

In 1840 he began supplementing his correspondence with personal interviews with pioneers, and the descendants of pioneers and Revolutionary soldiers, at their homes, having found that for his purpose the gathering of information by means of letters was slow and unsatisfactory, the mails being in those days tardy, unreliable, and expensive, while many of those who possessed the desired information were not adepts with the pen. There were then no railroads; the eager collector of facts traveled on his great errand for many years, far and wide, by foot, by horseback, by stage, by lumber wagon, and by steamboat, his constant companion being a knapsack well-laden with note books.

In these journeys of discovery, largely through regions of sparsely-settled wilderness, Draper traveled, in all, over sixty thousand miles, meeting with hundreds of curious incidents and hairbreadth escapes, by means of runaway horses, frightful storms, swollen streams, tipped-over stages, snagged steamboats, extremities of hunger, and the like, yet never once being injured nor allowing any untoward circumstance to thwart the particular mission in view. Many of those he sought, especially before 1850, were far removed from taverns and other conveniences of civilization; but pioneer hospitality was universal and generous, and a stranger at the hearth a most welcome diversion to the dull routine of a frontiersman's household. The guest of the interviewed, the inquisitive stranger often stopped weeks together at those crude homes in the New York, Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee backwoods—long enough to extract, with the acquired skill of a cross-examiner, every morsel of historical information, every item of valuable reminiscence stored in the mind of his host; while old diaries, or other family documents which might cast side-lights on the stirring and romantic story of Western settlement, were deemed objects worth obtaining by means of the most astute diplomacy.

It would be wearisome to give a list of those whom Draper visited in the course of these remarkable wanderings which he made his chief occupation, with few lapses, through nearly a quarter of a century, and continued at intervals for many years after. Only