

NEWS *from the* PLAINS



Volume IX, No 21.

NEWSLETTER OF THE OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

April 1995

THE GREAT PLATTE RIVER ROAD RUNS TO GRAND ISLAND CONVENTION

*Nebraska to Host the National OCTA Convention,
August 8-12, 1995*

by Helen E. Sundell

AS YOU ARRIVE AT CONVENTION headquarters at the Midtown Holiday Inn in Grand Island, you will be "camped" on one of the trails that followed the Wood River before joining the trail on the north side of the Platte River. From this "camp site," convention goers will travel on the Nebraska trails on the north and south sides of the Platte River, the theme of the 1995 Nebraska convention. Both the speakers and the tours focus on this area of the trail.

After the business meeting and welcome Wednesday morning, Merrill Mattes, our keynote speaker, will evaluate "The OCTA Revolution," describing the organization's impact on trail preservation and research. To prepare us for our journey along the Platte, Gary Zaruba, from the University of Nebraska at Kearney, will review 19th-century art and artists along the Platte River. Dr. Will Locke, from Hastings College, Hastings, Nebraska, uses a Mormon handcart replica as part of his program. Convention attendees will have a "hands-on" handcart experience as "Some must push and some must pull."

Friday's program follows Platte River trail history as Dr. Gilbert Adrian, from Hastings College, speaks about the flora and fauna indigenous to the region. Charles Trimble, an Oglala Sioux and president of the Nebraska State Historical Society, will describe the impact of the western migration on American Indians.

Dr. Jim Hanson, Jr. will deal with the years of the fur trade in Nebraska and Dr. Roger Blair will talk about the years of the

(See GRAND ISLAND CONVENTION on page 6)



OCTA Events



Now that the grass is starting to appear on the prairie, OCTA members are preparing to head west. Here are some of the great events scheduled for 1995—for more details, see the Announcements on page 16.

- April 8-9 California-Nevada Chapter sponsors Southern Trails Symposium, Zzyzx, CA.
- April 27 Dr. Norman Wright will regale Utah Crossroads with his research on pioneer odometers at the Salt Lake County Commission Chamber, 7:00 P.M.
- May 1 Nominations due for Friends of the Trail Award.
- May 20 Joint Gateway/Trails Head chapter field trip. Meet at Pony Express National Memorial, 9:00.
- May 21-22 Utah Crossroads invades Nevada on a Hastings Cut-off field trip from Pilot Peak to the Ruby Mountains.
- June 1 Nominations to Awards Committee due.
- June 4 National Trails Day.
- Aug. 8-12 Annual National Convention, Grand Island, NE.

THE EDITOR'S CORNER

MY FRIEND DAVID WHITTAKER told me history is the most humbling of professions—but he could have rephrased this truth as “history *and editing*.” Careful readers will note that *News from the Plains* has further updated its look, reflecting not only the ongoing evolution of the newsletter’s design, but also a need to correct the basic historical integrity of our masthead. How, pray tell, can a masthead be historically incorrect? Two of America’s most noted trail experts and two of my favorite people, LaMar Berrett and Greg Franzwa, wrote to explain. The masthead on our January issue showed the drover on the *right* side of the oxen, whereas oxen were always driven from the *left* side. How did a great scholar like your current editor make such a bone-headed error? As he learns every day, the breadth of his knowledge is only matched by the depth of his ignorance—perhaps there’s a lesson here for other experts, but I suspect it’s a lesson I’ll have to learn repeatedly. I believe the newsletter’s design is starting to gel, and appreciate the many helpful suggestions I’ve received from readers. I confess my initial desire to incorporate lots of “white space” in the design has been overcome by the sheer volume of OCTA news, and want to issue a blanket apology to the many people who sent in items that simply didn’t fit.

We have excellent contributions to enliven our annual convention issue. Helen Sundell outlines some of the fun to be had at this summer’s OCTA convention in Grand Island. Jay Mennenga describes the history of Nebraska’s Fort Kearny. Treasurer Jim Budde presents his annual reports on OCTA’s finances. Robby Gunstream takes us over the Oregon Trail through Wyoming and Idaho, exploring the Sublette Cutoff on a modern-day muleback expedition that will excite the admiration and envy of all trail lovers. Stay tuned in our next

issue for Robby’s continuing adventures on the Bear River and the Hudspeith Cutoff.

Current events crowded out several interesting historical items that have come my way, but Harold Schindler contributed a contemporary account of Sutter’s Fort that confirms a long-held suspicion: as a good Swiss, the captain pronounced his name *Sooter*. Experienced Sutter hands will note how early and successfully Sutter promoted his favorite fabrications—additional evidence that you shouldn’t believe everything you read, even in *News from the Plains*. (You can believe everything in the excellent historical series Hal is writing for *The Salt Lake Tribune’s* observance of the Utah Statehood Centennial.)

Buffalo Chips has drawn praise from several educators who are using it in their classrooms, but the feature needs your help. I know every one of this issue’s contributors personally—and I relied on my son for our first piece of artwork. Most depressing is the apparent lack of interest in our Classroom of the Quarter award—we received not a single nomination, and only a casual comment by my daughter alerted me to the excellent work being done by David Dahlkamp, her history teacher. I recognize that such journalistic nepotism is not appropriate, but I’m at the mercy of our members. I hope to move the text to an Educators’ page and fill Buffalo Chips with kid’s stuff—pictures, poems and puzzles. If you don’t like Buffalo Chips, ignore it, and it will go away. Otherwise, parents and teachers, contribute.

WOOPS

Your weary editor somehow managed to confuse pigs with swales in the January 1995 “Overland Acrostic.” While emi-

grants did often have swine—and legend holds that one man crossed at least part of the trail with pigs for power—“swine” appeared nowhere in the acrostic. The correct word is “swale,” whose dictionary definition is “a low track of marshy land,” but whose true meaning to all trail hounds is, “the trace of an old wagon road.”

John Bidwell’s “Earliest Explorations of Colusa County” caught the attention of several readers, notably John R. Gibson of Rocklin, CA. John’s careful examination of the Bidwell literature turned up a few holes in your editor’s scholarship. John sent me a copy of C. C. Royce’s *John Bidwell, Pioneer, Statesman, Philanthropist: A Biographical Sketch and Addresses, Reminiscences, Etc., of General John Bidwell*, published in Chico in 1907. The “Reminiscences” match the Bidwell material in Colusa County so closely that I must agree with Mr. Gibson that both versions were taken from the same source and edited separately. The source may be Bidwell’s recollections in the Bancroft Library—but perhaps Mike Gillis of California State University at Chico, who is working on a Bidwell biography, can solve these mysteries in time for the 1999 OCTA convention in Chico.

NEWS FROM THE PLAINS

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Assistant Editor Robert Hoshide

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Association

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Next Submission Deadline for *News from the Plains* is June 1, 1995

WITH SPRING ALWAYS COMES the familiar itch to tune up the old 4-wheel-drive and start working on the trail. But as Randy Brown reminds us, how we go about this task tells a lot about our real interest. Is it really historic trails preservation? Or is it just to have a good time with friends in the great outdoors?

If the former, why is it that Randy's National Trails Marking Committee has received no reports—not one—of trails marking activities by chapters? For the lack of documentation, it appears, a lot of the Carsonite markers we have put in the ground might as well be on the moon.

What makes this question compelling today is that OCTA has been entrusted under the National Park Service's Challenge Cost Share Program to place hundreds of markers on major trails over the next two years. The Park Service, the association's own bylaws and accepted preservation practice require that we take the time to make adequate records of this work.

Last February, Randy sent detailed instructions and a new, simplified form to chapter presidents and project coordinators on how to keep these records and report through him on the marking we will do. If you need additional copies, please get in touch with him and work closely with his committee. It only takes a little extra to do it right the first time.

On another important subject, every year there are some who complain, no doubt justly, that certain members or organizations have failed to win the recognition they deserve at OCTA's Annual Awards Dinner. By then, it's too late to do anything about it. So here's a reminder that the time to nominate someone to receive one of OCTA's coveted awards at our national convention is now. Don't put it off any longer.

To propose a worthy recipient for a Friend of the Trail Award, contact Karen Rennells, Committee Chairwoman, P.O. Box 308, La Barge, WY, 83122. She will provide a copy of the guidelines and nominating forms if needed.

Nominations for OCTA's Meritorious Achievement Award, National Certificate of Appreciation or Volunteer of the Year Award should be submitted in writing to Awards Chairman W. L. (Will) Rusho by June 1. His address is 5299 Gurene Dr., Salt Lake City, UT, 84117.

It's always heartwarming to see how much these awards are valued and appreciated by those who receive them. They extend well-deserved recognition and return much good will for our association. So your nomination is important to everyone. I urge you to send it in by the deadline, June 1.

Finally, when you read this, it will probably be too late to meet the April 1 deadline to nominate a candidate for election to the Board of Directors. But it will still be a good time to keep in mind that the non-profit corporation laws of Colorado, under which

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

OCTA is incorporated, require that 50 percent or more of our members must return their ballots for an election of directors to be legal.

For this reason, it is important to vote even if you don't know the candidates. You really can't go far wrong because every name on the ballot that you will soon receive is someone who is more than qualified to serve. So study the candidates and make your choices. Then make sure to get your ballot in the mail.

Now, from all indications, Helen Sundell and her Nebraska team have done an outstanding job in arranging for a great convention on August 8–12 at Grand Island. I look forward to seeing you there.

—Dave Bigler

NEWS FROM HEADQUARTERS

Jeanne Miller

OCTA Executive Director

Recently a number of new books about the emigrant trails have become available:

The Bidwell-Bartleson Party: 1841 California Emigrant Adventure. Documents and Memoirs of the Overland Pioneers. Edited By Dr. Doyce B. Nunis, Jr. Hardback, \$29.95

Far From Home: Families of the Westward Journey. By Schlissel, Gibbens, Hampsen. Paperback, \$14

Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and Plains. By Glenda Riley. Paperback, \$12.95

Great West: 1763 through the Early 20th Century. By David Lavender (American Heritage Library). Paperback, \$11.95

In Search of the Spanish Trail: Santa Fé to Los Angeles, 1829-1848. By C. Gregory Crampton & Steven K. Madsen. 8.5"x11", Paperback, \$24.95

Traveler's Guide to the Lewis & Clark Trail. By Julie Fanselow. Paperback, \$11.95

They Saw the Elephant: Women in the California Gold Rush. By Joann Levy. Now Available in Hardback, \$29.95

Utter Disaster on the Oregon Trail. By Donald Shannon. Paperback, \$16.95

Westering Women and the Frontier Experience: 1800-1915. By Sandra Myers. Paperback, \$15.95

Women in Waiting in the Western Movement: Life on the Home Frontier. By Linda Peavy & Ursula Smith. Paperback, \$17.95

Add postage and handling to book prices: \$3 for the first book; \$1 each additional book. 10% off book prices for OCTA members.

All books are available from OCTA, P.O. Box 1019, Independence, MO 64051.

FINANCIAL REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR 1993-1994

This report summarizes OCTA's fiscal activities for October 1, 1993 to September 30, 1994. For purposes of comparison, refer to last year's report in the April, 1994 issue of *News from the Plains*.

This past year has been another year of growth and progress for OCTA. Thanks to the strong support and loyalty of our members, we will be able to continue our efforts to preserve and protect our emigrant trail heritage. Thanks again for your support and dedication.—*Jim Budde, Treasurer*

Oregon-California Trails Association Balance Sheet

	Sept. 30, 1994	Sept. 30, 1993
<u>Assets</u>		
Cash:		
Petty Cash-Checking Account	\$ 933.03	\$ 1,999.73
Operating Account	41,543.35	17,899.82
Fund-raising Account	13,342.06	0.00
Convention Account	36,513.87	40,837.49
OCTA Store Account	39,432.74	30,972.99
Total Cash	131,765.05	91,710.03
Investments:		
Certificates of Deposit	23,155.58	29,334.97
Mutual Fund-Scudder	11,011.73	10,230.11
Mutual Fund-20th Century Equity	10,024.68	0.00
Mutual Fund-20th Century Income	8,809.92	0.00
Total Investments	53,001.91	39,565.08
Other Assets:		
Mo/Kan Account	0.00	15,585.61
Prepaid Expenses	4,579.56	2,275.00
Advance-Convention Expense	0.00	1,000.00
Total Other Assets	4,579.56	18,860.61
Inventory-Merchandise:		
True Diary	1,966.49	2,162.25
Reading, Writing, Workbook	2,832.73	6,231.09
Maps	3,324.30	5,811.68
All Other Merchandise	9,480.92	11,233.00
Total Inventory-Merchandise	17,604.44	25,438.02
Fixed Assets:		
Furniture & Fixtures	7,647.17	7,647.17
Office Equipment	8,279.16	7,150.09
Less: Accum. Depreciation	(15,926.33)	(14,797.26)
Total Fixed Assets	0.00	00.0
Land-California Hill	6,260.00	6,260.00
Total Assets	\$ 213,210.96	\$ 181,833.74
<u>Liabilities</u>		
Accounts Payable	\$ 6,556.91	\$ 120.40
Payroll Taxes Payable	189.00	222.08
Santa Fé Trail Store Account	6.51	0.00
Mo/Kan Deferred Revenue	1,765.36	15,585.61
Total Liabilities	\$ 8,517.78	\$ 15,928.09
<u>Fund Balances</u>		
Retained Revenue Over Expense	\$ 165,905.65	\$ 110,285.65
Current Revenue Over Expenses	38,787.53	55,620.00
Total Fund Balances	\$ 204,693.18	\$ 165,905.65
Total Liabilities & Fund Balances	\$ 213,210.96	\$ 181,833.74

**Oregon-California Trails Association
Statement of Support, Revenue and Expenses**

	1993-1994			1992-1993	
	ANNUAL BUDGET	ACTUAL	OVER/ (UNDER) BUDGET	ACTUAL	
Support and Revenue:					
Support:					
Annual Dues Income	\$ 75,000.00	\$ 82,843.00	\$ 7,843.00	\$ 77,075.00	
Life Memberships	0.00	2,250.00	2,250.00	3,000.00	
Donations	10,000.00	12,427.00	2,427.00	5,701.00	
Grants-Convention	0.00	0.00	0.00	\$ 5,367.00	
Total Support	\$ 85,000.00	\$ 97,520.00	\$ 12,520.00	\$ 91,143.00	
Revenues:					
Overland Journal & NFP Revenue	\$ 0.00	\$ 4,408.70	\$ 4,408.70	\$ 5,757.00	
COED Fees	0.00	1,450.00	1,450.00	1,077.00	
OCTA Sales Revenue (Net of Costs)	10,000.00	23,387.32	13,387.32	31,976.00	
Convention Revenue (Net Expenses)	10,000.00	27,177.89	17,177.89	30,441.00	
Interest Income	1,000.00	4,411.21	3,411.21	3,155.00	
Miscellaneous Income	0.00	2,000.00	2,000.00	0.00	
Carryover From Prior Year	22,000.00	0.00	(22,000.00)	0.00	
Total Revenues	43,000.00	\$ 62,835.12	\$ 19,835.12	\$ 72,406.00	
Total Support & Revenues	\$ 128,000.00	\$ 160,355.12	\$ 32,355.12	\$ 163,549.00	
Expenses:					
Officers	\$ 7,000.00	\$ 5,233.69	\$ (1,766.31)	\$ 5,347.00	
Committees	12,800.00	11,385.06	(1,414.94)	9,458.00	
Headquarters	53,732.00	52,404.08	(1,327.92)	40,770.00	
Preservation	14,500.00	9,721.00	(4,779.00)	9,161.00	
Publications	42,200.00	41,694.69	(505.31)	40,231.00	
Other (Capital Equipment)	1,000.00	1,129.07	129.07	962.00	
Total Expenses	\$ 131,232.00	\$ 121,567.59	\$ (9,664.41)	\$ 107,929.00	
Excess of Revenues Over Expenses	\$ (3,232.00)	\$ 38,787.53	\$ 42,019.53	\$ 55,620.00	

NET REVENUE FROM VARIOUS ACTIVITIES:

	1994	1993
Convention	27,177.89	35,808.00
OCTA Store	23,387.32	31,976.00
Publications	(36,415.15)	(33,653.00)

ANNUAL FUND RAISING DRIVE UPDATE

The last issue of News from the Plains reported the early results of OCTA's Annual Fund Raising Drive. Since then we have received over 100 additional contributions—look for their names in the next issue. As of February 15, 1995 the totals stand at:

Endowment Fund	\$4085	
Annual Fund	\$2396	
Designated Funds		
Preservation	\$345	
Archaeology	86	
Trail Marking, G & S	727	
Trail Mapping	136	
COED	225	
Education	120	
Special Publications	1095	
Subtotal:	\$2734	Total Funds Received to Date: \$9215

This represents another impressive effort by the members of America's foremost historic trail preservation association. Special thanks to the individuals who chose to make a difference!

GRAND ISLAND CONVENTION (from page 1)

cholera epidemic on the trail. Lyn Ryder will speak of later trail history with the development of road ranches along the Nebraska trail. And local historian, Ronnie O'Brien, will use the O'Brien family history to tell us about local settlements on the trail near Wood River.

Dr. Eli Paul, senior research historian for the Nebraska State Historical Society, will present one of the first showings of the recently discovered William Quisenberry sketches of Chimney Rock in 1851. Come to Grand Island to see this premiere presentation and to hear an overall review of Nebraska's trail history.

As the bus tours follow the trail, we ask you to use your imagination to visualize the trail as it existed before natural and cultural intrusion. One of the first stops on the tour south of the Platte River will be the Susan Hail grave site. Here the wind-blown prairie appears much as it did to the emigrants as they caught their first sight of the Platte River valley. Another highlight will be the stop at Fort Kearny, featured in Jay Mennenga's article. You will enjoy the Nebraska hospitality accorded to its guests as you visit the Dawson County Museum in Lexington, Nebraska. Then enjoy living history as you stop at the Jeffrey's ranch to see the approaches dug out by the emigrants crossing Plum Creek. The tour will end as we follow the Old Military Road from Shelton to Grand Island on the north side of the Platte River. As you listen to the commentary by local historians and diary excerpts compiled by Charles Martin, you will return to your "camp site" with an understanding of both the joys and hardships shared on

the Platte River trail.

The hikers' tour, led by Ross Marshall, will include a stop at Fort Kearny and a hike along the nearby Platte River. On the return trip to Grand Island, participants will stop at the Susan Hail grave site.

The tour north of the Platte River includes stops at one of the Ezra Meeker markers in Grand Island, the Loup River crossing near Palmer, Nebraska, the Mormon camp grounds south of Fullerton and the site of the Mormon settlement in Genoa, Nebraska. In Columbus, you will view the Loup River and ferry marker. On the return trip to your camp site, you will see the swales of the Old Military Road near Clarks and the Lone Tree marker at Central City, Nebraska.

For those of you who are driving to the convention, a pre-convention tour will meet at Ogallala, Nebraska on Monday, August 7, under the direction of Bob Roeser. You will visit California Hill, Ash Hollow, O'Fallons Bluff and the ruts at the nearby Kock ranch. On Tuesday, August 8, a pre-convention tour will meet at Oak, Nebraska to follow the trail along the Little Blue River with stops at the sites of road ranches and the Narrows. Russ Genung will lead the tour.

A major post-convention event will be the dedication at Alcove Springs Park near Marysville, Kansas on Sunday, August 13, at 2:00 P.M.

The Nebraska Chapter welcomes you to Grand Island where you will find "Nebraska, the Good Life" and the friendly hospitality extended to our guests. We look forward to making your visit an enjoyable and enlightening experience as you follow Nebraska's trails. ■



Following Bellwethers along the trail between Sweetwater Canyon and Rock Creek.

—Robby Gunstream photo

FOLLOWING BELLWETHERS

Herding Elephants with Sublette and Hudspeth during the Summer of 1994

BY ROBBY GUNSTREAM

AS REPORTED IN THE JULY 1994 issue of *News from the Plains*, the Thompson brothers, Pat and Chuck, the extraordinary mule skinner Richard Seiler and his wife Oskie, and I were on the trail this past summer. We hoped to cover approximately five hundred miles of the trail, beginning on July 16 just east of South Pass at Sweetwater Station and finishing in mid-August in Wells, Nevada. We planned to use portions of the main trail and two major cutoffs, Sublette's and Hudspeth's.

Our crew was an experienced one. Pat walked from Fort Laramie to Fort Bridger during the summer of 1990, while I had negotiated the eastern half of the trail from St. Joseph, Missouri, into southwestern Wyoming during 1991. With this behind us, we looked

Much of the forms and seriousness of this world is merely following bellwethers.

John Banks, July 8, 1849

forward quite eagerly to doing battle with Sublette and Hudspeth, as well as with the challenges of the main trail. Pat and I brought trail experience, Chuck an indomitable sense of humor, and Rick and Oskie a rare and valuable expertise with pack animals. Our mule team included Scarlet, Scooter, Squaw, Sue, Trinity, and Diamond Lil'. Nothing was spared in preparing to mount an expedition that would spend a month covering roughly a fourth of the road. To travel the trail, the group must function as a small, self-contained village complete with food, clothing, shelter, and emergency items.

As we prepared, our most burning questions concerned the two cutoffs: in practical terms, would the savings in miles justify the added stresses and strains the USGS topo maps and the emigrant diaries attested? Could we shed any light on the first half of that famous admonition, "Don't take no cutoffs"? How and why?

Of all my trail companions, I am closest to John Banks. Not coincidentally, he began Hudspeth's Cutoff on July 24, apparently five days after Hudspeth and Myers led the first party west from Soda Springs. To set a tone and our bearings, I would again like to turn to this dear friend.

SOUTH PASS

July 6: We took dinner on the banks of the Sweetwater, even here a considerable stream. A short time after we left we heard men cheering; we were through the pass! Until now the waters on which we camp and those that pass my home mingle in one common flood as they roll toward the Atlantic; here they seek the Pacific's tide.¹

Our first three days on the trail covered some 55 miles between Sweetwater Station and Pacific Springs. This spectacular section of the trail has ruts aplenty, good water and campsites, and marvelous views still much the same as when the emigrants enjoyed them. It poses several problems; it might, in fact, present a microcosm of the entire

trail experience. This route requires sustained travel at over 6500 feet, presents arid conditions one moment and river crossings the next, and provides the opportunity to view interesting wildlife.

Highlights include the magnificent Sweetwater Canyon, Rocky Ridge, the 40-degree water at Radium Spring, marvelous views of the Wind River mountains and Pacific (Oregon) Buttes, the final crossing of the Sweetwater River, and, of course, South Pass. Wild horses can often be seen in this section of the trail; this year we saw no horses, but watched for some time an enormous gray wolf about 300 yards away. We discovered Radium Spring on a hot afternoon, were restored by the sight of the Wind Rivers, toiled hilariously with Willow

Spring which one must go through rather than around, did battle with the Sweetwater at the Burnt Ranch, and paid homage to Ezra Meeker at South Pass.

South Pass is the place not to be missed by those with a passion for the trails of the American West. An interesting day can be spent locating the pass and exploring a few miles east and west. A trip to Twin Mounds and a westward return provides a glimpse of how the emigrants might have seen it. The expanse is so grand, the light so intense, and presence in the ruts so profound that no camera or written description will ever capture South Pass. To travel to South Pass and there to contemplate its history as a trade route, an international continental boundary, a gateway to the Ultima Thule, and a crossroad of cultures is to begin to understand some of the divergent forces in western American history. I know of no other place that is so immediately instructive.

As one descends from South Pass to Pacific Springs the trail changes quickly and not particularly for the better. With appropriate permission, Pacific Springs offers a fine campsite with good water, adequate feed for the animals, interesting ruins of the Old Halter and Flick Ranch, and a magnificent sunset. West of Pacific Springs today's trekker is faced with the same old dilemma: the easier, flatter yet longer route via Fort Bridger or the torturous desert and mountain route known as Sublette's Cutoff.

SUBLETTE'S CUTOFF

July 7: We intend to take Sublette's Cutoff. Such is the anxiety to go ahead that thirty-five miles without water weighs but little against the additional time of the other road, that being seventy-five miles longer.

A mile west of Pacific Springs the fun begins: water is nonexistent, it is hot, green is nowhere to be seen, nasty flies are everywhere, and the walking is through sand and sage. After the initial shock, spirits rise at the "False Parting

of the Ways," the finest bit of historical nonsense yet devised. Adding to the general euphoria is the thought that the Dry Sandy will surely be dry and the Little Sandy, after a long day, quite little. Yet, the trail, from Pacific Springs to the "real" Parting of the Ways, is full of delights: the mountain hens noted by John Banks, the marvelous play of light on Plume Rocks, ruts and old iron fragments that lovers of the trail so enjoy, and, of course, the Parting of the Ways, one of the most haunting places in the American West. The mind's eye and ear cannot help but embrace this place as the major crossroads it was 150 years ago, with the wagons, the animals, the people of many cultures, the commotion, the decisions, and, of course, the goodbyes. At this place today the heart takes over and fills the gaps.

The Sublette stretches from the Parting of the Ways to the Bear Valley and can be divided into two manageable segments: (1) the Parting to the Green River, and (2) the Green to the Bear Valley. The Sublette is a mean, uncompromising test of endurance and outdoor acumen. It is not, I plead, a place for organized youth groups, family outings, or for the inexperienced. It offers a wild variety of desert and mountain terrains and is not perfectly flat for so much as a half-mile. It is, however, a remarkable glimpse of the trail in that so much of it remains as the emigrants found it.

For the first section of Sublette's Cutoff, we camped at the Little Sandy, Big Sandy Reservoir, Buckhorn Canyon, and the Green River. To ease the difficulty of travel around the canals that now bisect the Cutoff, we turned left (southwest) at the Parting of the Ways, camped at the Little Sandy at the main trail crossing, and made our way northwesterly to a camp at the Big Sandy. It seems the emigrants traveled from there to the Green in a long 41-mile pull. With water available in a BLM well in Buckhorn Canyon, we decided to negotiate this segment in two days.

July 10: Started last evening at five p.m. Traveled until eleven, rested an hour, traveled on till four p.m. this day. It is a dismal journey, most of the time dust three or four inches deep and wind blowing. I was driving loose stock and toward the end of our march became very much exhausted; had to lay down to rest several times.... I had never felt so prostrated in my life.

Leaving the Big Sandy early on the morning of July 22 we started on the Sublette, crossing some of the most remote desert country remaining in the West. After leaving the reservoir and crossing Highway 187, we encountered this cheery sign after a mile along a county road: "Road Abandoned—Travel at Your Own Risk." We put our heads down and headed west.

If you head to the Sublette, avoid the water in the artesian well at the Big Sandy Reservoir. Though it tastes reasonably good, it is highly impregnated with sulfur, smells terrible, and will provide thrills aplenty twelve hours later. The Sublette offers challenges enough without the intestinal meltdown that plagued our intrepid

band across this desolate stretch. The general revelry that ensued was funny for a while, but an annoying complication to an arduous undertaking.

This portion of the Sublette was hot and long, the monotony broken by the subtlety of the terrain, three major canyons, and the vague feeling that we probably shouldn't be doing this. (In truth, the feeling wasn't vague at all.) We believed there would be water available at BLM wells in West Buckhorn Draw and Buckhorn Canyon. We planned to revive the fading animals at the well at the draw and push ahead to a camp at the well in the canyon. Our hearts sank when we found the well in the draw dry. As we pressed ahead to the canyon, we made contingency plans in case the canyon well was also dry. Surely this was the most anxious and thirstiest four miles of the trip as we contemplated having to travel through the night to the Green River as the emigrants had done. Alas, our relief was monumental as we discovered water in abundance in the Buckhorn Canyon troughs. Even the skeleton of an antelope head floating in one of them couldn't dampen our relieved spirits. We chased a bull out of the canyon, made camp, and fell asleep to the serenade of what seemed like dozens of desert coyotes.

Sixteen miles the following day, interrupted by a visit to the grave of Lucinda B. Wright, certainly one of the most remote trail graves, and a brief look at Steed Canyon, found us at the banks of the Green. When we arrived no one even stopped. We plunged in, hilariously and in near delirium, cooling our hot feet and all of the rest of us. We literally fell into the pasture and metaphorically into the waiting arms of Bob and Karen Rennells. It had been a long, hot, and unremitting two-day march from the Big Sandy, and a four-day ordeal from Pacific Springs.

July 17: The road is mountainous. Now you are on a high mountain and snow lower down than you; presently in a valley crossing a dashing stream, then raise your eyes and view the track, see now it winds, sometimes almost rearing up, then falling until it gains the summit of yonder mountain. This is our road.

After a day of rest at the Green, we headed for Pine Grove, one of the least-visited of all trail campsites. The desert terrain and heat resumed and we found we had underestimated the difficulty of this stretch of trail. Pine Grove, with its trees, grass, and spring, proved to be a fine campsite. Leaving Pine Grove, our road crossed Slate Creek Ridge, descended through Rocky Gap (which I suggest is actually 2.5 miles west of the location indicated on the South Fork Mountain USGS quad), and climbed the daunting Commissary Ridge. From Rocky Gap we used the Dempsey Cutoff to cross Commissary Ridge and traveled southwest to Ham's Fork to avoid development that now crowds the main Sublette route further south. This was a great day as both ridges offer magnificent views of the surrounding countryside and the trail segments that converge on Rocky Gap.

July 17: We climb a mountain this morning that seemed as if it never would find the summit, but of all the going down hill I

have ever seen or heard of, this beat in two miles not less than between two and three thousand feet. Both hind wheels locked and even then we had to hold to the wagon. It is so exceedingly steep as to be painful to walk down.

Our route from the Ham's Fork climbed to the main trail on the tableland to the southwest. We paid our respects to Nancy Hill, Alfred Corum, and others who rest in the area, passed Emigrant Springs, and then, instead of descending the ridge using the main portion of the Sublette, stayed on the ridge and headed north to the Dempsey Cutoff. The traverse of Dempsey Ridge is beautiful with spectacular views of Commissary Ridge to the east. Then the good Mr. Dempsey has a little surprise for you. Of all the going down hill I have ever seen or heard of, this beat everything.

Our sure-footed mules, under the guidance of the Seilers, handled this section of trail beautifully. However, to contemplate the descent with wagons is frightful indeed. For walkers, portions of the descent of Dempsey Ridge are clearly, in mountaineering jargon, Class 3, meaning the terrain is so steep that the use of hands for balance is required.

From the top of Dempsey Ridge at 8,200 feet the trail first descends 600 feet in one mile to the valley that holds Rock Creek. From here the trail winds northwesterly through the valley and climbs Rock Creek Ridge to a magnificent view of Sublette Flat, Stoffer Ridge, Cokeville, and the whole of the Bear Valley. From Rock Creek Ridge the trail descends 1,200 feet in another mile. You can see the trail across Sublette Flat during the descent of Dempsey Ridge and Rock Creek Ridge, yet when on the Flat you can't find it. I had heard experienced trail hands tell of this, but didn't quite believe it. I do now.

As we stood atop Rock Creek Ridge preparing for the final trek into Cokeville and the junction with the main trail, we would have contemplated the significance of a successful traverse of Sublette's Cutoff. Except for one small thing. Clearly, Sublette and Greenwood were not amused and from wherever they now rest they sent wind and threatening weather to remind us of our rightful place in the cosmos. Hoping we wouldn't be flattened in one final brilliant flash of heat and light, we saved the bragging for later, headed down the Ridge and across the Flat, sometimes on the trail and sometimes to its left or right, climbed Stoffer Ridge (another cruelty of geography), and dove into the shower at the truck stop in Cokeville, our first such experience in almost two weeks. The Sublette was ours.

—To Be Continued.

Notes

1. Quotes in italics are from the diary of John Banks in Howard L. Scamehorn, ed., *The Buckeye Rovers in the Gold Rush* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1965).

2. Randy Brown's "Attack on the Hudspeth Cutoff" in Volume 12, No. 2 of *Overland Journal* contains an excellent description of the Hudspeth Cutoff between Twin Springs and Sublette Reservoir.

CAPT. SUTTER.

The following graphic sketch of Capt. Sutter, and Sutter's Fort, is from an excellent letter from California in the last number of the Home Journal.

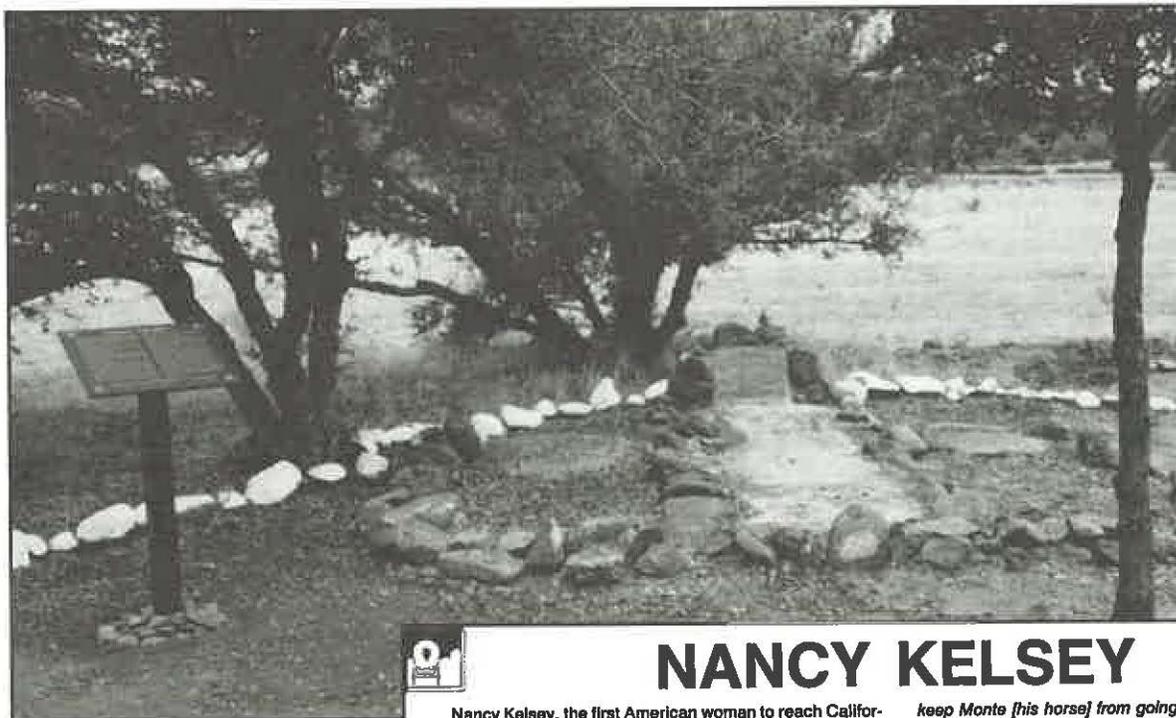
I will give, as you have requested, the reader of the Home Journal a sketch of Capt. Sutter (pronounced by himself Sooter,) his means, the fort bearing his name, and a few facts in relation to the gold region. He is about 52 years of age, of middling hight [sic], straight form, and possesses that symmetry and smallness of hand and foot which Lord Byron sets down as a sure evidence of gentle blood. In manners and conversation, Capt. Sutter is a perfect Chesterfield: he is well educated, and speaks several different languages fluently; he is a native of Switzerland, and was one of the officers of the Swiss Guard in the Revolution of July, during the reign of Charles X. After this Revolution, he emigrated so the United States, became naturalized and resided several years in Missouri; thence, in 1839, he came to California, and obtained a grant of ninety miles square of land from the Mexican authorities; his title is a conditional one, and may, hereafter, create trouble for him. In his private character, Capt. Sutter is kind, hospitable and generous. In fact, his generosity frequently lays him open to be preyed upon by the idle and worthless. When asked why he permitted such large demands upon his hospitality without a recompence, he replied: "What can I do, Sir—they come here, eat, drink and sleep and sometimes without even thanking me—but what can I do? I cannot turn them out in the wild forest." Surrounded as he was, on his first settling in this country, by tribes of wild Indians, he has, by kindness and just dealing, attached them to his interest, and he now has from three to four hundred of these Indians devoted to him and his. They, for their food and a pay from four to six dollars per month, man his fort, work his farms and mills, and do all the labor generally required in new settlements. Capt. Sutter, with all his lands and other property, is subjected to many annoyances. When the Russians, through necessity, abandoned their settlements at Ross and Bodega, Capt. Sutter purchased their stock, cannon furniture [sic], etc. and transported them, with great labor, to his settlements at New-Helvetia. This purchase was effected for a consideration of \$30,000, to be paid in an annual installment of wheat, deliverable to one of the Russian Fur Company's vessels. The installments, owing to the unfortunate seasons, have laid over for some years, and, should a Russian vessel appear at this juncture, his large crop will be swept away, at a mere nominal value.

Sutter's Fort, now called Fort Sacramento, is situated a short distance from the southern bank of the American Fork, on one of the tributaries of the Sacramento, 5 miles from its mouth and 120 miles from San Francisco. The fort is in form of a parallelogram, 500 feet in length by 150 in breadth.

The walls and houses are built of the oft-mentioned mud brick or adobe. Bastions at the angles, with cannons mounted, protect all sides, and numerous guns project from the mud walls. On the inner side, facing the court, are numerous buildings, occupied as storehouses, dwellings, and barracks for the garrison. The main store-house was rented, during the fever of gold digging, at \$3,000 per month. The garrison of the fort being more trusty men, are better fed and clothed than the farm Indians.

The crop of wheat raised by Capt. Sutter, for the year 1848, was upward of 30,000 bushels, which is valued at the round sum of \$80,000. This is the proceed from the labor of 125 rude Indians. He has also erected mills for grinding wheat and sawing timber, and it was in the construction of a dam and race for a sawmill that one of the persons in his employ discovered the gold.—*New-York Daily Tribune*, Saturday, April 7, 1849.

—Submitted by Harold Schindler.



Due to the efforts of OCTA and its Graves and Sites Committee, the grave of one of the great heroines of the California Trail, Nancy Kelsey, is now appropriately commemorated.

—Randy Brown photo.

NANCY KELSEY

Nancy Kelsey, the first American woman to reach California by the overland route, was a member of the Bidwell-Bartleson Party of 1841. This party reached the San Joaquin Valley ranch of John Marsh on November 4 after having crossed the summit of the Sierra Nevada near present Sonora Pass.

Nancy Roberts Kelsey was born August 1, 1823, in Barren County, Kentucky. With her family she soon moved to Jackson County, Missouri, where at age fifteen she married Benjamin Kelsey. Their first child, Martha Ann, was born about December 15, 1839.

The Kelseys joined the party of sixty-four emigrants who rendezvoused in early May 1841 at Sapling Grove, eight miles outside Weston, the fur company outfitting town on the Missouri frontier. These prospective emigrants intended to take "Sublette's Trace" to the Rocky Mountains and then find their way to California.

After an uneventful crossing of the plains, while camped on August 11 near Soda Springs in present Idaho, the company split. Thirty-four of the original party, including Benjamin, Nancy, and Martha Ann, turned south for California. On September 11, while in present northwest Utah, the Kelseys were forced to abandon their wagons. From then on, for nearly three months, Nancy rode horseback or walked, carrying her child across deserts and mountains until the end of the journey. One of her companions, Nicholas ("Cheyenne") Dawson, later wrote his recollection of her as they traveled down the rugged western slope of the Sierras:

"Once, I remember, when I was struggling along trying to

keep Monte [his horse] from going over, I looked back and saw Mrs. Kelsey a little way behind me, with her child in her arms, barefooted I think, and leading her horse—a sight I shall never forget."

The Kelseys had ten children in all and over the years lived in various places in California and Oregon, earning and losing several small fortunes. While at Sonoma in 1848 the Kelseys were involved in Fremont's "Bear Flag Revolt." Nancy is sometimes called the Betsy Ross of California for her part (with several other women) in sewing together the original California Bear Flag.

Benjamin Kelsey died in Los Angeles in 1889. Nancy left the city and homesteaded about 2.5 miles west of here in Kelsey Canyon where with her family's help she built a small cabin. During the last year of her life she suffered from an incurable cancer, and when near death Nancy asked that she be buried in a real coffin, "not something scraped up with old boards." Nancy Kelsey died August 10, 1896, while staying at the home of her daughter, Nancy Rose Clanton, which was located not far from this gravesite. She is buried between two children who died in 1895, a granddaughter and one other, now known only as "Baby Plummer."

By all accounts Nancy Kelsey must have lived her life as she was described by Joseph B. Chiles, a traveling companion of her youth, who, many years later, wrote of her as he knew her on the trail in 1841: *"She bore the fatigue of the journey with so much heroism, patience and kindness that there still exists a warmth in every heart for the mother and her child, that were always forming silver linings for every dark cloud that assailed them."*

Signing and Funding by

OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

1994

This is part of your American heritage. Honor it, protect it, and preserve it for your children.

OCTA PLACES MARKER AT NANCY KELSEY'S GRAVE

The Graves and Sites Committee has placed a marker at the grave of Nancy Kelsey. This grave is located on the ranch of Bonnie Goller in Cottonwood Canyon about 15 miles from New Cuyama, California. New Cuyama is located in a rural area of the state about 50 miles east of Santa Maria.

Nancy Kelsey is remembered as the only woman member of the Bidwell-Bartleson Party of 1841, the first emigrant company to travel directly overland to California. After a long life full of adventure, Nancy Kelsey homesteaded in the Cuyama neighborhood, not far from two of her daughters and their families. She died in 1896.

Interested parties who would like to visit the grave are asked to write Bonnie Goller at P.O. Box 206, New Cuyama, CA 93254 to obtain permission and directions to the ranch. The California-Nevada Chapter plans a dedication ceremony at the grave site on April 1 as part of the Mohave Desert trek that weekend.

I would like to thank Bonnie Goller personally for her cheerful cooperation during all phases of this marking project. The marker was placed at the grave Thanksgiving weekend, 1994. —Randy Brown, Committee Chair

FIRST FORT ON THE GREAT PLATTE RIVER ROAD

By Jay Mennenga

HOW COULD A FRONTIER FORT without stockaded walls occupy an important place in the Oregon-California migration? "Just as in ancient times all roads led to Rome, so on the frontier of the Great American Desert all roads led to Fort Kearny on the Platte."¹ Because of its location, Fort Kearny served as the gathering point of all the trails emanating from the Missouri River. Thus the Great Platte River Road began at this strategic point, today located eight miles southeast of the city of Kearney (note the different spelling), Nebraska. Ft. Kearny will be a tour stop during the OCTA Convention August 7-12, 1995.

THE TWO FORT KEARNYS

There were actually two Ft. Kearnys. Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny established the first at Table Creek (present Nebraska City) as a result of an 1844 report by the Secretary of War recommending a chain of forts along the Oregon Trail to protect the emigrants. Since the main route was overland from Independence, Missouri, and not up the Missouri River to Nebraska City, this fort was strategically misplaced. A War Department directive authorized the establishment of another fort "near Grand Island where the road to California encounters the Platte River."²

Topographical engineer Lt. Daniel Woodbury cited the new location's advantages: "a slight elevation two-thirds of a mile from the nearest bayou of the Platte, a guarantee against flooding; nearby, the heaviest timber of the Grand Island group; natural hay bottoms, and a strategic location for keeping the peace between the warring Pawnee and Sioux."

By May 1, 1848 the original Fort Kearny was abandoned. Immediately construction of the new post began with "175 men erecting temporary sod shelters, manufacturing bricks and adobes, and cutting and sawing timber for later permanent structures." Later that year this post was renamed Fort Kearny (it was temporarily named Fort Childs after a Mexican war hero). This first fort on the Oregon Trail was now ready to fulfill its mission of protecting emigrants. Fort Kearny came to symbolize the expansion and development of the West for 23 years from 1848-1871.

Captain Howard Stansbury of the Corps of Engi-

neers described Fort Kearny in 1849:

"The post at present consists of a number of long low buildings, constructed principally of adobe...with nearly flat roofs; a large hospital-tent; two or three workshops, enclosed by canvas walls; store houses constructed in the same manner; one or two adobe stables, with roofs of brush; and tents for the accommodation of the officers and men."

Emigrants' first encounters with Ft. Kearny ranged from appreciation for an oasis on the plains to disappointment at its construction. Dr. C. M. Clark, bound to Pike's Peak in 1860, appreciated the fort's value:

"On reaching this point, the emigrant feels that he has reached an oasis; he sees once more the evidence of civilization and refinement, the neat and comfortable tenements of the officers, the offices and stores, all remind him of home, and as he looks aloft at the masthead, where the stars and stripes are proudly waving to the breeze, he fully realizes he is still protected, still inhabits America."

A more dismal picture was printed by two diarists. Hamelin described the fort as "situated on a low bottom, which must prove very disagreeable in wet weather and would be considered first foundation in our country for the ague..." Dr. Caldwell saw Fort Kearny as "a hard looking place."

Mrs. Ferris expresses her disappointment upon seeing the fort in 1852:

"I had a confused notion of massive granite walls and frowning battlements, surmounted with cannon ready to belch forth their thunder; and surrounded with bastions and parapets, with grim visaged men... pacing to and fro with guns....As we rode up I could not help the conviction that we had mistaken a trading post for this fortress—but it was Fort Kearny and nothing else."

If Mrs. Ferris had returned 12 years later in 1864, she would have seen a series of fortifications constructed around the Fort Kearny building area. However, these walls were never needed, since the fort was never at-



William Henry Jackson's "Fort Kearny" shows this important Nebraska trail site at the height of the overland emigration.—Art courtesy of Scotts Bluff National Monument.

tacked by Indians. Today Mrs. Ferris would be pleased to see Fort Kearny reconstructed with a frontier stockade and four lookout towers. This impressive-looking structure is what you will see on our OCTA tour.

FORT KEARNY AND THE GOLD RUSH

"It is one of history's ironies that when the greatest gold rush in the history of the world first descended upon it, Fort Kearny was an infant of a post..., and with only a few pathetic structures to remind the homesick Argonauts of the civilization they had abandoned." Its busiest year was during the 1849 rush to California by the gold-seekers. An estimated 25,000 '49ers followed the south bank of the Platte River, thus passing in close proximity to the new fort. The busiest time during this peak year was from May 8-June 22. The busiest day during this time was May 24, when, according to twelve accounts, there were probably between 500-600 wagons and 2,000-2,500 emigrants.

"Aside from protection from the Indians, which was an intangible benefit as long as no Indians were in sight, the most appreciated service was provisioning." Even though Fort Kearny was only about one-sixth of the way to Oregon City, many emigrants were already out of supplies. The most important goods, "obtained from the commissary were grain, bacon, pickled pork, and flour." Buffalo meat, brought to the fort by professional hunters, provided a much needed source of vitamins.

The post blacksmith and post subtler also played important roles in assisting the emigrants. The former repaired wagon wheels and re-shod the animals. The latter sold groceries, cloths, lotions, syrup, soap, and even whiskey. The subtler also operated a crude post office, where the mail usually did not get through.

Addison Crane expresses his gratitude for these provisions:

"They are very kind to emigrants, as an instance of which I may mention that a blacksmith shop has been opened for their accommodation where they may mend their numerous breaks free of charge. Procured here a good meal of bread, fresh butter and milk, and ate so much it gave me a violet headache and made me quite sick all night.... There is a subtler's store where many articles can be held at enormous prices."

FORT KEARNY'S PLACE IN HISTORY

Ironically, Fort Kearny was never attacked by Indians. They knew better than to launch a frontal assault on even an unfortified fort guarded by many well-armed troops. No major battles occurred within 100 miles of this garrison. In 1864 the Sioux Indian uprising caused wholesale destruction of ranches and stage stations, resulting in much loss of life. Soldiers from the fort pursued but never caught the raiders. However, this fort did provide a sanctuary for the survivors.

If Fort Kearny's military exploits were not important,

what was its legacy? Fort Kearny was recognized as the place where all the trails joined to form the Platte River Road to Oregon, California and Salt Lake City. It was "the end of the shakedown cruise across the prairie and the beginning of the voyage across the perilous ocean of the Great Plains, a place to pause and reflect, to recuperate, to recognize, to get your bearings."

From 1848 until 1871, when Fort Kearny was discontinued, a panorama of American History passed through this important way station. First the gold rushers, then the periodic Indian Wars, the short-lived Pony Express, the Overland Stage Lines, and finally the transcontinental railroad all contributed to making this fort a bustling center of activity. The Pony Express even had a station here. Soldiers from Fort Kearny provided armed escorts for the stagecoaches, particularly during the 1860s during Indian raids. Its last important function was to protect the crews building the Union Pacific railroad lines.

FORT KEARNY TODAY

Fort Kearny is today a state park operated by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. It encompasses 40 of the fort's original 80 acres. While living in Kearney, I visited this fort often, strolling among the tall cottonwoods. This tranquil environment contrasted with the busyness of the garrison in its zenith. These experiences sparked my interest in the Oregon Trail, and I subsequently wrote my own book about the pioneers search for the "good life."

On our OCTA tour you will see a restored stockaded fort, complete with four lookout towers, and information panels inside the fort. You can see some of the original foundations on the parade grounds, complete with a flagpole. There is also a grass mound in which munitions were stored.

As you walk through the well-watered grounds, you may see living history displayed at the blacksmith-carpenter shop. The visitors center has an excellent museum detailing the history of Fort Kearny. An 18-minute film summarizes the fort's importance.

Gene Hunt, the park superintendent, will accommodate our visit and make its history come alive. We may even see firings of Fort Kearny's cannons! See you at the fort in August.

NOTES

1. Mattes, Merrill J., *The Great Platte River Road* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 167. Merrill Mattes' award-winning book is the major source for this article.
2. "The History of Fort Kearny," Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. All subsequent citations are from this source or Mattes.

Jay Mennenga is an OCTA member from Council Bluffs, Iowa. He has written a book on the Oregon Trail, Lessons from the Pioneers: Reflections along the Oregon Trail.



CROSSROADS

CHAPTER OUTLINES SPRING DOINGS

Trail Marking—Members of Utah

Crossroads are anxiously awaiting the arrival of warm weather and dry trails so that work on mapping and marking the trails can get under way again. A good many people are chomping at the bit to get out among the sagebrush with markers and tools in hand. Trail marking is one of Crossroads' primary goals this year. Preservation work will also continue at the Donner Spring Historic Site.

Spring Lecture Meeting—Norman Wright, who many of you will remember from the convention in Salt Lake, has continued his research on pioneer odometers and will share his latest findings with Utah Crossroads in a general membership meeting on Thursday, April 27th at 7:00 P.M. The meeting will be held in the Salt Lake County Commission Chambers. Wright is a dynamic speaker and his lecture promises to be interesting, informative and entertaining.

Field Trip—The spring trek is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, May 21 and 22. The two-day field trip will traverse the Hastings Cutoff from Pilot Peak across Nevada to the Ruby Mountains and on to the Humboldt River. Roy Tea and Al Mulder are in charge and will be receiving assistance from OCTA members in Nevada. For more information, contact Crossroads President George Ivory, Roy Tea, or Al Mulder.

Trails Day/Trails Week in Utah—National Trails Day and Utah Historic Trails Week will be celebrated in Utah with a week full of trail related activities coordinated by the various groups in Utah interested in trail history. Utah Crossroads Chapter and members will be involved in a big way with the celebration. President George Ivory will keep us posted on the activities and how members can get involved as details are worked out by the various agencies.

New Officers—At the January General Membership meeting of Utah Crossroads new officers were elected. After four highly successful and productive years as president, Al Mulder handed the gavel and the reins over to the new president George Ivory. Randy Wilson will serve as vice-president. Eldon Fletcher takes over as the new secretary. Gar Elison continues as our extremely competent treasurer. These new officers have exciting plans to keep Utah Crossroads busy on the trail. Crossroads expresses deep appreciation to Al Mulder, George Ivory, Morris Goates and Gar Elison for their great years of service.

—Lyndia Carter

COLORADO

OCTA CHAPTER IS REBORN

A week before Christmas 1994, Ward Cowley, elected interim president at the Colorado Meeting in Salt Lake City, asked Merrill Mattes and me to join him for lunch to chart a new direction for the group, asking where have we been, where are we now, and where do we want to go? After a fine lunch, we came up with these steps to become active again. Our plan is to have a spring meeting where all could contribute ideas. Merrill offered to contact the Nebraska folks to see if we could help at the National Convention in Grand Island next summer. They are planning a pre-convention tour of Western Nebraska and Merrill will keep in touch. I was to try to locate some place for a meeting. Our best bet appears to be the Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum supported by the Lowry Heritage Foundation. They have many great displays, parking space and meeting space. Admission fees are reduced for groups like ours.

The three of us will meet soon to set a date, time, place, and agenda and to get materials put together and mailed to the membership.

—Jim Bowers

GATEWAY

THE WIDE MISSOURI

Dr. Harmon Mothershead, Professor of History at Northwest Missouri State University, presented a paper, "The Wide Missouri," at the January 10, 1995, Gateway chapter meeting at the Pony Express National Memorial in St. Joseph.

Dr. Mothershead focused on the importance of the river during the era prior to steamboat travel. He used slides to illustrate the talk. Dr. Mothershead noted that the Missouri River was the way into the interior of the Louisiana Purchase for explorers and fur traders. He discussed the types of boats used for river travel, including bull, keel, flat, sail and steam. One difference between keelboats and steamboats was that while the steamboat moved you upriver, *you* moved the keelboat. Dr. Mothershead discussed the opinion of some scholars that the Mississippi should be considered the tributary of the Missouri.

Assistance for Dr. Mothershead's paper was provided by the American Mirror Program of the Missouri Humanities Council.

NEBRASKA

PLANNING ON TRACK FOR 1995 CONVENTION

Excitement is building in the Cornhusker State as plans for the 1995 OCTA National Convention at Grand Island, Nebraska are nailed down. All signs indicate that OCTA members will again be treated to a unique and enjoyable week of trail activities at the annual convention, whose theme this year focuses on the Great Platte River Road. Chapter President Helen Sundell reports that convention brochures and registration forms are in the mail, and she encourages those who plan to attend to make their room reservations immediately.



CA-NV

OCTA SALUTES ELISHA STEPHENS

At 11:00 on April 1, OCTA's CA-NV chapter, in association with the Cupertino Historical Society and the city of Cupertino, are scheduled to dedicate a monument to California trail pioneer and early Santa Clara Valley settler Elisha Stephens. A plaque mounted on a rock cairn on the Blackberry Farm Golf Course, site of Stephens' homestead, commemorates Stephens' leadership in 1844 of the first wagon party to cross the Sierra, noting his service in the Mexican War and his predilection for snacking on rattlesnakes.

—Mary Lou Lyon



SOUTHWEST

SECOND MAPPING TRIP SUCCESSFUL

To make up for the rainy weekend of our November mapping trip, southwest New Mexico gave us a perfect weather weekend in February. Frosty sunrises became cloudless, sun-warmed days, helping eleven chapter members and three guests from four states hone their mapping skills while enjoying the scenery.

OCTA board member Lee Underbrink of Wyoming probably got a little different taste of a trail outing; it was nice to have him along.

Three members got a bit of a head start on the weekend by spending Friday afternoon in the Coyote Hills, south of Lordsburg. Mapping this area had been the goal of the washed-out November trip; this day it got mapped.

The group met early on Saturday morning in Deming, fired up the CBs and headed for Cooke's Canyon and the Southern Trail. Richard Greene, Mr. SWOCTA himself and our head honcho, divided us into groups and we broke up to begin mapping our assigned segments. By

the end of the day, we had mapped four miles, visited with the couple who oversee the Cooke's Spring area for the BLM, seen at least a dozen grave sites (including one '49er whose marked stone is still present and whose death and burial is noted in at least one diary), plus a spectacular visit to an area of numerous Indian petroglyphs and mortar holes. One hillside had three parallel swales, showing a lot of usage over the years. Indeed, Cooke's Canyon is a gem of trail history.

The trail proved more elusive on Sunday as we returned to map an area west of Cooke's Canyon. Two mapping groups started from opposite sides of a large valley, planning to meet in the middle with the trail totally mapped. It all seemed very straight forward based on available information, but we discovered that field work does not always match preliminary studies.

By our bailout time at midday, weary searchers were hiking out of the desert brush onto the nearby gravel road, hoping the taxi driver, Underbrink, would come along soon and return them to the staging area. If not for Don Buck's trail-trained eye, it would have been a no-find day. We learn from each of these attempts, even when the trail doesn't show itself easily.

Don wrote an excellent report, pointing out our successes, as well as where we went wrong on our Sunday hike. He also informed us that we now have about 10 miles of the Southern Trail mapped, but there are a total of roughly 800 miles to that trail, leaving us a long way to go. We will take what we learned to future mapping trips. The plan for the next one is to work on the Southern Trail over Whitmire Pass into the Animas Valley.

Stay tuned.

—Rose Ann Tompkins

TRAILS HEAD

QUILTS ON THE OREGON TRAIL.

On January 19, the Trails Head chapter and the Friends of the National Frontier Trails Center sponsored Mary Bywater Cross' program, "Quilts on the Oregon Trail." Mary has done extensive research on the subject and had copies of her book, *Treasures of the Trail: Quilts of the Oregon Trail* available. Her slide presentation and talk surprised many of us because the number of quilts devoted to the Oregon Trail theme. Approximately 170 people attended the afternoon and evening sessions.

John Leamon and Ross Marshall had just returned from a three-day trek on the Oregon-California Trail from Independence, Missouri to the Nebraska border. Jere Krakow, team manager for the development of the California and Pony Express Trails comprehensive plan and four members of his team guided us over the trail to identify existing resources and ruts for future use and preservation. Jere works out of the Denver Office of the National Park Service.

The weather was unseasonably cold, but heavy coats, good car heaters and plenty of enthusiasm for the trail enabled us to survive.

We are looking forward to the mid-year board meeting in Independence March 18. It will be nice to see everybody.

—Ross Marshall

NORTHWEST

AN EVENTFUL YEAR AND UPCOMING EVENTS

The National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center at Flagstaff Hill near Baker City has anticipated greeting 200,000 visitors in 1994. They credit their dynamic programs, innovative volunteers, and the first annual "taste of the Trail" pioneer festival for this success.

On Christmas Eve Oregon City—the oldest west of the Rockies—celebrated its sesquicentennial as an incorporated city with a special stamp cancellation at the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center at Abernethy Green in Oregon City. Several hundred people got special covers. As soon as doors are installed and the huge hoops are covered in white canvas, the facility will be ready for the public. The Oregon Trail Foundation anticipates opening Governor Abernethy's Store—a gift shop—soon and Northwest chapter members will get a tour in February.

A Barlow Road Commemoration is planned for 1995-96. The Oregon City area has provided seed money to get started.

The 1996 Applegate Trail Sesquicentennial is planning a wagon train from Winnemucca, NV, to Independence, OR. Registration for wagons is due this month. More information is available from Jim Renner. Call 503-22-TRAIL.

WYOMING

INDEPENDENCE DAY AT THE ROCK

Mark the 4th of July on your calendar and plan to attend our trail celebration at Independence Rock. The Chapter Board approached the members at the January meeting with the idea of a celebration at Independence Rock on July 4 for a statewide OCTA get-together this summer. The members unanimously endorsed the idea. As yet our plans are very tentative, but we hope to commemorate pioneer celebrations at Independence Rock in many ways. Much help will be needed for this event, not only for the Casper members, but our out-of-town members will be needed on for volunteer duties to make this a success. It promises be a fun get-together for all of us. We need speakers to talk about the fur trapper and pioneer celebrations at Independence Rock and hope to present living history displays. The event will be widely publicized, so we have an excellent opportunity to promote trail awareness. More information will be available in future newsletters. We want to see as many OCTAonians as possible at this event.

IDAHO-MONTANA

CHAPTER DEFENDS CALIFORNIA TRAIL

One of the most important activities of the Idaho-Montana chapter this winter has been tracking events and legislation related to the City of Rocks. Rock climbers have launched an all-out assault on current National Park Service policies restricting rock climbing on the Twin Sisters, a famous California Trail landmark. OCTA members have been writing their legislators, but rock climbers from all over the



Idaho-Montana Chapter members mark the California Trail's descent into Birch Creek.
—Janece Thornton photo.

world are lobbying hard for unrestricted access to all sites in the National Reserve. The Idaho-Montana chapter encourages all OCTA members to write their congressional representatives and the NPS to preserve this precious pioneer landmark.

Chapter members have also installed in a trail marker where the California Trail comes into Little Birch Creek.

—Janece Thornton,
Secretary

Announcements

CONVENTION NEEDS MUSICIANS

Calling all interested musicians for the 1995 OCTA convention at Grand Island, Nebraska. We are hoping for another big "Jam" and plan to see you there this year—so bring your instruments—Thank You.

Joseph W. Fairfield
HC-85, Box 21
Bridgeport, Nebraska, 69336-9502

SOUTHERN TRAIL EFFORTS CONTINUE

by Rose Ann Tompkins

Taking the OCTA Board's mandate to heart, the Southwest Chapter has begun the long road to recognition of the Southern Trail as a National Historic Trail. There have been two organized chapter weekends to do ground mapping and work has begun on reaching the government agencies and legislators to further the effort.

Chairing the chapter committee in this effort are Rose Ann Tompkins and Reba Wells Grandrud. Rose Ann is coordinating the mapping program using OCTA's MET Manual (Mapping Emigrant Trails). At present, efforts are concentrating on the area in New Mexico between the Rio Grande River, near Hatch, and Guadalupe Canyon in the extreme southwest corner of the state. However, interested individuals are encouraged to work on other portions of the Southern Trail, which extends for about 800 miles between Santa Fé, NM, and Warner's Ranch in California. Maps, both modern and historic of the targeted area, plus diary accounts are being collected to aid in searching for the trail. These will be available to those wishing to do mapping. Knowing where the trail was in general terms and mapping via the MET Manual are very different matters. OCTA must convince the National Park Service that there are trail remnants that need to be protected and preserved; our mapping will show them in a graphic way.

Reba is coordinating the organizing the political support to achieve our goal. This is a large task; she will appreciate any assistance or information you can provide. Contact continues with Garn Hatch of the Mormon Trails Association and George Cardinet of the Heritage Trail Fund/Amigos de Anza, both of whom have expressed interest in working with Southern Trail enthusiasts. In connection with her work for Arizona's State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Reba is involved with ASCOT (Arizona State Committee on Trails), the Anza National Historic Trail, and is working with the Utah Department of State History and the Arizona BLM on the Honeymoon and Temple Trails in

the Arizona Strip. Of course, she maintains her personal interest in any historic trail.

If you can provide information or assistance, please contact us.

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W—602-542-7139
e-mail: tompkin@primenet.com

Rose Ann Tompkins
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Chandler, AZ 85224
H 602-963-3565
fax—602-963-2991

COED REPORTS GROWING SUCCESS

For the fiscal year ending September 30, 1994 we have added 400 surveys to the Census of Overland Emigrant Documents database. While this year's total is slightly lower than last year's (6,100 hours last year), the two years combined give a total of over 10,200 hours of work done by COED volunteers! This is the equivalent of five full-time people and is truly fantastic. Please give credit where credit is due and honor your chapter volunteers at your chapter meetings and in your newsletters.

—Kathy Roubal, COED Chair

HANK FINCKEN PRESENTS ONE-MAN SHOW

On February 18, 1995, OCTA member Hank Fincken presented the premier performance of his one-man play, "A Pocketful of Rocks," at the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indian and Western Art in Indianapolis, Indiana. Mr. Fincken is well-known in this area for his performances as Christopher Columbus, Thomas Edison and Johnny Appleseed.

In "A Pocketful of Rocks," Mr. Fincken is a 1995 dad taking his children camping on the California Trail. Hank doubles as J. Goldsborough Bruff, an artist and diarist who in 1849 was captain of a group of forty-niners.

His 65-minute presentation uses a blend of costumes, props, slides of Bruff's sketches from the Huntington Library and slides from Fincken's 1993 tour of the California Trail. He uses audience participation and a good sense of humor within the program.

Mr. Fincken's research was obvious in his attention to detail and historical accuracy.

DONATIONS ENHANCE OCTA COLLECTIONS

The Reverend Dominic Russo of Staten Island, NY, has donated his collection of Western Americana to OCTA. The donation includes an extensive catalog of trails slides, in addition to maps, William Henry Jackson prints and rare back issues of the *Overland Journal*. Russo enjoyed a long friendship with noted historian Paul Henderson and his wife Helen, whose daughter, Marjorie H. Waitman, has given the Merrill Mattes Library 82 copies of her father's original maps.

Editor—

Last October I made a trip to southeast Nebraska in search of trail markers between Hollenberg Ranch/Station near Hanover, Kansas and Fort Kearny. The purpose was to locate signs or markers or the geographical sites (where no sign or marker exists) and signs related to privately owned road ranches and the commercially owned enterprises such as overland stage or Pony Express way and home stations, and to photograph these signs and sites.

I did find many markers, but missed several if they existed at all. Using Franzwa's *Maps of the Oregon Trail* and *Oregon Trail Revisited*, I found what I think was a number of sites, but did not locate a marker and was unsure as to the probable geographical orientation so that a photograph could be taken.

I'm particularly interested in knowing if any readers have photographs or slides that they would be willing to share with me as I prepare a talk for the 1995 Grand Island OCTA convention in August. I'd like to obtain copies of photographs which can be converted to slides, or copies of slides. Credit would be given to those who may be willing to share photos or slides with me. I also need detailed location information.

Here is the list of trail markers that I need photos or location information for:

Rock Creek Station (ran out of time to get there - I KNOW there are signs there, but need a photo or two!); Oketo Cutoff; Fremont Springs; Rock House Pony Express Station; Virginia Station; Little Sandy Station (Helvey's Ranche); Big Sandy Station; Millersville (possible sites 1 and 2); Hackney Ranche; Smith-Simonton Grave; 32-Mile Station; Muddy Station; Summit Station or Springs; Valley Station; Dirty Woman Ranch; Platte Station; 17-Mile Station (also called Platte Station); Garden Station; and Craig (also called Shakespear).

Not all of my photographs came out as well as I had hoped, so I am including the list of markers I DID SEE below. If anyone has slides or photographs that might be better than mine, I would very much appreciate contact.

Hollenberg Ranch/Station; Whiskey Springs; Kiowa Station; Oak Grove Ranche; Little Blue Station; Liberty Farm; Pawnee Ranche; Spring Ranche; Lone Tree Station; Elm Creek Stage Station; Fort Kearny; Dobytown.

Please contact me as soon as possible by phone 303-492-0252 (weekdays) or 303-673-9563 (evenings) or via e-mail at ryder@kryos.colorado.edu. Mail responses should be addressed to PO Box 764, Niwot, Colorado 80544. Thank you all in advance.

—Lyn Ryder

Editor,

Congratulations on a very successful first issue. One question: Where is Eliza Houghton buried? Jack Steed's letter on page 17 raises the question but doesn't provide the answer. Did he ever find out? —Robby Gunstream

How about it, Jack?—Ed.

Queries and Comments

OREGON TRAIL CERTIFICATES

The Idaho Genealogical Society is issuing Oregon Trail Certificates to anyone whose ancestors traveled the Oregon Trail between 1811 and 1911. Applicants must prove direct descent from a person who traveled any part of the between 1811 and 1911 to qualify for a certificate. To receive an application or more information, write to:

The Oregon Trail Project
4620 Overland Rd., #206
Boise, ID 83705

If you have questions, write or post an E-mail message to me.

Donovan Yingst
12014 Ginger Creek Dr.
Boise, Idaho 83713-3659
E-mail: D.YINGST@genie.geis.com

OCTA BOARD MEETS IN MISSOURI

OCTA's Board of Directors met on March 18 in Independence, MO. President David L. Bigler reported OCTA "has continued to move forward on every front." The organization's expanding membership reflects Elaine McNabney's creative work, with 2,700 memberships encompassing more than 4,000 individuals in every state in the union. OCTA's impressive financial position owes much to the excellent management skills of Treasurer Jim Budde, who has resolved a long-standing insurance problem and whose fund raising drive has produced exceptional results.

The meeting opened with a welcome by Ron Stewart, mayor of Independence. The Board considered issues related to the city's support of OCTA Headquarters with an eye to cultivating the excellent relationship between OCTA and its host city. On a national level, Bill Watson outlined new legislative initiatives aimed at making OCTA's voice heard in the new Congress.

Chuck Dodd and COED chair Kathy Roubal gave the Board a fascinating demonstration of the COED database, which now runs under the Windows® operating system. The power and ease-of-use of the program—now undergoing an extensive "Beta" test cycle—impressed everyone at the demonstration.

President Bigler stressed the importance of grassroots action. The organization draws its strength and dynamism from local chapters, which are directly responsible for the success of efforts such as the annual convention and National Park Service Challenge Cost Share Programs. Bigler encouraged all members to take an active role in the association's nomination process and to vote in the association's elections.

THE READING TRAIL

by Lyndia Carter

Oh no! It happened, the thing you have been dreading all year. Your teacher has assigned a written report. You groan, your stomach knots up and panic sets in immediately. But you don't fear: she says you can choose your own topic as long as it has to do with social studies. You begin to relax—that means you can write about history. And since you really like bumping over the Oregon and California trails with your mom and dad or your grandparents, you can research something you actually like to read about. (Or maybe if you don't really like history yet, you will after you get a look at some good information books.)

There are some books you may wish to avoid when you're working on a report; an encyclopedia, most likely, for one. Nearly all teachers detest, (hate, really dislike) reading reports that have been copied from encyclopedias, especially the adult variety. And since you can't understand the words and sentences, there isn't

anything you can do but copy. Encyclopedias written for kids are a great improvement, but there are still some problems. For instance, they are pretty general since the articles must be very short. Details are what make history interesting, so it's best to try to find facts elsewhere. You may decide to look them over to get some beginning ideas, but you'll want to range wider for the good stuff. Don't let encyclopedias limit you.

Unless you were born an absolute genius and are reading five grade levels above average, avoid adult books. Because they are so complicated and the words are tough, you could get discouraged and give up on yourself and your topic, or you might start copying again in desperation. So the best thing to do is find books about history written just for kids. Believe it or not, there really are some you can look at, understand, and even enjoy. You'll learn enough so that you can write a fact-filled, interesting, and, of course, fantastic report. These books will give you great ideas for illustrating your report which always impresses teachers. (They don't like to be bored, either.)

If you get into the right books, you'll find facts can be fun! Here are three examples of nonfiction books that will start you on the right trail to that assignment. Maybe you'll want to read them even if you don't have to. (Look! see teacher and mom smile!)

A Frontier Fort on the Oregon Trail, written by Scott Steedman and illustrated by Mark Bergin, is chock-full of great information and you can learn as much by looking at the pictures as you can reading the text. If you look closely, you'll find amazing bits of history, especially about how people lived, their clothes, and

what life was really like for the pioneers, soldiers, trappers, and Indians. This is far more than just a trail book. It is well written so it can be understood and used by students. (But beware, adults make mistakes sometimes and there are a few goof-ups, such as the map as Sutter's Fort and Fort Kearny—the book mistakenly labels them Fuller's Fort and Fort Phil Kearney—and the Fort Facts at the back is wrong about the location of Fort Bridger. And in one picture the men driving the oxen should be walking beside them, not riding in the wagon). On the whole, though, this is a super book for learning—use it!

The Oregon Trail by R. Conrad Stein is a wonderful blend of facts, a true story from a trail journal, and illustrations. Every page has photographs, drawings, maps, or copies of early paintings that show trail life. It is a fun book to read and to look through to get the stuff you need for your report. You'll really like this one—besides it's short!

The Prairie Schooners, written and illustrated by Glen Rounds, is another fun book. There is more reading in this one, but it is so well written

that you won't mind a bit; the author even has a good sense of humor and writes more like a story-teller than just another dry college-professor-type writer. He covers lots of topics such as the wagons and animals, getting started, road conditions, dangers, accidents, sickness, Indians, bugs, short tempers, and the fun times on the trail, plus a whole lot more. You'll like his simple sketches because they are full of funny details if you look closely. This book gives you many particular ideas for your report and your own brain without being a bit boring. You can almost feel like you are on the trail with the people going west.

Well, now that you know researching for a report can be less painful than you thought, it's time to jump in and get reading.

[To the grownups who may be secretly reading this column, you are invited to join my young friends—I'm glad to have you along on the trail. Books for kids are a pleasant experience even for adults. Besides, you may get some ideas for the members of your family who "still look up to you."]

Happy trails,

—Mrs. C.

Buffalo Chips

BUFFALO CHIPS NEEDS YOUR HELP!

Our new feature for younger readers has brought in many compliments but few contributions. Kids and teachers, these are your pages—so let's fill them up. Send articles, poems, stories and above all, lots of puzzles and pictures to Buffalo Chips, 1451 Kensington Ave., SLC, UT 84105.

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- Cotton Socks
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- Hat
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- Silk Handkerchief
- Towels
- Wool Socks
- Wool Undershirts

Overland Acrostic

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 A C E H L Q W D M W W O O L U N D E R S H I R T S D F Y U

See if you can find these words—they run up, down, diagonally, and even backwards! We're out of room, so for the solution, send the editor a postcard.

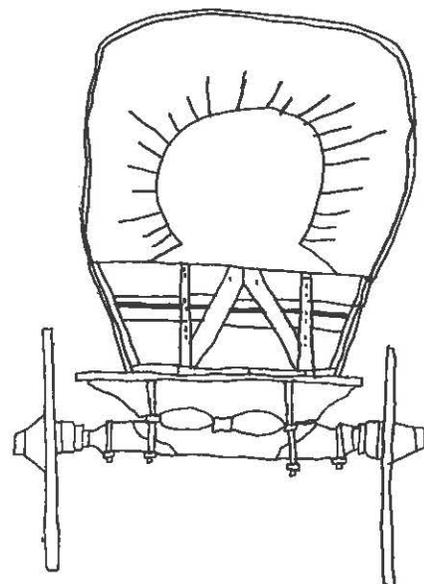
—submitted by Matthew Ivory.

CLASSROOM OF THE QUARTER

Sharon Nagata and David Dahlkamp of Salt Lake City's Clayton Middle School teach more than 300 eighth graders American History. For the last five years, they have created wagon parties of five students charged with organizing an expedition across the plains. The young pioneers outfit and supply a wagon, prepare a map and keep journal entries. They elect a wagon master and submit a roster of 25 members describing their ages, occupations, origins, destinations and dreams. Each wagon is allotted about \$700 to purchase a ton and a half of supplies, in addition to the wagon and camping outfit. Students submit a map showing routes and trading posts, a drawing of loaded wagon and three diary entries, including a character sketch of who they were and why they went west.

Students viewed a local video production, Trail of Dreams, describing the Oregon Trail, and Ric Burns' classic The Donner Party. They received handouts of journals entries, such as Jesse Applegate's description of a day with the Cow Column of 1843. Each company faces random events, including river crossings, buffalo stampedes, dry camps, prairie fires, storms and Indian encounters. The assignment ends with a letter home describing what they experienced on the trail and found in their new home. Half the student's grade is based on their group journal and half on their personal performance.

OCTA admires this creative program that brings our nation's trail history to life, and salutes the great effort of teachers Nagata and Dahlkamp in our "Classroom of the Quarter."



—submitted by Jesse Bagley

OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

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WHAT'S NEW IN THE *News*?

- ☞ The annual convention issue describes the many events members can look forward to in Grand Island, NE, this summer. Page 1.
- ☞ Treasurer Jim Budde's Annual Report on OCTA Finances. Pages 4-5.
- ☞ Following Bellwethers on today's Sublette Cutoff with Robby Gunstream and friends. Page 7.
- ☞ A sketch of Capt. Sutter, his means, the fort bearing his name, and a few facts in relation to the gold fields. Page 9.
- ☞ OCTA marks the grave of California Trail heroine Nancy Kelsey. Page 10.
- ☞ Jay Mennenga describes the history of a noted Nebraska landmark, Fort Kearny, in "First Fort on the Great Platte River Road." Page 11.
- ☞ Chapter News. Pages 13-15.
- ☞ Comments and Queries—letters to the Editor. Page 17.
- ☞ OCTA Board meets in Independence. Page 17.
- ☞ Buffalo Chips Rides Again!