so steep as to be almost perpendicular. All hands got out except Lancaster and I, and I remained in to show I was not afraid of Lancaster. The ambulance slid down the steep declivity as though it was on runners. So did our pedestrians, who had deserted Lancaster and myself.

When the company reached the valley the commander said that was the place to set up camp. After a bitterly cold night the travelers wakened up bright and

early. It was very cold. Ice was two inches thick in one of our buckets. Lieutenant Gilman had gone after the wagon, and we had nothing for breakfast except the remnants of the bread and cheese of the night before. Our chief cook, Mr. Campbell, another Baltimorean we found here, managed to find some green coffee, which he roasted and ground up between two stones, and with this we had a tolerably good breakfast. . . while engaged in taking our humble morning meal a solitary horseman appeared, whose look and demeanor at once attracted the attention of all. He was a man of about sixty-five years, with long, flowing white beard, and a keen blue eye that never quailed, and looked steadily at you. He sat on his little Indian pony as though he in the pony were a part of the same machine, and when he spoke his voice was so pleasing that it seemed to come from a throat that was lined with silver. It was my turn to take the cup of coffee, and I was in the act of swallowing the beverage, when all at once the solitary horsemen caught my eye and I caught his, and we mutually knew one another. He jumped off his pony with the agility of the youth of eighteen years, and we embraced one another, just as you have seen in the Bible the meeting between David and Jonathan. The solitary horsemen proved to be Jesse Gilmor¹⁵—our Jesse—who will be remembered by all Baltimoreans as the great apostle of greenbacks,¹⁶ and who some years ago was in the habit of making Rome howl in advocacy of and unlimited issue of paper money. The last time we saw Jesse was in Denver, Colorado, at the exposition, in charge of the Clear Creek county exhibit.¹⁷ He was then seated on a huge lump of silver, and was the personification of an unlimited issue of a depreciated currency. Now he was seated on a pony, his broad brimmed hat and loose pantaloons and coat, and general make-up, proclaiming that he was no longer an apostle of greenbacks,¹⁸ but the great high priest and patriarch of the cow-boys, the gentle shepherds of the plain.

Jesse Gillmore was the superintendent of an immense cattle ranch, about three miles to the east, that was one of the finest ranches in all New Mexico with the finest grass that could be found anywhere around. He informed Thomas us that the roads were very bad, and that the areas not snowed up were so muddy that it would take several days to make it to Zuni. Gilman suggested that the company should go to the ranch and camp there. When Lieutenant Gilman reported that the sup-

ply wagon was stuck in a snow bank, it was resolved to go to Gillmore's ranch.

Our friend's ranch is in a beautiful little valley, surrounded by the same character of high mesas that are found around Wingate. The house is not as commodious as Star Route Dorsey's is said to be, but it is the home of an honest man, and we felt at home in it. It contains three rooms and one window, and has an annex adjoining built of old Zuni ruins, which we took possession of as our quarters. Some of our party went out after deer, whilst I remain behind with Campbell, the cook, to look after the provisions. Our wagon and provisions came along about four o'clock, and by the time our party returned we had as royal a feast prepared as ever hungry men partook of. We made up for what we had lost the day before, and enough for two more days, in case our wagon should get lost again. When night came on the winds became high and the sky dark and lowering, and as we sat around the little wood fire in our narrow and contracted quarters, the question was asked, and what came we out for to see? We had only made about eighteen miles in two days. The roads were heavy with mud and snow, in the Zuni villages still twenty-five miles away, with no prospects of better roads, and the question still came upon us more forcibly than ever, what came we out for to see? We consulted our friend Jesse, and he could give us no encouragement to keep on. In this state of affairs, we held a counsel of war. I was for going on, in spite of the snow and mud. I stated that I had been reading about the Zunis, and they were a great people, and that we ought not to turn back. One of our party stated that he understood they were just like other Indians, and that he would get me a photograph of them. Jesse was appealed to, and he said he had seen many a Zuni and that they were not worth seeing, and that as to the villages, they were just like the one at Nutria. A ballot was called for, and on the votes being counted, it was ascertained that it was unanimously agreed to return to the fort the next day. We regretted very much this verdict, as we had all set our hearts on seeing the Zunis. But we concluded it was much better to postpone them than to run the risk of being snowed in, and it might be snowed under. Such things have happened, and might happen again. So we sought our headquarters, and were not long in falling asleep. The excitement of the past two days acted as a soporific, and we thought no more of the Zunis until wakened at six

o'clock the next morning for early breakfast. Uncle Jesse gave us a good, hot breakfast, and whilst we were waiting for our train to start, he set for a portrait by our Mr. Bull. He put on his greenback clothes for the occasion, and was so changed from the day before that we hardly knew him. When we left Uncle Jesse it was with regret, and if we never see him again we will always cherish the kindest feelings for him and the liveliest recollections of our visit to his ranch. If his theories in relation to stock ranges can be carried out, we expect, if we returned within the next ten years, to find vast reservoirs of water away up on the mesas, and that all of the calves are born on the same day.

On our return we stopped at a Zuni Village, in the Nutria Valley. The houses were all there, but the Zunis had all emigrated to their winter quarters down in the southern part of the reservation, which we failed to reach. We mounted the ladders and went through a number of the dwellings. They were all built of adobe, and were very strange-looking. There is no door on the ground floor, and to get into the dwellings you go onto the roof, and descend through a door to the interior. The walls are thick, and are made of adobe. The rooms are very small, and the entrances from room to room were holes, some of them so small that we could not conceive how a good-size Zuni woman could squeeze through. We found a lot of Zuni pottery, some of it a very handsome, which we appropriated as abandoned property. Each dwelling has a pottery, shaped like a bake oven, in which their household utensils or cooked. The Zunis are, no doubt, a very remarkable race. They own vast herds of sheep, and are said to be very rich. They are very exclusive and give no trouble. They make the finest kind of pottery and some very neat ornaments. It is hard to tell what their religion is, but they believe in a great many gods.

It was late in the evening before we reached Wingate, and we were glad when our ambulance was inside of the post. Colonel Biddle and the officers were sorry we had not seen all we had started to see, but congratulated us on our return, as a snowstorm had already set in, and it might have been a week or so before we could have returned. Winter is no time to see Zuni or Moqui, or any of these towns off of the road. . . .

To-day has been the first Sabbath since we left home that we have not been in our car, and we have spent it more pleasantly than any Sabbath since we left

home. We took lunch at 12 o'clock with Col. Biddle and Lieut. Kingsbury, one of the brightest young cavalry officers and it has been our pleasure to meet.¹⁹ He is a bachelor, but will soon be a benedict, and we predict for him are bright military career. At five o'clock we dined with Lieutenant and Mrs. Gilman and Miss Gilman, and it was a dinner long to be remembered. Mrs. Gilman the is not only an accomplished lady, but one of the rare kind, who, as the wife of an army officer, is calculated to throw a cheerful and home-like feeling around a frontier post. Every appointment in and about her house is in the very best of taste, and she has collected some of the rarest and most unique of Zuni, Moqui and Navajo curiosities and workmanship. Her only trouble, it seems to me, was how she is to hold on to them, since she has the spirit of giving to such a degree that her treasures will soon be exhausted. Lieut. Gilman is no less generous, and we are so much indebted to both of them for Indian mementoes that we could not have procured elsewhere, that we hardly know how we shall be able to acknowledge them.

John Lewis Thomas, Jr. departed Fort Wingate tonight with honest fillings of regret at parting from his new friends and acquaintances. He and his traveling companions resolved that if any of the officers of Fort Wingate ever come as far east as Baltimore, they would endeavor to show them how deeply the Easterners appreciated their kindness and courtesy.

Rick Hendricks is the New Mexico State Historian. He was the editor of the Southern New Mexico Historical Review for a decade and has been a frequent contributor. He is currently working on a book about John Lewis Thomas's travel writing.

Endnotes

- 1 "Thomas, John Lewis, Jr," Biographical Dictionary of the United States Congress, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=T000174> (accessed 13 October 2008).
- 2 Although the column in *The American* referred to him as F. D. Goldsborough, this was almost certainly Francis Carroll Goldsborough.
- 3 *Circular of the Maryland Agricultural College*. Baltimore: John Murphy and Co., 1863), 5; and *Annual Report of the Maryland Agricultural College for the Year 1891* (Annapolis: C. H. Baughman

- & Co., State Printer, 1892), 3.
- 4 American Oxford Down Record Assn, and W. A. Shafor. *American Oxford Down Record: Containing Pedigrees of Pure Oxford Down Sheep: From No. 643 to No. 1266*. Vol. 3, issued 1 May 1887 (Cincinnati: The Ohio Valley Publishing and Manufacturing Company, 1887).
 - 5 United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Experiment Stations, Circular No. 20, *Organization Lists of the Agricultural Experiment Stations and Agricultural Schools and Colleges in the United States. June, 1891* (Washington, D. C.: Published by Authority of the Secretary of Agriculture, 1891), 11.
 - 6 Prentiss Ingraham, *Land of Legendary Lore: Sketches of Romance and Reality on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake* (Easton: The Gazette Publishing House, 1898), 274.
 - 7 "Samuel Spencer," <http://www.answers.com/topic/samuel-spencer> (accessed 14 October 2008); and "Inventory of the Samuel Spencer Papers, 1854-1918," [http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/s/Spencer,Samuel\(1847-1906\).html](http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/s/Spencer,Samuel(1847-1906).html) (accessed 14 October 2008).
 - 8 United States Federal Census, Baltimore, Ward 14, Baltimore City, Maryland, 1900.
 - 9 United States Federal Census, Baltimore, Ward 15, Baltimore City, Maryland, 1920.
 - 10 United States Federal Census, Baltimore, Ward 14, Baltimore City, Maryland, 1900.
 - 11 The quoted material in this article is from Thomas's album of his 1885 train trip. John L. Thomas, Trip of Car 705, Ms 416, Archives and Special Collections Department, New Mexico State University Library, Las Cruces, New Mexico.
 - 12 James Biddle was born in Philadelphia on 11 December 1832. Biddle was appointed first lieutenant and quartermaster of the Tenth New York Volunteers in May 1861, the beginning of a long and distinguished military career. "Brevet Brigadier-General James Biddle, U. S. V.," *All Biographies*, http://all-biographies.com/soldiers/james_biddle.htm (accessed 22 November 2010).
 - 13 In 1880, William S. Woodside was born in Maryland on 2 August 1854. He was a law clerk in Santa Fe. He was postmaster at Fort Wingate in 1885; his father William G. Woodside was the paymaster of the Baltimore and Ohio. W. S. Woodside, Passport Application, 26 April 1884, District of Columbia, U. S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925, [database on-line], Provo UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2007; United States Federal Census, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1880; Donald, David. *Inside Lincoln's Cabinet: The Civil War Diaries of Salmon P. Chase*. New York: Longmans, Green, 1954, 241; and United States Civil Service Commission. *Official Register of the United States*. Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off, 1885), 2: 558.
 - 14 Lieutenant B. H. Gilman. "Army and Navy News," *New York Times*, 10 February 1886.
 - 15 Jesse Gillmore was born in Louisiana in June 1827. On 23 January 1856, he married Mary Pugh Collins in Lafourche Parish, Louisiana. She was born in Louisiana in October 1862. United States Federal Census, San Diego City, Ward 2, District 191, 1900; and Hunting for Bears, comp., *Louisiana Marriages, 1718-1925*, [database on-line], Provo UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2004.
 - 16 In order to fund the war effort, the United States government issued \$450 million in greenbacks, paper money not backed by specie, between 1862 and 1865. After the Civil War many Democrats wanted greenbacks kept in circulation, a position that Republicans who wanted a return to the gold standard opposed. The 1873 depression, referred to as the Panic of 1873, agricultural interests and debtors called for the printing of more greenbacks and the unlimited coinage of silver. These interest groups coalesced into a political movement and the creation of the National Greenback Party in 1876. In 1878 reorganized to incorporate labor into the party. When the new Greenback Party met in Toledo, Ohio, in February, Jesse Gillmore was appointed to the National Executive Committee representing Maryland. "The National Convention at Toledo," *Jackson Sentinel* (Maquoketa, Iowa), 28 February 1878; "A New Greenback Party," *New York Times*, 23 February 1878; and "The Greenback Party," <http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h212.html> (accessed 23 November 2010).
 - 17 Gillmore and his wife were living in Idaho Springs in Clear Creek County, Colorado, in June 1880. Their son, Collins, who had been born in Texas, and his wife, Lilly, were visiting at the time. Gillmore's occupation was recorded as "lawyer." United States Federal Census, Idaho Springs, Clear Creek County, Colorado, 1880.
 - 18 That Gillmore returned to the role "an apostle of greenbacks" is evidenced in a booklet he published after he settled in California. Jesse Gillmore, *Disastrous Financial Panics: Cause and Remedy; Benefits from Silver Coinage* (San Diego: Press of Fry and Smith, 1908).
 - 19 Henry P. Kingsbury.