33 It was in the winter of '49 and '50 that the writer found himself in the city of Peoria, Illinois, working at his trade, ironing off California wagons, or wagons intended to cross the plains the following summer. At that time the whole West was in a blaze--everybody had the California fever, and every man that could raise sufficient money to buy an outfit was making preparation for a trip across the plains. On the 21st day of March, 1850, I bade good-by to my friends of the good city of Peoria and embarked on a steamer for St. Louis with three others, who were to be companions
34 or messmates, namely: D. C. Young, J. G. Boyden and D. C. Gunn. D. C. Young was a merchant of Chilliclothe, Illinois, who was taking the trip for his health. He was a consumptive, and his physicians told him there was no chance for his life if a trip across the plains would not help him. Before he had spent thirty days on the plains he commenced mending, and before we got to Sacramento he was, to all appearances, a well man. J. G. Boyden was a musician. When we got to California he was paid $16 per day for playing in gambling-houses. In the summer of 1854 he lost his life on the steamer Gem when she blew up on the Sacramento river. D. C. Gunn was an aged man. He claimed to be a direct descendant of the celebrated Jonathan Carver, the great traveler of the Eighteenth Century.

Well, in due time we arrived in St. Louis and took a steamer for Fort Leavenworth, with our California wagons on board. The steamer was crowded with argonants, like ourselves, seeking the golden fleece--bound for the land of gold. In due time we arrived at Fort Leavenworth, where we were anxious to fit out, as the Government had advertised a lot of condemend Santa Fe mules for sale there and they were considered good animals to cross the plains. We went into camp on a large timber flat just above the fort on the banks of the Missouri. The next day the other members of the party crossed the river to the town of Weston, in Missouri, to prospect for supplies for a trip. They left me in camp to take care of things, as I was the
35 "kid" of the camp. It suited me very well, as I had bought in St. Louis a "pepper-box," or Allen's revolver, with which I wanted to practice, as the Commanches were liable to make a raid on us while passing through their hunting-grounds. I made bullets and used up considerable powder, but never became an expert with my pepper-box gun.

One day, while in camp alone, I had my first experience with Uncle Sam's boys. Two of them came into camp and wanted to know if I had any whisky. I told them that Colonel Ogden had forbidden us to let the soldiers have liquor, and I could not do so. They coaxed a long time, and finally wanted to know if I didn't want a good fat deer. I thought some venison would go very well about that time. "Would I give them a pint of whisky if they would get me a fine young buck?" I thought that would be breaking our bargain with Colonel Ogden, but then, we did not agree not to trade whisky for a young buck, so I finally agreed. They started for the deer, and fifteen minutes later I heard a shot. In another fifteen minutes they were back in camp with a carcass minus the head, feet and skin. Throwing it down, they said:

"There is your deer; now give us the whisky."

I examined the carcass, and told them it was not a deer, but a hog. They looked at me with all the appearance of the essence of virtue itself, and said:

"You must be a d--n fool; don't you know a deer
36 from a hog? You ain't got enough sense to go to California!"

But they got the whisky, and I got the "deer," without hearing from Colonel Ogden. The sale of the Government mules and wagons came off. We purchased three of the Spanish mules, but they didn't exactly suit Mr. Young--he was afraid their feet were too small; there was no underpinning; in case the mules got into a mudhole their feet were so small they would go out of sight altogether; and he came to the conclusion that we must have one animal with big feet, so as to keep the balance of the team above the mud. So he bought in Weston a big horse with big feet, and felt satisfied that we would go through all right. Our team was composed of three small Spanish mules and one big black horse, about fourteen hundred pounds in weight--as heavy as the balance

of the team. We had a good deal of fun with "Dave," as we called him, about his matched wheelers. However, it made a good team, and they landed us in Sacramento all right. We had a jolly time in breaking the mules. They were pack animals, and decidedly objected to being put in harness. There was some tall "bucking" about that time, but with the help of our fourteen-hundred-pound horse, and lots of patience on the part of our teamster, we got them into some sort of order in about a week's time. Our supplies were all in, and time hung heavy on our hands, for we were waiting for the grass to get up before
37 starting on our long and weary trip across the plains. The grass was late that spring, and, with a few sacks of corn for feed, we started on about the 20th of April, for the land of promise.

38 In my last chapter I had got started on the plains; but I will explain here that I hired my passage in the outfit, paying one hundred dollars for the trip, the regular price being two hundred dollars. In consideration of my agreeing to do D. C. Young's portion of the work and my own, he agreed to take me for half-price, and allow me fifty pounds of baggage. I sold all my good clothes before leaving Peoria, and bought me two pairs of stout shoes, four hickory shirts, two pairs of stout pants and one hat, which constituted my outfit. The balance of the fifty pounds allowed I made up with horse nails, shoeing hammer, pinchers and rasp--that is, a kit of shoeing tools. Before leaving camp I got a piece of white cotton cloth. With a bottle of ink I painted and put on our wagon these words: "Horseshoeing done here!" Be-
39 fore leaving the State we purchased several guide-books. Among the lot was what was called "the Mormon Guide-book," which was found the best of the lot. After striking the Council Bluff road, we found it correct in every particular--distance from water to water, and the same regarding wood and grass. Our route lay through a fine rolling prairie country--what is now part of the State of Kansas. The first stream we crossed was called the Little Blue, and some distance further west we struck the Big Blue. Before starting we decided that we would travel alone and on our own account, camp where we pleased, and start when we pleased. One great trouble with the early emigrants was that, before starting, they formed themselves into companies and elected a captain, and bound themselves to obey his orders. But very soon they became dissatisfied, and the company broke into fragments.

We were now in the home of the buffalo--every day we were in sight of vast herds of them, occasionally shooting one for fresh meat; generally a yearling calf. The meat of the buffalo is of coarser grain than beef, but very tender and juicy. Timber we found very scarce; but in its place were "buffalo-chips," as they were called on the plains. For nearly three hundred miles they were the only fuel we had. Some of our tenderfeet brethren might turn up their noses at a good buffalo steak broiled on "buffalo-chip" coals, or a loaf of bread baked in
40 buffalo ashes, but it made a feast fit for a prince--anyway good enough for us.

The first sign of settlement we met was Fort Kearney, then occupied by Uncle Sam, with a small garrison. At the fort I made the acquaintance of the afterwards celebrated Major-General Sterling Price, of the Southern army. He had started across the plains with a large train. When near Fort Kearney one of his wagons broke down--a box in the hub was broken. There was no blacksmith at the fort at that time, and he had none in his company. One of his men rode up to our wagon to inquire if there was a blacksmith in the crowd. I was pointed out to him as a son of Vulcan. He wanted me to go to the fort and repair his wagon, but I did not wish to go, as it was early in the day and our train would be far ahead before I could get the job done. But as the colonel insisted on getting the job done, as he could not travel, and he had a large train losing time, Finally he offered me fifty dollars to do the job for him, and a horse to ride to overtake our wagon. I did the job in about two

hours. He was as good as his word, and offered me the fifty dollars. But my skin was not thick enough for that. I took ten dollars and called the account "square." He then wanted me to leave the party I was with, and offered me one hundred dollars per month to do his work, I to have a horse to ride until we reached California. On consultation with my friends I re-
41 fused the offer, and that was the last I saw of General Price.

Our road lay up the South Fork of the Platte river for many days, until we came to the crossing which we had to ford. The Platte, or at least the South Fork of it, is one wide moving river of sand, running rapidly. If one's team stopped one minute it was buried in sand. Then our big-footed horse did good service. Our little Spanish mules humped up their backs, something like a cat going to war, and were afraid to move. We had to jump out of the wagons and persuade them, with good stout whips and clubs, to go. In traveling up the south side of the Platte river we found one of the best natural roads, for the distance of four hundred miles, that is to be found, I believe, on the face of the earth. The scenery is most magnificent. Mountains to the west are piled up against each other as far as the eye can reach. It is surprising the distance that can be seen on these plains. Three of us went from the emigrant road to examine the celebrated "Chimney Rock." The distance did not seem more than two or three miles. We started early in the morning, expecting to visit the rock and get back to the wagon at noon. We got to the rock about one o'-clock, and it was dark when we got into camp, tired and hungry. But it was well worth the labor and tramp. "Chimney Rock," at a distance, looks like some huge steeple placed atop of some mighty ruins that for thous-
42 ands of years had withstood the storms and tempests of the Rocky Mountains. The pillar itself is composed of soft rock easily cut with a knife. As far up the shaft as could be reached were names of hundreds of adventurers. This is the region of thunder and lightning and hail storms. Frequently, in the afternoon, storms would arise out of what appeared to be a clear sky. When a small black cloud appeared in the south or west, it was time to look out, for the chances were that within an hour we would have the whole artillery of heaven turned loose upon us, with hailstones in abundance. At such times we camped, unhitched our mules and tied them to the wheels of the wagon, while we drove picket pins over the wheels, and lashed the wagons down, to keep them from blowing over. About the 24th of May we arrived at Fort Laramie, where were stationed two or three companies of soldiers. All emigrants were requested to register their names at the fort, that the Government might be informed as to the number of persons crossing the plains that summer. The names were numbered, and I think my number was 53,232--that number of peoplehaving already crossed before we got there; so you can have an idea of the number of people on the plains in the summer of '50. From the time we left Fort Laramie we were never out of sight of trains, before and behind us, until we reached Sacramento City.

43 On leaving Fort Laramie we soon entered the Black Hills country, where we found rough roads. We bade good-bye to "buffalo-chips" and adopted greasewood in their place. In due time we arrived at the South Pass, or what is called the backbone of the American continent. A person looking round him here would hardly think that he was standing on the backbone of a continent. The summit was marked with a stake. On one hand the rain that fell would run into the Atlantic Ocean, and on the other into the Pacific. It appeared like a great level plateau--mountains to the north, mountains to the south, mountains to the west! Those to the west were the mountains of most interest to us, as we had to take our way over them--from the summit to old Fort Bridger, a trading post situated west of Green River, in what is called the Wind River Mountains.

Compiled by M. J. Mattes - 1945
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John Carr
Pioneer Days in California
Eureka, California, 1891
(Newberry Microfilm 3 - 28)