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NAVAJO INDIAN HORSE THIEVES HOTLY PURSUED BY ROBBED MEXICANS—
from the oil paper, Charles M. Russell, 1904

Yellowstone Kelly

From New York to Paradise

by Jerry Keenan

During the summer of 1870, members of a woodcutting party working along the banks of the Yellowstone River were about to launch a raft for the downstream journey to Fort Buford when they heard an unexpected yet unmistakable sound floating toward them on the morning breeze. A small raft appeared presently around the far bend of the river. On it an individual, clad in buckskin shirt and overalls, with a mien that projected total communion with his surroundings, was deftly playing the concertina. Indeed, one of the woodcutters declared that "he made the sweet strains of his Concertina respond in Music with as much contentment and peace of mind as if he were floating on the bosom of the waters he so highly honoured in music, the 'Suwanee River.'" In this way, one Montana pioneer recalled an incident involving Yellowstone Kelly, one of the more interesting figures in the dramatis personae of the American West.¹



The shaky script of seventy-seven-year-old Luther S. Kelly's inscription (opposite) in the copy of his memoirs that he gave to the Montana Historical Society, contrasts with his youthful vigor as a scout forty-eight years earlier (above).

For the files of the
Montana State Historical
Society, by the author
Greetings

The lure led to the
Wilds beyond that elusive
ever shifting Western frontier
where Red Man smote
White man, and White
man walbysed Red man
in the effort to gain or
maintain a footing —
now vanished and but a
memory of long ago.

Luther S. Kelly

Paradise Calif.
Sept 17 1926.

Like many other young men of his era, Kelly saw the American Civil War as a grand adventure. With the war drawing rapidly to a close, however, he feared that it would end before he had an opportunity to contribute. In early 1865, he was sixteen years old. With his mother's permission, he withdrew from Geneva Wesleyan Seminary in Lima, New York, and headed for Rochester to join the army. The minimum age for enlistment being eighteen, Kelly was rejected. Persistent, he tried again at a different location, and on March 28, 1865, was accepted finally for service in Company G, Tenth U.S. Infantry. Naive about military matters, Kelly had unwittingly signed up for a tour of duty with the regular army rather than with the volunteers. The mistake committed him to serve three years regardless of the war's duration.⁶

Kelly barely had time to don his uniform before the conflict was over. The closest he came to the Grand Army of the Republic was to serve as a guard during the great victory parade down Washington's Pennsylvania Avenue. As he recalled in his autobiography:

All day long that column passed, and our arms became numb with saluting and holding our rifles at a carry. Some regiments were arrayed in white collars and many had new uniforms; other regiments, perhaps direct from the field, had no time to make requisition on the quartermaster for new clothing. So they passed, horse, foot, and artillery,

followed by camp followers and "bummers" in strange and quaint attire gathered in foraging forays on the flanks of armies.⁷

Shortly after the grand parade, Kelly's unit departed for duty at Fort Ripley, Minnesota, on the upper reaches of the Mississippi River near present-day Brainerd. Kelly remained at Fort Ripley for a year before moving on to Fort Wadsworth and Fort Ransom in Dakota Territory, where he eventually received his discharge.

While stationed in Dakota, Kelly developed a liking for the vast reaches of the trans-Mississippi West. In his free hours he often hunted, not only providing fresh meat for the garrison, but honing skills he would need later on. He saw buffalo for the first time, as well as Sioux Indians, who would play an important role in his life in the years ahead.

When his enlistment expired in the spring of 1868, Kelly wanted to see more of what lay beyond the Missouri River. Returning to St. Paul, he cashed his pay vouchers and embarked in pursuit of a long-standing dream. He proceeded to the Canadian settlement of Fort Gary (now Winnipeg).

4. Brown and Felton, *Frontier Years*, 105; Hanson, *Conquest of the Missouri*, 159.

5. Luther S. Kelly, *"Yellowstone Kelly": The Memoirs of Luther S. Kelly*, ed. by M. M. Quinife (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), I.

6. *Ibid.*, 3; Luther S. Kelly, "Military and Civil Service Record," (hereafter "Service Record") Records Service, Record Groups 94, 393, Washington, D.C., National Archives.

7. Kelly, *"Yellowstone Kelly"*, 6.



KELLY'S DUEL WITH TWO SIOUX WARRIORS

From an illustration by C. M. Russell, in "Back-Trailing on the Old Frontiers."

From there he intended to journey westward to wherever the "spirit of adventure might lead me, until I had reached the wild country at the headwaters of the Missouri River."⁸

At Fort Gary, Kelly joined a party of Montana miners, who had elected to winter on the Red River, instead of in the more expensive gold camps. From these miners Kelly added to his growing store of knowledge about the northern plains tribes, especially the Sioux. The miners attempted to dissuade him from continuing, but Kelly was determined. Striking out alone, he left the Red River camp, crossed the Assiniboine River, and subsequently threw in with a party of mixed-blood Indians bound for the Mouse River. It was during this phase of his westering journey that Kelly met Sitting Bull, a Hunkpapa Sioux who had not yet attained the prominence of his later years. Kelly recalled that Sitting Bull had a "round, pleasant face, and wore a head scarf of dirty white cloth, while most of his followers affected black head-gear."⁹

Leaving the mixed-bloods, Kelly pushed on alone toward the Missouri River country, finding the region vast and interesting, if a bit ominous. In later years he retraced the journey in his memoirs:



Bailey, Dix & Meent, photographers. MHS Photograph Archives

Sitting Bull, with his favorite wife, poses in front of his camp at Old Fort Randall, Dakota Territory, in 1882.

I rode leisurely along until I had topped the low divide of grassland, with here and there scrub timber in the hollows and ravines, and from this viewpoint I saw, not the valley of the Missouri, but the country beyond, with rough hills and ridges covered with dark timber like cedar. It seemed a forbidding-looking country, under the shadow of low-lying clouds far on the western horizon. It was, indeed, a land of broils and feuds, where dwelt many tribes of men of different tongues, whose pastime was war until the white man came, who warred against none, but fought all, because all opposed.

I rode at a good pace and suddenly arrived on the bank of the great Missouri, which rolled along between narrow bluffs with no valley or timber on either side. Perhaps not in hundreds of miles could the river have presented to the stranger a more unattractive aspect than at the bend where I touched it. Yet its potential power, mighty in its confinement between gray bluffs of sandstone, was apparent at once.

Man and horse took a refreshing drink of mighty Minnishushu, then I marked the places where Lewis and Clark's boatmen must have trod while cordelling their clumsy boats up the river, for there was no shifting of the channel in that rockbound bend.¹⁰

During the winter of 1868-1869, the commanding officer at Fort Buford needed a rider to carry dispatches to Fort Stevenson, some fifty miles down the Missouri River. The two regular riders were long overdue, and they were feared victims of a Sioux war party. There were no volunteers, none, that is, until young Kelly stepped forward and offered his services. He was quickly turned down, however, because of his age. As he had three years earlier when trying to enlist, Kelly persisted and was finally given a chance. He had no trouble reaching Fort Stevenson, but on the return trip he encountered a pair of Sioux warriors and, in a thrilling duel, disposed of both attackers, though he lost a finger and sustained an arrow wound in the knee. The incident gained a measure of fame for the young man, and witnessed the beginning of a reputation that was to grow and eventually mark him as one of the most skilled scouts and hunters in the Missouri River country.¹¹

In the spring of 1873, Marsh recommended Kelly as a guide to Colonel George A. Forsyth. More than four years earlier, Forsyth had made

8. *Ibid.*, 15.

9. *Ibid.*, 21.

10. *Ibid.*, 23-24.

11. *Ibid.*, 45-47; Hanson, *Conquest of the Missouri*, 152-53, 155. Kelly may have lost a finger in this fight, although he does not mention it in his own account, Philippe Regis de Trobriand, *Military Life in Dakota: The Journal of Philippe Regis de Trobriand*, trans. and ed. by Lucile M. Kane (1951; reprinted, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 355-57.

something of a reputation for himself at the Battle of Beecher Island, Colorado, where, in September 1868, he had commanded a company of civilian scouts in a fight against a large force of Cheyenne Indians. Forsyth was preparing to embark on a military reconnaissance of the Yellowstone River from Fort Buford to the mouth of the Powder River, a point farther upstream than a steamboat had ever gone. If the river proved navigable that far, steamboats could haul supplies to a military base camp established at the mouth of the Powder to protect Northern Pacific Railroad surveying crews working west from the line's western terminus at Bismarck.

At the time, the Yellowstone valley was largely *terra incognita*, and Forsyth wanted a reliable guide. Marsh knew Kelly could be depended upon, and when the riverboat *Key West* stopped near Kelly's cabin along the banks of the Missouri near present day Williston, North Dakota, Marsh extended an invitation for Kelly to accompany the expedition. Kelly had spent the previous five years hunting and trapping in the Missouri River country and was one of the few white men intimate with much of the region to be traversed. The upper reaches of the Yellowstone, however, were not as familiar to him, and the prospect of exploring that country appealed to his sense of adventure. Kelly accepted, providing that Marsh agreed to transport his supply of pelts to Fort Buford. Forsyth was delighted to have Kelly along.¹²

The expedition was successful, enabling Forsyth to advise General Philip Sheridan that the Yellowstone River was indeed navigable and the region rich. Of Kelly's service, Forsyth recalled:

Our guide, known as "Yellowstone" Kelly, was another capable character, who gave us much information of the country on each side of the river through which we were passing, and he has since won a lasting reputation on the old Western frontier as an able scout and a reliable guide.

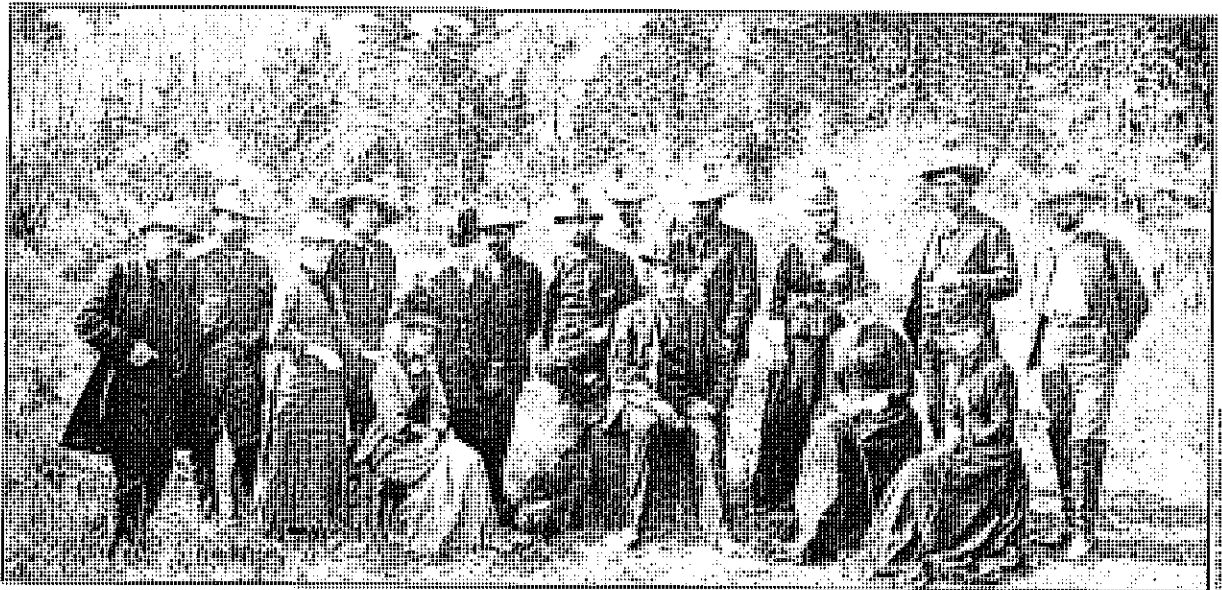
For his part, Kelly recalled that Forsyth was a "very pleasant gentleman, quiet and reserved, not much given to recounting past deeds and events, never a word of Beecher Island or the stiff fight and defense made there."¹³

Kelly spent the next several years as an occasional guide, but mostly as a hunter and wolfer in the Bears Paw Mountains and Judith Basin of central Montana, sometimes in the company of others, sometimes by himself.¹⁴ Relations between the United States government and the northern plains tribes, meanwhile, continued to deteriorate. Neither the Horse Creek Treaty of 1851 nor the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 brought peaceful coexistence between the two cultures. The discovery of gold in the Black Hills of Dakota Territory therefore exacerbated a raw condition. Although the 1868 Laramie treaty guaranteed the inviolability of the Black Hills, federal officials

12. Hanson, *Conquest of the Missouri*, 157, 160. Kelly says it was the *Far West*, Kelly, "Yellowstone Kelly," 98-101.

13. Hanson, *Conquest of the Missouri*, 168; Kelly, "Yellowstone Kelly," 102-103.

14. *Ibid.*, 50-52, 117-38.



General Nelson A. and Mrs. Miles (10 and 13) at ease with visiting friends from the East and a few staff at Fort Keogh.

made little effort to enforce the treaty and seal the area against an invasion of miners.¹⁵

The summer of 1876 represented the apogee of the Plains tribes' power with their stunning victory over Custer on the sun-bleached slopes above the Little Big Horn River. Stung by Custer's defeat, the army was determined to resolve the northern plains conflict with a decisive campaign against the Sioux and Cheyenne. The assignment was given to Miles. That fall, while at his headquarters at Fort Keogh near the Tongue River's confluence with the Yellowstone (the site of present day Miles City), Miles found an unusual calling card waiting for him. The "card" was actually the foot-long paw of a large cinnamon bear left by Kelly, who had come to offer his services as a scout. Miles was impressed both with the young man's sense of humor and with his reputation. A camaraderie soon developed between the two, each seeming to appreciate the special qualities of the other. One of Miles' biographers claims that Kelly "was one of the few persons with whom Miles could relax."¹⁶

Kelly's service under Miles proved to be only the beginning of an association with the military that was to endure for more than a quarter of a century and take him to such distant places as Alaska and the Philippines, where he would reap a rich harvest of experiences. Miles pursued the Sioux and Cheyenne throughout the fall and winter of 1876-1877 in a campaign that culminated with the Indians' defeat at the Battle of Wolf Mountain in January 1877. Shortly thereafter, Kelly returned

east for the first time in a dozen years. As he recalled later, it was a brief stay:

City life, though exciting enough, was not to my liking, and aside from the pleasure of a reunion with the home folks and meeting again the friends of my boyhood, a trip to New York and Washington completed the rounds and I was ready to return to the plains and mountains of Montana and Dakota.¹⁷

He was back in time to join Miles' staff during troubles with the Nez Perce Indians in the summer of 1877. When Chief Joseph surrendered to Miles at the Battle of Bears Paw Mountain, bringing to an end the Nez Perce flight for freedom and one of the great odysseys of history, Kelly was present.

The following spring, Kelly surveyed a wagon route from the Tongue River to the Black Hills with a three-man detachment from the Second Cavalry. Another assignment that summer took Kelly and two soldier companions through Yellowstone Park to determine whether prospectors were violating the territorial rights of the Crow Indians. The great natural beauty of the area deeply impressed Kelly, who expressed his appreciation for such things in a description of Yellowstone Lake:

15. Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1973), 243-46; Albert L. Hurtado, "Public History and the Native American: Issues in the American West," *Montana The Magazine of Western History*, 40 (Spring 1990), 62.

16. Kelly, "Yellowstone Kelly," 148; Virginia W. Johnson, *The Unregimented General: A Biography of Nelson A. Miles* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1962), 112, 135.

17. Kelly, "Yellowstone Kelly," 177.



MHS Photograph Archives

Though the Fort Keogh Guard Mount stand well dressed in buffalo coats, eastern Montana winters were brutal ordeals for many soldiers.

I gained the summit and throwing myself breathless on the ground gazed long at the beautiful view spread out before me. Below was the lake at a distance of ten or twelve miles, like a gem of silver in an emerald setting; beyond, the continental divide, with the Three Tetons looming dark and misty to the left in the distance, jagged and capped with snow. With my glasses I could see whitecaps on the lake, snow-white flocks of pelicans, and steam rising from some geysers on the east shore of the lake. Reluctantly I turned away from this enchanting view and retraced my steps to camp, on the way shooting a noble buck, whose horns were in velvet.

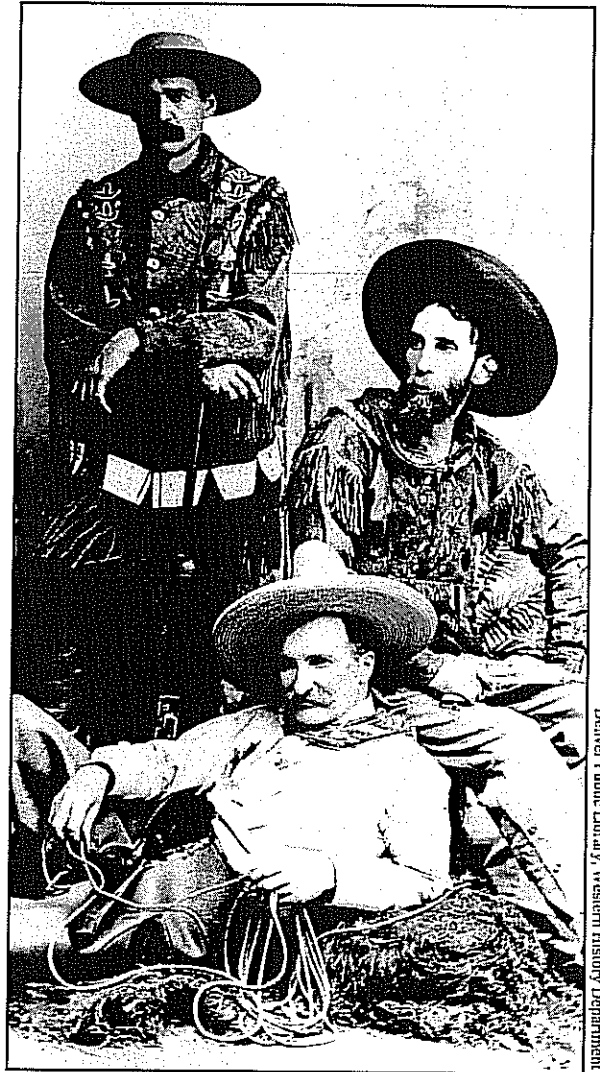
Kelly returned to Fort Keogh and, during the winter of 1879–1880 which he recalled as being “bitterly cold,” participated in the final operations against the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians. As a result of the campaign, many of Sitting Bull’s followers abandoned their Canadian exile and returned to the agencies.¹⁸

As the decade of the 1880s began, it was obvious to Kelly that a transition was underway in the valleys of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers:

The great blank spaces on the map of this extensive region had now been filled with trails and wagon routes; hunters, stockmen, and prospective settlers roamed at will looking for locations. Even the red men who had fought us at Wolf Mountain and had surrendered in good faith to the military were contented in their camps under the observation of competent officers; while the hostile and turbulent element, under the leadership of Sitting Bull and other chiefs, were safe—as we then judged—across the border to the north, under the observation of the Dominion officers.¹⁹

The spring of 1880 found Kelly bound for new adventures in the Colorado Rockies. Recent troubles with the Ute Indians, which had begun with the Meeker Massacre the previous September, resulted in stationing a contingent of troops at a new cantonment on the White River. The Ute difficulties were well in hand by the time Kelly arrived in western Colorado. Experience of his caliber was always welcome in the frontier army, however, and Kelly yet again was pressed into service as a scout for the army.

Compared to the Montana campaigns with Miles, Kelly’s Colorado experience was to prove tame. Much of his duty involved a reconnaissance to determine the feasibility of a military route from White River to Grand Junction. Nevertheless, he



Denver Public Library, Western History Department

Probably during his return to Colorado, Kelly (standing) and two companions assumed a pose of idealized romanticism.

found western Colorado much to his liking. As in Yellowstone Park and elsewhere, the discovery of new vistas always managed to rouse his zest for life:

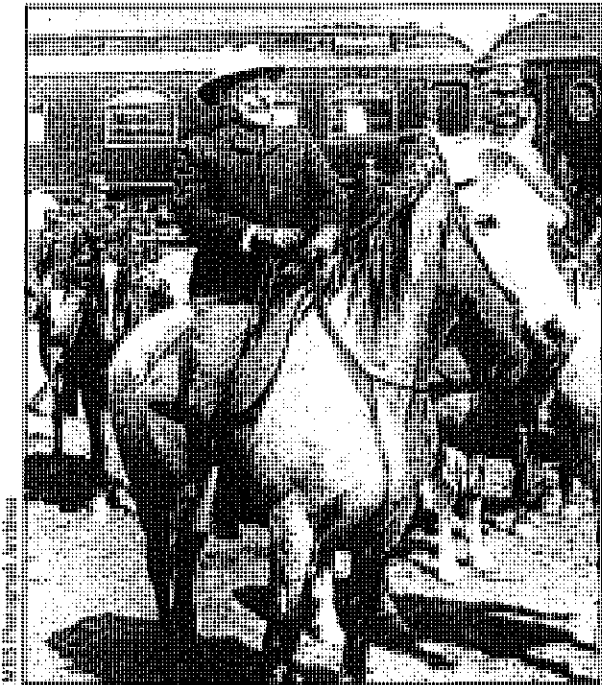
Skirting the ridges that look down on Grand River, I came to the heads of Plateau Creek, a beautiful region, but not a place to look for gold. What did I care? Being heart and mind free, I gave myself up to the joy of living and camped in the shadow of aspens in lovely spots where deer and elk were abundant.²⁰

Kelly remained in western Colorado after the military’s peace-keeping force pulled out in 1883. With the frontier largely pacified, he concluded that the skills of an army scout were no longer in

18. *Ibid.*, 219-20, 229.

19. *Ibid.*, 240.

20. Kelly, “Service Record”; Kelly, “Yellowstone Kelly,” 244-45.



President Theodore Roosevelt, with vintage T. R. gusto, prepares to enter Yellowstone Park about 1903.

demand. He decided it was time for a change. The army offered him a new assignment, but Kelly preferred to remain in Colorado where the hunting was good. Besides, he had more than hunting in mind. During his reconnaissance work for the army he had seen land in the Grand Junction area that looked good to him. He decided to give farming a try. For a man who had lived virtually his entire adult life as a solitary frontiersman, farming represented a major transition, although considering the state of the shrinking frontier, it was probably a realistic decision on Kelly's part.

In 1885 Kelly again traveled east for a visit, stopping in Detroit to visit John Murray, an old boyhood friend, who introduced him to a young woman named Alice May Morrison, the daughter of a Detroit jeweler. A whirlwind courtship ensued, and the two were married on September 23, 1885. He was thirty-six, she was twenty-nine, and Kelly listed his occupation as a farmer in Grand Junction, Colorado, on the marriage license.²¹

Other than his eastern trip and marriage in 1885, little is known of Kelly's activities between 1883 and 1892. Kelly and Theodore Roosevelt were acquainted by the time Roosevelt became president and in all likelihood, it was sometime during this phase of his life that he met T.R., probably when Roosevelt was on one of his western hunting trips.²²

Kelly was not to remain strictly a farmer, however. When General George Crook died in March

1890, General Miles replaced him as commander of the Department of the Missouri. Two years later, Kelly joined his old commander in Chicago as a general services clerk in the war department.²³ For Kelly, the move to Chicago represented the second dramatic change in his life. He apparently made the transition to city life with little difficulty and seems to have felt perfectly comfortable moving into a new milieu. It should be remembered that Kelly was an educated man and an able if not gifted writer. He was also approaching his middle years and may well have looked upon an urban environment as attractive after so many years away from the amenities of civilization. The responsibilities of married life also may have been a factor.

Not surprisingly, Kelly began to project the kind of strong patriotic profile so much in evidence in late nineteenth-century America. For Kelly, overt patriotism was not ill-matched to his background nor to his subsequent experience. He joined the George H. Thomas Post of the Grand Army of the Republic and became active in politics and military affairs. He also joined the National Geographic Society, the Sons of the American Revolution, the Society of the War of 1812, and the Naval and Military Order of the Spanish-American War.²⁴

In 1898, Captain Edmund Forbes Glenn invited Kelly to join his Alaskan expedition as a guide. Although he was now forty-nine and had been inactive for several years, Kelly accepted the challenge. At 164 pounds and just under six feet, he was still in reasonably decent physical condition. Miles helped Kelly secure the appointment, describing him as "one of the most intelligent frontiersmen and explorers in our service," in a letter of recommendation to Secretary of War Russell Alger.²⁵ Kelly also received additional support from friends and business associates of his two brothers, William D. Kelly and Albert Kelly, president and treasurer respectively of Pennsylvania's Clearfield Bituminous Coal Company.²⁶

Kelly developed a special feeling for Alaska, which at midlife undoubtedly evoked memories of his young manhood in the Yellowstone valley. In later years he described the experience to his friend Roosevelt who, perhaps more than anyone,

21. Kelly, "Yellowstone Kelly," 255; certified copy of marriage record, Michigan Department of Health, Lansing; April 2, 1903, newspaper clipping in author's possession.

22. Kelly's military and civilian service record fail to mention this period of his life, although Kelly may have described these years in an unpublished Alaska/Philippines manuscript that has not survived.

23. Kelly, "Service Record."

24. Ibid.; Luther Kelly to Secretary of the Interior, March 16, 1913, "Service Record."

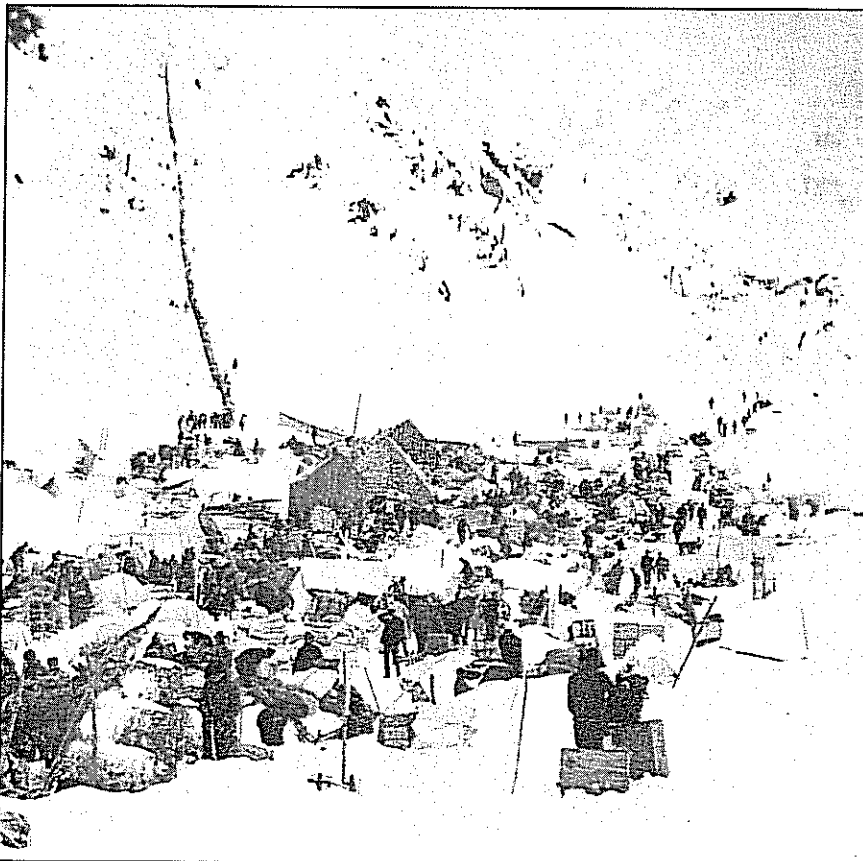
25. Nelson A. Miles to Russell Alger, November 5, 1898, in Nelson A. Miles, *A Documentary Biography of His Military Career, 1861-1903*, ed. by Brian C. Pohanka and John M. Carroll (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1985), 251; Kelly, "Service Record."

26. Kelly, "Yellowstone Kelly," 14.

Kelly's trip to Alaska paralleled that of many others, including these women prospectors on their way to the Klondike in 1898.



H. W. Kilburn, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives



H. W. Kilburn, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives

Ascent to the 3,500-foot summit of Alaska's Chilkoot Pass

would appreciate Kelly's feelings of exhilaration for the "land of the midnight sun":

The air is brisk, it has that quality, cruel in some respects, which requires four meals a day to satisfy hunger. This I know by experience, tho when one has hiked from Portage bay to the Matanuska, and across the interior thru that lovely region of a thousand lakes, where for an hundred miles or more one may look back over a vista of green hills and see the lofty Copper river range of solid ice glittering in the sun, with here and there a rocky point protruding—the desire for food is braced to the limit by the ozone and labor of travel. Especially if you happen to be on short rations.²⁷

The expedition spent the late spring and summer of 1898 exploring southern Alaska as part of the army's effort to bring order to a lawless area and to determine practical routes to the gold fields. During May and June, Kelly made a reconnaissance from Cabin Creek to the Yukla valley, an area he described in his official report as "one of great beauty, well timbered and walled in at its upper extremity by bold and precipitous mountains that round off gradually into a low, flat country as the Arm is approached."²⁸ Seventeen years later, the experience was still fresh enough in his memory to describe the journey in glowing terms:

There were meadows of tall red top. Little prairies that were covered with short bunch grass and bordered with fur and spruce, just as you find in Montana. It was not all plain sailing tho, for we had roaring glacier streams to cross and some of our traveling was down the shallow beds of streams and over hills covered with moss. We had a pack train of horses and mules, but they gave us no trouble. . . . The lakes, hills and valleys of this region, are a marvel of beauty as far as the Delta river and beyond. Along the route, we could look back for one hundred miles or more and see the vast ice-cap that protrudes from the Matanuska to the Copper river. To the north the McKinley group appears, and beyond Copper river, Mount St. Elias shows. When we could, we camped under the lovely spruce trees or on the shores of lakes. . . . It is difficult to convey in simple language the charm of traveling in that region of Alaska. R. L. S. [Robert Lewis Stevenson], might do it but even he would require more adjectives than he used in his journey of the Cevennes.²⁹

Sometime prior to joining Glenn's expedition, Kelly applied for a commission in the regular army. His attitude toward military life had changed since

his discharge from the Tenth Infantry. In writing his memoirs many years later, he recapitulated how he felt about army life in 1868:

I was too much enamored with the free full life of prairie and mountain to suffer the restriction and discipline of another period of service in the army, especially in time of peace. There is nothing finer for a young fellow than a three-year term in the United States army, for it teaches him method, manliness, physical welfare, and obedience to authority. One enlistment is sufficient, however, unless one wishes to make soldiering a profession.³⁰

While Kelly and the expedition savored Alaska's natural beauty, the United States and Spain went to war. American troops were in Cuba and Admiral George Dewey had quickly dispatched a pitiful Spanish naval force in Manila Bay. Hoping to join in the action, Kelly returned from Alaska in the fall of 1898 and promptly accepted a commission as captain in the Seventh Volunteer ("Immunes") Infantry. He reported for duty at Macon, Georgia, in December, but his unit was mustered out on February 28, 1899, without seeing active duty.³¹

Kelly immediately began lobbying for another commission in a volunteer regiment, and Miles once again aided his old scout with a letter to the adjutant general on March 6, 1899, which read in part:

I have known Captain Luther S. Kelly (late Captain, 7th U.S. Vol. Infantry), many years on the frontier in different Indian campaigns, and know him to be an intelligent, trustworthy and brave officer. He would make an excellent captain in one of the volunteer regiments, and I earnestly recommend his appointment.³²

On the same day Miles was writing to the war department, Roosevelt, then governor of New York, also recommended Kelly to the adjutant general, saying: "It gives me the greatest pleasure to endorse the application of Captain Luther S. Kelly,

27. Luther Kelly to Theodore Roosevelt, February 11, 1917, M-358, Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

28. Luther Kelly, "From Cabin Creek to the Valley of the Yukla, Alaska," in E. F. Glenn and W. R. Abercrombie, *Compilation of Narratives of Exploration in Alaska* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 685-86. See also, Melody Webb, *The Last Frontier: Alaska and The Yukon Basin* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), 145-49.

29. Kelly to Roosevelt, January 29, 1915, M-358, Roosevelt Papers; Robert Louis Stevenson, *An Inland Voyage: Travels With a Donkey in the Cevennes*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907).

30. Kelly, "Yellowstone Kelly," 14.

31. Kelly, "Service Record." At the time of the Spanish-American War ten regiments of infantry, seven composed of white troops and three of black troops, were recruited from the southern states. Because of their southern origin, all these troops were believed immune from the effects of yellow fever, hence the name "Immunes," Dr. Richard J. Sommers, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, to author, March 9, 1989.

32. Indorsement from Nelson A. Miles, March 6, 1899, in "Service Record."

late of the 7th U.S.V. Infantry, for a captaincy in one of the new volunteer regiments."³³

Kelly was in Alaska again in the summer of 1899 with railroad magnate E. H. Harriman's expedition, which included some of the nation's most prestigious scientists, including George Bird Grinnell, John Burroughs, and C. Hart Merriam among them.³⁴ When he returned to the states in late summer, Kelly was offered and, on August 21, accepted an appointment with Company A, Fortieth Volunteers, serving first on regimental recruiting duty at Fort Riley, Kansas, then joining his company in mid-September. From Kansas, the regiment traveled by rail to the Presidio at San Francisco, from where, on November 23, it embarked on the U.S. Sea Transport *Indiana* for the Philippines, reaching Manila on December 27.³⁵

In the Philippines, Kelly was with General James M. Bell's expedition to the South Camarines in February 1900. He commanded the left wing during the fight at Libmanan in southern Luzon and was part of General John C. Bates' force that took control of key ports in the southern Philippines. Afterward he was put in command of the post at Dapitan, Mindanao. In describing his experiences in the Philippines years later, a private who had

served in Company A recalled that "Capt. Kelly was a real man."³⁶

In 1901, Kelly was mustered out of the volunteer service and appointed treasurer of the Mindanao province of Surigao, where in 1903 he conducted a courageous defense of the town against a band of Philippine ladreses or outlaws and received a presidential commendation for his services. William Howard Taft, recently appointed governor of the Philippines, reported the details of Kelly's action to the secretary of war:

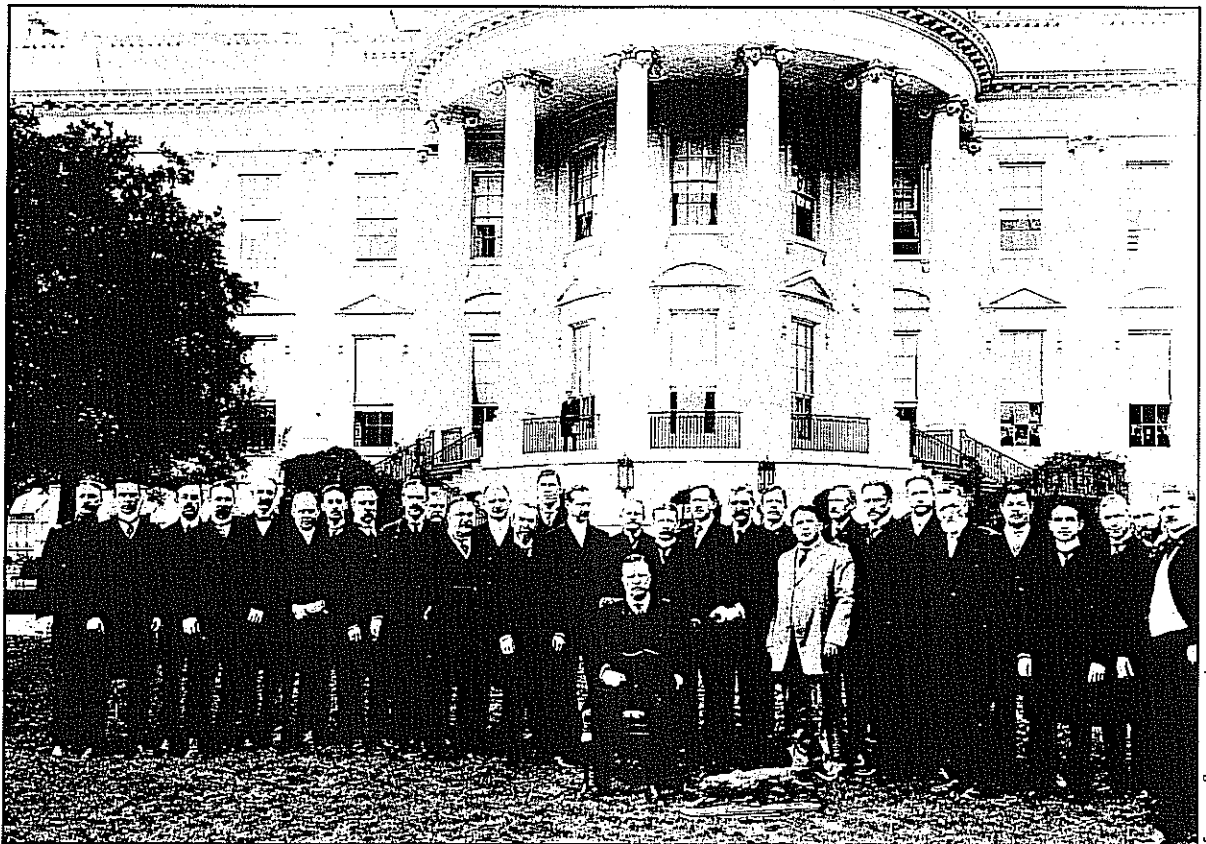
Affair at Surigao turns out to be escape of ten prisoners sentenced to long terms for ladronism, who with 60 or 80 of their fellows, returned to Surigao, succeeded in surprising and rushing the Constabulary barracks, obtaining constabulary arms and ammunition, killing constabulary Inspector Clark, and thus taking command of the town. Nine Americans, including two women, retreated to the

33. Kelly, "Service Record."

34. William H. Goetzmann and Kay Sloan, *Looking Far North: The Harriman Expedition to Alaska, 1899* (New York: Viking Press, 1982), 69. This account erroneously identifies Kelly as a "former scout for Custer."

35. Kelly, "Service Record."

36. *Ibid.*; file of James C. Keeler, Jr., Private, Company A, Fortieth Volunteers, Department of the Army, Spanish-American War, Philippine Insurrection Research Project, U.S. Army Military History Research Collection, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.



Kelly, cigar in hand, (ninth from the right) on the lawn of the White House with other members of President Roosevelt's "Tennis Cabinet"

Provincial Building, where, under the direction of Luther S. Kelly, Provincial Treasurer, formerly Captain of Volunteers and still earlier Indian scout known as Yellowstone Kelly, barricaded building against the attacking party. The Americans, armed only with a few shotguns and short of ammunition, but maintained their defense against the ladrones, refusing to yield to an ultimatum demanding guns by the reply of Kelly that they would not give up a single gun and would kill on sight any ladrone within range. Assistant Chief Taylor arrived at Surigao with Constabulary force about 18 hours after the attack.

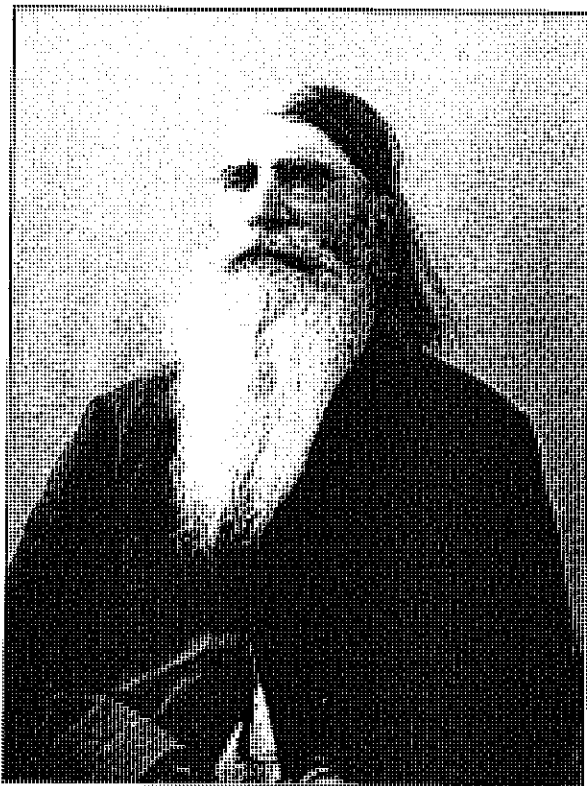
President Roosevelt expressed his feelings about the Surigao event in a March 25 letter to Kelly, saying that the cable describing Kelly's conduct was read at the breakfast table by the entire family with a feeling of pleasure and pride.³⁷

Returning to the United States in 1904, Kelly was next appointed Indian agent at the San Carlos Apache Reservation in Arizona. At the time, Kelly was considered a member of President Roosevelt's "tennis cabinet," an informal group of friends and acquaintances who had served or been associated with the president in some capacity. Roosevelt called his tennis cabinet an "elastic term." Among others, the group included Major General Leonard Wood, Secretary of the Interior James Garfield, and U.S. Forest Service chief Gifford Pinchot.³⁸

In 1908, as the result of a bureaucratic conflict in which the Office of Indian Affairs apparently wished to have a younger man in the San Carlos job, Kelly was replaced and offered the agency at Kishena, Wisconsin, instead. He rejected the assignment, although at eighteen-hundred dollars per year it would not have meant any change in salary. Stung, Kelly submitted his resignation to President Roosevelt.

If I am too old for this place [San Carlos], I am not young enough for the other and so have declined it. As the office has made it impossible for me to remain here, having reduced the salary and appointed a young inexperienced employe [sic] at this agency to take my place, there is nothing left for me to do but to leave the service.³⁹

Despite what he considered a ploy to get rid of him, Kelly retained a strong desire to remain in government service. He was fifty-eight, but the prospect of civilian life was not enticing. In June 1909, he wrote to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, R. G. Valentine saying, "if the opportunity should occur, I would be pleased to consider a vacancy in the Sioux country." Four years later, he wrote again, this time to the Secretary of the Interior, explaining the unfortunate circumstances surrounding his replacement at San Carlos and asking to be reinstated when there was a vacancy. As late



Luther Sage Kelly near the end of his life

as 1917, Kelly sought to rejoin the military. On April 8, 1917, two days after the United States entered World War I, Kelly wrote to the Secretary of War, offering his services "in whatever capacity I may be most useful." The offer was refused, and there would be no further calls. Kelly's years of government service had come to an end. His appetite for a fresh endeavor, a new challenge, was far from satisfied. In his mid-sixties, Kelly engaged in several mining operations near Lida, Nevada.⁴⁰

In 1915, Kelly and his wife retired to a small fruit ranch in Butte County, California, near the town of Paradise, overlooking the Sacramento River valley. "I have under way an orchard of olives, almonds, prunes, figs, walnuts, all of which do well without irrigation," he wrote Roosevelt in 1917, inviting T. R. to visit him. Failing in health, the former president would never be able to make the journey.⁴¹

37. Kelly, "Service Record"; Roosevelt to Kelly, March 25, 1903, M-358, Roosevelt Papers, Library of Congress.

38. Theodore Roosevelt, *Theodore Roosevelt: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1916), 48.

39. Kelly, "Service Record"; Department of Interior memo, Transfer of Superintendent, Indian School, San Carlos, Arizona, Letters Sent, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Central Classified file, 1907-1939, National Archives; Kelly to Roosevelt, January 4, 1909, M-358, Roosevelt Papers.

40. Luther Kelly to R. G. Valentine, June 22, 1909, Luther Kelly to Secretary of the Interior, March 24, 1913, Letters Sent, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Central Classified file, 1907-1939, National Archives; Kelly, "Service Record."

41. Kelly to Roosevelt, February 11, 1917, M-358, Roosevelt Papers.

For some time, Kelly had been working on a manuscript describing his Montana and Colorado experiences. In April 1926, Yale University Press published the work under the title *Yellowstone Kelly: The Memoirs of Luther S. Kelly*. That year Kelly wrote to artist Edwin Deming, who had done several illustrations for the book, expressing disappointment that he had earned less than \$120 since the book was published. By then in his late seventies, Kelly's health was failing rapidly. He had lost his sight in one eye and could barely see out of the other. Deming urged him to see a New York oculist, but Kelly demurred. Trying to sell his California property, he probably considered the expense of an eastern trip too great.⁴²

In his last months, Kelly continued to work on a new manuscript detailing his experiences in Alaska and the Philippines, which Houghton Mifflin rejected. "I think I shall try New York, hereafter," he told Deming, and "will probably address the Century Company soon." He asked Deming for advice on New York publishers. The story of his Alaskan and Philippine experiences, however, was never published. Kelly died on December 17, 1928. At his own request his body was returned to Montana, where it was held until the following June.

42. Kelly to Edwin Deming, October 2, 1926, Kelly to Deming, undated letter, University of Oregon Library, Eugene.

43. Kelly to Deming, undated letter; Luther Kelly, "Last Will and Testament," MHS Archives; Alice May Morrison Kelly, State of California, "Certificate of Death," Book 15, p. 386, Recorder's Office, Butte County, California.

44. Kelly, "Yellowstone Kelly," 54.

Then his remains were taken to the rimrock above Billings, where with full military honors, they were laid to rest on Kelly Mountain overlooking the vast sweep of the Yellowstone valley. "I feel my body will rest better in Montana," Kelly wrote in his will, "the scene of my early activities, than in the vastness of Arlington." Unable to accompany her husband's body to Montana, Alice Kelly remained in California, where she lived ten more years in declining health, dying in 1938 at age ninety.⁴³

Kelly's accomplishments transcended those of the typical frontiersman. He not only had experienced the frontier West first-hand, but his powers of observation and ability to record his experiences on paper set him apart from others who had trod many of the same trails but lacked his gift of expression. Moreover, the desire to seek out new challenges, as exemplified by his work in Alaska and the Philippines, gave him a dimension of understanding and vision enjoyed by few others of his era. Perhaps he characterized himself best when he quoted the poet in his memoirs:

Keep not standing fixed and rooted
Briskly venture, briskly roam.⁴⁴ *am*

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Kelly's final resting place on the rimrocks overlooking Billings, Montana

