

Freeman, Frederick Kemper (15 June 1841-9 Sept. 1928), frontier journalist, was born in Culpeper County, Virginia, the son of Arthur Freeman, a railroad agent, and Mary Allison Kemper. Freeman attended schools associated with his mother's family; between the ages of ten and about fourteen, Freeman attended Kemper Family School, later known as Kemper Military School, in Boonville, Missouri. After returning to Virginia, he attended Kemper College in Gordonsville. On 9 May 1861 he enlisted in the Confederate army, in which he participated in the battle of Manassas and rose to the rank of lieutenant in the Signal Corps.

Freeman's career in frontier journalism, for which he is principally known, began in the spring of 1866 when his brother Legh Richmond Freeman asked him to take over the *Kearney Herald*. Legh had founded the newspaper in December 1865 at Fort Kearny, Nebraska Territory, a site on the construction route of the Union Pacific railroad. While Legh traveled around the West and sent dispatches to his brother, Freeman managed the daily activities of the newspaper, which he initially published on an old hand-roller press. Shortly after taking over the paper, he moved operations out of Fort Kearny and into Kearny City. Moving, it turns out, was Freeman's specialty. In the fall of 1866, when railroad construction proceeded beyond Kearny City, Freeman loaded his printing equipment on three wagons and traveled a hundred miles to the next railhead, North Platte, Nebraska Territory, whose rowdy population earned it the nickname "Hell on Wheels." The Freemans' newspaper, which they had renamed the *Frontier Index*, also quickly earned a nickname, the "Press on Wheels." Between 1866 and 1868 the paper rolled through Fort Sanders, Laramie City, Benton, and Green River City in Dakota Territory and Bear River City in Wyoming Territory. During one of these moves, a wagon and equipment weighing close to 7,000 pounds ran over Freeman, causing spinal and internal injuries and hospitalizing him for two months at Fort Sanders.

As much businessman as journalist, Freeman also printed fliers for rail workers and miners. His commercial interests were obvious in the *Frontier Index* as well. Thomas H. Heuterman, biographer of Legh Richmond Freeman, has calculated that about two-thirds of the space in the forty-five extant issues of the paper was devoted to advertising. Advertisers included a bakery, a saloon, and a saddlery. The two brothers combined to fill the remaining one-third of the newspaper's space. Roving reporter Legh, often writing under the pseudonym "General Horatio Vattel, Lightning Scout of the Mountains," contributed witty sayings, travel narratives, and tall tales about an enormous buck sheep and a petrified forest. Freeman handled more mundane matters, such as news about railroad construction, Indians, stage schedules, and the weather. Both brothers, however, were capable of producing incendiary material. Legh regularly blasted Ulysses Grant, whom he called a "whisky bloated, squaw ravishing adulterer," and Freeman accused a Fort Sanders general of being a southern sympathizer who supported Grant in order to advance his own career. However, Freeman, who also owned hotels and speculated on real estate, used editorial space to criticize western rowdiness as well. In an article published on 29 May 1868, he wrote, "Our citizens should support a strong police force and help them to put down crime and rowdiness. We were told yesterday of two bands of horse thieves and highwaymen that have their dens on Crow and Dale creeks, each numbering thirty or forty men. They are circling around Laramie, playing Indian. We say go for 'em."

The Freemans' controversial reporting may have contributed to the dramatic end of their enterprise in Bear River City in November 1868. A mob, reportedly led by a relative of a man imprisoned or killed by vigilantes, destroyed the Freemans' equipment and burned their office. The riot, in which more than a dozen people may have died, has been blamed on various factors, including the Freemans' association with vigilantes and the paper's harsh treatment of Grant and Mormons. Legh himself blamed the Credit Mobilier ring, which the Freemans supposedly had angered. Freeman, on the other hand, claimed that railroad owners arranged the riot to remove the brothers from land holding huge coal supplies.

Whatever the reason for the riot, both brothers returned to Virginia. Freeman left behind careers in not only journalism and business but politics. He had sat on the Nebraska Territorial Council in 1867, served as a Nebraska state senator in 1867 and 1868, and traveled to New York in 1868 as a delegate for the Dakota Territory to the Democratic National Convention.

Again following the lead of his brother, who had returned to the West in the 1870s, Freeman became a frontier journalist again in 1892. This time, the Freemans operated an agricultural paper, the *Washington Farmer*, in Anacortes, Washington. Freeman again left journalism, however, and moved to Georgia, where he grew pecans and ran a wholesale grocery business. In 1896 he married Mary Julia Roper. He died in Albany, Georgia.

During its brief existence under Freeman's leadership, the *Frontier Index* became more than a novelty. First, its readership extended well beyond the rail workers, business people, and speculators in the boomtowns where it was published. In 1868 Legh claimed a circulation of 15,000 and said 2,000 editors wished to publish the paper's news. A reference to the *Frontier Index* in a New Hampshire newspaper shows that the paper was recognized in the East. Its major impact, however, was in the West, where it exerted economic, social, and cultural influence. Legh wrote, "After the Union Pacific Railroad came along, our print became the advertising medium which built up ten of the terminal towns of that national artery of commerce." While emphasizing the Freemans' economic motives, Heuterman points out that their newspaper helped to shape its communities, particularly in the area of law and order. Finally, James R. Dow credits the *Frontier Index* with helping to spread folklore in the Wyoming Territory.

- Extant copies of the *Frontier Index* are stored at the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. Letters of the Freeman family are in the James Lawson Kemper File at the Alderman Library Manuscripts Department, University of Virginia, Charlottesville. Almost all the published information relating to Frederick Freeman concerns his role in publishing the *Frontier Index*. One particularly thorough source on the Freemans and their newspaper is Thomas Heuterman, *Movable Type: Biography of Legh R. Freeman* (1979). Brief descriptions of the *Frontier Index* also appear in James Melvin Lee, *History of American Journalism* (1923); Robert F. Karolevitz., *Newspapering in the Old West: A Pictorial History of Journalism and Printing on the Frontier* (1965); and John Myers Myers, *Print in a Wild Land* (1967). Legh Freeman wrote his own account of the newspaper, *The History of the Frontier-Index (the "Press on Wheels"), the Ogden Freeman, the Inter-Mountains Freeman and the Union Freeman*, which Douglas C. McMurtrie edited and published in 1943.

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