

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED SEP 24 1976

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Chimney Rock
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
S of Bayard off US 26
CITY, TOWN
Bayard
STATE
Nebraska
VICINITY OF
 VICINITY OF
CODE
31
COUNTY
Morrill
CODE
157
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Third
NOT FOR PUBLICATION

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Nebraska State Historical Society
STREET & NUMBER
1500 R Street
CITY, TOWN
Lincoln
STATE
Nebraska
VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Morrill County Courthouse
STREET & NUMBER
CITY, TOWN
Bridgeport
STATE
Nebraska

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Historic Preservation in Nebraska
DATE
1971
DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS
Nebraska State Historical Society
CITY, TOWN
Lincoln
STATE
Nebraska
FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Chimney Rock is located approximately four miles south of the community of Bayard, Morrill County, Nebraska. It is on the south edge of the North Platte River valley. This natural landmark is a slender spire rising from a conical base. At the present time, Chimney Rock rises to an elevation of about 325 feet above the base of the cone or 480 feet above the river valley. The spire alone is about 120 feet in height; historical accounts indicate that it may have been 50 to 100 feet higher in the past. Chimney Rock is an isolated erosional remnant of the bluffs at the edge of the Platte Valley to the south. It is composed of layers of Brule clay of Oligocene age and layers of volcanic ash. A stratum of sandstone is exposed near the base of the cone.

The environment of Chimney Rock has seen few alterations by man. In 1940, a small stone monument was erected on the southeast edge of the cone. This marker commemorated a gift from the Durnal family to the Nebraska State Historical Society of approximately 80 acres of land including Chimney Rock. The only other modern intrusion is Chimney Rock Cemetery, located approximately one-quarter mile to the southeast. The 89-acre plot of land owned by the state will provide a buffer zone to protect this historic landmark from further modern encroachment.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Chimney Rock was the most famous landmark on the Great Platte River Road, the most traveled segment of the network of trails which early pioneers took to California and Oregon. Mattes (1969) has researched over 350 trail guides and diaries and found that 330, over 95 percent, had a reference to Chimney Rock. The nearest competitor was Scott's Bluff, which was mentioned in less than 80 percent of these sources. These figures clearly point out how profoundly Chimney Rock impressed the emigrants.

This natural phenomenon was probably named by some forgotten fur trader who ventured west before the settlers. Robert Stuart in 1813, William Henry Ashley in 1826, and Joshua Pilcher in 1827 all traveled the North Platte River valley and must have been in sight of Chimney Rock. Unfortunately, they left us little record of their journeys. The first written description of the landmark was by Warren Angus Ferris, an American Fur Company employee who saw it in 1830. In an account of his experiences as a fur trapper in the Rocky Mountains, published in 1842, he wrote:

"We reached on the following day the "Nose Mountain," or as it is more commonly called, the "Chimney," a singular mound, which has the form of an inverted funnel, is half a mile in circumference at the base, and arises to the height of three hundred feet. It is situated on the southern margin of the North Fork of the Platte, in the vicinity of several high bluffs, to which it was evidently once attached; is on all sides inaccessible, and appears at the distance of fifty miles shooting up from the prairie in solitary grandeur, like the limbless trunk of a gigantic tree. It is 500 miles west from the Council Bluffs."

In the 1830's, Chimney Rock's name does not appear to have been firmly established. Three writers of this period attempted to convey the vulgar Indian designation. Zenas Leonard called it "Elk Peak," Nathaniel Wyeth referred to it as "Elk Brick" and William Marshall Anderson reported that it was called "E.P., or Chimney Rock, a solitary shaft." Alfred Jacob Miller referred to it in French as "Puine du Cerf."

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet Item #9

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 83

UTM REFERENCES

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	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

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	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

D	1,3	6,3,7,3,0,0	4,6,1,8,1,9,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Richard E. Jensen, Curator of Historic Sites

Sept. 16, 1976

ORGANIZATION

Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

1500 R Street

TELEPHONE

432-2793

CITY OR TOWN

Lincoln

STATE

Nebraska

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Martin J. Kretz

9/16/76

TITLE

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

DATE

Sept. 16, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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CONTINUATION SHEET Significance ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

After about 1840 the name was fairly standard, although occasionally shortened to simply "the Chimney". A few individualists substituted Chimney Cliff, Chimney Tower or Chimney Mountain but these changes did not become popular. The spelling was often rendered as "Chimley" or "Chimly," possibly reflecting a phonetic spelling of the pronunciation of the times. Samuel Parker, the Presbyterian Missionary who traveled up the North Platte in 1835, questioned the precision of the name. In his book published in 1838 he wrote:

"Encamped at noon of the 22nd, near another of nature's wonders. It has been called the chimney; but I should say, it ought to be called beacon hill, from its resemblance to what was beacon hill in Boston. Being anxious to have a near view, although in a land of dangers, I concluded to take an assistant and pass over the river to it. The river where we crossed was about a mile wide, shallow and full of quicksand, but we passed it without any difficulties. We rode about three miles over a level plain, and came to the base. The distance from the other side of the river did not appear more than a mile, so deceptive are distances over plains without any landmarks.

"This beacon hill has a conical formed base of about half a mile in circumference, and is 150 feet in height; and above this is a perpendicular column, twelve feet square, and eighty feet high; making the whole height about 230 feet. We left our horses at the base, and ascended to the perpendicular. It is formed of indurated clay or marl, and in some parts is petrified. It is of a light chocolate, or rufous color, in some parts white. Near the top were handsome stalactites, at which my assistant shot, and broke off some pieces, of which I have taken a small specimen."

Many travelers compared Chimney Rock to more familiar sights. Some likened it to the chimney of a sugar refinery, chemical works or iron foundry, while others were more general, describing it only as an old or delapidated chimney. In 1849, Charles Gould described it with a certain unimaginative honesty as the "remains of a sand bluff." The following year one imaginative optimist saw it as "some vast giant leaning against the distant clouds, standing sentinel at the entrance to an enchanted fairyland."

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CONTINUATION SHEET Significance ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3

The travelers in the 1840's and 50's could see Chimney Rock at a distance of thirty to forty miles. Some of the pioneers wrote that in earlier days it could be seen at even greater distances. The location of the Chimney was undoubtedly deceiving to many travelers. Wyllis Alden, on the north side of the river, wrote that "we traveled abreast of it four or five days, but it never seemed to change position." William Lorton, on the south side, had a different impression. He stated that "it seems to recede as you approach." Many diarists reported their surprise that distant objects seemed so close. One traveler wrote that what had "seemed ten was really fifty miles" away.

These distances could be verified by counting wagon wheel revolutions or pacing the distance. The height of Chimney Rock could only be estimated, since it was impossible to reach its summit. These estimates ranged from the impossible exaggeration of about 3,500 feet to a mere 30 feet. More believable estimates ranged from about 300 to 500 feet. Many travelers reported that it had formerly been higher; most attributed this loss to wind and water erosion, but a few said lightning had dislodged portions of it and one writer in 1864 said that soldiers shot it with a small cannon, "breaking off about thirty feet of its top." Many writers predicted that it would erode away entirely in a few years. Although the Brule clay which composes Chimney Rock is still eroding, the dire predictions of 130 years ago have not proven true. Portions of the spire have fallen, as witnessed by the rubble around the base. It is not possible to determine the rate of reduction, but it will certainly be many decades or even centuries before it is completely gone.

Hundreds of travelers wrote or carved their names on Chimney Rock. In 1850 Solomon Gorgas referred to "thousands of names cut and written with lead pencil." Not a few travelers went to considerable difficulty to write their names on the Chimney. Charles Tuttle was with a party traveling on the north side of the river in 1850. He wrote:

"Encamped for noon opposite chimney Rock on the south side of Platte River. . . . I had but little difficulty in crossing the river though the current is very swift and I had to swim a considerable way. . . . I saw hundreds of names out in the rock some at a dizzy height. . . . I wrote mine above all except two and theirs were about 8 feet higher than mine."

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A few attempted to scale the landmark but none were successful. Many went no higher than the base of the spire, but a few went further. In 1850, Dr. A. H. Thomasson described the method most commonly used:

"I went up it about 4 hundred feet then it became so steep that they was feet holts cut in so we could clime up about 25 feet further then we could see where some had cut noches and drove little sticks to clime about 20 feet further but did not venture up that"

The environs of Chimney Rock have not changed radically since the wagon trains passed there well over a century ago. Highway 26-92 parallels the North Platte River, but skirt Chimney Rock at a distance of slightly over one mile. An occasional farm house and cultivation in the river bottoms are the only other modern intrusions, but their impact upon the landmark is relatively small. One can still see Chimney Rock at a distance of at least ten miles while traveling westward. Beyond this distance, the view is blocked by the community of Bridgeport unless one leaves the major highway.

There is one recorded prehistoric archeological site approximately 1,000 feet northwest of Chimney Rock. Evidence of a former occupation at this site, designated 25 MO 73, consists of chert flakes and cores. The significance of the site has not been determined.

In 1941, 80.3 acres of land containing Chimney Rock were donated to the Nebraska State Historical Society by the Roszel F. Durnal family. In 1956 an additional 3.2 acres was deeded to the Society by Norman and Donna Brown. In that same year, Chimney Rock was designated a National Historic Site by the United States Congress.

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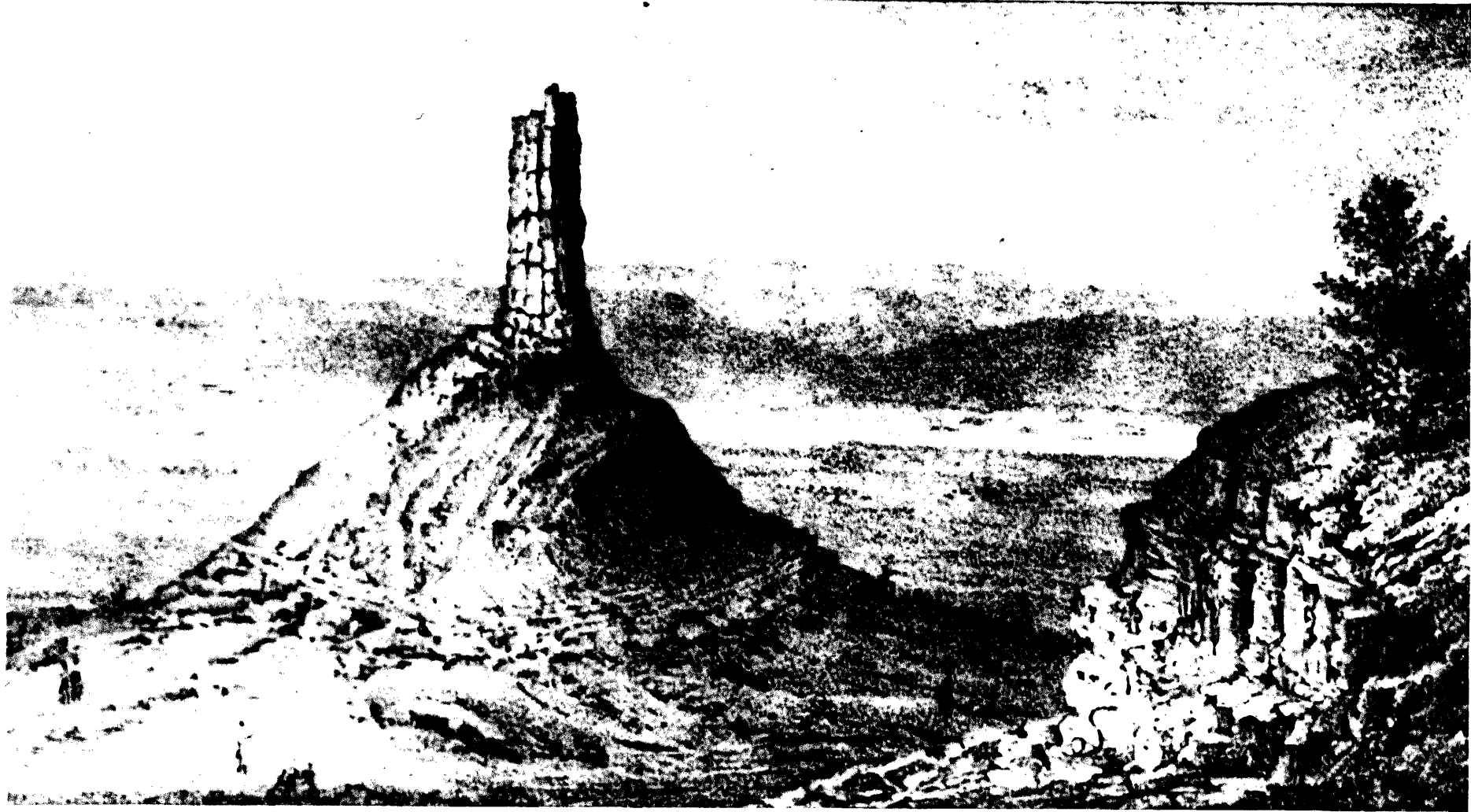
CONTINUATION SHEET Bibliography ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

Ferris, Warren Angus, Life in the Rocky Mountains, Herbert S. Auerbach and J. Cecil Alter, editors, Rocky Mountain Book Shop, Salt Lake City, 1940.

Mattes, Merrill J., The Great Platte River Road, Nebraska State Historical Society Publication XXV, Lincoln, 1969.

Parker, Rev. Samuel, Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains, Mack, Andrus and Woodruff, Printers, Ithaca, 1840.

Tuttle, Charles M., "California Diary . . .", Wisconsin Magazine of History, Vol. 15, 1931.



#2- Chimney Rock

Nebraska State Historical Society

#C538-32

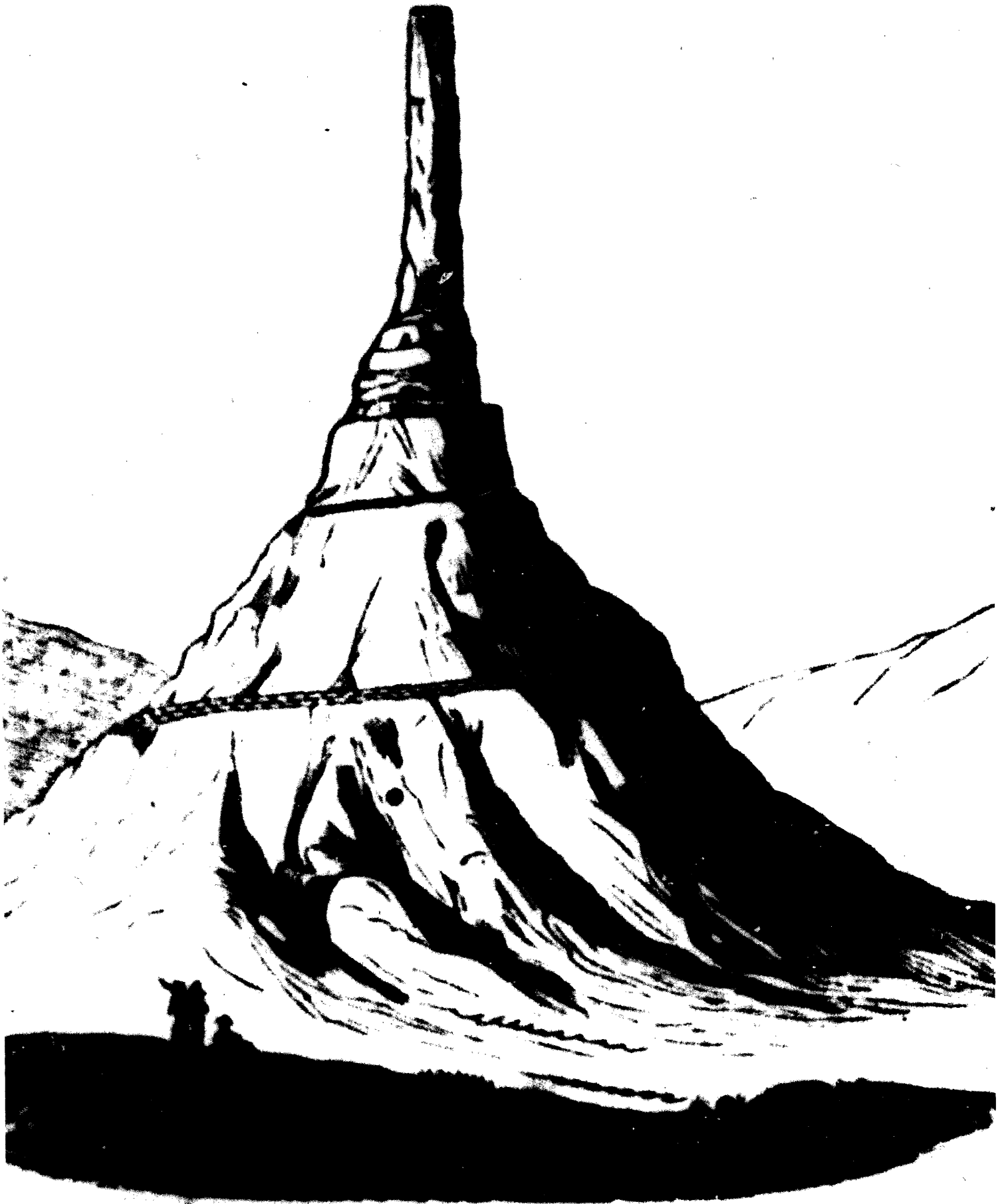
Chimney Rock sketch by Father

Nicolas Point, S.J., done in

1841. The view is to the north

SEP 24 1976

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#5 - Chimney Rock

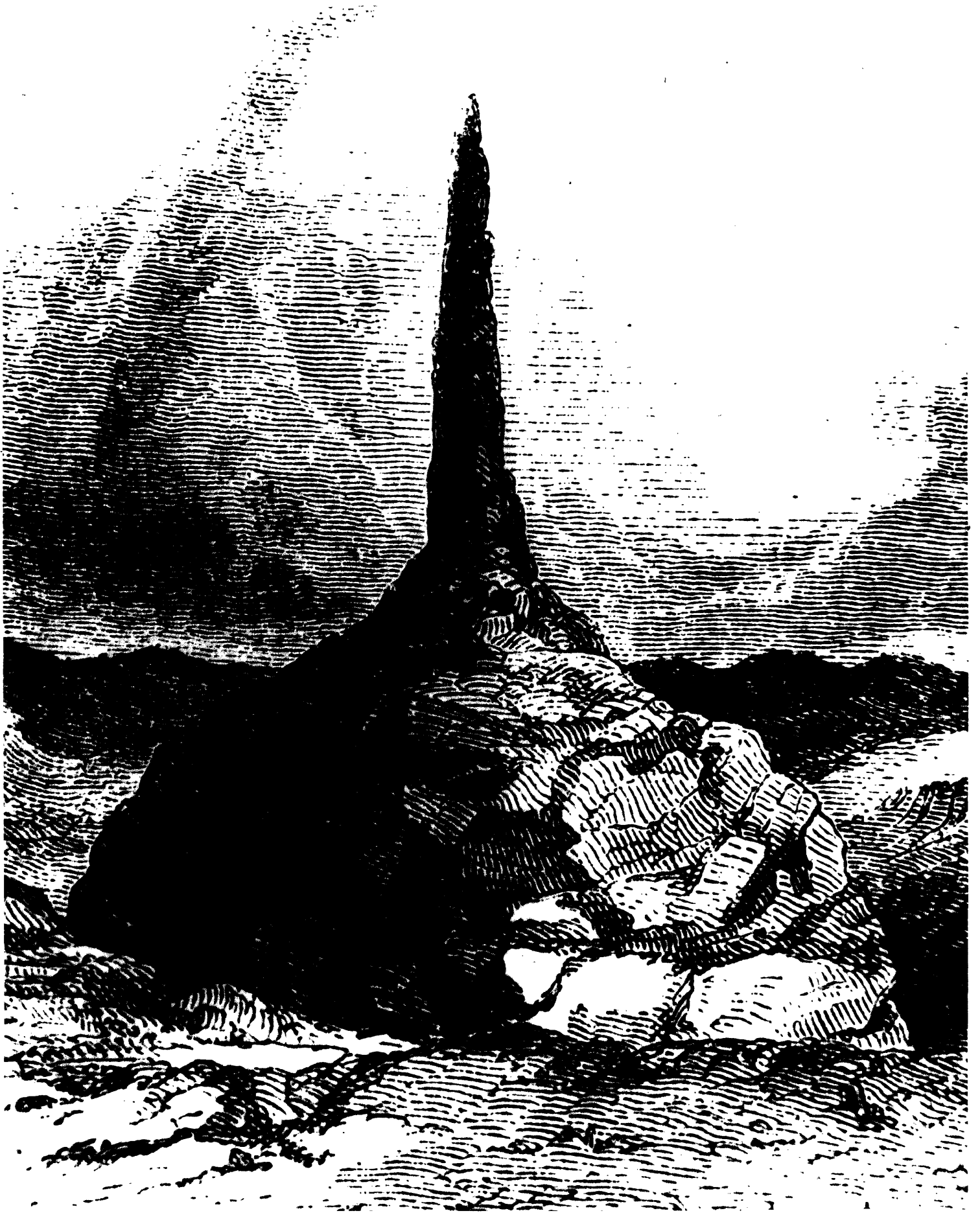
Nebraska State Historical Society

#C538-14

Sketch of Chimney Rock done by W.
Wadsworth in 1852, which
appeared in the National Wagon
Road Guide

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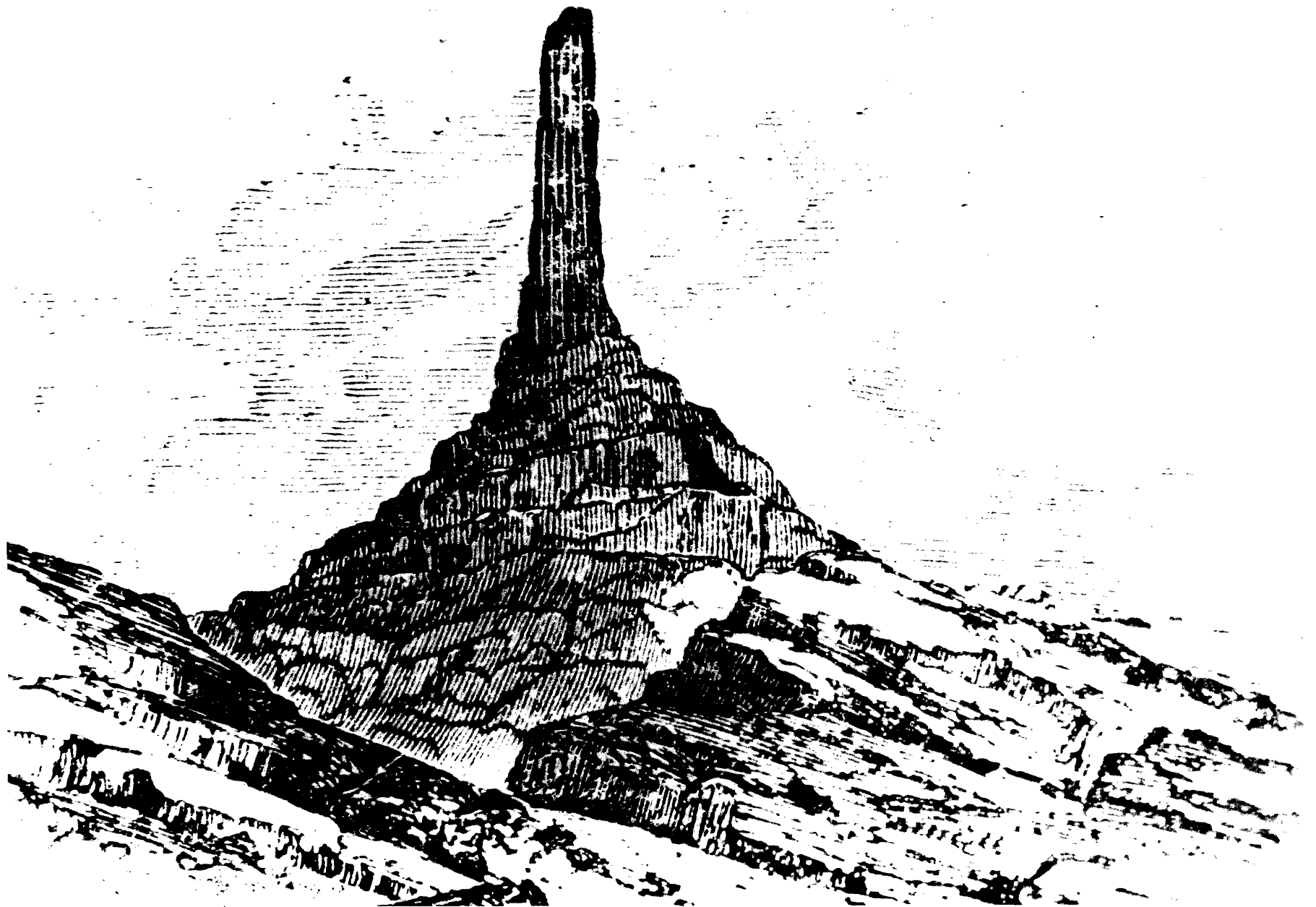


#6 - Chimney Rock
Nebraska State Historical Society
#C538-40

Randolph B. Marcy's sketch of
Chimney Rock, done in 1859

SEP 24 1976

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#7 - Chimney Rock

Nebraska State Historical Society

#C538-60

Margaret Carrington's sketch of
Chimney Rock, done in 1866

SEP 24 1976

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