



FORT EDWARDS, 1830.  
From original etching made by a grandson of Major John Renele Wilcox, commandant of the forts on the Mississippi river.

# Pen Pictures of Early Western Days

VIRGINIA WILCOX IVINS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY WM. S. IVINS

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agent, Mr. Daniel Hine, to take me on board, paid a dollar for my passage and reached Warsaw at eleven o'clock that night more dead than alive, as I had been sick all day from the rolling of the coach.

In 1848 the house on the corner of First and Johnston street, built by James Ivins, was sold by him to his brother, Charles Ivins, who remodeled it into a hotel, having leased to a Mr. Emery, who died before getting it into running order, leaving his widow with small means. Mr. Ivins kindly released her of the responsibility and while waiting for a tenant kept the house open himself, his son, William S. Ivins, taking temporary charge. As time went on no renter was found and Mr. Charles Ivins' family kept the house themselves for almost four years, giving it the name of the Ivins House. It was a most comfortable place for the times. Many of the old residents put up there on their first arrival in town. I could name forty or fifty prominent men who made their first home in Keokuk at the Ivins House. Many young men boarded there and it was very lively with parties, rides, walks and other amusements. In 1855 it was sold to a man by the name of Bunel who kept it for a number of years.

Steamboats were really more numerous then than they are at present. A line of elegant packets had been established between here and St. Louis,

one of which was a remarkable blower and was quite appropriately named the Boreas, whose escape puff could be heard from Canton, twenty miles away; this may seem incredible but it is absolutely true; I have heard it many times and oft. Most of the others could be heard four or five miles; it was before the introduction of steam whistles and they were all high pressure engines.

Weddings were of frequent occurrence here, but many of the young men went away "for the girls they left behind them." Mrs. Emery opened a boarding house on Second street between Main and Johnson streets, and here it was quite the fashion for the newly married people to board. Among these I remember Capt. C. F. Conn and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Charles McDonald, Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Rankin, Judge and Mrs. James M. Love, Capt. Charles Morrison and wife, and Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Comstock, besides some others not so youthful who made their first married home with Mrs. Emery.

Mr. and Mrs. Abram Chittenden and Mr. and Mrs. William McGavie lived in apartments over their store on Water street. They were leaders in much of the gaiety, in most of which I participated until our departure for the West, four years after my marriage to Mr. William S. Ivins.

Ivins '53

## CHAPTER VIII.



NOTABLE epoch was marked in the history of the United States by the opening of California to settlers, and in the year 1849 the discovery of gold made the emigration great, but in the year 1853 the exodus of enthusiastic emigrants from the states to the

Pacific slope had reached its height. Not only had the wonderful gold deposits of California been developed, but the remarkable agricultural resources of the whole western slope had been demonstrated and an all absorbing interest in that far off Eldorado and land of sunshine pervaded the entire country, more marked perhaps throughout the Mississippi valley where thousands looked longingly towards that Golden Sunset Land, finally to turn resolutely Westward Ho, all undaunted by the besetting dangers of the overland journey or the perils of the tedious voyage around Cape Horn. Among these my husband and I decided upon the former mode of travel as being the quicker and perhaps less dangerous.

Blessed with the fearlessness of youth we started bravely forth to seek fortune and a new home with but slight conception of the dangers, difficulties and

hardships we were to encounter and knowing little of the sterner realities of life upon the more remote frontier.

The time of our departure was in the spring of the year as early as the weather would permit.

The previous winter months were spent by myself in busy preparations for the journey, in contriving suitable clothing for my husband, myself and for my little boy of a year old and in putting up such preserves, pickles and other delicacies as could be kept to become most acceptable when afterwards compelled to partake of cold meals as we often were throughout our trip.

Aside from these the provisions were such as were used in army life and consisted of ham, bacon, smoked beef and venison, crackers, hard bread and flour, tea, coffee and sugar, beans, rice, lard and butter, molasses, vinegar and other condiments. No vegetables were taken, the process of canning being then unknown, but a large fruit cake was put in for high feasts, together with wine, brandy and medicine.

My husband occupied most of the winter in purchasing a drove of cattle and such horses as he would need, in breaking oxen to the yoke and in fitting up the wagons of the outfit, three in number, which were worthy of description.

They were strong and heavy, not unlike those in present use on the farm and often met with on

country roads. The wagon boxes were divided into compartments and packed with the supplies not in daily use, and above these they were floored or decked over. To these decks were attached the bows upon which were stretched heavy duck covers.

To this extent the wagons were identical, excepting mine, which was called the house wagon, to which a more extended description will be accorded later. The baggage wagon was stored with bedding and articles in daily use consisting mainly of the camping outfit, tent, stove, etc., extra yokes and chains with two large cans for carrying water on the desert. These with the addition of the drovers' baggage filled every available space.

The second wagon was reserved to the use of Dr. and Mrs. Galland, my uncle and aunt, who had decided at a late moment to accompany us, being unwilling that I should undertake the journey with no other woman in the party. This was made as comfortable as possible, in fact quite cosy. The third, the house wagon, differed only from the others only in construction of the decking which extended out over the wheels, making the interior quite roomy. Its width accommodated a large hair mattress and bed with pillows, bolsters, etc. Back of these at the head of the bed was room for a side saddle and a large box for clothing, which could be used for a table when meals were taken in the wagon. At the forward end was a wide spring seat

with cushions and buffalo robes. The forward compartment beneath the deck was made readily accessible by means of a trap door, where we always kept some provisions and such articles as might be needed in an emergency, with a small can of water sufficient for two days' consumption. The back board was arranged to let down with chains so as to form a cupboard wherein were stored provisions for daily use, and was most convenient when preparing meals. The wagon top was lined with thick comforts making it impervious to wind and weather, and from the center swung a large lantern. Along the sides were long boxes like window gardens where were kept sewing materials and various odds and ends dear to the housewife's heart. Above these suspended to the bows by straps hung a shot gun with flasks and horns of ammunition. The fire arms were kept loaded until an accidental discharge of the gun engendered a greater degree of caution, but of this more anon. We are yet many days and hundreds of miles from this point in our chronicle, and it were ill to anticipate.

By the first of April everything was in readiness and the party made up, consisting of my uncle and aunt, my husband and myself and little boy, five drovers and a young German cook; in all ten adults and one child. Some few days were spent in arranging the last details and on the fifth of the month the start was made.

The day was anything but auspicious, the chill east wind blew a gale and the occasional gleams of sunshine that struggled through the dull and leaden sky only served to accentuate the gloomy and bleak desolation that pervaded the scene. But the hearts of the little band were brave and hopeful and the farewells were cheerily said. The wagons were started in the forenoon in charge of the men going out some ten miles to a point where the cattle were herded, and my uncle and aunt with Mr. Ivins and myself and baby boy went out later to spend the night at the farm house and be ready for an early start in the morning.

The following morning, April sixth, the regular line of march was taken up and the eventful journey of many months of danger, hardship and privation was well under way.

Heading the little train was the house wagon, then followed respectively the wagon of my uncle and aunt, the baggage wagon and lastly the cattle, a hundred of them with the drovers in the saddle. Everything was new and bright and during the first few days presented quite an imposing appearance.

The roads were almost impassable; for weeks it had rained almost unremittingly and they had become rivers and lakes of mud and mire that became worse as the train pushed on. Ten miles a day was the greatest possible distance made, and

would make ten yoke of oxen to a wagon, to pull them out of the mud holes and ruts while the rain came down in torrents.

The train halted at night where good pasture could be obtained for the stock, the family stopping at farm houses with the drovers camping, for whom Carl, the German cook, prepared meals.

On Sunday, April ninth, we reached Oskaloosa, the drive through town being made as the church bells were ringing for morning service. The sound filled my heart with longing for friends at home who were worshipping in the dear little church which would know us no more for years, but no regrets were spoken and we moved on at a snail's pace.

To add to the general depression my little boy was attacked with congestion of the lungs and the train laid by at a place called What Cheer with but small hopes of his recovery, but fortunately my uncle was a skillful physician and brought him through when death seemed almost inevitable. We were not comfortable at the inn and my uncle thought best to move on and carry the little one on a pillow, so we proceeded on our way, some one walking and carrying him for many days. However, the change seemed to be of benefit and he recovered rapidly.

## CHAPTER IX.



THE State of Iowa is three hundred miles across, the road leading up a divide between two or three inland streams and through a fine country, but still made dreary by the cold rains of the early spring. Passing farms and villages, fording creeks and ferrying rivers; April seventeenth we reached the Fabian river, where for the first time it was necessary to camp and sleep in the wagons. Here Mr. Ivins found it advisable to substitute fresher oxen, for those driven were very tired. It was distressing to witness the struggles of the poor beasts to keep from being yoked, but after hours of hard work it was accomplished and we drove down a steep hill expecting to ford the stream and drive right on. What was our disappointment, however, to find the river so swollen by the rains as to be impassable except in a dug out made of a hollow log. Here was a dilemma; fortunately the cattle could swim and some of the men had to do the same in order to keep them together, but how to get the wagons and family over was the question. However, Mr. Ivins soon devised a way.

Unloading the lumber wagon he launched it like

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a boat, then taking the family in it he towed it some distance up the stream and floated it across guided by himself in the dug out. In this way by many successive trips the whole outfit was gotten over. It was sundown when the last load was landed. My uncle, who was not much of a water man, was thrown into the stream by the upsetting of the dug out early in the fray, but fortunately with no serious consequences. The fire was made and Carl got supper while my aunt and I made the beds and cared for the baby for the night; and a more weary party never sought their downy couches.

The next few days were quite monotonous, the usual routine in camp and the steady gait of the oxen on the road brought us to Council Bluffs April twenty-first where we stopped a short distance out of the town pasturing the drove, while the family staid at the farm house and the men camped in the yard. Here we remained nine days.

Not being suited with his help, Mr. Ivins changed here for an entirely new set of men, all excepting Carl, and the final preparations were made, for our road now lay beyond civilization.

After a good rest at Council Bluffs we were quite ready for the forward move and on the morning of May first the little train was again in motion, driving through the streets of the town and across the wide flat to the Missouri river to be ferried over.

On reaching the flat we found, however, that there were at least five hundred wagons before us with thousands of cattle waiting to cross and were told that we must wait our turn, which probably would not come for several days. My husband was in no mood for waiting, so watching his opportunity he rushed in while some slower person was getting ready and before night we were on the Nebraska side and made our camp where the city of Omaha is now situated. To celebrate our fortunate start we killed a fine calf and feasted on the last fresh meat we had for three months, excepting occasionally when some one would kill a jack rabbit or a sage hen, although they were not very plentiful.

At an early hour on the morning of May second we took up our line of march toward the Golden West on the broad well beaten road, which was lined with vehicles of every description, cattle, horses, sheep and mules with men, women and children walking to save the beasts of burden. We were almost always in sight of trains for the first five hundred miles, further on as the roads branched off leading to different points or passes we were more alone.

It was a bright, beautiful morning and our courage was renewed by having made so successful a start west of the Missouri river. After luncheon Mr. Ivins went ahead to arrange about crossing the

Elk Horn river, which is the first branch of the Platte on the north side, as our road was to take us that way. He also would look for a convenient camping ground for the night. He had been gone but a short time when the sky became overcast and a fearful storm arose with wind, rain and hail which came down in torrents. The train had to be stopped and the oxen turned around to be sheltered by the wagons, while the men crept under them for protection. I was lying down with my little boy unheeding the storm and was singing as was my usual habit, but could hear the poor drovers below me complaining and bewailing their lot in no mild terms. Suddenly one of them exclaimed, "By George! if she ain't a singin'!" My song ceased at once; not so with the storm which lasted over an hour; then the sun came out and we proceeded on our journey but did not reach Elk Horn till after dark, where we found Mr. Ivins waiting for us and anxious at our delay. He had selected a good camp ground and we were soon arranged for the night, but had to be content with a cold supper as we had nothing for fuel. From this on for hundreds of miles our only fuel was sage brush and buffalo chips which are anything but pleasant to burn.

As soon as Mr. Ivins came into the wagon he said: "Well, whom do you think are here? The Crams. I have just come from their tent where I left Mr. Cram with his horse and pack."

her standing on the only dry spot in the tent holding a bird cage and the girl trying to get supper." Now the Cram train had been a source of much worry to me and so deserves a special explanation.

## CHAPTER X.



Cram's train consisted of a party from our home town of Keokuk and was composed of six persons besides drivers and servants. They were Mr. and Mrs. Cram, Mr. and Mrs. George, and Mr. and Mrs. Nense. The first two ladies were sisters and had been dear friends of mine from childhood. During the winter we had planned to go west together. But as Mr. Ivins arranged to take a drove of cattle and Mr. Cram wanted to go with horses and spend less time on the trip, we gave up traveling together, only promising to see as much of each other as possible on the first part of the journey, but of course later on we would be far behind. Three months would be the limit to their trip, while to ours there was none, with every prospect of a tedious journey.

The contrast was just as great between our mode of preparation. Their train consisted of three large heavy covered spring wagons painted black, such as were used by the old stage lines for mud wagons in winter. They were somewhat like an ambulance but opened at the side with the driver's seat in front. There were folding beds inside,

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64 *Pen Pictures of Early Western Days.*

leaving room for small chairs and sewing tables, work baskets, bird cages and pretty knick knacks around; and the women were tastefully dressed, and had a good girl to do the cooking, and taking all together they were very stylish. Mr. Cram rode a white mule with jingling accoutrements, and they had an elegant marquee tent and camp equipage which was carried in a lumber wagon, and all were drawn by fine horses; and really they were "no end of swell," and the contrast worried me not a little.

The ladies of the party did not cross the state of Iowa in the wagons, but went to St. Louis by boat and thence up the Missouri river on the large steamer Kentucky which was owned by Mrs. Cram's father, he taking it to Council Bluffs to be used as a ferry boat during the rush of emigration. They had been at Council Bluffs two weeks. Their journey so far had been a pleasure trip only, as they had remained on the boat waiting for the water to subside. Their wagons were ferried across the same day with ours, but before noon. They had driven out as far as Elk Horn where they were again waiting their turn to be ferried over. This might not come for days as there were hundreds there before them waiting for the same thing.

The river had overflowed its banks and the water extended for miles on the other side of the river. So far we seemed the more fortunate, and I quite congratulated myself that my house was

*Pen Pictures of Early Western Days.* 65

at least dry, although it had only a duck cover. My little Dutchman was becoming most reliable and trustworthy and not at all afraid of the weather. While on the road he took care of my little boy, and in camp took entire charge; and I will say now that he was a true, faithful friend when friends were scarce, never faltering in his affectionate care for me and mine. May success and happiness attend him wherever he may be.

We retired early and after a good night's rest awoke by times in the morning; upon looking out I saw a perfect sea of white wagon tops and exclaimed: "Oh! we shall be so long waiting our turn to be ferried over." My husband replied: "I do not intend to wait," and started out to reconnoiter; soon returning in great haste, he said: "If you will hurry we can get across before any one else is ready." Things were just thrown into the wagons, and we were so fortunate as to be the first to be ferried, because we were for once the early birds. Mr. Ivins then went back and had the cattle driven into the stream some distance below, where, by keeping them away from the shore, they at last struck out for the other side, soon reaching it in safety, where the drovers herded them till the wagons were ready to start.

We drove on about five miles to high ground where we camped for the rest of the day, but no Cram train came in sight before we had

next stream to cross was Loup Fork, the second longest branch of the Platte; this we did, however, without difficulty. The cattle had learned what was expected of them when driven into the water, and at once made for the other shore where we camped for that night.

The morning of May fifth saw us moving on at the usual rate of about twenty-five miles a day. We stopped at noon for luncheon after which I decided to ride on horse back, which I often did in the earlier stages of the journey. My uncle rode most of the time, so I always had company. After I had mounted Mr. Ivins asked me to go and start up some of the drove which had lagged. The horse knew just how to do that so it would be no trouble. I saw that the saddle girth needed tightening and called to one of the men to come and fix it. He ran towards me throwing up his hands and calling me to hold on. This startled the horse which at once began stepping backwards, the saddle slipping with every step, and before I could stop him I was on the ground with his great hoof just coming down on my face. My arm was up holding on to the bridle. I let go of this and pushed his foot with all my might, taking the skin off my arm from the elbow to the wrist. I succeeded, however, in keeping him from stepping full on my face, but for weeks I was greatly disfigured with my blackened eyes and swollen nose. My ride was postponed for

that day; the excitement was great in the small party for I was a most important personage in their estimation, especially that of my husband, for we were like boy and girl starting out to seek our fortunes, I being at that time only twenty, and he just a few years older. A few days afterwards, however, I would have my ride, making another attempt in company with my uncle. The guide book said that after leaving Loup Fork there were no more trees for five hundred miles. We were quite skeptical and were sure that a clump of green some distance from the road must be trees, so we proceeded to investigate, riding off in great glee. It proved to be a ledge of rocks covered with bushes, and to our consternation an immense gray wolf walked out to meet us. We were not slow in getting back to the road, quite willing in the future to accept the guide book.

The whole country as far as the eye could reach was composed of low sand hills covered with coarse grass, cactus and sage brush, with the Platte on one side, along whose banks the road led most of the time. We could see the emigrant trains on the road on the south side of the river. On one occasion, looking across we saw a large herd of buffalo come rushing down a hill towards the river, trampling down both train and people in its mad career, and on into the river before they could escape. Many

persons must have been injured, but we could not ascertain if such were the case.

The Platte is a most peculiar river. On stooping down and looking across the water seems to round up like an over-filled goblet, and has a smoky taste like buckskin tanned by the Indians.

We were in the midst of the rainy season, and every afternoon were treated to the most terrific thunder storms I ever witnessed, which came up about four o'clock, the thunder and lightning snapping and cracking around like whip cords. Unless we camped early supper was out of the question, and on many nights a cold colation had to satisfy us. One night in particular the storm was so violent that the men could not guard the cattle. Since leaving Loup Fork we had been warned to beware of Indians and it was safer to have a guard, but this night it was given up. We seemed to be right in among the clouds, and in the morning passed two newly made graves of men who were killed by lightning the night before. We traveled on at the usual rate for several days without incident. Neither Carl or I knew how to make bread, and we were very tired of batter cakes and poor, heavy biscuits. One evening we camped near a very nice looking family. The woman was baking bread and it looked most tempting. I thought, what a fine thing it would be if we could have such bread. So I took courage and called on my neighbor of the night to

ask for information. She seemed quite willing to teach me and gave me some yeast with instructions how to use it. As I never kept house it was not strange that I did not know. We had thrown our stove away and had no way to bake except in a reflector and the wind always blew into that whichever way it came, making things taste of sage, and the flavor was anything but good; all of which I stated in pretty strong terms. She then offered me a Dutch oven which she said was too large for her use, which I gladly accepted. She also supplied me with yeast sufficient to last me all summer with care. I went home in triumph; sent Carl after the Dutch oven, and at once proceeded to try my hand at the new method. I did just as my kind neighbor directed, and in the morning had two loaves of elegant bread which Carl baked by making little fires of sage twigs on the lid and under the oven, which did not look as if they were doing any good, but the bread came out a beautiful brown. After that Carl improved on the teacher, made his sponge and bread over night, punched it down a little in the morning and baked one loaf while he was getting breakfast and another while we were eating and getting ready to start. I never saw such bread or tasted any as good before, and never expect to again. Upon the whole we were having rather a good time; were all well, were becoming inured to privations, and things were moving along quite satisfactorily.

**B**y this time we had reached a point opposite Grand Island, Neb. After a long day's drive, had camped near the river, supper was over, the guards stationed, and we had all retired with no expectation of danger or harm.

All was quiet until about midnight, when suddenly without any warning or apparent cause, the whole one hundred head of cattle started up, went wild and stampeded, running right over the guards in their frenzy, and were off like the wind. The noise was like the roar of Niagara for a few minutes, and then all was silent. The guards followed and the other men joined in the chase, leaving my uncle and aunt and me quite alone in the camp. After hours of running they brought back about sixty, all the others having escaped entirely. There was no more sleep for them or us that night. The poor creatures seemed perfectly terror stricken, and it took the whole force to keep them from rushing off again. When daylight came, however, their fears seemed to subside. As soon as it was light in the morning Mr. Ivins prepared to go in search of those that were lost. Selecting his most reliable man, Clark by name, he made ready for



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*Pen Pictures of Early Western Days.* 71

a three days' journey. No entreaties of mine could dissuade him and he assured me there was no danger, but I could not be convinced. After exhausting all persuasion in vain I had Carl put up a hamper of food, as much as they could carry, for the horses were so completely worn out with the night's chase that they were obliged to go on foot. So taking the hamper and a roll of blankets they departed on their perilous expedition. Going directly away from the road they plunged at once into the wild unexplored country, filled with buffalo, wolves and the more terrible hostile Indians. It was with a heavy heart I saw my husband start on that fearful journey, but to him fear was unknown, and he laughed at my anxiety. They soon found the trail of the cattle, which they followed steadily all day, at night sleeping on the ground. As soon as it was light they resumed their way, at a rapid gait, still keeping their eyes on the ground and beginning to have hopes of overtaking them.

They had walked in this way till about four o'clock in the afternoon, when for some cause Mr. Ivins raised his head, and glancing around he saw silently following them five Indians, and exclaimed: "My God, Clark, look at the Indians!"

The savages on seeing that they were discovered, drew up their guns and took aim at the two men, but did not fire, as my husband beckoned to them to come near. They rushed up and danced a war

dance around their prisoners, whooping and yelling like mad. Mr. Ivins pretended to think them friendly and explained to them by signs that he was hunting cattle, representing the horns and manner of running. They gave him to understand that they had seen them in a certain direction, and ordered the two men to move on with them. My husband refused but they pointed their guns at them again, in a most threatening manner, and he concluded that "discretion was the better part of valor," so they walked on until the sun was almost down. Again Mr. Ivins halted and signified his intention of having supper, and began building a fire. The Indians still insisted upon his going on, but he would not look at them and pretended not to understand. As soon as the fire blazed up one of the Indians kicked it out and cocking his gun ordered Mr. Ivins to march in no gentle terms, so on they went till almost dark and the usual storm was arising. Finally, reaching a small creek where there were willows, they held a council and deciding to camp began cutting willows for a wigwam. Mr. Ivins was heavily armed with a six shooter and large bowie knife and he at once began cutting willows, using his bowie knife which was bright and sharp. One of the Indians wanted to take it. Mr. Ivins gave it to him as a matter of course. He examined it closely, then taking a willow sapling cut it into small pieces, exclaiming with every stroke, "Whoo!" After my husband thought he had used it long enough, he

took it and again assisted in building the wigwam. The frame work being finished they took Mr. Ivins' blankets to line it and made quite a shelter. However, it was small protection against the Nebraska storms. The Indians then examined the hamper and took what food they wanted, discarding the pork, which they called "coche," but eating all the other kinds. Supper over, they went into the wigwam taking their prisoners with them, and laid down placing the two men between them.

By this time the rain came down in torrents and the water was soon six inches deep where they lay. The Indians with scanty clothing suffered terribly, grunting and groaning constantly. It was as dark as Egypt and as dreary. In the middle of the night, without the slightest apparent cause, they gave simultaneously the most terrific whoop, and sprang up dragging their captives out of the wigwam with the evident intention of dispatching them. As soon as they were released Mr. Ivins told Clark to get back into the wigwam as rapidly as possible, and he did the same. One of the Indians remained in the wigwam, and to this circumstance they probably owed their lives at that time, as had they fired into the tent they were in danger of killing their partner. In a little while the rascals crept back and laid down, but there was no more sleep.

When the sun rose bright and clear they got up and made a breakfast out of the provisions left in

74 Pen Pictures of Early Western Days.

the hamper, but seemed in no hurry to resume their journey. One of their number amused himself by representing to Mr. Ivins how they would shoot and scalp them, going through the motions with great gusto. Mr. Ivins pretended to think it a joke and laughed with him. They asked how many times his revolver would shoot, and he explained that it was one more times than there were Indians.

My husband instructed Clark that if an attack were made upon them that he should jump at one Indian and grab his gun, shoot another and that he would manage the other three. The villains, however, knew nothing of this. About eleven o'clock in the morning Mr. Ivins made up his mind that it was time to get away, so endeavored to make them understand that he must go to his wife and baby on the road.

He showed them his ammunition, and proceeded to divide with them, giving to each and shaking the flasks to show that he had given them an equal share. He also took a paper of pins, which he had in his pocket, giving some to each one; they were so pleased with these, sticking them all over their blankets.

He now directed Clark to take down the blankets and roll them up and be ready to start. One of the Indians wanted part of one of the blankets for leggings; upon Clark refusing to let him have it he became greatly enraged. Mr. Ivins seeing this made

Pen Pictures of Early Western Days. 75

the blanket from Clark as if he, too, were offended and cut in two just as his honor wanted, giving him his choice of the pieces, upon which he became much interested in arranging them, and went some little distance off. This one seemed to be the chief and was the most overhearing.

Mr. Ivins now saw that this was their opportunity, so told Clark to start on and not look back. As he started my husband shook hands with each one, said good-bye and walked after his companion. He went rapidly, not looking back for fear of orders to return, but expecting a bullet every minute; nevertheless kept straight on until he was beyond gunshot, when, glancing back, he saw the Indians huddled together talking and wildly gesticulating, all excepting the cross one who was still engaged with his costume. Just then the two men went over a small rise of ground; they immediately started into a run and kept that pace for many miles. My husband was convinced that the Indians fully intended to shoot them, but were deterred from doing so by his kindly treatment of them. Of course, if they had looked back and disobeyed orders it would have given an excuse for firing upon them.



Pen Pictures

76 All day the two men steadily pursued their way, having given up the idea of going further to look for the cattle, which were too far away by this time. All day they walked over plains and sand hills covered with sage brush and cactus, until their feet almost gave out and their boots became unbearable. Mr. Ivins discarding his walked in his stockings feet till they were worn out, and then in his bare feet, which were filled with the needles of the cactus. Still they toiled on, passing hundreds of buffalo who would just look at them, and not quit grazing or even rise if lying down.

Mr. Ivins had taken his course towards Platte river, guided only by the wind. It was a cloudy afternoon and he had no other means of judging the points of the compass. A dozen times Clark stopped, refusing to proceed further in that direction, declaring that they were going away from the road, but as my husband kept on he would follow, not daring to be left alone or wishing to desert his companion.

About nine o'clock that night they found the road, striking it about fifteen miles ahead of where

77 they left us. Mr. Ivins directed us before leaving that we should travel about five miles each day during his absence, not anticipating the difficulties that would beset us. The first day we had gone the allotted distance and camped again on the bank of the river. Supper was over, and as all seemed quiet we ~~left~~ felt quite secure; but for fear of another stampede we had stationed the wagons at right angles with the river, that forming one side, with chains fastened securely from the wheels of the three, thus making a sort of fence, the open side to be guarded by the men; then I had twelve yoke of oxen yoked up and chained to the wheels. Into the hollow square I had the cattle and horses driven. The guards took their places and the family went to their quarters. I could not sleep, so did not get to bed and was reading. About midnight, just as the night before, there was a sudden rush, right over the guards and away went the cattle again like the wind. Those chained to the wheels ripped and tore in their mad frenzy, and I thought they would take the wheels off in their terror, but they were securely chained and after a while calmed down. It was not a pleasant experience to be in the wagons while they tugged with such force as to almost pull them to pieces. When they became quiet I looked out. Nothing was to be seen or heard but the breathing of the poor frightened creatures; all the others were gone and the men following on horses and on foot. Towards morning they

78 came driving them all back, none having gotten away that night.

We had an early breakfast and started, thinking it better to have them on the road than to stay in one place. As yet there was no news of my husband and I was very uneasy about him. The poor animals were nearly worn out, so we took a long rest at noon, then made a short drive and camped some distance from the river, quite near the road. That night, with the exception of the regular storm which was not severe, was more restful to the most of the train, but my anxiety increased when no word came from my husband who was out in that desolate country in such great danger.

The next day we made the appointed five miles, camping as before, but away from the river, near the road. The cattle were becoming more quiet, and we hoped that the worst was over, but before we could have supper the usual storm broke in all its fury. The tent was blown down, the thunder and lightning were so terrific that the men could not guard the stock, the rain and hail came down in sheets and darkness settled down on us like a pall. My poor husband was away with no protection, where I did not know, and my distress cannot be described. If there were only something that I could do it might be some relief, so I tried to keep a beacon light for him, with a lantern raised on a wagon tongue, which the wind blew down as often as we propped it up.

79

After a while the camp became silent and the gloom deepened. Alone with my baby boy in the wagon I fully realized the situation, and was certain that I should never see my husband again. As the hours wore on I became almost frantic. My aunt hearing my sobs tried to comfort me with loving words, but both she and my uncle were old people and could not come to me in the fearful storm.

My senses were unusually acute and about two o'clock I thought that I heard a faint hello. I listened; it was repeated, and now surely it was a call. I sprang to the front of my wagon, dashed up the curtain and shouted with all the strength of my not weak lungs, again and again; and truly it was a call nearer, and I knew the voice of my poor husband. It was some little time before they reached the camp, and when he came into the wagon our meeting was very silent. We could not talk then, and it was a long time before he told me of all his dreadful trip and truly wonderful escape.

I got out dry clothes for him, bathed his head, and oiled his face which was blistered, bathed his poor feet, and tried in every way to make him comfortable. He was utterly worn out, and it took many days to pick the cactus needles out of his feet. In the morning he told me of his narrow escape, and I said then for the first and only time, "Let us go back;" but he replied, "No, we will go on tomorrow." So we again took up our journey with

80 what was left of our fine herd, thankful to be together once more.

We were then nearing Chimney Rock, which is an immense shaft of granite resembling a smoke stack, on the south side of Platte river, in sight of which we traveled five days. The river here makes a great bend, the road still leading up its banks. The cattle were growing footsore and weary and every day we feared that some of them would give out. The air was filled with odors that were not of "Araby the Blest," the road being lined with carcasses of dead animals, and I had to carry my camphor bottle in my hand most of the time. I had a serious cause of anxiety at this time, although not personally concerned. Some stock dealers in California had sent east for ten thousand sheep, which were being driven overland in charge of hired drovers. They had started with them on the south side of the Platte, but finding very poor grass determined to try the other side. At the head of Grand Island, Nebraska, they attempted to swim the sheep across. The flock becoming frightened, rushed onto the island which was under water, and no efforts could get them off for twenty-four hours. Standing in the water so long made their feet tender, and as soon as they stepped into the alkali dust they became sore and many of the poor creatures laid down in the road, refusing to go any further, and had to be left. They were immediately ahead

81 of us, and every morning we would pass the remains of those that the wolves had devoured the night before. All day we would drive past the little creatures knowing what to expect for them. It distressed me beyond measure. A week's rest would have saved them, but the men would not wait, so rushed them on, leaving from twenty to fifty a day for two or three weeks. I begged so hard to save one little lamb that my husband was willing, so I took it into the wagon, washed its feet, oiled and wrapped them up, thinking that I was going to have a fine pet, but it was too large to keep in such close quarters. It would not even try to walk, so I was obliged to leave it, and another monster of a grey wold had a feast that night.

82 It was now the latter part of June. We had reached a point of the river opposite Fort Laramie, where we turned off the Platte, which we had followed up to this time, into what the guide book called the Black Hills. Ascending a steep hill, we drove onto a small, level plateau and camped. I walked to one side and looking down a precipice saw a deep gorge with the river tumbling and dashing through, with none of the calm, gentle flow we had witnessed for weeks. This was our last sight of the Platte river. Here the first antelope and mountain goats were in sight, but kept at a safe distance.

When the morning came the wind was blowing a gale, making traveling impossible.

All day we were shut up in the wagon with the curtains fastened closely down, with everything outside anchored to the rocks, and the men in a ravine some distance away guarding cattle. It was a day to be remembered, and we were glad when the sun went down.

- The following morning was like spring and we got off in good season, now coming into the mountains in earnest. We halted at noon on the bank of a beautiful little stream called Goose Creek. It
- 83 was filled with speckled trout. Mr. Ivins took out tackle and went fishing. I went, too, but talked so much that he became disgusted and sent me off. Not having any more fishing tackle I fixed up a thread and pin hook, and to my great surprise caught a lot of little beauties before he had a bite. We staid some hours, until we had caught a fine fry for supper, and reluctantly left the spot. Among our drove was an immense red ox, too large to yoke and we had no mate for him. I never saw so large an one; he always led the drove and was gentle as a dog. Mr. Ivins procured a bell for him, to suit his size, and he carried himself with great dignity. He always slept near the wagons and was a great pet. When we crossed small streams the men would jump on his back and ride over. There was something really noble about him. One evening Mr. Ivins said to me, "If we get Rouser," as we called him, "through, I will get a thousand dollars for him." I laughed at his high figures, and we strolled to where the old fellow was lying down, resting as we supposed. Mr. Ivins examined his feet and said "I am afraid they are growing tender." He looked hollow eyed and we were anxious about him, for fear he might be alkaliied. The next day he seemed listless but kept up with the drove. We camped early. By this time he did not want to eat but seemed very thirsty, and would stay near the wagons as if he did not like to be alone. As night came on he grew worse rapidly,
- 84 and by bed time we knew that our poor dumb friend was doomed. He moaned like a human being in pain and would get up and try to follow us. We gave him medicine, but it did no good, and he would look at us with his great brown eyes in the most appealing manner. His groans became more distressing, and before daylight poor Rouser had crossed his last river. We could not bury him, so left him with his big bell strapped around his neck.

Our drove of cattle was growing less, forty were lost at Grand Island, some others had died, one a fine cow giving milk, and now we took our coffee black.

Leaving Goose Creek Mountains we traveled over a plain covered with curious formations of rock, called Pulpit Rocks, from their resemblance to church furniture. They were from ten to twenty feet high, apparently thrown there by some convulsion of nature, with the level plain surrounding them. The road wound in and out among them and they were very interesting.

- July first we came to the Sweetwater Mountains, and crossing the first range made our camp on the river of the same name, a beautiful stream, cold and clear as crystal. We were quite near Independence Rock. This is an immense rock rising out of a level plain seventy or an hundred feet high, on the sides of which hundreds of emigrants had cut their names. The top, which is almost flat, has
- 85 an area of three or four acres and is covered with vegetation. It is a most singular hill, being almost perpendicular on all sides. A number of men were hard at work hoisting a deserted wagon to the top, intending to roll it off to celebrate Independence day, so near at hand.

The next day we went a few miles up the stream to Devil's Gorge, a wild and romantic place. The huge rocks seem to have separated to make room for the river which dashes through the deep gorge, rushing and foaming like a torrent for half a mile, then spreads out into a calm, gentle river again with grassy banks and pebbly bottom.

We remained here over the Fourth, and celebrated by opening a demijohn of wine, and demolishing that, and a large fruit cake which was baked for the occasion in our far away Iowa home.

Our road led now through the mountains and up into the Rockies, leaving Sweetwater on the morning of July fifth. We were reaching a high altitude going steadily up, although the road was not very steep, arriving at South Pass the same day. I rode here on horseback for the last time, past banks of snow grown yellow with age, which gave no signs of melting, although the sun was shining brightly.

At this place we again overtook the Gram party and traveled together for several days, when they left us to hurry forward.

Virginia W. Ivins

Pen Pictures

1905

(Newberry Microfilm 2 - 28)