

A Journey to California

Bodega, Port of the Russians
Upper California, March 30th 1842.

Most Esteemed, Sir:--Owing to circumstances I am compelled to abridge my Journal and likewise a description of the Country so far as I have been able to travel. By perusing the following pages you will learn most of the particulars of all my travels since I left the United States.

I will now begin with my daily Journal, from the time the Company arrived at Kansas River, till they arrived at Marsh's in Upper California.

The Missionary Company consisted of 11 persons vis--Capt. Fitzpatrick the Pilot Father DeSmet, Pont and Mengarino, Missionaries; John Grey, hunter,--Romaine, and 5 Teamsters.

Our Company was composed of the following individuals, T. H. Green, G. Hinshaw, Charles Hopper, J. P. Springer, A. G. Patton, J. Bartleson, N. Dawson, Josiah Belden, J. M. Jones, J. W. Chandler, John De Swart, E. S. Brolaske, M. C. Nye, Elias Barnet, Major Walton, A. Walton, Green McMahan, J. McDowel, R. H. Thomas, Elisha Stone, Isaiah Kelsey, Saml. Kelsey and family, William Towler, Richard Williams and family, E. W. Plugge, W.P. Overton, Geo. Simpson, V.W. Dawson, Andrew Kelsey, Benj. Kelsey and family, Ewd. Rogers, D. F. Hill, A. Cook, Jones, Carroll, Jas. Ross, Henry Huber, John Roland, Wm. Belty, Thos. Jones, Augustus Pifer, Jas. John, R. Rickman, H. Peyton, Chiles, Charles Weaver and James Shotwell, the last six did not overtake us at Kansas river.

The Trappers for the Mountains--Jas. Baker, Piga a Frenchman and Wm. Mast.

2 A. E. Frye and Rogers on a pleasure excursion--Williams, a Preacher, on a visit to Oregon.

May T. 18th 1841. Having waited at this place (2 miles W. of Kansas river) 2 days, and all the Company being arrived, except those heretofore mentioned, the Company was convened for the purpose of electing a Captain and adopting Rules for the Government of the Company; when T. H. Green was chosen President--and J. Bidwell Secretary.

After the Rules were read and adopted, J. Bartleson was elected Captain; it will be understood that Fitzpatrick was Capt. of the Missionary Company and Pilot of the whole--Orders were given for the company to start in the morning, and the meeting broke up.

W. 19th. This morning, the wagons started off in single file; first the 4 carts and 1 small wagon of the Missionaries, next 8 wagons drawn by Mules and horses and lastly, 5 wagons draw by 17 yoke of oxen. It was the calculation of the company to move on slowly till the wagon of Chiles overtook us. Our course was West, leaving the Kansas no great distance to our left, we traveled in the valley of the river which was prairie excepting near the margin of the stream. The day was very warm and we stopped about noon, having traveled about 12 miles.

This afternoon we had a heavy shower of rain and hail. Several Kansas Indians came to our camp; they were well armed with bows and arrows, and some had guns, they were daily expecting an attack by the Pawnees, whom they but a short time ago had made inroads upon, and had massacred at one of their villages a large number of old men, women and children, while the warriors were hunting buffalo.

T. 20. The day was tolerably pleasant, our road was interrupted by small streams

which crossed our course in every 2 or 3 miles during the day, the land was prairie, except the narrow groves which accompanied every stream—timber principally, bur-oak, black walnut, elm and white hickory. Travelled this day about sixteen miles and encamped in a beautiful grove of timber through which meandered a small stream.

F. 21st. Our oxen left us last night, and it was 9 o'clock before we were all ready to start, passed a considerable stream called Vermillion, a branch of the Kansas, on its banks was finer timber than we had heretofore seen, hickory, walnut &c., the country was prairie, hilly, and strong; we passed in the forenoon a Kansas village, entirely deserted on account of the Pawnees, encamped by a scattering grove, having come about 15 miles.

3 S. 22nd. Started at six o'clock this morning, travelled about 18 miles, high rolling prairie, encamped on a small stream, shaded by a few willows.

S. 23rd. All the oxen were gone this morning excepting nine, there was considerable complaint among the company, some saying at this slow rate of traveling we would have to winter among the Black Hills, and eat our mules &c. We however made a start about 9 in the morning, proceeded about 9 miles and stopped to wait for Chiles' waggon which overtook us about 5 P.M; 14 Pawnees were seen by the wagon, well armed with spears &c. It was supposed they were on an expedition against the Kansas.

M. 24th. Travelled about 13 miles today over rolling prairies and arrived at the Big Vermillion, a branch of the Kansas, here we were obliged to stop, the water being so high as to render it impossible to cross with the waggons.

T. 25th. Passed the stream without much trouble and made a stretch of about 20 miles when we encamped on the border of a beautiful forest where we found plenty of grass and water. The country, over which we passed, was similar to that of yesterday.

W. 26th. Two waggons were broke today; about a dozen Pawnees came to our camp, stopped to repair the waggons, having come about 15 miles. A deer was brought in by C. Hopper. A man by the name of Williams, a methodist preacher overtook the company this evening on his way to visit the Oregon Territory: he had not arrived in time to start with the company from the settlements, and had travelled entirely alone, without any gun or other weapon of defence, depending wholly on Providence for protection and support.

T. 27th. Started, late, being detained at repairing the waggons, the day was warm, but the evening mild and pleasant encamped in a commodious valley, well watered by a beautiful little stream which glided smoothly through the scattering grove, come about 15 miles.

F. 28th. Started, about sunrise, travelled about 5 miles and stopped to take breakfast. The heat was oppressive and we were compelled to go 20 miles farther before we came to either wood or water. The stream on which we encamped is a fork of the Kansas and is well known to all the mountaineers, by the name of the Big Blue, an Antelope was killed.

S. 29th. We again started about sunrise and travelled not less than 22 miles. One antelope was killed—saw several Elk.

4 S. 30th. Nothing of importance occurred—distance about 15 miles—grass mingled with rushes, afforded our animals plenty of food of the best quality.— Game appeared to increase, though but one deer and one antelope were brought in.

M. 31st. This morning about 10 o'clock we met six waggons with 18 men, with Fur

and Robes on their way from Ft. Larimie, to St. Louis. Ft. Larimie is situated on Larimie's Fork near its junction with the N. fork of Platte, and is about 800 miles from Independence. The waggons were drawn by oxen and mules—the former looked as though they received a thousand lashes every day of their existence! the rusty mountaineers looked as though they never had seen, razor, water, soap, or brush. It was very warm, and we travelled till dark before we were able to reach water, and then it was not fit to drink, and then we could not procure any wood, grass scarce.

June, T. 1st. This morning we hastened to leave our miserable encampment and proceeding directly north, we reached Big Platte river about 12 o'clock.—The heat was uncommonly oppressive. I here discovered the ground was in many places hoary with Glauber Salts, or at least I was unable to distinguish them by taste. This afternoon we had a soaking shower, which was succeeded by a heavy hail storm. Wonderful! this evening a new family was created! Isaac Helsey was married to Miss Williams daughter of R. Williams, The marriage ceremony was performed by the Rev. Fr. Williams, so we now have five families if we include a widow and child.

W. 2nd. This morning the company was convened for the purpose of making a vote upon the question, whether the companies should continue to travel together? that some were complaining that the Missionaries went too fast; but the very thought of leaving Mr. Fitzpatrick who was so well acquainted with the Indians &c. &c. met, as it ought to have done, the disapprobation of all. We now proceeded directly up the river, making this day about twelve miles.

T. 3rd. Still continued up the river, travelled about 16 miles, rained in the afternoon.

F. 4th. Half past six this morning saw us on the march, the valley of the river was here about 4 miles wide, antelope were seen in abundance—a young man (Dawson) was out hunting, when suddenly a band of Chienne Indians about 40 in number came upon him; they were pleased to strip him of his mule, gun and pistol, and let him go. He had no sooner reached the camp and related the news than the whole band, came in sight; We hastened to form a Carral (Yard) with our waggons, but it was done in great haste. To show you how it effected the green ones, I will give the answer, I received from a stout, young man (and
5 he perhaps was but one of 30 in the same situation, when I asked him, how many indians there were? he answered with a trembling voice, half scared out of his wits, there were lots, gaubs, fields and swarms of them!!! I do really believe he thought there were some thousands, lo! there were by 40, perfectly friendly, delivered up every article taken, but the Pistol.

S. 5th. Started early to get clear of our red visitors—descried a large herd of Buffalo on the opposite side of the river—saw several Boats descending the river, laden with fur, robes &c, they belonged to the American Fur Company—one of our company E. Stone returned with them—The latter part of the day was very inclement, high winds, dark clouds rushed in wild confusion around and above us, soon with amazement we saw a lofty water spout, towering like a huge Column to support the arch of the sky; and while we were moving with all haste lest it should pass over us and dash our wagons to pieces, it moved off with the swiftness of the wind and was soon lost among the Clouds—Rain & hail succeeded, the largest hail stones I ever saw, several were found, an hour after the sun came out bright & warm, larger than a turkey egg—9 of the Indians that left us this morning, returned this evening.

S. 6th. This morning was extremely cool for the season, 25 more of the Indians came up with us.

M. 7th. Three Indians continued with us, the wind blew very hard toward evening—3 Buffalo's were killed and part of their meat was brought to the camp.

T. 8th. There were 8 or 10 Buffalo killed to day, but not one tenth of the meat was used, the rest was left to waste upon the Prairie. In the afternoon we passed the confluence of the N. & S. forks of Platte River & encamped, having come about 18 miles, many hundred of Buffalo's were seen at this place. The scenery of the Country on the Platte is rather dull and monotonous, but there are some objects which must ever attract the attention of the observant traveler; I mean the immense quantity of Buffalo bones, which are every where strowed with great profusion, so that the Valley, throughout its whole length and breadth, is nothing but one complete slaughter yard; where the noble animals used to graze, ruminate and multiply in uncounted thousands--but they are fast diminishing. If they continue to decrease in the same ratio, that they have for the past 15 or 20 years, they will ere long become totally extinct. It has been but a few years since they left the frontiers of Missouri, and are now fast retreating towards the Rocky Mountains.

6 The Indians are anxious to preserve them, and it is said of them, that they never kill as long as they have any meat remaining, but behold with indignation the shameful and outrageous prodigality of the whites, who slaughter thousands merely for their robes and leave the meat, which is far more delicious than that of tame Cattle, to waste, or be eaten by Wolves & vultures.

W. 9th. Spent the day in crossing the S. fork of Platte--a Buffalo was killed from a herd that came within 300 yards of the Camp. We crossed the river by fording the water being sufficiently shallow--width of River here about 2/3 of a mile--its waters are muddy like those of the Missouri.

T. 10. This morning the most of Oxen were again at large, owing to the neglect of the Owners to the great danger of losing them by the Indians and by their mingling with Buffalo, or by their straying so far that it would be impossible to track them on account of the innumerable tracks of the Buffalo--making therefore, rather a late start, we continued to ascend the river on the N. side.--We traveled about 14 miles and encamped on the river, Buffalo were seen in countless thousands on the opposite side of the river; from the time we began to journey this morning till we ceased to travel at night; the whole south side of the stream was completely ~~and~~ clouded by these huge animals, grazing in the valley and on the hills--ruminating upon the margin of the river, or crowding down its banks for water.

Through the remissness of the sentinels, the guard last night was nearly vacant; and as this was considered dangerous ground on account of the warlike Pawnees, Chiennes &c. a Court Martial was called to force those to their duty on guard, who were so negligent & remiss.

F. 11. The Oxen had wandered about 1/2 mile from the camp this morning, when a man was sent to bring them in; he soon came running back in great haste, crying "the Indians are driving the Oxen off'!!! In less than half an hour the oxen were at camp and not an Indian seen--all this is easily accounted for, when we consider how timidity and fear will make every bush, or stone, or stump an Indian, and 40 Indians, thousands--Vast herds of Buffalo continued to be seen on the opposite side of the river--Distance today about 20 miles.

S. 12th. Left the S. fork, and after a march of 12 miles found ourselves on the N. fork--in the afternoon passed a small Ash grove of about 25 trees--timber is so scarce, that such a grove is worthy of notice--we encamped on the N. fork having come about 18 miles--on leaving the S. fork we left the Buffalo also.

7 S. 13th. A mournful accident occurred in the camp this morning--a young man by the name of Shotwell while in the act of taking a gun out of the wagon, drew it with the muzzle towards him in such a manner that it went off and shot him near the heart--he lived about an hour and died in the full possession of his senses. His good

behavior had secured him the respect and good will of all the company, he had resided some 8 or 9 months on or near the Nodaway River, Platte purchase Missouri prior to his starting on this expedition; but he said his mother lived in Laurel County, Kentucky, and was much opposed to his coming into the West—he was buried in the most decent manner our circumstances would admit of after which a funeral sermon was preached by Mr. Williams. In the Afternoon we passed on about 5 miles, making an inland circuit over the hills which approached boldly by the river and compelled us to leave its banks—we however reached it again by descending the dry channel of Ash Creek on which was considerable timber—Ash, Cedar &c.

M. 14th. The day was so cool and rainy we did not travel.

T. 15th. There was so sudden a change from cool to cold, that we were not comfortable in our best apparel. I do not remember, that I ever have experienced weather so cold at this season of the year—traveled about 16 miles.

W. 16th. Several wild horses were seen on the opposite side of the river—advanced about 20 miles—encamped on the river, opposite to high and uneven Bluffs, bearing considerable forests of pine,

T. 17th. Continued to coast along up the river—encamped on its banks nearly opposite to a huge isolated bluff, bearing some resemblance to an immense castle in ruins. Its distance from us no one supposed more than 1 1/2 miles, and yet it was at least 7—this deception was owing to the pure atmosphere through which it was viewed, and the want of objects, by which only, accurate ideas of distance can be acquired without measure.

F. 18th. About 12 o'clock today we passed another object, still more singular and interesting—it is called by the Mountaineers, the Chimney, from its resemblance to that object; and is composed of clay and sand so completely compact, as to possess the hardness of a rock. It stands near the high Bluffs that bound the Valley on the South, and has been formed from a high isolated mound which, being washed on every side by the rains and snows of ages, has been worn down till nothing is left but the centre which stands upon an obtuse cone, and is seen towering like a huge column at the distance of 30 miles. The column is 150 feet above the top of the cone and the whole, 250 feet above the level of the plain.

8 Distance made today about 20 miles.

S. 19. [We gradually receded from the river in order to pass through a gap in a range of high hills, called Soot's Bluff's, as we advanced towards these hills, the scenery of the surrounding Country became beautifully grand and picturesque—they were worn in such a manner by the storms of unnumbered seasons, that they really counterfeited the lofty spires, towering edifices, spacious domes and in fine all the beautiful mansions of Cities. We encamped among these envious objects having come about 20 miles.

Here were ~~found~~ first found the mountain Sheep } two were killed and brought to camp—these animals are so often described in almost every little School Book that it is unnecessary for me to describe them here.

S. 20th. [Passed through the Gap—~~gullies~~ came into an extensive plain, the beautiful scenery gradually receded from view—came to a creek called Horse—passed it, reached the river again—cool and windy—having come about 23 miles.

M. 21st. We had an uncommonly good road today—an abundance of cottonwood timber—traveled late, having taken a stride of 27 miles.

T. 22nd. Eight miles this morning took us to Fort Larimie, which is on Larimie's

fork of Platte about 800 miles from the frontiers of Missouri, it is owned by the American Fur Company, There is another fort, within a mile and a half of this Place, belonging to an individual by the name of Lupton, the Black Hills were now in view, a very noted Peak, called the Black Hill Mountain was seen like a dark cloud in the Western horizon, (Remark.) The Country along Platte River is far from being fertile and is uncommonly destitute of timber, the Earth continues as we ascend, to become more strongly impregnated with glauber Salts.

W. 23d. Remained at the Fort, the things of Mr. Shotwell were sold at Auction.

T. 24th. Left the Fort this morning and soon began to wind among the Black Hills, two of our men stopped at the Fort, (Simpson and Mast) but, two other men with an Indian and his family joined us to travel to Green River--Encamped having made about seventeen miles--hills here sandy--many wild Peas likewise an abundance of Peas, wild--though the bush was dissimilar to ours, yet the pods bore an exact similarity, taste, the same.

F. 25th. Journeyed over hills and dales--encamped on a stream affording plenty of grass, better Cotton-wood timber, it resembles the sweet Cotton wood of Missouri, except the leaves are like those of the willow--distance 18 miles.

9 S. 26th. Travelled about 18 miles, and missing our road, encamped on the North fork, at noon we passed the best grass I had seen since I left the frontier of Missouri, it was like a meadow, kind of blue grass--found Buffalo, killed three--

S. 27th. Day was warm, road hilly, found no water for 20 miles, encamped on a stream affording grass and timber in abundance, cotton wood &c. found no hard timber.

W. 28. Passed an immense quarry of beautiful white Alabaster, 3 buffalo killed, distance travelled 18 miles, encamped on a little rivulet affording as good water as ever run.

T. 29th. Arrived at the N. fork this evening, road good, distance travelled 15 miles.

W. 30th. Ascended the N. fork about 16 miles and encamped on it. Buffalo in abundance, killed six.

July, T. 1st. Spent the day in passing over the river to the North side of it: the water ran very rapidly, and it was with considerable difficulty that we forded it. One Mule was drowned, and one waggon upset in the river, the water in the N. fork is not so muddy as the South fork.

F. 2nd. Continued to coast up the N. fork, the bottoms of the river were in many places completely covered with Glauber Salts, so much so, that even handfuls could be taken up perfectly white. A man (Mr. Belden) was hunting a short distance from the company, and left his horse tied while he crept in pursuit of a Buffalo, but he was not able to find the same place again and consequently lost his horse. Though the country is perfectly free from timber, excepting near the river, yet there is so great a similarity in the hills that experienced hunters are frequently bewildered in a clear day, when attempting to find a certain place a second time.

S. 3rd. Left the N. fork, a distance of 12 miles took us to a spring of cool, though unpleasantly tasted water. The day was intensely warm, and road mountainous, killed four Buffalo and two deer.

S. 4th. Pursued our way over hills and dales, scorched with heat, came to a small

copse of red willows, from which issued excellent springs of water, three buffalo killed, distance travelled 22 miles.

10 M. 5th. The hills continued to increase in height, after travelling 16 miles we encamped at a noted place called Independence Rock, this is a huge isolated rock covering an Area, perhaps of half a square mile, and rising in shape of an irregular obtuse mound, to the height of 100 feet. It took its name from the celebration of the 4th of July at this place by Capt. Wm. Sublette, and it now bears many names of the early travellers to these regions. Immediately at the base of these rocks, flows a small stream called Sweet Water and is a branch of the N. fork, six Buffalo killed today.

T. 6th. This morning John Gray and Romaine were sent on to Green river to see if there were any Trappers at the rendezvous, and then return to the company with the intelligence, all hands were anxious to have their names inscribed on this memorable land mark, so that we did not start until near noon, went up stream about 8 miles and encamped on Sweet Water.

W. 7th. As we journeyed, the mountains were high and naked, passed a pond that was nearly dried up, perfectly white with Glauber Salts, and in many places two or three inches deep, so that large lumps weighing several pounds were taken up.—Buffalo increased in number, 10 were killed, travelled today about 14 miles.

T. 8th. This morning we came in sight of Wind River mountains, their snow enveloped summits were dimly seen through the misty clouds that obscured the Western horizon, made about 15 miles today and encamped on Sweet Water, in full view of thousands of buffalo, 20 were killed, we now began to lay in meat to last us over the mountains to California.

F. 9th. Travelled about 18 miles, killed ten Buffalo.

S. 10th. Travelled about 14 miles and stopped to kill and dry meat, Buffalo began to grow scarce.

S. 11th. More than half the company sallied forth to kill meat, but the whole, killed but 6 or 7 Buffalo. Remained hunting and drying meat, killed today but 4 or 5 buffalo.

T. 13th. Left our hunting encampment and met John Gray and Romaine returning from Green river, they found no person at the rendezvous on Green river, nor any game ahead, it was therefore thought best to lay in more meat, while we were in the vicinity of the Buffalo. We therefore came to a halt having travelled about 15 miles.

W. 14th. Company engaged in hunting and curing meat.

T. 15th. As many of the company had articles of traffic which they wished to dispose of at Green river, a subscription was raised to recompense any who would go and find the trappers. John Gray started in pursuit of them, while the company marched on slowly waiting his return. Travelled about 6 miles today.

11 F. 16th. Travelled about 10 miles and encamped opposite the wind river Mountains where we were in full view of many lofty peaks glittering with eternal snow and frost under the blaze of a July sun.

S. 17th. Traveled about 5 miles—still on Sweet Water.

S. 18th. Left Sweet Water this morning, course S. W. crossed the divide which separates the water of the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, and after a travel of 20 miles reached Little Sandy, a branch of Green river—1 Buffalo was killed.

M. 19th. 15 miles took us on to Big Sandy, which is likewise a branch of Green river--2 Buffalo were killed.

I. 20th. Traveled about 18 miles in a circuitous direction, first west and then South. Country was extremely dry and dusty--no game seen but a few antelope--encamped on Big Sandy, having come about 18 miles.

W. 21st. Descended Big Sandy about 15 miles and again encamped upon it--no grass, had a little rain this Evening but not enough to lay the dust.

T. 22nd. Descended Big Sandy about 12 miles and stopped where we found plenty of grass--this was very acceptable as our teams were already much jaded for the want of grass. The oxen however stood travel &c. as well as the horses and mules. Gray returned this evening having found Trapp's company, which consisted of about 20 men. They had returned to meet our Company though on their way to hunt Buffalo, and were now encamped on Green river about 8 miles distant. Gray had suffered much in overtaking the Trappers, his mule gave out, there being no water for a great distance, and he, himself was so much reduced by hunger and thirst that he was unable to walk, he was therefore compelled to crawl upon his hands and feet, and at last came up with the Company in the most forlorn situation imaginable--if they had been another half mile farther, he never could have reached them.

F. 23d. Went to Green river--distance 8 miles--spent the remainder of they day trading with the hunters.

S. 24th. Remained at this encampment and continued our traffic with the hunters. Chiles sold his oxen 2 yoke, and wagon, another also was left.

S. 25th. Left the rendezvous this morning, 6 of the company viz. John Gray, Peyton, Frye, Rogers, Jones and Romaine, started to return to the United States. Baker stopped in the Mountains to trap, crossed Greene River and descended it about 8 miles, Trapp and his company likewise left in pursuit of Buffalo.

(Remark) I will not omit to state the prices of several kinds of mountain goods, Powder which is sold by the cupful (pint) is worth \$1 per cup. Lead 1.50, per lb. good mackinaw Blankets 8 to 15 dollars, sugar \$1 per cupful, Pepper \$1 also, Cotton and Calico shirts from 3 to 5\$, Rifles from 30 to 60; in return, you will receive dressed deer-skins at \$3, Pants made of deer skins \$10, Beaver skins \$10 Moccasins \$1; flour sold in the Mts. at 50 cents per cupful, Tobacco at \$2 per lb. Butcher knives from 1 to 3\$, a good gun is worth as much as a horse, a cap lock is preferred, caps worth \$1 per box, We crossed Green river, went about 8 miles down stream and encamped.

THE FIRST EMIGRANT TRAIN TO CALIFORNIA

109 In November or December of 1840, while still teaching school in Platte County, I came across a Frenchman named Roubideaux, who said he had been to California. He had been a trader in New Mexico, and had followed the road traveled by traders from the frontier of Missouri to Santa Fe. He had probably gone through what is now New Mexico and Arizona into California by the Gila River trail used by the Mexicans. His description of California was in the superlative degree favorable, so much so that I resolved if possible to see that wonderful land, and with others helped to get up a meeting at Weston and invited him to make a statement before it in regard to the country. At that time when a man moved out West, as soon as he was fairly settled he wanted to move again, and naturally every question imaginable was asked in regard to this wonderful country. Roubideaux described it as one of perennial spring and boundless fertility, and laid stress on the countless thousands of wild horses and cattle. He told about oranges, and hence must have been at Los Angeles, or the mission of San Gabriel, a few miles from it. Every conceivable question that we could ask him was answered favorably. Generally the first question which a Missourian asked about a country was whether there was any fever and ague. I remember his answer distinctly. He said there was but one man in California that had ever had a chill there, and it was a matter of so much wonderment to the people of Monterey that they went eighteen miles into the country to see him shake. Nothing could have been more satisfactory on the score of health. He said that the Spanish authorities were most friendly, and that the people were the most hospitable on the globe; that you could travel all over California and it would cost you nothing for horses or food. Even the Indians were friendly. His description of the country made it seem like a Paradise.

The result was that we appointed a corresponding secretary, and a committee to report a plan of organization. A pledge was drawn up in which every signer agreed to purchase a suitable outfit, and to rendezvous at Sapling Grove in what is now the State of Kansas, on the 9th of the following May, armed and equipped to cross the Rocky Mountains to California. We called ourselves the Western Emigration Society, and as soon as the pledge was drawn up every one who agreed to come signed his name to it, and it took like wildfire. p. 110--Map "Western Territories in the Forties, showing the principal routes of exploration."/ In a short time, I think within a month, we had about five hundred names; we also had correspondence on the subject with people all over Missouri, and even as far east as Illinois and Kentucky, and as far south as Arkansas. As soon as the movement was announced in the papers we had many letters of inquiry, and we expected people in considerable numbers to join us. About that time we heard of a man living in Jackson County, Missouri, who had received a letter from a person in California named Dr. Marsh, speaking favorably of the country, and a copy of this letter was published.

Our ignorance of the route was complete. We knew that California lay west, and that was the extent of our knowledge. Some of the maps consulted, supposed of course to be correct, showed a lake in the vicinity of where Salt Lake now is; it was represented as a long lake, three or four hundred miles in extent, narrow and with two outlets, both running into the Pacific Ocean, either apparently larger than the Mississippi River. An intelligent man with whom I boarded--Elam Brown, who till recently lived in California, dying when over ninety years of age--possessed a map that showed these rivers to be large, and he advised me to take tools along to make canoes, so that if we found the country so rough that we could not get along with our wagons we could descend one of those rivers to the Pacific. Even Fremont knew nothing about Salt Lake until 1843, when for the first time he explored it and mapped it correctly, his report being first printed, I think, in 1845.

This being the first movement to cross the Rocky Mountains to California, it is not surprising that it suffered reverses before we were fairly started. One of these was the publication of a letter in a New York newspaper giving a depressing

view of the country for which we were all so confidently longing. It seems that in 1837 or 1838 a man by the name of Farnham, a lawyer, went from New York City into the Rocky Mountains for his health. He was an invalid, hopelessly gone with consumption it was thought, and as a last resort he went into the mountains, traveled with the trappers, lived in the open air as the trappers lived, eating only meat as they did, and in two or three years he entirely regained his health; but instead of returning east by way of St. Louis, as he had gone, he went down the Columbia River and took a vessel to Monterey and thence to San Blas, making his way through Mexico to New York. Upon his return--in February or March, 1841-- he published the letter mentioned. His bad opinion of California was based wholly on his unfortunate experience in Monterey, which I will recount.

In 1840 there lived in California an old Rocky Mountaineer by the name of Isaac Graham. He was injudicious in his talk, and by boasting that the United States or Texas would some day take California, he excited the hostility and jealousy of the people. In those days Americans were held in disfavor by the native Californians on account of the war made by Americans in Texas to wrest Texas from Mexico. The number of Americans in California at this time was very small. When I went to California in 1841 all the foreigners--and all were foreigners except Indians and Mexicans--did not, I think, exceed one hundred; nor was the character of all of them the most prepossessing. Some had been trappers in the Rocky Mountains who had not seen civilization for a quarter of a century; others were men who had found their way into California, as Roubideaux had done, by way of Mexico; others still had gone down the Columbia River to Oregon and joined trapping parties in the service of the Hudson Bay Company going from Oregon to California--men who would let their beards grow down to their knees, and wear buckskin garments made and fringed like those of the Indians, and who considered it a compliment to be told "I took ye for an Injin." Another class of men from the Rocky Mountains were in the habit of making their way by the Mohave Desert south of the Sierra Nevada into California to steal horses, sometimes driving off four or five hundred at a time. The other Americans, most numerous perhaps, were sailors who had run away from vessels and remained in the country. With few exceptions this was the character of the American population when I came to California, and they were not generally a class calculated to gain much favor with the people. Farnham happened to come into the bay of Monterey when this fellow Graham and his confederates, and all others whom the Californians suspected, were under arrest in irons on board a vessel, ready for transportation to San Blas in Mexico, whither indeed they were taken, and where some of them died in irons. I am not sure that at this time the English had a consul in California; but the United States had none, and there was no one there to take the part of the Americans. Farnham, being a lawyer, doubtless knew that the proceeding was illegal. He went ashore and protested against it, but without effect, as he was only a private individual. Probably he was there on a burning hot day, and saw only the dreary sandhills to the east of the old town of Monterey. On arriving in New York he published the letter referred to, describing how Americans were oppressed by the native Californians, and how dangerous it was for Americans to go there.

112 The merchants of Platte County had all along protested against our going, and had tried from the beginning to discourage and break up the movement, saying it was the most unheard-of, foolish, wild-goose chase that ever entered into the brain of man for five hundred people to pull up stakes, leave that beautiful country, and go away out to a region that we knew nothing of. But they made little headway until this letter of Farnham's appeared. They republished it in a paper in the town of Liberty in Clay County,--there being no paper published in Platte County,--and sent it broadcast all over the surrounding region. The result was that as the people began to think more seriously about the scheme the membership of the society began dropping off, and so it happened at last that of all the five hundred that signed the pledge I was the only one that got ready; and even I had

hard work to do so, for I had barely means to buy a wagon, a gun, and provisions. Indeed, the man who was going with me, and who was to furnish the horses, backed out, and there I was with my wagon!

During the winter, to keep the project alive, I had made two or three trips into Jackson County, Missouri, crossing the Missouri River, always dangerous in winter when ice was running, by the ferry at Westport Landing, now Kansas City. Sometimes I had to go ten miles farther down--sixty miles from Weston--to a safer ferry at Independence Landing in order to get into Jackson County, to see men who were talking of going to California, and to get information.

113 At the last moment before the time to start for the rendezvous at Sapling Grove --it seemed almost providential--along came a man named George Henshaw, an invalid, from Illinois, I think. He was pretty well dressed, was riding a fine black horse, and had ten or fifteen dollars. I persuaded him to let me take his horse and trade him for a yoke of steers to pull the wagon and a sorry-looking, one-eyed mule for him to ride. We went via Weston to lay in some supplies. One wagon and four or five persons here joined us. On leaving Weston, where there had been so much opposition, we were six or seven in number, and nearly half the town followed us for a mile, and some for five or six miles, to bid us good-by, showing the deep interest felt in our journey. All expressed good wishes and desired to hear from us. When we reached Sapling Grove, the place of rendezvous, in May, 1841, there was but one wagon ahead of us. For the next few days one or two wagons would come each day, and among the recruits were three families from Arkansas. We organized by electing as captain of the company a man named Bartleson from Jackson County, Missouri. He was not the best man for the position, but we were given to understand that if he was not elected captain he would not go; and as he had seven or eight men with him, and we did not want the party diminished, he was chosen. Every one furnished his own supplies. The party consisted of sixty-nine, including men, women, and children. Our teams were of oxen, mules, and horses. We had no cows, as the later emigrants usually had, and the lack of milk was a great deprivation to the children. It was understood that every one should have not less than a barrel of flour with sugar and so forth to suit; but I laid in one hundred pounds of flour more than the usual quantity, besides other things. This I did because we were told that when we got into the mountains we probably would get out of bread and have to live on meat alone, which I thought would kill me even if it did not others. My gun was an old flint-lock rifle, but a good one. Old hunters told me to have nothing to do with cap or percussion locks, that they were unreliable, and that if I got my caps or percussion wet I could not shoot, while if I lost my flint I could pick up another on the plains. I doubt whether there was one hundred dollars in money in the whole party, but all were enthusiastic and anxious to go.

114 In five days after my arrival we were ready to start, but no one knew where to go, not even the captain. Finally a man came up, one of the last to arrive, and announced that a company of Catholic missionaries were on their way from St. Louis to the Flathead nation of Indians with an old Rocky Mountaineer for a guide, and that if we would wait another day they would be up with us. At first we were independent, and thought we could not afford to wait for a slow missionary party. But when we found that no one knew which way to go, we sobered down and waited for them to come up; and it was well we did, for otherwise probably not one of us would ever have reached California, because of our inexperience. Afterwards when we came in contact with Indians our people were so easily excited that if we had not had with us an old mountaineer the result would certainly have been disastrous. The name of the guide was Captain Fitzpatrick; he had been at the head of trapping parties in the Rocky Mountains for many years. He and the missionary party went with us as far as Soda Springs, now in Idaho Territory, whence they turned north to the Flathead nation. The party consisted of three Roman Catholic priests--Father DeSmet, Father Pont, Father Mengarini--and ten or eleven French Canadians,

and accompanying them were an old mountaineer named John Gray and a young Englishman named Romaine, and also a man named Baker. They seemed glad to have us with them, and we certainly were glad to have their company. Father DeSmet had been to the Flathead nation before. He had gone out with a trapping party, and on his return had traveled with only a guide by another route, farther to the north and through hostile tribes. He was genial, of fine presence, and one of the saintliest men I have ever known, and I cannot wonder that the Indians were made to believe him divinely protected. He was a man of great kindness and great affability under all circumstances; nothing seemed to disturb his temper. The Canadians had mules and Red River carts, instead of wagons and horses,--two mules to each cart, five or six of them,--and in case of steep hills they would hitch three or four of the animals to one cart, always working them tandem. Sometimes a cart would go over, breaking everything in it to pieces; and at such times Father DeSmet would be just the same--beaming with good humor.

115 In general our route lay from near Westport, where Kansas City now is, northwesterly over the prairie, crossing several streams, till we struck the Platte River. Then we followed along the south side of the Platte to and a day's journey or so along the South Fork. Here the features of the country became more bold and interesting. Then crossing the South Fork of the Platte, and following up the north side for a day or so, we went over to the North Fork and camped at Ash Hollow; thence up the north side of that fork, passing those noted landmarks known as the Court House Rocks, Chimney Rock, Scott's Bluffs, etc., till we came to Fort Laramie, a trading post of the American Fur Company, near which was Lupton's Fort, belonging, as I understood, to some rival company. Thence after several days we came to another noted landmark called Independence Rock, on a branch of the North Platte called the Sweetwater, which we followed up to the head, soon after striking the Little Sandy, and then the Big Sandy, which empties into Green River. Next we crossed Green River to Black Fork, which we followed up till we came to Ham's Fork, at the head of which we crossed the divide between Green and Bear rivers. Then we followed Bear River down to Soda Springs. The waters of Bear Lake discharged through that river, which we continued to follow down on the west side till we came to Salt Lake. Then we went around the north end of the lake and struck out to the west and southwest.

116 For a time, until we reached the Platte River, one day was much like another. We set forth every morning and camped every night, detailing men to stand guard. Captain Fitzpatrick and the missionary party would generally take the lead and we would follow. Fitzpatrick knew all about the Indian tribes, and when there was any danger we kept in a more compact body, to protect one another. At other times we would be scattered along, sometimes for half a mile or more. We were generally together, because there was often work to be done to avoid delay. We had to make the road, frequently digging down steep banks, filling gulches, removing stones, etc. In such cases everybody would take a spade or do something to help make the road passable. When we camped at night we usually drew the wagons and carts together in a hollow square and picketed our animals inside in the corral. The wagons were common ones and of no special pattern, and some of them were covered. The tongue of one would be fastened to the back of another. To lessen the danger from Indians, we usually had no fires at night and did our cooking in the daytime.

The first incident was a scare that we had from a party of Cheyenne Indians just before we reached the Platte River, about two weeks after we set out. One of our men who chanced to be out hunting, some distance from the company and behind us, suddenly appeared without mule, gun, or pistol, and lacking most of his clothes, and in great excitement reported that he had been surrounded by thousands of Indians. The company, too, became excited, and Captain Fitzpatrick tried, but with little effect, to control and pacify them. Every man started his team into a run, till the oxen, like the mules and horses, were in a full gallop. Captain

Fitzpatrick went ahead and directed them to follow, and as fast as they came to the bank of the river he put the wagons in the form of a hollow square and had all the animals securely picketed within. After a while the Indians came in sight. There were only forty of them, but they were well mounted on horses, and were evidently a war party, for they had no women except one, a medicine woman. They came up and camped within a hundred yards of us on the river below. Fitzpatrick told us that they would not have come in that way if they were hostile. Our hunter in his excitement said that there were thousands of them, and that they had robbed him of his gun, mule, and pistol. When the Indians had put up their lodges Fitzpatrick and John Gray, the old hunter mentioned, went out to them and by signs were made to understand that the Indians did not intend to hurt the man or to take his mule or gun, but that he was so excited when he saw them that they had to disarm him to keep him from shooting them; they did not know what had become of his pistol or of his clothes, which he said they had torn off. They surrendered the mule and the gun, thus showing that they were friendly. They
117 proved to be Cheyenne Indians. Ever afterwards that man went by the name of Cheyenne Dawson.

As soon as we struck the buffalo country we found a new source of interest. Before reaching the Platte we had seen an abundance of antelope and elk, prairie wolves and villages of prairie dogs, but only an occasional buffalo. We now began to kill buffaloes for food, and at the suggestion of John Gray, and following the practice of Rocky Mountain white hunters, our people began to kill them just to get the tongues and the marrow bones, leaving all the rest of the meat on the plains for the wolves to eat. But the Cheyennes, who traveled ahead of us for two or three days, set us a better example. At their camps we noticed that when they killed buffaloes they took all the meat, everything but the bones. Indians were never wasteful of the buffalo except in winter for the sake of the robes, and then only in order to get the whisky which traders offered them in exchange. There is no better beef in the world than that of the buffalo; it is also very good jerked, i. e., cut into strings and thoroughly dried. It was an easy matter to kill buffaloes after we got to where they were numerous, by keeping out of sight and to the leeward of them. I think I can truly say that I saw in that region in one day more buffaloes than I have seen of cattle in all my life. I have seen the plain black with them for several days' journey as far as the eye could reach. They seemed to be coming northward continually from the distant plains to the Platte to get water, and would plunge in and swim across by thousands
118 --so numerous were they that they changed not only the color of the water, but its taste, until it was unfit to drink; but we had to use it. One night when we were encamped on the South Fork of the Platte they came in such droves that we had to sit up and fire guns and make what fires we could to keep them from running over us and trampling us into the dust. We were obliged to go out some distance from camp to turn them: Captain Fitzpatrick told us that if we did not do this the buffaloes in front could not turn aside for the pressure of those behind. We could hear them thundering all night long; the ground fairly trembled with vast approaching bands; and if they had not been diverted, wagons, animals, and emigrants would have been trodden under their feet. One cannot nowadays describe the rush and wildness of the thing. A strange feature was that when old oxen, tired and foot-sore, got among a buffalo herd, as they sometimes would in the night, they would soon become as wild as the wildest buffalo; and if ever recovered it was because they could not run so fast as the buffaloes or one's horse. The ground over which the herds trampled was left rather barren, but buffalo-grass being short and curling, in traveling over it they did not cut it up as much as they would other kinds.

On the Platte River, on the afternoon of one of the hottest days we experienced on the plains, we had a taste of a cyclone: first came a terrific shower, followed by a fall of hail to the depth of four inches, some of the stones being as large

as turkeys' eggs; and the next day a waterspout--an angry, huge, whirling cloud column, which seemed to draw its water from the Platte River--passed within a quarter of a mile behind us. We stopped and braced ourselves against our wagons to keep them from being overturned. Had it struck us it doubtless would have demolished us.

Above the junction of the forks of the Platte we continued to pass notable natural formations--first O'Fallon's Bluffs, then Court House Rocks, a group of fantastic shapes to which some of our party started to go. After they had gone what seemed fifteen or twenty miles the huge pile looked just as far off as when they started, and so they turned and came back--so deceptive are distances in the clear atmosphere of the Rocky Mountains. A noted landmark on the North Fork, which we sighted fifty miles away, was Chimney Rock. It was then nearly square, and I think it must have been fifty feet higher than now, though after we passed it a portion of it fell off. Scott's Bluffs are known to emigrants for their picturesqueness. These formations, like those first mentioned, are composed of 119 indurated yellow clay or soft sand rock; they are washed and broken into all sorts of fantastic forms by the rains and storms of ages, and have the appearance of an immense city of towers and castles. They are quite difficult to explore, as I learned by experience in an effort to pursue and kill mountain sheep or bighorn. These were seen in great numbers, but we failed to kill any, as they inhabit places almost inaccessible and are exceedingly wild.

As we ascended the Platte buffaloes became scarcer, and on the Sweetwater none were to be seen. Now appeared in the distance to the north of west, gleaming under its mantle of perpetual snow, that lofty range known as the Wind River Mountains. It was the first time I had seen snow in summer; some of the peaks were very precipitous, and the view was altogether most impressive. Guided by Fitzpatrick, we crossed the Rockies at or near the South Pass, where the mountains were apparently low. Some years before a man named William Subletts, an Indian fur trader, went to the Rocky Mountains with goods in wagons, and those were the only wagons that had ever been there before us; sometimes we came across the tracks, but generally they were obliterated, and thus were of no service. Approaching Green River in the Rocky Mountains, it was found that some of the wagons, including Captain Bartleson's, had alcohol on board, and that the owners wanted to find trappers in the Rocky Mountains to whom they might sell it. This was a surprise to many of us, as there had been no drinking on the way. John Gray was sent ahead to see if he could find a trapping party, and he was instructed, if successful, to have them come to a certain place on Green River. He struck a trail, and overtook a party on their way to the buffalo region to lay in provisions, i. e., buffalo meat, and they returned, and came and camped on Green River very soon after our arrival, buying the greater part, if not all, of the alcohol, it first having been diluted so as to make what they called whisky--three or four gallons of water to a gallon of alcohol. Years afterwards we heard of the fate of that party: they were attacked by Indians the very first night after they left us and several of them killed, including the captain of the trapping party whose name was Frapp. The whisky was probably the cause.

120 Several years ago when I was going down Weber Canon, approaching Salt Lake, swiftly borne along on an observation car amid cliffs and over rushing streams, something said that night at the camp-fire on Green River was forcibly recalled to mind. We had in our party an illiterate fellow named Bill Overton, who in the evening at one of the camp-fires loudly declared that nothing in his life had ever surprised him. Of course that raised a dispute. "Never surprised in your life?" "No, I never was surprised." And, moreover, he swore that nothing ever could surprise him. "I should not be surprised," said he, "if I were to see a steamboat come plowing over these mountains this minute." In rattling down the canon of Weber River it occurred to me that the reality was almost equal to Bill Overton's extravaganza, and I could but wonder what he would have said had he suddenly come upon this modern scene.

As I have said, at Soda Springs--at the northernmost bend of Bear River--our party separated. It was a bright and lovely place. The abundance of soda water, including the intermittent gushing so-called Steamboat Spring; the beautiful fir and cedar covered hills; the huge piles of red or brown sinter, the result of fountains once active but then dry--all these, together with the river, lent a charm to its wild beauty and made the spot a notable one. Here the missionary party were to turn north and go into the Flathead nation. Fort Hall, about forty miles distant on Snake River, lay on their route. There was no road; but something like a trail, doubtless used by the trappers, led in that direction. From Fort Hall there was also a trail down Snake River, by which trapping parties reached the Columbia River and Fort Vancouver, the headquarters of the Hudson Bay Company.

Our party, originally sixty-nine, including women and children, had become lessened to sixty-four in number. One had accidentally shot and killed himself at the forks of the Platte. Another of our party, named Simpson, had left us at Fort Laramie. Three had turned back from Green River, intending to make their way to Fort Bridger and await an opportunity to return home. Their names were Peyton, Rodgers, and Amos E. Frye. Thirty-two of our party, becoming discouraged, decided not to venture without path or guide into the unknown and trackless region towards California, but concluded to go with the missionary party to Fort Hall and thence find their way down Snake and Columbia rivers into Oregon.¹ The rest of us--also thirty-two in number, including Benjamin Kelsey, his wife and little daughter--remained firm, refusing to be diverted from our original purpose of going direct to California. After getting all the information we could from Captain Fitzpatrick, we regretfully bade good-by to our fellow emigrants and to Father De Smet and his party.

¹Of the party leaving us at Soda Springs to go into Oregon I can now, after the lapse of forty-nine years, recall by their names only the following: Mr. Williams and wife; Samuel Kelsey, his wife and five children; Josiah Kelsey and wife; C. W. Flugge; Mr. Carroll; Mr. Fowler; a Methodist Episcopal preacher, whose name I think was also Williams; "Cheyenne Dawson"; and another called "Bear Dawson." Subsequently we heard that the party safely arrived in Oregon, and some of them we saw in California. One (C. W. Flugge) was in time to join a party and come from Oregon to California the same year (1841).

"The First Emigrant Train to California,"
by John Bidwell (Pioneer of '41), Century Magazine.

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