

FROM THE PLAINS

The following letter, though not of a late date, will be found interesting.

On the Road to California, 20 miles east of the)
South Pass, July 1st, 1849.)

Dear Sir:--I am here something over 700 miles from St. Joseph and 1,100 miles from Suter's Fort, my place of destination. We reached here on yesterday, and will remain until to-morrow morning, resting our cattle. We have had remarkably good weather, roads and grass, and I may say health, with one exception, Wm. Comer, who died on little Blue River. I have but little to write, other than a sketch of my travels, which I will here commence.

I arrived at St. Joseph, May 5th, at night, where I met my team and hands. As soon as my freight was landed, I made way for my camping ground. On the 6th, we took up our march to the river, where we were detained two days before we could possibly cross. We then came out six miles over the worst roads we have passed. On the 10th we arrived at the Indian station, where there are several houses, a fine three story school house and church, built of brick. There is also a store and a blacksmith shop here; at this place I saw many Indians of the Iowa tribe. We passed on 9 miles further and and camped in the prairie.--We use dry willows for fuel, which ~~XX~~ in my stove answered a good purpose. I carried the fuel on my horse about two miles. 11th, started early and fell in with the Springfield Rangers, who had just organized and elected Young Addison captain, to whom I had letter of introduction; he invited me to join his company. The company was opposed to receiving Smalley for the reason that her had a family. I therefore declined joining, not wishing to leave him alone. We traveled with the company to-day and camped near them. 12th, traveled 18 miles to day through prairie, passed several graves, and camped within two miles of the Rangers. The Rangers to-night agreed by vote to receive us and Smalley in their company. 13th, the Rangers being detained by a man sick with cholera. We determined to go on to a large creek and remain the balance of the day. 14th; the Rangers, not having come up and it being uncertain how long they would be detained with the sick man I determined to start on about 7 o'clock, leaving the other two wagons. I expected however, to drive slow, and if they were not detained very long they would over take me; traveled 18 miles to-day and camped on a ridge near wood and water, with good grass for a few cattle.

At this place a team came up and camped, with which was a young man from Lasalie by the name of Hall. 15th, passed over a pretty good Prairie country, with good roads about 20 miles, and camped in a Ravine, 4 miles east of big Blue River. 16th, started early (Hall's team in company) and reached Blue river at 8 o'clock, and there I was detained one hour by other teams crossing before I got over. This is a pretty stream 60 yards wide, 2 1-2 feet deep, good fording; at noon we over-took the Jerseyville Company, Capt. Knapp, who is a first-rate Phy sician. We traveled and camped with them at night. About 10 miles from the river we came to the junction of the St. Joe and Independence roads. Along the latter can be seen numerous trains of ox and mule teams. This evening Capt. Knapp invited us to join his company, 13 wagons in number. I consented on condition that I might withdraw if the Rangers came up with us. The Capt. called a meeting at night, and by a unanimous vote we were received, and a committee appointed to inform us of the result.-- 17th,

started at 6 o'clock, passed over a broken country, crossed two small streams and camped on the prairie. i miles west of the last creek.

At this stream all the trees near the road were covered over with cards, some of paper, some of boards and in many places the trees were skinned and written upon giving names of individuals and companies, &c. The Post offices, as they are called, we found at all the principal crossings.--At the Nimehaw, by this means, I learned that the Cass Boys were four days ahead, and I have not overtaken them yet. 18th, started at 6 o'clock, and traveled about 20 miles over a broken prairie country, parallel with the little Blue river. I saw to day great quantities of iron ore. Shortly after noon Bryant's train of Pack mules, 140 head, passed us, being the first pack train I ever saw. 19th, started at 6, passing over broken prairie country, crossing several small streams, at one of which we found the Bloomington company, who had lost forty head of their cattle in a stampede. I heard from them 2 or 3 days afterwards and they had not yet found their cattle; they expected to have to leave a part of their wagons, and, loading and proceed with the balance. Came 20 miles more, remained stationary, owing to the sickness of Wm. Comer, who died with cholera, at 6 o'clock P. M. 21st, left early, traveled up Blue river, and camped, distance 22 miles. 22d, followed the little Blue until 4 o'clock, we reached a diverging point where we left it and struck across the prairie north west 5 miles, where we found wood and water, and camped for the night; 30 miles travel.

23d--Started early in order to reach the Platte river to-day. Antelope have been seen for a day or two past. I saw, perhaps, thirty antelope and one wolf, but could not get a shot. The antelope is the most timid and wild animal I ever saw,--always occupying high, commanding places. We reached the Platte valley about three o'clock. A new road having been made, we turned immediately up the valley, and camped in the prairie, 10 miles below new Fort Kearney, near the head of Grand Island; came 20 miles. 24th, started early and reached the fort at noon. There is a circular saw mill in operation here, and they are making preparations to build extensively. The government have troops stationed here. I could have purchased here flour for \$2.50 per 100 lbs., and bacon at \$1,00 per 100 lbs; large quantities of which had been abandoned by the emigrants, finding themselves over loaded. Wagons can now be seen every day, boxes, trunks, powder, lead, and in fact every article once thought to be indispensable for the trip thrown away. A great number of the mule teams are leaving their wagons and packing their mules. Mules will not do in the harness for this trip. We have gone ahead of a great many. They look poor and worn out. Just at this moment there are two men passing in view, with one mule apiece, heavily packed, walking and leading them. There are a great many difficulties taking place with men who joined with one team, and in trains they are shifting and bursting up every day.

I do not know of a single train except this but what have had splits, "brake ups" and quarrels.--No fighting that I have heard of; several accidents have occurred by accidental shooting, but none very recently. Some by teams running away.--Some depredations are committed, said to be done by the Indians, For my part I have more fears of the whites driving off my cattle than of the Indians. I have not seen any Indians since we left the Missouri, except a small party encamped on Platte, at the mouth of Ash Hollow, and three squaws at Fort Laramie. I do not believe there are any near our road. There are no fresh signs of them. A great number of persons are sadly disappointed in not getting horses from them, as they expected. Our teams stand the journey very well.

I will resume a sketch of my travels at another time. Myself and men are in good health.--Three heartier men are hard to find. I never ate so much in my life in the same length of time.--I have killed one antelope and some of our men have assisted in killing two buffalo. The meat of the antelope is very fine;--that of the buffalo I like better than most beef.

We had no trouble in crossing the streams, except blocking up the wagon beds crossing Laramie fork. I have lightened some, by throwing out a few articles, such as powder, lead, &c. We keep guard every night. I am exempt from that duty by virtue of my office of assistant captain. I am very little with the train. While moving, I go a-head, examine roads and select camping places. Smalley came up five days ago from the rangers; his family in good health. J. G. Conover and Simpson are ten miles behind us. They are all well. They had with others left the rangers. They could not agree. Smalley will remain with us. I never saw the like in my life: old acquaintances are continually quarreling and separating. Two men, not a half mile below us are left over their piles, with one mule each. They fell out and made a division of their property, one part got the wagon and four mules, leaving these two behind. The great difficulty in getting along is, that the wagons are generally too heavy. A load should consist of from 1,800 to 2,000 lbs.--with five yoke of oxen, round bodied, tight built, not too heavy, and from 5 to 8 years old.

We have met some Mormons going to the States. We expect now to meet persons frequently from the Salt Lake and California. I will write you again before long.

Your's,

Benjamin H. Gatton.

To Geo. H. Cambell, Bath, Illinois