

J. H. McBride
letter

Copy from typewriter at
Nebraska State Historical Society

NSHS

Received June 11th

See Platte River and Navigators
at 886

Kanesville, Iowa, May 12th 1850
4 Miles from the Council Bluff
Landing

My Dear Wife: You see by the date of this letter where I am but you cannot realize any more about this place than I did when penning the letters of Henry Weld. In the first place I will tell you that I left St. Louis, on the 27th of April in the Steamboat Robert Campbell for the Bluffs and for the fourteen days past I have been on board of said boat, contending with the current of this River - And such a current and such a river is nowhere else to be found on this globe and I am pretty sure the like will not be found on any other. To talk of the Missouri river is time wasted. I have read and heard of it from many pens and many mouths, and yet have known nothing of the greatness - power - and majesty of said river. I have been on her bosom only fourteen days when she has been merely playing her lullaby pranks. But such pranks as they are, yet they are well calculated to awe the mind and subdue the spirit of man. While ascending the great stream we encountered masses of floating timber extending as far as the eye could reach, and washing forward to its borne with an impetuosity which was truly appalling. The floating masses of timber consisted of everything which constitutes forests above. Vast trees of giant size, roots & log mixed indiscriminately with brush and ordinary flood wood. These floating masses are evidence as far as possible, yet our paddle wheels are often badly fractured by coming in contact with some intrusive log, which was unwilling to yield the right of floating where his Master Missouri, had pleased to send him. But what is now transpiring is nothing to what transpires when he puts on his full armor for the mighty foray. Then the spectator may behold thousands of acres of the most beautiful and fertile land, & covered with a forest more dense and of a growth the most gigantic whelmed in a common and utter ruin in a few days. But I have told you, and truly too, that description is tame, & insipid and although I would like to have you view and contemplate scenes of such grand and imposing character, yet I am well aware that the pen can never bring them with vividness to the mind. But I will not dwell upon the journey, or the Maddened, foaming and boiling Missouri. It is a mighty river, and is in the heart of a mighty Empire, and its shores will soon be teeming with a dense population, and I hope by moral & intellectual worth it will be fit and worthy to be its occupants. The country here is sublimely beautiful, and it would do my heart good to have you see & realize as I have seen and felt this day. The valley of the Missouri here, is six or eight miles wide and you can see how it looks here by imagining a vast amphitheatre, surrounded by equally vast promontory formed in a semi circle. The plan of this amphitheatre is as level and beautiful as Squaw Prairie, and more fertile if possible, and in 20 years from this time some point in this amphitheatre will be occupied by a large and flourishing city. Such is my prediction. I arrived here yesterday, the 11th of May, and relieved the anxiety of my companions, who had become tired of paying \$3.00 a bushel for corn and other things in proportion. We are all here in fine health and spirits, and intend hauling out for the plains on the 15th and then adieu to civilization. Ere this reaches you, your husband will be far away on the plains towards the setting Sun. I have ordered the Editor of the St. Joseph paper to forward three more copies of his paper to you, that you might learn through its columns of the departure of the last trains of Emigrants. While in St. Joseph it snowed 2 inches deep on the deck of the steamboat in the night, and about an hour before light in the morning it commenced to raining, and the snow left as unceremoniously as it came. There has been a vast deal of suffering among the emigrants that came on early, - many - very many have died, and many will not be able to proceed on their way and must return, for the want of the necessary means. It has resulted more disastrous to those who came on here early than I had anticipated, although I predicted

[This copy in matron collection]

Fort Laramie, June 9th 1850

My Dear Wife:- By the date of this letter, you discover where your husband was on the 9th of June. I am now while writing nearly as far west of Ogle County Illinois, as Ogle County Illinois is west of New York City. I wrote to you from the Bluffs in the midst of confusion and could scarcely collect my thoughts to write a sentence. The changing scenes through which we all are passing has a tendency to distract and dissipate mind so that it cannot be brought to bear with intensity on any one subject. I still feel the embarrassment and am fearful that I cannot bring to mind while writing in haste all that I intend to tell you. What I write you must be for you all,--and Brother Robert must consider it as much his letter as though I had directed it to him. The truth is, my time is wholly occupied from one end of the week to the other so that I have no time to write, no time to read - and scarcely any time to rest - and yet I never enjoyed a journey better or felt more in a fit mood to triumph over all difficulties than at the present time. We crossed the Missouri on the 16th where thousands were clamoring for a preference and where excitement ran high. Details cannot be entered into. Suffice it to say that acres of ground were covered with living masses of human beings who were anxiously, and clamorously waiting to cross the mad stream which here forms the boundary line between civilization and barbarism. We crossed and commenced wending our way westward over high rolling prairies such as I had never seen before. It was not like Illinois prairie although I cannot describe minutely the difference. We entered the valley of the Platte River on the 17th after crossing the Elkhorn River and there opened to view before us one of the finest appearing valleys in the world. I have thought and felt a thousand times while passing up this valley that it was well worth a six month trip to see it. I must hit upon a figure so that you and Robert may see the Platte River as though you were looking at it in a mirror. Here it is. (Say as the prairie on which Belvidere is situated which is 4 miles by 3 in extent and perfectly level.) Place four to eight square prairies abreast and then add on just such prairies till the line is as long as the distance between Chicago to Buffalo, with a river running generally in the center, and you have the Platte Valley, which surpasses all the valleys which I have ever seen or ever expect to see in beauty or loveliness. It is as wide in some places for a hundred miles together as from our place in Pleasant Valley to Belvidere and as level as a well laid out garden bed. There are, it is true, some little depressions, and elevations, and the pen cannot describe it in all its aspects. Its course is due west and as straight as though it was designed by providence for the great thoroughfare of the nation.

We have followed this valley 532 miles and have scarcely found a place where the least grading would be required for a railroad track. Beautiful streams empty into the Platte from the north, which flow over a bed of sand and can be forded with all ease and safety. You have heard of Chimney Rock and Scotts Bluff. We travelled in sight of these bluffs three days in approaching and receding from them. The Platte is not a deep stream, but varies from a half a mile to a mile & a quarter wide. In fact it appears larger two hundred miles up than it does where it empties into the Missouri.

The nitre and alkali of this valley is astonishing. It extends over a space up and down this valley for hundreds of miles. There is enough alkali and nitre in its valley, could it be properly saved and purified from foreign matter, to serve

June 23d. 6 miles west of Independence Rock,
in the valley of the Sweetwater where we
have been encamped since Friday the 19th.

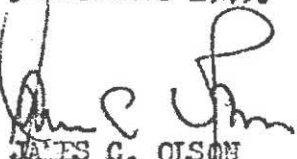
My dear wife:- You can form but little idea of the surrounding objects with which I am encompassed. I will here state to you that I am here commencing this letter to forward to you from the South Pass which is one hundred miles South-west of us. Since I wrote you from the Fort (Laramie) I have been quite unwell, having been reduced somewhat by the worst type of Bluddy Flux. But through the kindness of an all prevailing and merciful Providence I am now in the best of health. We left the Fort on the morning of the 13th and made our passage through the Black Hills, and found the road the best the world can produce, it being better in the main than the best McAdam Road. Now this assertion is qualified and I wish you to understand it by this explanation. The country as we approached the Black Hills is rough and rather more broken than the township of Brecksville, Ohio, and you will of course understand that we have had to rise high hills and descend into deep valleys or rather ravines, and this process has been continuous day after day, and each night finding ourselves at a greater altitude. While passing through these hills the air was cold and bracing, so much so that we could walk after our teams with overcoats and mittens on. The light of the sun in these elevated positions is a pale and silvery color and the clouds thin and airy having neither the density or substantial form of the clouds in the low lands. Now as to the road, let me say that with the exception of the passage through gorges in the mountains, where the sand sometimes prevails it was beat as hard and smooth as a rock. So that the steel cask or pick axe could make no impression on it as it would on a well seasoned white oak log. The ease therefore, with which the thousands of wagons roll over these roads can be easily imagined. We travelled up through these hills till we again emerged into the valley of what may be called the upper waters of the Platte, after passing vast beds of the finest plaster in the world. On the morning of the 11th of June, we arose and found that the mountain tops and even their sides were covered with snow. It looked quite picturesque I can assure you, and made us feel that we were neither in the Missouri or Rock River valley. When we had arrived within 28 miles of the Salt Lake ferry we found that some emigrants had started a new ferry and being in advance of our train I had our company's wagons entered and we designed crossing the next day and encamped within a short distance in order to be on hand when our turn came as noted on the Registry. But while thus waiting we had to witness the most painful sights that I ever saw or ever wish to see in this life. The first was as follows. A company of fifteen or 20 men were swimming a lot of about 80 head of oxen across above us and some of these men having been in the water for several hours up to their armpits were unfit for swimming, yet in this condition, two of them attempted to swim across a stream called Deer Creek, which lay between us and them. One of the men swam it easily enough but the other, ere he had passed one third of the distance cried out for help but his companion dare not return to him as he had no strength to spare and if he had he knew the peril of the undertaking and pushed for shore as fast as possible. The hundreds on the shore kept as still as possible, save the encouraging words "Swim Slow and you will be safe." But the strength of the man was gone and down he went, and in an instant a score or more of coats were off for the hazardous plunge to the rescue, but the cry was "the man that ventures will be lost" but regardless of all caution one young fellow exclaimed "I have no wife or children to miss my loss" and sprang forward and made the plunge and having arrived at the spot, the drowning man again came to the surface and instantly seized the adventurous youth by the hair of the head and dragged him under and as was supposed forever. But, although he had no wife or child yet he had a friend and that

very high from the plain below yet when you are on its top you find that you are at a giddy height. It is almost covered by the names of thousands who appear to seek no other immortality than that of recording their names here on this immense rock in letters as large as those on a common Grocery Sign. I am now on my seventh page and I will drop my yarn until I have placed a little greater distance between myself and those I hold most dear in life. By the way the seed that I spoke of in my last letter was lost while struggling for life in the River at the Ferry at Laramie. It was indeed a loss, but not so bad as I expected it would be. Kiss my dear children for me and assure them that they all shall be remembered with fine presents if their father ever lives to reach home. I have picked up some mountain specimens for Marcella.

June 24th. This day we resumed our journey at an early hour. Our sick man being able to sustain the motion of the wagon. We fairly got into the valley of the Sweetwater River about noon. The width of this valley is about 8 or 10 miles and the mountain tops on either side are covered with snow although the heat in this valley, some portions of the day was quite oppressive. I attempted the passage of "Devils Gate" but did not succeed, it being a terrible passage way, where the Sweet Water River breaks its way through solid granite rock and leaves solid walls of granite as high as two of the highest Chicago church spires by placing one above the other. I fairly trembled as I looked up to this immense height and finding that the first two hundred feet was perpendicular and that the next two hundred feet was hanging, or rather leaning directly over my head. It is one of the most interesting sights that I have seen but my nerves were hardly adequate to the task of its contemplation. When we entered the valley how strange the sight and imposing the appearance. Two lines of teams were in motion before us and each extended more than a mile and as far as the eye could reach, presented the appearance of one vast encampment. The whole valley is swarming with life and animation. Of the thousands of horses here I scarcely find a team that looks better than ours. I have forgotten to tell you that while at the Ferry Harding and myself took a stroll into the mountains. We travelled about five miles and ascended a high spur or peak and had one of the most extensive views that man ever witnessed. It seemed that we had in the circuit of vision at least one thousand miles but it is impossible to tell the distance as every thing here baffles and confounds all preconceived opinions and ideas. But the most glorious sight of all was the real Rocky mountain himself as he reaches his vast and eternal promontories into the North West. There he stood with cliff above cliff and promontory above promontory, in awful grandeur and being clothed in perpetual snow looked precisely like one vast thunder cloud when the sun has given it a gorgeous and radiant trapping. Such a view and such a sight I will probably never witness again. The distance, judging from facts which we have ascertained to a certainty, cannot be less than two hundred, and maybe five hundred miles. It is in surveying scenes like these that makes us feel our own nothingness and leads the mind to a proper appreciation that Almighty Power which has upreared these eternal monuments of his power and glory.

June 27th. This evening we intended to camp in the South Pass but have failed to reach there by a few miles but I am now amid eternal snows and although we are encamped on the head waters of the Sweetwater River, on a pretty little flat where the white & red clover are blooming in all their native beauty, yet we can go a little beyond and get all the snow we want for cooking, washing or to make ice cream if, indeed, we only had the other condiments. The distance to the snow is about ten rods from our tent where I am writing. I intended when I left Independence Rock to give you as perfect a picture of the valley as I could but I have had quite an ill time which broke the chain in my Journal which I have kept up to the 24th. This valley, from the Great Rock to our present encampment is 91 miles and in the lower part of it is quite wide, varying from 6 - 8 & even 12 miles wide. Now you must not suppose that

A true copy of original in possession of Miss Myrtle Wood, Wabash, Nebraska,
5 December 1949.



JAMES C. OLSON
Superintendent
I.S.E. S.

Great Salt Lake City, July 13th

My Dear Wife:- You little know the emotions of my heart, as I take my pen in hand for the object of again addressing you. I am here in the Great Valley, and find that my time will not permit me to write all that I wish to inform you of. I must be brief, and tell you of all that I have wrote before, so that you will know whether my letters have failed to reach you. I wrote you from Fort Laramie on the 12th of June, or about that time, and also from the South Pass on the 29th day of June by Estes & Co.'s Express mail, covering 3 & $\frac{1}{2}$ sheets, for the conveyance of which to the States I paid 50 cents. In this last letter I informed you that we were all well, and so we were - but that evening Harding Patrick was taken sick, and very sick, and he supposing that it was nothing but an ordinary cold, took some of the Composition medicine which we have for colds. It proved the worst thing that could have been given. In the night I found that he was so bad that something must be done, and accordingly gave him six pills. These only produced slight effect, and as morning dawned I applied to a physician for counsel. He ordered Calomel, but I could not prevail upon him to give a sufficient quantity to meet the emergency of the case. By this time we had learned what we had to contend with as it was evident that it was a very severe attack of the mountain fever. But as I feared, the doctor's medicine produced very little effect and with what feeling you may judge, I discovered that the chances of his recovery were fearfully diminished by this error of the Physician. During this period we have been giving him as many fever powders as he could bear and kept him in a stupor. I urged the doctor to give him from 15 to 20 grains of Calomel as the case was becoming more critical every hour. But he refused. I resolved the matter over in my mind for some time, and came to the decided conviction, that nothing would save him if another and that a powerful dose of Calomel would not. I prepared the dose and gave it, and it was as large as I dare give, and then anxiously awaited the result. It was something like 12 or 15 hours before it operated, so completely was his system under the influence of this burning mountain fever. It produced the very effect that I was so anxiously desiring, as it had pervaded his whole system and changed his harsh and wiry pulse into a more calm and steady motion. You may judge of my feelings when I discovered that all was not lost and that Calomel had in this case shown its potency when all other remedies had failed. In two days Harding has been reduced from perfect health so that he could neither stand or go and looked like a mere shadow of his former self. He recovered quite slowly--but has now nearly gained his usual strength. Harding had just got able to walk about the camp when Charles was taken in the same manner, viz: violent pain in the head and back - and great pressure of blood to the head. In this case I did not wait for the counsel of any phusician and acted upon my own knowledge of medicine, and found that with calomel in large doses I could manage the mountain fever as easily as the common billious fever. While I had Charles and Harding on my hand, Dr. McFarlan had my friend Wm. Troop on hand to take care of. He was very sick and the Dr. has had a hard time of it in taking care of him. I am of the opinion that had it not been for the strong Brandy & Cayene pepper preparation that Mrs. Patrick furnished us I would not have lived to pass through the Sweetwater Valley and the Calomel which I procured in St. Louis I consider has been of equal service in Harding's case. Between fatigue, anxiety and a slight derangement of my system, I have become as poor as a snake and my legs have become like candle rods, mere skin and bones, but the head I believe is as cool as a cucumber and well prepared mentally to encounter the toil and dangers of the weight hundredsmiles that lie directly before us. We have exchanged our gay and noble horses for oxen and it was hard parting with them. The stern law of necessity was the only reason for this as Harding and myself had resolved that they should be

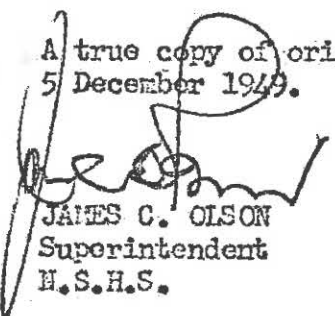
I must say a word about wheat. For wheat, this climate beats every thing that I have ever heard or dreamed of. From one bushel sowing they have raised as high as one hundred and sixty-nine bushels. It was sown in drills & covered 4 acres. 50 bushels here is about a fair yield to the acre. You need not think there is any gammon about this, and you may inform Robert that the wheat tells larger stories for itself than the inhabitants. I never saw the like in any country. It is like Egypt in the seven plentiful years--the land yields by handfulls. Corn does not do well, it being too frosty. Potatoes, Peas, Beets, Carrots, onions, and vegetables generally do well. I have seen great melon vines but I think they will not accomplish much without something to shelter them from the cool night air. I have laid down my pen for several minutes to study out the little et cetras about which you and Robert wish to make enquiries. I cannot tell every thing although I could gratify your curiosity if I only knew what questions you would wish to ask. I am writing at a table in the city and the great valley lays out like a level plain before me from 20 to 40 miles wide and extending something like two hundred miles from terminus to terminus, and thousands upon thousands of cattle feeding upon the rich bottom lands belonging to the city. Every city lot here contains $1 \frac{1}{4}$ of an acre and each man that moves here may pay one dollar and a half for recording the same and then go on and build a home for his family with nothing more to pay save his tythe money, which is one tenth of his earnings. This goes into the treasury for church purposes as well as for public works. The improvements made here in the 3 years the Mormons have been here is astonishing. The houses are built of unburned brick, called "doubies" and are comfortable and genteel dwellings. They have five flouring mills and saw mills now in operation, and others going up. Their lumber is chiefly sawed out of the fur trees and is not so good as pine, although it answers very well as a substitute. Coal has been found in great abundance in the valley and I am informed that they are now making a railroad on which to transport the same to the city. Stone coal is now \$1 per bushel in the city and coal 50 cents. Salt is obtained out of the lake in its native state and when ground is far superior to any salt which we receive from the east. It is quite possible that we may be supplied in the Mississippi Valley with the article of salt from this lake. I am satisfied that for the next 20,000 years the Rocky mountains will furnish the world with Pot Ash and salaratus. The valley of the Platte and Sweetwater can do it without half trying. God only knows the wealth that lies hidden in these mountains for the benefit, perhaps of coming generations, which now appears to the eye and mind as a great barren waste upon the earths surface--or in another view as mere monuments of his almighty power upon which man may look and be humble. But I believe the majority of those who are pouring over and through these mountain passes and deep gorges view them as the ox or ass views them.

I have just been out to the mountain side where the Hot Spring Bathing house is located, but there was such a crowd to get into the hot bath that I could not wait my turn and strolled along the mountain side until I reached the place where the water came pouring out of the mountain side hot and sparkling. The water, in taste, when cool I should judge to be like the Saratoga water. It is right temperature to wash dishes or clothes--not hot enough to scald--this is called the Warm Springs--the next spring above is the Hot Spring and will scald the bristles from a hog or cook eggs. Edwin Morgan & myself took a good wash in the Warm Springs, and saved our quarters. The price for the bath being 25 cents a person. From a comfortable seat beside this hot fountain I surveyed this great and singular valley and mountain ranges, until my yeart was full and my spirit struggled to trace back in the chain of

that was in the wagon. The ball grazed his body and tore his hand to pieces. This is more particularly for brother Robert. Butter is 38 cts. Bacon 50cts per lb. Milk 10 cts per quart. lumber 40\$ per thousand feet. tea 2\$ to 3\$ per lb. Sugar 50 cts per lb. Dried peaches 7\$ per lb. Well my dear wife were there no eyes to see this letter but yours I would write another sheet over and tell you a little of Mormonism as it is here, but it is an unprofitable subject and I will defer the matter entirely. It is hardly noon now and we haul out for the last great effort and we know we have trouble ahead although we are taking every measure to guard against the worst. I believe we shall get through if God wills it--otherwise we fail. May God bless you my dear wife and those dear children of ours. From your husband.

J. H. McBride

A true copy of original in possession of Miss Myrtle Wood, Wabash, Nebraska,
5 December 1949.


JAMES C. OLSON
Superintendent
N.S.H.S.

time, link by link through countless ages, which have been required to produce the tremendous & mighty changes on this earth's surface. I have made mention already of the extent of the valley but have not mentioned that other valleys branch from this both north and south and I believe one to the west. A month would be little enough time in this valley to collect all the information necessary for my journal, free from other duties. In this distance to the south west of me lies Salt Lake, so highly charged with salt that a man cannot drown in it. He can only sink to his arm pits by keeping an upright position in the water. The United States Engineer has just finished the survey of the shores of this lake & finds that it is 600 miles in circumference and in this lake which serve as islands, are located as I am informed seven mountains which rise several thousands of feet from the surface of the water. While here seated alone and wrapt in the contemplation of the past, present, and future, the strong desire arose in the mind that you could be by my side to enjoy the scene that I was then enjoying and feel the deep inspiration that rested upon my soul. There would before me the River Jordan urging its pure and beautiful water towards the lake and the declining sun throwing its golden light glittering and sparkling from a thousand snow capped peaks presented a picture beyond the reach of the poets pen or painter's pencil. It was here that my heart wished to trace the long distance between us in spirit, and commune with your spirit—but little thought that strong hearts desire would be so soon granted in a manner so near the reality as it has been. Last night I retired to rest after committing all I hold most dear in life to the safe keeping of that God in whom we live and move and have our being and before whom I hope we walk in purity of heart, and slept in peace, and if ever mortal spirit has been permitted to wing its way free from a living body I believe mine has had the privilege. I saw you and told you where I was and found you apparently happy and my heart overflowed with grateful emotions for this brief and happy interview. But we will call it a dream, although I felt that my clay tenement was nearly two thousand miles from you in the far West, at the time of our meeting. By the request of Harding and Charles & Linus Morgan, I here state that they are all now in good health, although they all have been sick, and a hard place it is to be sick while passing over burning sandy plains or through mountain gorges. We all know it for we have had a grial of it. Judge Wheelock will please inform Mrs. Morgan that her husband will not write until he reaches the mines, and Charles & Harding also have decided not to write from this place. As I have given direction on the back of this letter for you to open it, I would esteem it a great favor to have you forward it to Mrs. Patrick as soon as possible and she will see that my wife receives it at the earliest possible moment. I dare not tell you of the fearful havoc that the mountain fever and Cholera has made of the emigrants. My heart bleeds when I think of the desolate hearts and desolate homes that this years emigration has made. We have the news that at least two thousand have died of Cholera in the Platte Valley and great numbers have died of mountain fever and others by drowning, the naked truth is the sum total of mortality between the Missouri River and the mines is truly appalling--12 were drowned at the Ferry on Green River in one day--by counting the number that have been drowning alone at the hundred different crossing places, at ferries and fords, and it presents a frightful account. No time for explanation, but I suppose there has been more than the usual quantity of snow in the mountains and of course all the rivers are higher in the region of country through which we have had to pass. My friend Barret is two days ahead of us. I found him sick here of mountain fever. He was recovering and got able to ride and has passed along. He was overjoyed to see me. I took dinner at a private house in town on Saturday and met at the table Robert Waterman of Genoa and Bishop of Belvidere. Bishop came near losing his life by the carelessness of one of his travelling companions. It was by the discharge of a gun

brought back to Ogle County if the thing were possible. So you see that Harding and myself have had to exchange our horses which cost us \$181 dollars for one yoke of oxen. We exchanged the horse which Harding and I traded for with Robbs for another yoke by putting one of Morgan's horses with him. So we have one yoke of Oxen and a half, and Morgan having traded for a yoke of oxen at the same time, he has a yoke of oxen and a half, so that we have three yoke of oxen and Charley's two ponies. The large horses stood the journey well till within a few days past, when they failed as it were, all at once. The truth of the matter is, the large horses walked faster than the ponies, and of course had to perform more than their proportion of the labor. The ponies are in pretty good condition now. Of the description of the country this side of the Pass, I will not be able to give you, till I return, or you read my journal, and even that is quite meager, as my time has been so much occupied in taking care of the sick, that I had neither time or disposition to write much. Since their recovery, I have filled it up from memory as well as I can. Should the materials collected on this journey justify it I will revise the whole and publish it when I reach New York or Boston. But I am now surrounded by too many dangers to leave me very sanguine in ever reaching either of those two points. It is in vain that I should attempt to describe our journey from the Pass to Green River and from Green River to this place. Suffice it to say that we have passed over mountains and mountain streams, up deep defiles where the light of day was almost excluded by the vast and unknown height of Rocky cliffs that towered above us. Through these dark defiles we wound our way and hour after hour our long lines moved on till hours seemed like days while laboring to emerge from these, apparently interminable labyrinths & my dear wife it is amid such mountain passes and on the sides of such Rocky cliffs that the Mountain Goat and Mountain sheep securely dwell; on places where not even the daring sea bird, would venture to rest her foot. It was through one of these fearful passes we made our way to reach Webber River, and our blood flowed more freely and we breathed more easily when we emerged into an open space, where we could enjoy the free air and the full light of day. Up this river we then made our way until we had ascended to an elevation that placed us very near on a level with eternal snow, and then followed up a little rivulet channel to the summit level of this mountain. From this summit we could view the mountain tops in every direction clad in their usual habit of white. Before us lay a vast basin in the mountains into which we descended, and found one of the most beautiful streams that I ever beheld. In this basin were thousands of acres of the most beautiful meadow land and watered by this mountain stream, being pure and cold as the best spring water. We passed on through the basin and again began to ascend till we were as high up in the world as I ever wish to be. From this point we commenced our descent into the valley of the Great Salt Lake and descended about 4000 feet in 20 miles--Some tell us that it is 5000 feet. Be this as it may, I would never wish to have your nerves put to the test in making the passage through this Cannon which is called the Golden Gate to the City. The mormons pronounce the word Cannon in the mountain "Kenyan" of the mountain. "All's well that ends well" and we are here where there is an abundance of every thing, save tea, coffee, sugar, bacon, and dried fruit. Money is almost as plenty as chips and I think quite as plenty as I have known them in my wood yard when I have been out of wood in harvest time. Five dollars a day is the common price in the harvest field--and five dollars a bushel is the price for wheat. The city is beautifully laid out, with wide streets at right angles and is the best watered city in the world as pure mountain water flows through almost every street in the city and you can walk out of your house, cup in hand and drink pure cold snow water out of that which would be a filthy gutter in any other city upon earth. The water flows with a rapid current over a bright gravelly bed, sparkling as it flows along.

this valley looks that wide - far from it. Where you would call it a mile wide it would surely be as much as six and when you would think it two or three, rest assured a man would have to travel half a day to get across it. This perfect deception upon our organs of vision is produced by two causes. The most prominent of which is the high and Rocky promontories which line the north & south borders of this valley and the lesser cause is the rarified air or rather less dense air through which the rays of light passed from the objects to the optic nerve. But you would like to know what kind of a river the Sweetwater is. Here you have it. It is almost precisely such a river as the Kalamazoo in Michigan, as to size and color of water but much more rapid. This river is now full banks- occasioned by the melting of the snow that is now in the mountains. We have crossed this river six or seven times within the three days past and the higher we have ascended the more water we have found. I have no room for explanation. While I am speaking of this river I will also tell you that for two days past we have had the most splendid view of the Rocky mountains north of the pass and viewed these vast promontories covered with perpetual snow with real pleasure. The valley for the last fifty miles has been a perfect jam. Nothing will give you so good an idea of it as to refer you to the Log Cabin Celebration of 1840. You remember the way the teams came pouring into Kalamazoo on that occasion. But the number in Kalamazoo compared with those of the present occasion would be mere moonshine. The long lines while under way and the vastness of our encampment is truly astonishing. There is beyond a reasonable doubt 50,000 Californians on the road and extending about five hundred miles. In addition to them the Mormon train of 15,000 which was to leave the Missouri river on the 15th of June, must now be on the lower waters of the Platte. God alone knows what their teams are to live on for we leave the country behind us shorn of almost every vestige of vegetation which is fit for the support of horse, mule or ox. They will have to do as Lot was commanded of old, flee far back into the mountains. There will be no alternative. We have heard many distressing deaths behind us on the waters of the Platte by a disease resembling cholera. We know not whether to believe the reports or not. You will probably learn something of these matters by the newspapers as the news will go to the states by the Express which carries this letter to the frontier if these reports are really so. Linus Morgan is with us in our tent tonight and is now fast asleep and so is Charles & Harding. The boys have no wives and no children to think of and so sleep soundly. If you only had Ossian's Poems I would refer you to his description of the "Storm Hill". Where we are now brings it forcibly to my mind. It has been snowing, hailing, thundering, and raining around us and on us this blessed day and yet a portion of the day has been very warm. We should never complain in Illinois of the fickleness of the climate. There are several topics which I would like to write about, but they would require more space and time than I have at my disposal. One of these matters is the Alkali & Niter of the country. This niter & Alkali region extends from the valley of the lower Platte to the head branches of the Sweetwater. I believe this vast region of country is no more nor less than a _____ from which the world will be supplied at no very remote period, with Potash & Niter. The Hills and mountains are full of these minerals. To investigate the matter properly would require much space and much time. So adieu to this matter for the present. In the morning as we drive up to the pass this letter will be placed in the Express mail for the conveyance of which I expect to pay fifty cents or one dollar. It is to be conveyed to St. Joseph and then mailed in the United States mail. I wish you would let me know when you write about the time this arrives to home. I have been finishing this letter amid the war of thunder and raging of elements and therefore cannot vouch for grammatical accuracy in style. I will add a line or so and close this at the office in the morning, so good night and God's blessing be with you till we meet.

I enclose a specimen of the Red & White clover of this region.

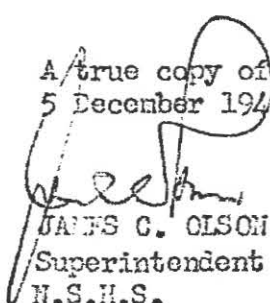
friend waited for no call or imploring look but made known his determination that come life or come death he was to the rescue and actually dove down and released his friend from the iron grasp of the drowning man and brought the drowning man to the surface of the water after he had sank for the fourth time and the whole three were saved. Although I have not and cannot tell half of the little incidents in this scene yet being quite unwell at the time it had the effect of depressing my spirits for the first time since I left home. But an hour had scarcely elapsed before we had another scene on the tapis where two more men came very near losing their lives. It produces in my mind one of the most painful sensations that I ever experienced to see and feel a human being is going down into a watery grave in the full vigor of health and strength. The spectacle is horrible and those who have not witnessed the scene and noticed the imploring look and agonizing struggle know nothing of it. I wish to be spared the pain of ever witnessing the like again. You may wish to know where my coat was about these times. I can tell you it was off and not long coming off either but I thought of home, of wife, or children, and comprehended the danger and chances in less time than it requires a dull scholar to solve a problem in Euclid and had it not been for considerations of this nature together with my poor state of health, it is quite probable that I might have been the first one to have engaged in this doubtful enterprise, for I am fully satisfied that it is altogether less painful to drown than to look on and see another drown. My little mishap in the water at the Fort, my horse had some influence in making me more cautious than I otherwise would have been. These hair breath escapes set us all thinking and after pondering the matter well we came to the conclusion that it was beyond our power to lessen very much the risk of life in crossing at this point. We then took a vote to ascertain who were in favor of leaving this ferry and crossing at the Salt Lake Ferry 28 miles above. There was a decided majority for crossing at the Salt Lake Ferry & we soon had our teams harnessed and under motion. We crossed in the afternoon of the 18th at a ferry where the amount of money taken in one day is almost incredible. I will tell you the facts and you and those who read must make your own calculation. When we had our wagons entered there were five ferry boats running on rope with tackling and each boat passed a team and wagon once in ten minutes. The wagon was five dollars and each horse one dollar, so that at every ten minutes one of these boats earned from twelve to 15 dollars and this was one continued operation night and day and proceeded without the least confusion or interruption. In fact it is the best managed ferry that I was ever at and the best paid and few indeed grudged the money when they can have opportunity of passing this dreadful stream thus safely and expeditiously. The number of teams passed here by these boats in one day almost exceeds belief, and has been for the past three weeks and will continue for the space of about 3 weeks longer. The money taken, if in silver, would have to be counted by the cart load. It will probably exceed 250,000 for the six weeks operation. At any rate it cannot fall very far short of that sum. Since we left the ferry we have had hard fare for our horses and we are now recruiting them as before stated six miles from the road where we have found a patch of the best of grass for our starving horses. One of our company, Mr. Daily is now quite sick and had it not been for this we would have been under way for the South Pass this morning. As it is, it gives us another day's rest and that too the rest of the Sabbath. In the morning we intend resuming our journey and as I am now up to our present camp I will embrace the opportunity of telling you something of Independence Rock, of which we all have heard something from our California bound friends. In the first place I will tell you that it is a solid granite rock or nearly so and of a long oval shape and from 150 to 200 feet high and large enough to fill the whole valley between our house and Turner Crowell's, a quarter of a mile. I went on the top of this Rock the morning after arriving here and although it does not look

the world for ages. I shall attempt no solution of its origin. I believe it is a part and portion of the soil here as much as lime and gypsum is elsewhere.

I have found some beautiful flowers and plants, and I have herein enclosed a few seeds of the cactus species, which I hope you will have planted and cared for. The plant when grown looks like a fruit basket full of ripe fruit and had I the plant at home from which I took these little seeds, I would not part with it short of 25 dollars. It was one of the most beautiful things that I have ever seen. Give some to Mrs. Patrick and Eliza so that some may be saved. They grow on the open plain and this fact is all the information that I can give, or as to the kind of treatment which the seed ought to receive. Do as well as you can with the seed and I will drop the subject for something else.

The whole valley may be called destitute of timber, although in some places there may be found cottonwood, box elder, willow and the like, and when we have ascended high up the river where high bluffs commence, some small cedars may be found. I will have to cease describing, as room and time is wanting. The Ferry Boat at this place broke the rope last night about 2 o'clock and four men came near being drowned - one horse lost. While writing our men are helped to construct a float to cross our provisions with, when this is done we shall cross our wagons & teams the best way we can. You wish to know how our team is. It cannot be better. All alive and doing well, Horses well - wagon well - and the boys well - can you wish for anything better. An express arrived last night from St. Louis and I paid 25 cents for the St. Louis Republican. By it I find that the cholera is again making some progress there. I mention this to allay any fears which may be entertained by our friends in the States. My last dates from St. Louis is up to the 10th of May. What may have transpired since that date I have no means of knowing although I apprehend that St. Louis will suffer severely before the season is through, with that disease. I have been to the Fort and find nothing worthy of note. Soldiers & officers very polite and accommodat. Found in the fort two beautiful pieces of brass cannon - 12 pounders. They are indeed curious peacemakers. There has been one death this spring on the north side of the Platte of inflammation in the bowels, out of thousands that have been pouring through the region for the last month. There is less sickness probably among the emigrants en route for California than among the same number of men at their homes East. I must make my letter a medley so here it goes. We live fine. The best of coffee & tea - make the best of raised biscuit well-shortened - goose butter, good bacon, and fine dried beef and excellent appetites. We cannot ask to be blessed by Almighty more highly than we have been. And as to Hardin, he is all that I expected and more in the bargain. Vast quantities of iron is strowed along the route through which we passed - enough to make any one man rich could he have it in a good market. Coats, pants, shirts & drawers - in any quantities - first rate place for a paper mill as rags can be had without even three cents a pound being asked for them. Met with an old acquaintance yesterday from Perrysburg, Ohio by the name of Jazues. I have seen men on my journey from the four quarters of the globe and almost from every kingdom and nation. The number registered here

A true copy of original in possession of Miss Myrtle Wood, Wabash, Nebraska,
5 December 1949.

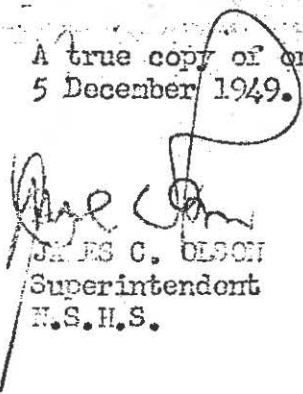

JAMES C. OLSON
Superintendent
N.S.H.S.

enough. I cannot hear any thing of William McBride, or of Mr. Acker I think they must be far below this. There is not grass enough on the plains at the present time, to keep a goat from starving to death, yet we shall proceed, having abundance of corn meal and the horses are as gay and fine as though they were kept for a gentleman's carriage. It made me feel fine to see that the team had stood the journey so well. The boys have taken the very best care of the horses and few teams look as well as ours and none better. The sick one is well and looks as smooth as a new dime. I have not received any letter from you here as yet although I am expecting one. I hope the next mail will bring me one. If you hear of evil reports of Indian murders, cholera, small pox and many other fell destroyers of the human species, believe them not without undubitable evidence of the truth, I will forewarn you before hand, that a thousand idle tales are already afloat and I wish that your heart may not be troubled. Remember that life is in the hands of an Almighty God, and that no harm or evil can befall me without his permit.

Monday May 13th. The mail has just arrived and no letter from home. I am indeed sorry, but cannot help it. The mail closes in a few minutes for the East, and I must make short work. I have met with many old acquaintances from many parts of the East. Some from Allegan, Mich. and some from Kalamazoo and others from different parts of Ohio. The mustering of Californians on the frontiers, is like the marshaling of the hosts of an Empire for a military invasion. In truth, we are going out by bands, with all the materials for offence and defence. I will have a few lines prepared to drop in the post office as we leave this place. From your husband

J. H. McBride.

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5 December 1949.


JAMES C. OLSON
Superintendent
H.S.H.S.