

JOHN G. NEIHARDT was the subject of one of John Craig's "Stories of the Day" in the Chicago Daily News recently. The article read in part:

John Neihardt, the poet, is the only man in Chicago, so far as we know, who admits to being perfectly happy. That's because, at 63, he has completed five books, which he calls his epic cycle of the West. Some of his early years were spent living with the Indians and to the Sioux he's known as "Flaming Rainbow".

A small man, gray-haired, with the leathery face of a frontiersman, he spends his working time now in the Office of Indian Affairs, as director of Public Information. On the fourth Monday of every month he attends a meeting of the Westerners, a local organization born last December. Its members are business and professional men. For most of them interest in pioneer life is a means of escape from the routine of the city, although some are familiar with the Plains.....

Attempting in 1908, a 2,000 mile trip down the Missouri River in a homemade boat, Neihardt rescued from probable oblivion the manuscript of a now famous book, "The Conquest of the Missouri." After 600 miles he was pretty well done in from bucking headwinds and fording low places by swimming, when he caught up with the steamboat piloted by Capt. Grant P. Marsh. "They say of me," Marsh once told Neihardt, "that I can take a steamboat on dry land if there's been a heavy dew." Recognizing the bedraggled poet, Marsh roared from the hurricane deck, "Come aboard!" "He had a voice like a buffalo bull," Neihardt recalled. After he had been dried out and made comfortable, the guest was shown the manuscript, which was based on the life of the skipper himself. Marsh said the book had been turned down by nearly every publisher in the East. He wanted Neihardt's opinion, so hired him as a deckhand, but would let him do no work, except read.

"I was convinced it was a classic," said Neihardt. "I sold it to the Outing Publishing Co. It was later taken over by McClurg's, has gone through many editions, and is in the library now. I'm proud of having something to do with its publication. That's another reason I'm a happy man."

The author of "The Conquest of the Missouri," incidentally, is Joseph Mills Hanson, now a member of the Westerners.

Day or so before the September Round-Up, the editor of the Brand Book received a note from ALBERT PARRY which read:

The announcement of the September 25 meeting reached me here, in New York, far away from the invigorating breezes of the prairies. Alas, I won't be back in Chicago in time for the Round-Up. Better luck next time.

The item I promised you for the Brand Book was in regard to the origin of steamboating on the Volga river, which, as I found out some two months ago while perusing certain old Russian records, was patterned definitely and deliberately after the steamboating of the Mississippi. A certain Russian engineer came to this country in the middle of the 19th. century, traveled West, observed and admired life on the Mississippi, ascribed the "rise of the Midwestern empire" to the Mississippi steamboat, and, on returning to Russia, boldly introduced this very steamboat -- with hardly any changes -- to the Volga waters. The data on this Mississippi-Volga "connection" is so interesting that I am planning to do an article on it for some or other publication. An old Russian exile, a lawyer-folklorist from the lower Volga region, lives in New York these days, and he seems to know a lot about the subject of American steamboats on the Volga. I expect to meet him before I return to Chicago. His testimony will be most valuable addenda to the printed records I have discovered.

Last night, from another Russian exile, I heard a few amusing details of Grand Duke Alexis' buffalo-hunting trip in the West, which details, I am sure, do not appear in any printed records, either American or Russian.... Give my best regards to the boys on Monday night. Wish I could be there!