

14

ZOOM VERSION

**The First Ferry Boat Used at Yuma.**

(S. F. Bulletin.)

**ERRON BULLETIN:**—A correspondent of the Bulletin of May 6, 1885, writing from Fort Yuma, speaks of the first ferry established across the Colorado river at that point by Lieut. (not Colonel) Couts, as being the cause of that bloody event known as the Yuma Massacre.

In the history of the boat used for that purpose it is mentioned as having been "constructed from the bed of a wagon in which a family of Howards had ridden from the state of Wisconsin, and must have been a curiosity in its way and should have been preserved by the pioneers."

The boat referred to has a history not without interest to some now living, apart from the tragic incident to which it bore so unfortunate a connection. It was not constructed from a wagon bed as stated by the Bulletin's correspondent, but was built as a boat complete at the beginning, and first launched on the waters of Lake Michigan. In length 16 feet over all, beam 5 feet 6 inches, except the bow, which was decked, and used for the driver's seat; it was provided with an adjustable cover that gave it all the advantages of a coach when mounted on wheels, and the comforts of a stateroom, when used on the water. It was specially designed to meet the exigencies of travel en route to California, and its first service on water was at Fort Benton at the crossing of the Arkansas; the next being the navigation of the Gila river, for which the owner intended it at the start. This he accomplished without serious impediment in the month of September, 1849. Embarking at the Pima villages with his wife and one child, with a physician and Baptist minister as companions of the voyage, he reached Fort Yuma at the mouth of the Gila, a distance by the river's course of 250 miles, in three and one half days. Lieut. Couts at that time was in command of the United States escort to the Mexican Boundary Commission, and had headquarters at Fort Yuma. Being informed by some advance riders of the emigrant party that one of their number with his family was coming down the river by boat, he at once sent a detachment from the post up the river to give such aid to the expedition, as the Lieutenant afterward told the writer, its not only possible but probable outcome might require. But the squad passed without seeing the reckless voyagers and did not put in appearance at the fort until several days after the latter had arrived there, and in safety. This is believed to be the first navigation of the Gila river, and it may be added, incidentally, that on the passage down, a boy was born to the wife of Mr. Howard, who is now living in Lake county, California, and claims to have been the first child of American parents born in Arizona.

While waiting at the fort for the arrival of his company, by which he had sent his team and running gear, Mr. Howard sold his boat to Lieut. Couts, receiving \$300 and an army ambulance body in exchange. With the latter mounted on the wheels in previous use, the trip was completed to San Diego.

After some service at the Colorado ferry, Lieut. Couts brought the craft over the desert to the coast at San Diego bay. At some expense it was put in presentable repair, when it was again committed to the element in which it first floated 3,000 miles away.

To some of the delightful excursions on the bay, an invitation to the writer from the Lieutenant was not forgotten. On more than one of those occasions the song and beauty of the Scherita Bandini was the inspiration of the hour, and it was only a little later on when one of the Castilian sisters became the gallant officer's wife.

**E. H. HOWARD.**

EUREKA, Cal., June 27, 1885

