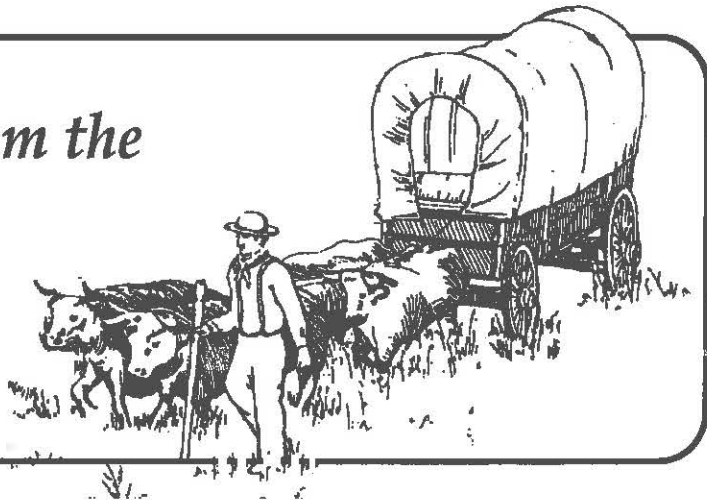


# NEWS *from the* PLAINS



Volume X, No 2.

NEWSLETTER OF THE OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION

April 1996

## HASTINGS CUTOFF SESQUICENTENNIAL FOCUS OF ELKO CONVENTION

*Nevada to Host the National OCTA Convention,  
August 12-18, 1996*

by Patricia Loomis

**C**OME AUGUST, HUNDREDS OF OCTA MEMBERS will converge on Elko, Nevada, for the association's annual convention in a setting rich in the history of overland emigrant trails, gold miners and cattle barons.

A week filled with activities awaits convention goers. Tours over the historic trails of northern Nevada (there are more than 400 miles of them in Elko County alone), visits to modern open-pit gold mines and an old-fashioned Basque barbecue are on the convention program coordinated by co-chairs Paul Sawyer and Bob Pearce.

The convention runs from August 14 to 18, but OCTAns should plan on arriving a couple of days early for the two-day pre-convention field trip (August 12-13) that will celebrate the sesquicentennial and explore the route of Hastings Cutoff. An archaeology survey session on August 12 and mine tours on August 13 will highlight preconvention activities.

The first day of the Hastings trek will visit Big Springs at today's Johnson Ranch where in 1841 the Bidwell-Bartleson party abandoned most of their wagons and Flowery Lake, which James Frazier Reed called "Mad Woman Lake." The second day will trace the trail down the east side of the impressive Ruby Mountains past old Fort Ruby, through Hastings (later Overland) Pass and up the west side of the Ruby range to the south fork of the Humboldt River and the meadow where the Hastings Cutoff rejoined the California Trail.

On Wednesday, August 14, the convention will officially start

(See ELKO 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 1996. Contact members or the chapter for details.

- April 20 Idaho Chapter meeting at the Quality Inn in Pocatello, 10 AM.
- May 1 Nominations due for Friends of the Trail Award.
- May 4-5 Crossroads Chapter revisits the Hastings Cutoff on its spring field trip.
- May 18 Wyoming Chapter work party near Devil's Gate.
- May 18-19 Jim McClain leads a Forty Mile Desert trek for the CA-NV chapter.
- June 1 Nominations to Awards Committee due.
- June 1 National Trails Day. CA-NV trip to Bruff's Camp.
- June 9 Don Wiggins on Donner Trail from Verdi to Truckee for the CA-NV chapter.
- June 11 Pony Express Re-Ride, a 10-day, 227 hour ride from Sacramento St. Joseph.
- Aug. 12-18 Annual National Convention, Elko, Nevada.



## THE EDITOR'S CORNER

I SPENT TWO STORMY MARCH weeks in Washington City and a cold week in Missouri and Arkansas; it seemed like the farther south I went, the colder it got. The opportunity to explore the National Archives (the Indian Depredations Claims alone are an untapped gold-mine of overland lore) and the Library of Congress was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The Pony Express National Memorial and the City of St. Joseph rolled out the red carpet for the semi-annual OCTA Board meeting, and their fine hospitality was much appreciated.

The board meeting produced some excellent work, if I do say so—OCTA has a new chapter forming in Kansas and it got a unanimous official green light. Public Relations Chair Lesley Wischmann has jump-started OCTA's exploration of the electronic frontier and OCTA now officially sponsors the Internet overland-trails mailing list. Look for an OCTA Web page in the not-to-distant future. And if none of this makes any sense, come to the Electronic Frontiers workshop at the convention to see what it's all about.

This issue updates our coverage on the national convention in Elko—which is shaping up to be an event to remember—and continues Robbie Gunstream's tale of his trek down the Humboldt last summer. Jim Budde provides an excellent summary of OCTA's financial situation. We have two articles that describe the creation of OCTA's newest but as-yet-unnamed chapter. This issue has a bumper crop of chapter reports and another one of Lyndia Carter's great adventures on the Reading Trail.

The Statehood Centennial got off to a bang in Utah on January 4, and now Sesquicentennial fever seems to be awakening in California. The CANV chapter is hearing from the folks sponsoring the celebration, although naturally the Mormons have got the

jump on everybody—even the Bear Flaggers, as far as I can tell—and will celebrate the sesquicentennial of the arrival of the ship *Brooklyn* in San Francisco this July. I've even been invited to speak at the festivities to explain why Sam Brannan beat Brigham Young west by an entire year.

In the November 1995 issue of *folio*, the always-interesting Greg Franzwa gave excellent coverage of the recent reburial of Rebecca Winters near Scotts Bluff. His article pointed out that Paul Henderson, trail scholar extraordinaire and Burlington Northern Railroad conductor for many years, never bought the notion (repeated in the Fall 1995 NFP) that the surveying crew had reworked the route to avoid the grave of this Mormon pioneer. I still believe it, but I'll admit I'm probably wrong. Given Greg's coverage of the event I concede it appears the Burlington line made the best of a bad situation, and showed great concern for the families and some appreciation of the history.

Finally, I'm packing it in as editor of *News from the Plains*. I've very much enjoyed editing the newsletter, but my writing schedule is so demanding I can no longer spare the time or energy to edit *News from the Plains*. I will stay in the harness until the completion of the Fall 1996 issue. I've volunteered on OCTA publications since 1990, and when I finish this assignment I will have completed 24 quarterly issues. I will be glad to take a rest from the deadlines and hope to complete a few of the books I've got in the works—but I will miss much of the fun involved in putting out the news magazine (see—I don't consider it a newsletter) for an outfit like OCTA. It also opens up a great opportunity for someone who wants to take on one of the organization's most exciting jobs.

### NFP STARTS SEARCH FOR NEW EDITOR

OCTA is looking for a new editor for *News from the Plains*. It requires being able to produce camera-ready copy, so computer literacy and knowledge of word processing or page layout is extremely helpful. Compensation is negotiable. Interested parties should contact OCTA's Publication Chair:

Rose Ann Tompkins  
1125 West Mission Drive  
Chandler, AZ 85224-2354  
email: tompkin@primenet.com

### SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

You can greatly increase chances of publication (and reduce the chance that the editor will alter your meaning) by sending material on computer disk in Macintosh or DOS format. Please save the files in a couple of formats, preferably Microsoft Word, WordPerfect 5.x, ASCII text or RTF formats (**I can't read WP 6.0 files or the more esoteric word processors.**) Enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope to have material returned and a postcard for notification of publication decisions.

## NEWS FROM THE PLAINS

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full-time FAX number: 816-836-0989.

Next Submission Deadline for *News from the Plains* is June 1, 1996



## THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

**T**HE MID-YEAR BOARD MEETING will have passed by the time you receive this issue. However, as I write this, we are in preparation for it, and I expect a full agenda.

On February 9, Jeanne Miller coordinated a surprise luncheon for Lois Daniel, former editor of the *Overland Journal*. The board at its August meeting had directed that bound volumes of the journals which Lois had edited be presented to her in appreciation of her work. It was a pleasure to see her surprise and to help present the volumes.

By now, you have received the first issue of the *Overland Journal* edited by Marilyn Holt. She is to be complimented on her fine work and for carrying on OCTA's tradition of successful publications. We need to support Marilyn in her new position.

I again had the pleasure of representing OCTA on February 21. Mayor Stewart of Independence, John Mark Lambertson, director of the National Frontier Trails Center, Jim Budde and I were present for a ceremony in which OCTA placed additional books on loan in the Mattes Library at the Trails Center. (Please see Jim Budde's article on page 16.) Mayor Stewart pledged his support of the National Frontier Trails Center and commended OCTA for providing such an outstanding library in Independence. As an OCTA member, you should be proud of this library and visit the site when you are in the midwest.

Many chapters are now coming out of winter hibernation and will begin mapping, marking and trekking the trail. Please keep in mind the need to publicize your activities. This often-overlooked task, is an important part of making people aware of OCTA. Contact your local media. Write articles, take photos and submit them to your local papers if they cannot provide coverage of your events. As part of your planning for each event, assign someone to see that you receive publicity. Public Relations Chair Lesley Wischmann is eager and qualified to advise and to help you. Please talk with her.

The plans for the convention in Elko are in full swing. I have visited several times with Paul Sawyer and am extremely impressed with not only the meticulous attention to detail, but also the enthusiasm with which Paul, Bob Pierce and the local committee are showing. Let's all join them in Elko in August!

—Jacqueline Lewin, President

### OCTA BOARD MEETS IN ST. JOSEPH

OCTA's Board of Directors met on March 23 in St. Joseph, Missouri. President Jackie Lewin reported OCTA continued to make progress in its mission to promote and protect America's historic emigrant trails. The meeting opened with a welcome by Larry Stobbs, mayor of St. Joseph. Dick DeShon, president of the Pony Express National Memorial whose headquarters played host to the meeting, welcomed OCTA's board and members.

OCTA's financial position remains in excellent shape due to the management skills of Treasurer Jim Budde, whose fund raising drive has produced great results. Total membership has shown a slight decline in the last year, but the board acted to eliminate the single-member category and created a single entry-level membership at \$35.

The meeting focused on the organization's growth. The board unanimously approved the formation of a new chapter in Kansas. Public Relations Chair Lesley Wischmann produced an excellent strategic plan to help OCTA improve its public relations efforts on several fronts. Lesley's clear proposal led the board to officially sponsor the Internet overland-trails mailing list and to authorize creation of an Internet Web page for OCTA.

The board unanimously approved two resolutions offered by preservation officer Tom Hunt. The motions urged the Wyoming BLM to nominate South Pass Historic Landscape District to the National Register of Historic Places and supported the purchase of Robidoux Pass in Nebraska for inclusion in the Scotts Bluff National Monument.

On a national level, Bill Watson outlined the status of legislative initiatives aimed at making OCTA's voice heard in Congress. National Parks Service representatives Jere Krakow, Kay Threlkeld and Tom Thomas updated the board on the status of the country's National Historic Trails.

The Publications Committee has a new leader, Rose Ann Tompkins, who comes to the position with a wealth of experience in OCTA publications. The new chair submitted a written set of guidelines for the Publications Committee. In addition to overseeing *News from the Plains* and the *Overland Journal*, the committee will tackle defining policies and procedures to produce a new edition of OCTA's emigrant trails map.

#### IN MEMORIAM

Edgar W. Stanton, III, member and good friend of OCTA since 1988, passed on January 28, 1966. Edgar's great-grandfather's diary got Edgar interested in the trails, and resulted in his editing and writing *The Trek of James MacDonal*d. Edgar's professional-quality photographs have been used in the *Overland Journal* and chapter publications. He will be missed.

## FINANCIAL REPORT FOR FISCAL YEAR 1994-1995

This report summarizes OCTA's fiscal activities for October 1, 1994 to September 30, 1995. For purposes of comparison, refer to last year's report in the April 1995 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

Assets	<u>Sep. 30, 1995</u>	<u>Sep. 30, 1994</u>
<b>Cash:</b>		
Petty Cash-Checking Account	\$ 1,811.37	\$ 933.03
Operating Account	50,576.93	41,543.35
Fund-raising Account	306.15	13,342.06
Convention Account	10,664.88	36,513.87
OCTA Store Account	<u>39,527.30</u>	<u>39,432.74</u>
Total Cash	102,886.63	131,765.05
<b>Investments:</b>		
U.S. Treasury Bill	20,000.00	0.00
Certificates of Deposit	24,315.77	23,155.58
Mutual Fund-Scudder	22,542.83	11,011.73
Mutual Fd-20th Century Equity	12,964.80	10,024.68
Mutual Fd-20th Century Value	<u>12,397.14</u>	<u>8,809.92</u>
Total Investments	92,220.54	53,001.91
<b>Other Assets:</b>		
Prepaid Expenses	0.00	4,579.56
Grants Receivable	<u>15,823.19</u>	<u>0.00</u>
Total Other Assets	15,823.19	4,579.56
<b>Inventory-Merchandise:</b>		
True Diary	1,829.25	1,966.49
Reading, Writing, Workbook	6,343.30	2,832.73
Maps	1,426.60	3,324.30
All Other Merchandise	<u>20,122.99</u>	<u>9,480.92</u>
Total Inventory-Merchandise	29,722.14	17,604.44
<b>Fixed Assets:</b>		
Furniture & Fixtures	8,246.54	7,647.17
Office Equipment	9,679.13	8,279.16
Less: Accum. Depreciation	<u>(17,925.67)</u>	<u>(15,926.33)</u>
Total Fixed Assets	0.00	0.00
Land—California Hill	<u>6,260.00</u>	<u>6,260.00</u>
Total Assets	\$ 246,912.50	\$213,210.96
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Accounts Payable	50.00	\$6,556.91
Payroll Taxes Payable	594.90	\$189.00
Santa Fé Trail Store Account	(138.29)	6.51
Mo/Kan Deferred Revenue	<u>0.00</u>	<u>1,765.36</u>
Total Liabilities	\$456.61	\$8,517.78
<b>Fund Balances</b>		
Retained Revenue Over Expense	\$ 204,693.18	\$ 165,905.65
Current Revenue Over Expenses	<u>41,762.71</u>	<u>38,787.53</u>
Total Fund Balances	\$ 246,455.89	\$ 204,693.18
<b>Total Liabilities &amp; Fund Balances</b>	<b>\$ 246,912.50</b>	<b>\$ 213,210.96</b>



**OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION**  
**Statement of Support, Revenue and Expenses**

	<u>ANNUAL</u> <u>BUDGET</u>	<u>ACTUAL</u>	<u>OVER (UNDER)</u> <u>BUDGET</u>	<u>ACTUAL</u>
<b>SUPPORT:</b>				
Dues income	\$75,000	\$80,256	\$5,256	\$82,843
Life memberships		250	250	2,250
Donations	<u>10,000</u>	<u>10,618</u>	<u>618</u>	<u>12,427</u>
<b>TOTAL SUPPORT</b>	<b>85,000</b>	<b>91,124</b>	<b>6,124</b>	<b>97,520</b>
<b>REVENUES:</b>				
Overland Journal & NFP revenue		5,024	5,024	4,409
COED fees		1,494	1,494	1,450
OCTA merchandise revenue (net of costs)	10,000	34,189	24,189	23,387
Convention revenue (net of expenses)	10,000	23,955	13,955	27,178
Interest income	1,000	14,039	13,039	4,411
Miscellaneous income		1,765	1,765	2,000
Carryover from prior year	<u>22,000</u>		<u>(22,000)</u>	
<b>TOTAL REVENUES:</b>	<b>43,000</b>	<b>80,466</b>	<b>37,466</b>	<b>62,835</b>
<b>TOTAL SUPPORT AND REVENUES</b>	<b>128,000</b>	<b>171,590</b>	<b>43,590</b>	<b>160,355</b>
<b>EXPENSES:</b>				
OFFICERS	7,800	6,354	(1,446)	5,234
COMMITTEES	15,300	13,253	(2,047)	11,385
HEADQUARTERS	59,698	56,387	(3,311)	52,404
PRESERVATION	12,700	6,489	(6,211)	9,721
PUBLICATIONS	46,300	45,345	(955)	41,695
OTHER (CAPITAL EQUIPMENT)	<u>2,000</u>	<u>1,999</u>	<u>(1)</u>	<u>1,129</u>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>143,798</b>	<b>129,827</b>	<b>(13,971)</b>	<b>121,568</b>
<b>EXCESS OF REVENUES OVER EXPENSES</b>	<b><u>(\$15,798)</u></b>	<b><u>\$41,762</u></b>	<b><u>57,560</u></b>	<b><u>\$38,788</u></b>
<b>NET REVENUE FROM VARIOUS ACTIVITIES:</b>				
		<u>1995</u>		<u>1994</u>
CONVENTION		\$23,955		\$27,178
OCTA STORE		\$34,189		\$23,387
PUBLICATIONS		(\$40,176)		(\$36,415)

ANNUAL FUND RAISING DRIVE UPDATE	
FUND RAISING DRIVE III	
(As of January 31, 1996)	
Endowment Fund	\$4131
Annual Fund:	\$1897
Designated Funds	
Preservation	449
Archaeology	200
Trail Marking, G&S	1027
Trail Mapping	499
COED	158
Education	175
<u>Special Publications</u>	<u>1075</u>
	<b>\$3583</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b><u>\$9611</u></b>

## ELKO CONVENTION (from page 1)

with a general membership meeting and a keynote address by Fred Gowans. Joyce Badgley Hunsaker will present her one-woman show, "Fanny: A Woman of the Trail" and Don Buck will describe "The Humbug: Emigrant Experiences along the Humboldt." The afternoon is devoted to the traditional OCTA workshops, plus the first-ever workshop, "Exploring Electronic Frontiers," explaining the overland-trails mailing list and OCTA's presence on the Internet. The afternoon will also feature a live wagon and team demonstration and chapter meetings. The evening combines the traditional opening-night social with the books and authors night, and will conclude with a presentation by Amy Warner.

The full day of papers on Thursday includes presentations by Chuck Dodd, Will Bagley, Ruth Anderson, Jack and Patricia Fletcher, Kristin Johnson and Charles Greenhaw. The evening will showcase "An Evening of Cowboy Poetry."

Those who can't enjoy the preconvention field trips will still be able to see much of Hastings' route on the bus field trips scheduled for Friday and Saturday, August 16 and 17. Another field trip will explore the California Trail through Thousand Springs Valley and will

transport participants to Record Bluffs on a hay wagon. A third tour will visit Gravelly Ford, famed landmark on the California Trail.

The traditional awards banquet is set for Friday night, while an authentic Basque barbecue, complete with wine and dancers from the National Basque festival, is set for Saturday night.

The convention will conclude with the dedication of a kiosk on Sunday, August 18. The kiosk will commemorate the sesquicentennial of the Hastings Cutoff at the end of the route, the confluence of the South Fork with the Humboldt River.

A four-day post-convention camping tour over the Applegate-Lassen trail across the Black Rock Desert and through High Rock Canyon is planned for August 19 to 22.

Elko has many attractions for first-time visitors, including historic saloons and modern casinos. The Brand Room of the Commercial Hotel tells the story of Nevada's cattle industry. Family-style dining is available in several excellent Basque restaurants, including the Star. The exhibit in the Western Folklore Center, headquarters for the famous Cowboy Poetry Gathering, is well worth a visit.

THE STRANGE VICISSITUDES  
OF FORTUNE

*Below. Lunch time in central Nevada. Photo by the author.*



*Above. Looking south from near Emigrant Pass into the Crescent Valley. Photo by the author.*

ROBBY AND BREWSTER  
TACKLE THE HUMBOLDT.



# STRANGE VICISSITUDES OF FORTUNE

*On to New Helvetia in the Summer of 1995*

by Robbie D. Gunstream

## THE UPPER HUMBOLDT

THERE IS MUCH ALONG THE UPPER HUMBOLDT to delight today's traveller, too. Although much of the trail has been obliterated by railroads, Highway 40 and Interstate 80, it is possible to approximate the California Trail through the area by piecing together a route made from county roads, old sections of Highway 40, occasional ruts, farm roads, open fields providing cross-country travel and gravel roads that parallel the rail beds. The miles are pleasant. The magnificent vistas of the upper Humboldt Valley, with the Ruby Mountains to the south and Bishop Canyon to the north, entertain the traveller today as they surely did the emigrants. The upper Humboldt affords fine forage for the animals and adequate water, although its sulfuric quality hints at what is to come.

Our travel through the upper Humboldt region took five days. We paralleled the river into Elko, brushed the South Fork and its magnificent canyon where Hastings Cutoff joins the main emigrant road, made our way through Carlin Canyon, and, finally, left the river and toiled up Emigrant Pass, which provided the emigrants with a means of avoiding Palisade Canyon.

It was along the upper Humboldt that we experienced our first taste of the hot day/cold night syndrome. Our first day out of Wells took us 24 miles south to the River Ranch. After a warm day, the evening cooled off dramatically and we awoke the following morning to temperatures below freezing. We couldn't help but wonder what it might be doing in the Sierra if it was freezing in northeastern Nevada! "Hurry along as fast as you can," indeed.

The difficult pull out of present-day Carlin to the top of Emigrant Pass must have required a major effort for the emigrants. The rut evidence indicates that the road was good and that the obstacles to continuous travel were few—but it was a hot, laborious grind, requiring ascent of several steep ridges.

As relieved as the emigrants must have been to reach Emigrant Pass and its small springs, it is here that the gates of Hades itself open up and that everything we have all read about the Humboldt—rumored and real—begins in earnest.

## CENTRAL HUMBOLDT TO THE SINK

*The face of the country is much changed. It appears white and sterile. —August 14, 1849*

After turning south from Primeaux Springs at Emigrant Pass the country changes. The relatively friendly and beau-

tiful upper Humboldt gives way to a starker landscape. We travelled south, found a marvelous stretch of ruts well-marked by OCTA, topped a rise and discovered a startling view south to the Humboldt and the whole of the Crescent Valley. It must surely be the view the emigrants enjoyed at this place, but, also, it provides an idea of how the emigrants perceived the entire central and lower Humboldt. The view into Crescent Valley, unbroken by encroachments of development, provides the closest approximation we found of what central Nevada must have looked like before the intrusion of highways, cultivation, dams and cities. This is how the California Trail must have looked to the emi-

grants—an immense expanse, a stark vista of barren mountains and sandy valleys, broken only by the meanderings of the Humboldt River.

Following the long descent to Gravelly Ford one dis-

covers the bleaker aspects of the Humboldt for the first time. As John Banks wrote on August 15, 1849, the country is "barren and disagreeable.... When we reached the river no grass...." There is still no grass—or at least very little. In addition, the channel of the river has changed, probably several times, since emigrant days, so the exact location of the Humboldt in the vicinity of Gravelly Ford is not obvious (to us, in any case.) Water, like grass and terrain, begins to be less assured.

From Gravelly Ford we toiled for nearly two weeks to reach the Big Meadows in present Lovelock. We discovered the central Humboldt to be an interminable ordeal of heat, bad water, boredom and alkali flats. Between Iron Point and Red House we felt like we were on a treadmill; the scenery did not seem to change for two and a half days. Into the second day we thought we saw a gate marking the entry to the 26 Ranch; the Ranch came and went and still the poles of the gate presented themselves far, far away. Finally, the "poles" turned into the chimneys of the Valmy Power Plant, a site we loathed with ferocious intensity. Never were we more glad to put a landmark behind us and out of sight. Along the central Humboldt we toiled: through North Battle Mountain, past where Reed killed Snyder (?), past the Big Bend, through Emigrant Canyon, past Winnemucca, along occasional meadows and steep cliffs, past Cosgrove and Callahan Bridge, finally to Lassen's Meadow and present-day Rye Patch Reservoir. On we marched in solitude and on miles of original trail, trying to endure and to glimpse the emigrant experience. And this was it—here was the endurance test, the toll of the trail, the pressing on of men, women, children and animals through declining essential resources. The cumulative effect is somehow exponential. We relied on our experience and

*If good roads, fine grass and water, accompanied with excellent health can cause satisfaction to men placed in our situation, then we should be satisfied. I have never seen meadows to exceed these in luxuriousness.*

—John Banks, August 10, 1849<sup>1</sup>



paced ourselves carefully, made judicious use of rest days, and tried to save something for what we knew was to come. We were beneficiaries of resources and supplies the emigrants would have paid any price to have had and yet the two weeks between Gravelly Ford and Lovelock were mentally, physically and emotionally exhausting. John Banks couched his anxiety on August 20, 1849: "Country very sterile. No wonder this river sinks; more wonder it runs." The single redeeming quality of the central Humboldt route is the immensity of the vistas with their incomparable expanse of space and light.

In retrospect, writing from the comfort of my home, the memory of the two weeks seem mercifully compressed, more so than any other segment of the entire trail. I discovered here that endurance means staying focused and contained, concentrating on successfully accomplishing the little repetitive tasks of trail life, lowering expectation to levels appropriate to the place, sustaining the spirit at all costs. The days of sameness passed, not swiftly but surely. And finally, upon reaching the crest of a long ridge south of Rye Patch Reservoir, the lushness of the lower Humboldt burst upon us.

At Lovelock, in what was once the Big Meadow, the endurance test of central Nevada is over. Good grass and water were available to the emigrants in abundance. It is a place to recruit and to prepare for the greatest challenge of the California emigrant road.

### THE CARSON RIVER ROUTE

*At dusk we reached what is properly the Sink. An embankment some twenty feet high extends across the bed of the river, extending from mountain to mountain, perhaps one and a half miles wide.... The barrier has all the regularity of art...—August 31, 1849*

At the west end of the Humboldt, at its Sink, where it finally dies in the desert, you pick your poison: Carson or Truckee River, Covered Wagon or Donner Pass. Both routes require negotiating the crux of the entire California emigrant trail: the Forty-Mile Desert. It is the ordeal by fire, the crucible of the California emigrant experience, the single rite of passage that set the California emigrants apart from everyone east of the Missouri River, forever.

Our plan was to use the Mormon-Carson River Route, first opened by Mormons returning from California to Salt Lake City in 1848.<sup>2</sup> The route requires travel west and southwest from the Sink, crosses the Forty-Mile Desert, and deposits the traveller at the Carson River at Ragtown.

We left Lovelock and, after a long day, found ourselves camped on top of the embankment mentioned by Banks and so many other diarists. The embankment and the Sink are hardly hospitable places although the sunset and views to the north and south were spectacular. The Humboldt River, even in this extremely wet year, now dies miles before the embankment, well before what used to be Humboldt Lake. Most daunting of all, the embankment offers a taunting view of the Forty-Mile Desert that awaits.

Our plan was to try to reach in the Carson River in a day and a half of travel. We planned to leave the embankment early in the morning, pass the Sink, penetrate the desert as many miles as possible, and arrive by nightfall at the south end of the Upsal Hogback. We would then leave the Hogback early the following morning and hope to reach the waters of the Carson by noon. In support of this plan, we put ourselves and Brewster on limited water and food rations—survival rations, really. As the emigrants, we were forced to carry water for use during the crossing, and water, for those travelling in our fashion, is acutely heavy.

At the Sink I had my own "Parting of the Ways" and

*Man and beast break for lunch on the Humboldt Road. Photo by the author.*





had to say goodbye to my friend John Banks. Banks and the Buckeye Rovers used the Truckee River/Donner Pass route. Through his diary, I kept an eye on Banks as he and his party followed their course north of ours. Though no longer walking with him, I contemplated the meanings of a portion of his diary entry for September 1, 1849, written during his crossing of the Forty-Mile Desert as he made his way to the Truckee:

As I watched the sun rise over the mountain top I was thinking of human life; how wonderful it changes and how brief its span. Season after season rolls along, we heed them not, except occasionally to give them a passing thought as milestones in the journey of life. If we have an object in view, we count the distance, we measure time, earnestly looking to the end we push on, scarcely dreaming this is the journey of life.

On Sunday, September 23, on my 44th birthday in this journey of life, we left the Sink at 9:00 A.M. feeling extremely unsure of what lay ahead and what the day would bring. I would not have minded staying right there for, oh, several months or, better yet, heading back to Lovelock to think this through one more time. However, the time for the greatest test of our trail acumen was at hand.

Fortunately for us, the day was relatively cool, and the temperature only reached the upper 80s. For the first seven miles the road is sandy, but provides an adequate track for walking. Following this is Parran Flat, a six-mile, salt-covered mud pie; one cannot walk upon it, at least not in a relatively wet year such as this, without breaking through. It was here that we began to labor with each step and I began to worry about Brewster. By early afternoon, however, we were across Parran Flat. We rounded the Hot Springs Mountains and, to our great relief, found the trail again sandy but firm. With the Hogback now in view, we continued southwest through the afternoon, passing the large historical monument close to mid-crossing. Toward the south end of the Hogback we climbed a short incline and there in the distance was the first sight of the trees along the Carson! It was a sight that gladdened our hearts as surely as it did the emigrants. We made camp, making judicious and extremely careful use of our water supply, had a short birthday party and spent a peaceful evening in a remarkably quiet setting.

After an early start on the morning of September 24 we pressed on across alternating sand and alkali flats, passed Soda Lake and various farms that have encroached into the desert terrain and found ourselves at the Carson River at 1:00 P.M., greatly relieved. In all, the desert crossing had taken 13 hours of walking.

In retrospect there are three portions of the emigrant road that are of serious and perhaps equal difficulty: (1) the miles from Casper to Independence Rock; (2) the forty-one-mile portion of the Sublette Cutoff from the Big Sandy to the Green River; and (3) the Forty-Mile Desert. The Forty-Mile Desert hit the emigrants so hard, I believe, because it occurred after a sustained march of some 1,800

miles over four or more months and after a two-week period of travel down the Humboldt River where essential resources—food, forage and water—were of decreasing quality and increasing scarcity. The Forty-Mile Desert imposed on the weary travellers a great hardship that proved the undoing of many.

Today the Carson River still provides welcome relief from the miles of desert. Upon reaching it, we felt that the ordeal is over. The big trees remain, the water tastes better than anything available for many weeks, forage is abundant and we understood why the emigrants were so relieved to reach this point.

## NOTES

1. Quotes in italics are from Diary of John Banks in Scamehorn, Howard L. ed., *The Buckeye Rovers in the Gold Rush* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1965).
2. For information about the opening of the Mormon-Carson Emigrant Trail and Hensley's Salt Lake Cutoff, see *A Road from El Dorado: The 1848 Trail Journal of Ephraim Green* (Salt Lake City: The Prairie Dog Press, 1991), edited by, I believe, Bill Wagley.

## LOCAL INITIATIVE LAUNCHES NEW OCTA CHAPTER IN KANSAS

On February 18, 1996, 38 people gathered at the Klop-tenberg Center in Hanover, Kansas, to explore the possibility of creating a chapter of the Oregon-California Trail Association in Washington, Marshall and Pottawatomie counties of Kansas. This could include a larger part of Kansas also. Six of those in attendance are presently OCTA members.

Duane Durst of Hanover, Duane Iles of Blue Rapids and Vern Osborne of St. George, all OCTA members, coordinated the meeting. Duane Durst, who hosted the meeting, noted that most OCTA chapters encompass an entire state but there is no restriction from the Association to establish a chapter encompassing only a few counties. Our goal is to provide a chapter for all interested Kansans. Duane then read portions of an encouraging letter from Ross Marshall, past president of OCTA and presently the Chapter Chairman for that organization.

Vern Osborne spoke about the organization, purpose, activities and publications of OCTA and read an encouraging letter of support from Jackie Lewin, President of OCTA, in regards to forming a local chapter which included an offer of assistance. He also talked about conventions he has attended. He encouraged all to attend the 1996 convention in Elko and discussed the possibility of a local chapter hosting a convention in the future. Duane Durst introduced a few dignitaries present: Don Ubben, Marshall County Historical Society President; Estaline Carpenter, recipient of an honorary life membership from OCTA for her extensive work in Nebraska on behalf of the Oregon Trail; David Sanner, President of the Kansas Pony Ex-



Members of OCTA's newest chapter gather at the March 23 Board meeting in St Joseph. Left to Right: O. F. "Doc" Maskil, Harriet Maskil, Vern Osburne, Carol Osburne, Duane Durst, Jim Bradley, Marian Bradley and Ken Martin.



press Association; Ken Martin, past president of the National Pony Express Association and his wife Arleta; Bill Hayes, publisher of the *Washington County News*; and Marian Bradley of Westmoreland, President of the Rock Creek Historical Society of Pottawatomie County and her husband Jim.

Duane Iles discussed markers that are up in this area, places that are in need of preservation and informed the group that this summer we could help the Trails Head and Gateway chapters locate trail markers in this area. Duane Durst then read more of Ross Marshall's letter about establishing a chapter in this area.

Interest in forming this chapter seemed high and two more meetings were planned. On March 10 at 2:30 P.M., a second meeting was held in Blue Rapids at the Community building and on April 14, a third meeting will be held in Westmoreland at the elementary school, also at 2:30 P.M.

Vern Osborne  
6950 Flush Road  
St. George, KS 66535  
(913) 494-2449

## OCTA WELCOMES NEW CHAPTER IN KANSAS

For the first time since 1989, OCTA's Board of Directors has granted a charter for a new chapter. Application was made at the mid-year Board meeting in St. Joseph, Mo., March 23, by a group of trail enthusiasts from north central Kansas. The presentation was made by a resident of Pottawatomie County, Vern Osborne of St. George, Kansas, after an introduction by Ross Marshall, chair of the Chapters Committee.

The basic territory for the new chapter will be Pottawatomie, Marshall and Washington counties which include about 100 miles of the Independence Route of

the Oregon-California Trail, as well as segments of the St. Joseph Road of the California Trail. The Pony Express Trail also passes through Marshall and Washington counties. The Gateway and Trails Head chapters formerly covered these segments of the trails and both chapters have actively assisted in the establishment of this new chapter.

Many residents of these counties have long been active in the researching, marking and preserving the trail, but in the aftermath of the Oregon Trail 150th Anniversary events held in the area their efforts became more organized and focused. In 1995, they began to consider the benefits of organizing themselves into an OCTA chapter. Duane Durst, who is the Director of the Hollenberg Pony Express Station, headed up the efforts in Washington County. Duane Iles of Blue Rapids led the efforts in Marshall County. Vern Osborne led the effort in Pottawatomie County. Organizing meetings have been held in both Washington and Marshall Counties with about 40 people in attendance at each. One more is scheduled in April in Pottawatomie County. More than twenty new OCTA members have joined and Vern presented OCTA Treasurer Jim Budde with over \$400 in membership checks at the meeting, which not only brought a big smile to Jim's face but made the board approval a "slam dunk." They are projecting over 50 members will join OCTA during this organizing year.

Many key trail sites are located in this part of Kansas, such as both the Red (Little) and Black (Big) Vermillion River crossings, Scott Springs, Alcove Springs, both the Independence crossing and Marshall's Ferry crossing of the Blue River, the junction of the Independence and St. Joe routes, the Hollenberg Pony Express Station, Marysville Home Station and many extant trail rut segments and grave sites. Plenty of preservation and public awareness work to be done in this area.

We look forward to working with this new chapter as OCTA continues to grow. Welcome aboard!

*Ross Marshall, Chair, Chapters Committee*



## CA-NV

### GOLD COUNTRY SYMPOSIUM

Another gold medal gathering and "fantastic" was the most popular word to describe it. After a continental breakfast and visiting time, M. C. Bill Rupp called the Gold Country Symposium to order and introduced Sonora's 46th mayor, Jack Rucker, and Tuolumne County historian Carlo De Ferarri. Attendees were then immersed in Tuolumne County history.

Since the meeting was held in the historic old Opera Hall, our first speaker, Pat Perry, Sonora's finance director and an avid historian, gave us "A Brief History of Sonora and the Opera Hall." The stone walls of the Star Flouring Mill formed the base of the Opera Hall when it was built in 1885 and it became the pride of the community. The building hasn't been altered over the years and still has its original windows, and the hoist in the balcony was used to raise and lower the chandelier.

Sherrin Grout has been a California State Park Ranger at Columbia since 1978. She spoke about "Columbia: 1850-1860," the decade of greatest mining activity. Miners were attracted to Columbia because of the numerous creeks in the area, but when those dried up in summer, the miners would go elsewhere and then return once again when the creeks were running. The miners became so enthusiastic about finding gold nuggets that they began mining the cemetery, exposing corpses and forcing it to be moved to its present location.

The morning session ended with a fascinating account of "Tuolumne County Emigrants Via the Southern Route," presented by Shann Rupp. Eleven percent of all the documents Shann has read were written by people who traveled the Southern Route, and of those, over half ended up in Tuolumne County. The Southern Route was favored because people could leave earlier, but it took longer and emigrants encountered such things as heat so intense that wheel rounds fell off several times a day, chili peppers in every bite of food, cactuses, miserable-tasting pelican meat when food stores were low, snakes, tarantulas and more.

During lunch break the name of the chapter was officially changed to the California-Nevada (CA-NV) Chapter. A new chapter logo was adopted.

The afternoon session began with Richard Dyer, retired Columbia College history professor, telling us about "The Miwok Indians and the First Pioneer Americans in Tuolumne County." Because the early American arrivals set out to get rid of the Miwoks by destroying their homes, food caches and belongings and by

moving them away, there are very few Miwoks left today, and they are struggling to maintain their culture and identity. Many Indian names, however, remain on the land, such as Tuolumne, Yosemite and Hetch-Hetchy.

Final speakers for the afternoon, Dick Davis and Dave Johnson, told about "The Sonora Trail Revisited." Clark, Hayes, Skidmore, Stubblefield, Morehead and Jarbot are some of the names of people who traveled the Walker River-Sonora Trail and at one time or another were involved in working a grass-rich meadow south of Tuolumne City. The Duckwall family is most closely associated with the pass and crossed it in 1853. That same year, the Patrick party crossed the pass to Sonora, and eventually George Washington Patrick became Sonora's second mayor.

Before we left the Opera Hall, Gail Kulhavy of "California 150" was introduced and made an appeal to the OCTA CA-NV Chapter to use 150's resources to celebrate California's sesquicentennial.

At the Sonora Elk's Club, cocktails, a delicious dinner and our final speaker of the day, Dr. Patricia Stanford, ended a fantastic day. Dr. Stanford donned appropriate apparel and regaled us with tales, both humorous and sad, of the women emigrants who endured so much to reach their final destination.

The weather gods smiled on OCTA and the Clammers (E Clampus Vitus, a fraternal organization dating back to Gold Rush days) on Sunday, when we all gathered at a busy corner in Sonora to unveil an impressive monument dedicated to the emigrants who reached the end of the trail. A letter from Tom Hunt, National Trails Preservation officer, was read, and Danine Cozzens, the great-great-great granddaughter of George Washington Patrick, spoke to us.

It was a fantastic weekend for the 176 people who were there.

—Virginia Hammerness

## NORTHWEST

### ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEET IN OREGON CITY

The Northwest Chapter's annual membership meeting was held in Oregon City on February 24. Approximately 65 members and guests attended. Some last minute location and agenda adjustments were required due to flooding in the area in early February. The historic First United Methodist Church, located near John McLoughlin's house, was a more than suitable substitute for our usual riverside motel. A visit to the End of the Trails Interpretive Center was also cancelled due to damage to that facility. Water was 18



inches deep in a building located over 45 feet above sea level. A heroic staff and volunteer effort is targeted to achieve re-opening of the Center in mid-April.

Wendell Baskins, outgoing Vice President, presented the 1996 outing plan. Included are a March 10 meeting with the Linn County Historical Society in Albany, OR and an Applegate Trail event in Eugene on May 18. In late May the opening of "Going Places: Travel to and through the Rogue River Valley, 1826-1996" will be held in Medford. A "to be defined" outing will held on National Trails Day, June 1, hopefully on the Naches Trail. On August 8 and 11 there will be a bus tour of the Applegate Trail. In September and October there will be various wagon activities on the Applegate Trail. Finally, on October 19 we will have our annual meeting in the Seattle-Tacoma area and on October 28 there is a celebration in Eugene noting the 150th anniversary of the community and its relationship to the Applegate Trail. Contact Glenn Harrison or Dave Welch for details of any of these events.

A highlight of the meeting was Jim Tompkins' presentation of Clair Belsher historic slides of the Barlow Road. Jim's commentary drew on his own extensive knowledge and interview with Mrs. Belsher. She is currently preparing interpretive material to go with the slide presentation.

New officers for the Chapter were installed. They are: Dave Welch, President; Glenn Harrison, Vice President; Suzanne Hornbuckle, Secretary; and Joyce Bolerjack, Treasurer (continuing). Lethene Parks joined Vic Bolon and Ella Mae Young on the Board of Directors.

We hope that OCTAnS outside of the Northwest will be able to join our activities. Also, we look forward to the gathering in Elko.

—Dave Welch

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## CROSSROADS

### JOHNSON DESCRIBES DONNER ORDEAL IN UTAH

Kristin Johnson treated the Utah Crossroads Chapter to an evening with the Donner Party on January 11, 1996, in Salt Lake City. Johnson, current editor of Crossroads, is an expert on the members of the Donner Party and their journey west. She has long been fascinated by their saga and has devoted herself to researching their trek.

Johnson focused on the experiences of the people from the time they began preparations for the journey up through the crossing of Utah. Hers was a history of the people, not of the trail. The early parts of the trek have been overshadowed by the disaster in the Sierra Nevada. The attraction and the impact of the Donner Party is the human angle, not their historical significance, but that they burned themselves into the hearts and minds of readers because of what they endured. They were ordinary people stuck in an extraordinary adventure.

Kristin brought the human element into her story.

She created an awareness of the party as individuals. They were from diverse ethnic groups, some of whom spoke different languages, with many women and children, and included all ages, philosophies and economic conditions. Diversity may have led to conflicts that exacerbated problems.

Most came from the states that bordered the Mississippi River and most had been preparing for several months for the journey. Many were traveling as families. Ms. Johnson gave excellent thumbnail sketches of some of the participants' lives before they started out. The Reeds' baby son died in December 1845 and they left his body behind. Sarah Graves and Jay Fosdick married not long before leaving with Sarah's family. Lavina Murphy had been a Mormon and may have been trying to go west to be with the Mormons who would be going there the next year. In St. Louis, Luke Halloran was trying to sell his store before going. Some were leaving for better health in California—perhaps this is what motivated the Donner brothers.

During her research, Kristin studied many newspapers from the 1840s in the areas from which the people came. She found many articles on Oregon and California, such as letters from the West home, lots of advice on how to get West, glowing descriptions of the land that was waiting. She demonstrated how influential Lansford W. Hastings' book had been. Charles Stanton and both the Donners had read Hastings, as had George W. Harlan of the Harlan-Young party. However, the cutoff itself was only barely mentioned in the book; he was promoting California, not a way there. It was not until Hastings came back east on the cutoff that he began to promote it as the way to get to California.

Johnson noted that Fremont crossed the Salt Desert in 1845. Both Hastings and Fremont were at Sutter's Fort in the winter of 1845-46 and perhaps discussed the practicality of a wagon road across the Salt Flats. Fremont's idea of crossing the Great Basin got out in the spring of 1846. In January 1846, he wrote of it in a letter to his wife. Word was also spread later in 1846 by Wales Bonney, who carried Hastings' letter promoting his route.

Johnson spoke of the impact of Hastings on the Donner Party members. At Fort Laramie, James Clyman told Reed not to take the cutoff. Kristin suggested there is research yet to be done to solve several of the mysteries which still muddy the waters of what made the Donner Party decide to take Hastings Cutoff. At Independence Rock the group meet Bonney and by the time they left the Little Sandy the members of the Donner Party had probably made the decision to follow Hastings' route.

On July 27, 1846, they reached Fort Bridger to find that Hastings had left with groups who had arrived at the fort earlier. They spent the next few days resting, refreshing the cattle and buying more stock. They picked up some stragglers and on July 31, they left Fort Bridger behind. They traveled through Echo Canyon and found a message from Hastings near today's Henefer that said



not to go down Weber River Canyon. Reed and two companions set out to find Hastings and get instructions while the rest made camp. Reed found Hastings at the Great Salt Lake. Hastings traveled back part way with Reed to point out the route. How far they went is another matter of much speculation and curiosity upon which the historical record is unclear. Johnson discussed the possibilities of both Emigration Canyon and Parley's Canyon.

While Reed was gone, the Graves family, which was six days behind the Donner Party at Fort Bridger, caught up. When they actually met the main party is open to question. After Reed returned, the party struggled over the Wasatch Mountains, using up much time and energy. The passage of the Salt Desert was an enormous ordeal for people and animals.

Ms. Johnson got the Donner Party to Donner Spring at the foot of Pilot Peak as the evening drew to a close. Her lecture answered many questions and provoked many others. Kristin Johnson helped us know the people of the Donner Party on a more intimate level; she told the story of the Hastings Cutoff portion of the Donner Party journey through Utah superbly.

—Lyndia Carter

175th Anniversary activities in July, perhaps to include some self-guided auto tours; and the Chapter's "fall rendezvous" on the South Platte/Overland Trails at Fort Lupton. The Chapter has received information from the Julesburg Tourism Director, Anna Scott, regarding the grand opening of their new Information Center which has been constructed along the South Platte River Trail on I-76, scheduled for May 4; Colorado Governor Romer will attend the ribbon cutting ceremony, and OCTA members are encouraged to show their support. Terri is outlining more specific plans for the year's activities in her forthcoming Chapter newsletter.

The Chapter is actively seeking a person to fill the position of Preservation Officer for Colorado, responsibilities to include the marking of trails in the state. Anyone interested may call Terri Tiehen at (303) 699-4487, or (303) 757-9651 (Work.)

—Margaret Bowers

## COLORADO

### CHAPTER PLANS FOR 1996

Colorado Chapter officers met on Saturday, February 3, at the home of President Terri Tiehen to formulate plans for 1996. Jim Bowers reported that the Chapter now has 48 paid memberships and submitted a list of names and addresses to be mailed to Chapter members.

The semi-annual members' meeting was scheduled for April 20 in Aurora, with the program to be on the South Platte River Trail. The following field trip possibilities were discussed: Participation in the Santa Fé Trail's

## GATEWAY

### CHAPTER MEETS IN ST. JOSEPH

Once again the Gateway Chapter met at the world famous Pony Express National Memorial on November 14, 1995. The Gateway members feel very fortunate to have the privilege of meeting at this historical site. The old stable that was the starting point of the Pony Express has been restored to mint condition, and transformed into a museum that tells the story of the Pony Express. It is the center piece for the complex.

A couple of blocks away is the old Patee House Hotel, where the Pony riders stayed. At the top of the four-story brick building is an observation cupola. From this vantage point, they could see the in-bound rider approaching the Missouri River from the Kansas side. It has

## IDAHO-MONTANA

### CHAPTER LOSES VALUED MEMBERS

Our president, Ralph Thornton, was ill in the first part of 1995 and in July he was seriously burned in an explosion and fire. At the Idaho Chapter meeting in Grand Island, both Ralph and Secretary Janece Thornton resigned their offices with IOCTA due to Ralph's health. The only chapter officers remaining were president-elect Fred Dykes, treasurer Virginia Ricketts and the board of directors.

Virginia Ricketts chaired the Grand Island meeting and I took minutes as secretary pro tem. I had a good representation at Grand Island with 13 members present.

Much to our regret, Ralph Thornton passed away on November 23, 1995. Pete Laudeman, an active OCTA member for many years who was serving on

our board and was employed by the Burley, Idaho BLM, also passed away in November. Pete did a lot of work on the management plans for the book *Emigrant Trails of Southern Idaho*, which is available through the Idaho BLM offices. Both these men will be greatly missed by OCTA.

The Idaho chapter is plodding along and hopes to get back on an active track this year. We will be having our Spring Business meeting in Pocatello on April 20 at the Quality Inn.

Mike Bateman and crew have a wonderful set of tours and speakers lined up for the 1997 Convention in Pocatello and we hope to see you all there.

—Peggy Cristobal



also been restored and houses one of the finest museums of its kind in the midwest. If this is not enough to satisfy you in your journey back into the previous century, then walk next door and visit the home of Jesse James, my grandmother's third cousin. Here you can see where he was gunned down by the Ford brothers in 1882. If it sounds like we are proud of the many attractions to see in historic old St. Joseph, Missouri, we are, and we invite all of you out along the trail, to come visit us sometime.

Our January meeting was canceled so the chapter could travel to Crown Center in Kansas City, Missouri, to attend a play entitled "Across the Plains, The Journey of a Palace Wagon Family." The play is about the journey of thirteen-year-old Virginia Reed, a member of the fateful Donner-Reed party that traveled the Oregon-California trail in 1846.

There were 39 OCTA members in attendance. They were from Gateway, Trails Head and also a group from the Alcove Springs and Hanover, Kansas, area. An enjoyable time was had by all.

A special meeting was called in January by President Richard Hill. He announced that he would have to resign as he and Elaine were moving to Columbia, Missouri, located in the central part of the state. This will enable them to be near their children and grandchildren. Richard has been a good president and a hard working member. We want to wish them much happiness and best wishes in their new adventure. They will be sorely missed. Our secretary Mary Knab has consented to complete the remainder of Richards term. Mary is a very capable leader and we are confident she will do a good job.

Several of our members recently traveled to Hanover, Kansas, to conduct a meeting to promote OCTA and help organize a chapter in the area. Gateway member and National President Jackie Lewin spoke to the group. Several people from the Alcove Springs and Hanover area attended. They showed a lot of interest in opening a new chapter and there will likely be one in the near future. Happy Trails.

—Jim Jarrett

## WYOMING

### TREKS PLANNED FOR 1996

It seems as though we're finally thawing out after a long stretch of cold weather in late January and early February. Not much snow in many areas of the state...other than the western mountains. All of this has caused chapter members to become a little stir-crazy and yearn for field trip weather.

Thanks to Randy Brown, Wyoming Chapter Trek Chair, several very interesting and highly scenic treks are on the horizon for this season. The old military road used by Custard and the Mormon Pioneers can be visited. It is just west of Casper along the north side of the North Platte through Dr. Oliver Scott's ranch and ending up at the

BLM interpretive site at Bessemer Bend. This short and easy trek would be just a warm-up to a series of more rigorous treks during the summer. Try this one for size: From the seventh crossing of the Sweetwater River to St. Marys Station; up Rocky Ridge, McLean meadows, the Willies Handcart monument on a breezy ridge; and then back to an overnight rest area. This could be a very long one-day trip or a two-day journey. Or, perhaps the Seminole Cutoff from south of Ice Slough to Burnt Ranch—another long day.

Randy is also looking at the possibility of an Overland Trail trip from Saratoga to Rawlins. There are excellent overnight accommodations at Saratoga, allowing an early start. There's also a fine golf course and excellent fishing in the North Platte. There's a trip along the Mormon Trail (Hastings Cutoff) from Fort Bridger to the Wyoming-Utah border. This would be a long, two-day trip for those travelling from the Casper area.

All OCTA members are cordially invited to join us on these treks. There are ample experts along to provide interpretation and tour guide services. Transportation is not provided. Four-wheel drive rigs are frequently necessary.

We hope to focus on preservation efforts this year. Any threats to our designated and non-designated trails threaten our heritage. We ask all members to be alert to potential damage or destruction of trail segments.

Finally, our thanks to the National Park Service for publishing the updated Mormon Pioneer National Historic Trail brochure. This full-color map has excellent pictures and a superb narrative drafted by Wyoming OCTA member Jude Carino. We're also looking forward to Elko's convention...my old home town.

—Tim Monroe

## TRAILS HEAD

### CHAPTER STAYS BUSY THROUGH THE WINTER

On September 16, the fall trek centered on Pottawatomie County. First, the modern trekkers stopped at the Kansas Museum of History in Topeka to view the Henry Roushi gravestone and the S. M. Marshall stone, both of which were found decades earlier in Pottawatomie County. The trek then followed the trail route through Willard, Rossville, St. Marys, Westmoreland and Blaine. Disembarkments were at the Big Elm near the Cholera Cemetery, Scott Springs Oregon Trail Park, the pasture from which the S. M. Marshall gravestone originated.

At the November 9 annual meeting, held at Raytown Historical Society Museum, Roberta Bonnewitz spoke about the history of Raytown in general and Walter Cook spoke about the Santa Fé Trail between Independence and State Line. The 1996 officers elected at the meeting are Mary Conrad as president, Bill Bullard as vice president, Tom McCutcheon as secretary and Jim Budde as



secretary.

Many Trails Head members joined Gateway on Sunday, January 28 at the Coterie Theatre for the dramatic production "Across the Plains: The Journey of the Palace Wagon Family."

On February 18th, Trails Head held a joint meeting with the Missouri River Out Fitters (MRO) of the Santa Fé Trail Association at the Frontier Trails Center in Independence. Pat Short spoke on Jabez Smith, an early businessman of Independence who bankrolled many freight wagons bound to and from Santa Fé. He also was the surety bondsman for military supply trains from Ft. Leavenworth to Santa Fé and to Fort Laramie. On February 22, Trails Head met again at the Trails Center. Ann Reinert spoke about women and the trail.

In April, Trails Head will join MRO in a bus tour of the Santa Fé Trail route from Lexington to Independence Square.

—Mary Conrad

## SOUTHWEST

### SWOCTA OPEN HOUSE

In an effort to reach OCTA members living in our area who were not chapter members, an Open House was held on Saturday, February 3. Invitations were sent to all OCTA members living in or close to the Phoenix, Arizona area.

The Open House was held at the home of Harland and Rose Ann Tompkins. Turnout was light, but those who came seemed to have a good time visiting and looking at the displays.

Three tables of information were made available. One consisted of brochures about OCTA, the SWOCTA chapter and COED, as well as our three photo albums and four symposia proceedings. Another held the items available from the OCTA catalog that we happen to have, along with order blanks. The reasoning for this was that when members don't attend conventions, they do not have a chance to browse the books. Finally, there was a display of maps and mapping information being used in the chapter's project of mapping the Southern Trail. All displays were popular.

Light refreshments were served and we had a short slide program showing some of the trail outings which we have had over the years. No one seemed eager to leave, therefore we called it a success.

We felt this was a worthwhile activity for a chapter like ours where the membership is so widely scattered and it is often necessary to travel long distances to attend a meeting. There are tentative plans to have a similar activity in the Tucson and Albuquerque areas.

### APRIL MAPPING WEEK

SWOCTA will have a second week of mapping along the Southern Trail in early April, concentrating on the

area between the Rio Grande River and Cooke's Spring. As before, we will be camping and will use GPS and CB units and 4WD vehicles to facilitate the work. Contact person: Rose Ann Tompkins, 1125 W. Mission Dr., Chandler, AZ 85224, phone (602) 963-3565.

### TRAILS WORKSHOP HELD IN SOCORRO, NEW MEXICO

Charles Townley of Las Cruces, New Mexico, organized the trail workshop held Saturday, February 24 in the Socorro, New Mexico, area. The purpose was to develop political and community support for southwestern trails. The day began with a tour of the ruins of Fort Craig led by Brenda Wilkinson of the BLM. Established in 1854, after the heaviest emigrant use, it was located on the travel route along the west side of the Rio Grande. It was abandoned permanently in 1885, after serving as a Union fort during the Civil War and as a control during times of Indian raids.

Following lunch at the famous Owl Bar in San Antonio, the group met in a facility located at the Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge for the afternoon workshop. Short presentations were presented by John Conoboy, Long Distance Trails Group, Santa Fé office, National Park Service; Reba Grandrud from the Arizona Historic Preservation office (and a SWOCTA member); and Mike Taylor of the New Mexico Preservation Division. Taylor's presentation included slides of trail remnants of El Camino Real along the Rio Grande River.

Representatives of the three trail groups present, Santa Fé Trail Association, Old Spanish Trail Association and Oregon-California Trails Association (Southwest Chapter) each took time to share information about their organization. The group then broke into smaller groups to discuss various phases of how to get our message out and gain political and community support. Townley will take all our results and compile a report for us. It was certainly worthwhile to have the trail groups talking together, since we share a common purpose.

At 5 p.m. the meeting broke up to allow those interested to go into the bird refuge to watch the evening fly-in. This is a large wintering place for a number of birds, with Sand Hill Cranes being well represented. Two whooping cranes were also spotted as well as a variety of other birds and wildlife.

The day ended with dinner at the Val Verde Hotel in Socorro, where we all sat together in a back room at a long table, visiting with old and new friends. Several expressed an interest in having this kind of joint meeting periodically. Our appreciation to Charles Townley for organizing the day.

In a very short business meeting, SWOCTA officers were elected. They are: Marie Greene, President; Rose Ann Tompkins, Vice-President; Ruth Root, Secretary; Harland Tompkins, Treasurer. Sheri Lee will be the new editor of the newsletter, *Desert Tracks*.

—Rose Ann Tompkins



# Announcements

## CALL FOR FIDDLERS THREE

All Elko-bound OCTA musicians should pack their musical instruments (fiddles, harmonicas, guitars, mandolins, banjos and squeeze boxes) and be prepared to join the OCTA "traditional music ensemble." This OCTA JAM GROUP is an impromptu organization, and has been asked to render a few tunes for the Social and Author's night on Wednesday evening (8/14/96) and again on Thursday eve (8/15/96) for the Cowboy Poetry readings. So sharpen up yer "Turkeys," "Sweet Betsys," and "O'Suzannas" and join the fun. Please direct any questions or comments to Olive Donaldson, P.O. Box 493053, Redding, CA, 96049. (916) 221-3061.

## ARCHAEOLOGY COMMITTEE REBORN

This past Fall I was appointed to serve as chair of the Archaeology Committee for OCTA. I have served on this committee since its beginning. Though I am not a professional archaeologist, I have extensive training and experience in this field. I work extensively with the Eldorado National Forest and the Toiyabe National Forest doing field work as a volunteer.

OCTA first recognized the need and importance of archaeology by adopting a position to operate under legal and ethical practices. I am excited about the challenges of taking a leadership roll for this committee.

This committee does not necessarily consist of professional archaeologists, but we look to the professional for guidance when doing investigations in the field.

One goal of mine will be to have the Archaeology Committee become more active and available to chapter activities. One of the best archaeology workshops the committee had, I believe, was the two-day excavation of the Wyoming stage station at the Rock Springs Convention. Another was the two-day workshop at the Baker City Convention. Both were very informative and got the membership involved. Hopefully we can expand on these workshops.

So far we have only five members on the Committee. It would be great to have a representative from each chapter. So far not every chapter has chosen to have a representative.

Other members of the Archaeology Committee as of this writing: Jude Carino, Casper, WY; Mary Conrad, Kansas City, KS; Richard Hill, Cameron, MO; Russell Tanner, Rock Springs, WY.

To join the Committee, send a note to: Frank Tortorich, 12544 Eldel Road, Pine Grove, CA 95665-9718 or call (209) 296-7242.

—Frank Tortorich

## DONATIONS ENHANCE THE MATTES LIBRARY

On February 21, 1996, President Jacqueline Lewin presented a number of significant new books to the National Frontier Trails Center. These volumes will be added to the Merrill J. Mattes Library for use by trail researchers and historians. The ceremony was attended by the Mayor of Independence, Ron Stewart; NFTC Director John Mark Lambertson; Jim Budde, Treasurer; and OCTA's Executive Director, Jeanne Miller.

The books included a six-volume set of Carl I. Wheat's *Mapping the Trans-Mississippi West*, Wright Howes, *U.S. IANA (1650-1950)*, six trail diaries from the COED Program, *The 1849 California Trail Diary of Elijah Howell*, edited by Susan Badger Doyle and Don Buck, and *California Wagon Train Lists*, by Louis J. Rasmussen.

The Wheat set was collectively donated to OCTA by Don Wiggins, Bill Rupp, Virginia Hammerness, Don Buck, Chuck Dodd, Leon Schegg, George Hesse, Pat Loomis and Geno Oliver. The collective value of all these books exceeds \$1,000 and provides another example of OCTA's continuing support in building the research collection in the Merrill J. Mattes Library at the National Frontier Trails Center in Independence.

—Jim Budde

## FORT HALL—HUB OF THE WEST

This is the first notice to all trail friends to begin preparations for the 1997 convention at the Pocatello Park Hotel during the week of August 11-17. Located at the Pocatello Creek exit, the hotel is associated with the same group that owned the Salt Lake City 1994 convention hotel. We have negotiated a rate in the range of \$59.00 and so we are asking everyone to plan on staying at the convention motel. They have agreed to provide comp rooms based on our occupancy rate.

Our theme will be Fort Hall, Hub of the West. Our speakers are starting their preparations and it should be a fun convention. If any of you have papers that you would like to give that fit this theme, please send them to me or at least notify me as our selection committee will make final selections this summer.

Through the efforts of Mr. Robert "Red" Perry who is a member of the Fort Hall band, we hope to visit the original Fort Hall site and have a walking tour down Ross Fork Canyon. Our other tours include the Soda Springs area where you can enter the Bateman—Arthur Hope debate about the starting point of the Hudspeth-Myers cutoff, and the parting of the ways at Raft River.

One pre-tour goes from South Pass over the Lander Road to Afton, Wyoming and Pocatello. The second tour starts at Burley and goes to Granite Pass, City of Rocks and then over the Hudspeth cutoff to Arimo and Pocatello. We think that everyone should be able to find something fun and educational so start your 1997 planning now while you are getting ready for Elko in 1996.

—Mike Bateman and Jim Allen



I am writing a book based on the life of Noah Spencer Kellogg. In 1853 Noah made his way from Council Bluffs, Iowa, to Portland in Oregon Territory. I wonder if anyone has ever come across his name in your research? I am also looking for anecdotal material about those who traveled the trail—things that aren't generally known. Thanks,

Jerry Dolph, Author

*Fire in the Hole: The Untold Story of Hardrock Miners*  
Washington State University Press, Pullman, Washington

I was more than a bit surprised when the January issue of your publication came to my attention. The mention of the marking of the Sarepta Fly grave and the Plum Creek Massacre Cemetery came as very interesting news to me.

I would like to make one comment, however. As author of *Captive of the Cheyenne*, I am very concerned that an access road to the Massacre cemetery may endanger it as an archeological site. We all know there are unscrupulous individuals that could take advantage of easier access. The attention brought to the site with additional signs and a road could invite problems. I have urged that the Dawson County Historical Society obtain title to the site—to no avail. On a related matter, when our book was published, I was unable to locate an individual possibly related to the Massacre victims. Jack Fletcher, an Arizona resident, had visited the museum in Lexington many years ago. Might he be on your membership list or do you know of his present whereabouts? Thanks for letting me express my concern.

Russell A. Czaplewski

Historian, Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer

The End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (EOTIC) sustained damage during recent flooding and is closed until April 15. The staff moved office equipment, computers and records to higher ground but were unable to move furniture and the copier. As the flood waters rose beyond the projected 41 feet (because of large inflows from Abernethy Creek and the Clackamas River) the staff boated in and moved all store merchandise and artifacts to upper shelves. The waters continued to rise and exceeded the 45'7" flood level by 18" despite the "official" flood level of 45'5" reported by the weather service. At its highest point the EOTIC was said to appear to be like "three huge wagons fording the Willamette River." At least real wagons would have floated.

One report called the EOTIC "ground zero" for the worst flood damage. When the water was at its highest, manager Jane Sligar boated in and entered the building as her husband took videos of the damage. The best part shows Jane canoeing down the hall of Abernethy Store in the dugout canoe that will be part of our living history display.

The "silver lining in this cloud" is the staff and community involvement in the clean up. No fewer than a dozen people at a time moved artifacts to the Oregon Historical Society warehouse, mopped floors and walls and cleaned displays. On Valentine's Day the staff took time out to sing happy birthday to the state of Oregon (137 years old). If you call the EOTIC the phone has the message "the pioneer spirit of braving the elements."

—Jim Tompkins

## Queries and Comments

I just received my January *News From the Plains* and wanted to drop you a line and thank you for all the wonderful work you do for the OCTA. I wrote a letter once to the editor thanking them for the *Overland Journal* and what it did for me. If I may I would like to recite my story again.

I had always heard that I some LDS in my family tree but wasn't sure where. My cousin went to the Ramona Pageant in El Cajon, Ca. one year and saw in the program a person with a family name—Roberds. He called this person and found out we were indeed related. We also found out that there had been a family reunion for some 50 years we didn't know about.

I decided to start my research on the Roberds line after going to the reunion in San Bernardino, CA. Anyway, I had come to a dead end on one of the Roberds' daughters who had married a guy named Wm. Prouse or Prows. No one had any info on them or what happened to them. Enter the *Overland Journal!*

I was on vacation in Boise at my friend Larry Shilet's house and saw a copy of the *Overland Journal* on the table. He started telling me how I should join and how good the magazine was. I was looking through the index and saw the name of the Roberds daughter that I was stuck on. It referred to an issue he didn't have. The next day we went to the BSU library and found the back issue. What a find! Not only did it have the story about Wm. Prows (Prouse in the Mormon Battalion records) but had all kinds of history and so on. Over the last three years this has led me on a journey that has introduced me to Mike Landon and Prof. Owens at Sac State. I have found I am a relative of Wm. Prows who should have a book written about him. He was in the Mormon Batt., Co. B with some well known historians, was at or near Coloma with Marshall, cut the trail to Carson City recently dedicated, discovered gold near Virginia City (per the *Overland Journal*), led a wagon train with his future in-laws back to California. Went back to Utah during the recall. This is where the family became separated. He became a polygamist, went to jail fathered 23 children from his two wives, and died in the LDS colonies in Mexico. And to think I would never have this rich history if not for the OCTA.

Thank you so much for this labor of love. I wish I could do more for the organization. Thanks again,

Ross McClintock

Nalgie@eworld.com

Ross might be in my edition of *Frontiersman: Abner Blackburn's Narrative*. It contains a very different view from John Townley's of the question of who first discovered gold in present-day Nevada—The Editor



# THE READING TRAIL

by Lyndia Carter

We are going down the reading trail with three girls, Cassie, Elly and Patty, or more exactly, Patty's doll. That doesn't mean you boys aren't welcome. True, girls' experiences on the westward journey were somewhat different than the boys who were assigned different responsibilities, but you will find that boys and girls, even back then, had much in common and that the events which make up history affected all members of the wagon train. With Cassie and Patty you will share their childhood; with Elly you will go as a teenager into adulthood.

*Cassie's Journey: Going West in the 1860's* by Brett Harvey (New York: Holiday House, 1988) is an authentic and well-written fictional account of a family going to California. You will see the day to day life of a village on wheels and a typical westering family through the eyes of a young girl. Mr. Harvey has based the story on events he read in a number of accounts written by women and girls who really walked the trail west. Cassie is easy

to relate to: you will feel her sadness when the family pet cow drowns, her happiness in making a friend and their good times together; her sense of excitement, adventure and even monotony as the days drag on and on; her terror when she faces stampeding buffalo; her sorrow when she must leave her friend. Cassie mixes in the trail facts so casually in her story that you do not even realize you are learning a lot of history. Cassie is believable and her words make her long-ago journey seem very real to young readers today. I think you will especially like the illustrations by Deborah Kogan Ray. Every page has beautiful drawings that portray the story. Brett Harvey, the author, and Deborah Ray, the illustrator, have been true to historical fact. However, they goofed a bit on the transportation: 1) a wagon is not 10 feet wide, it is more like 4 1/2 feet wide and 10 to 14 feet long; 2) oxen are not driven like horses or mules from the wagon; the driver must walk beside them to keep them moving along. Despite these two small and rather common mistakes, the story teaches you much about life on the trail and what it would have been like for a child to "see the elephant."

*Patty Reed's Doll: The Story of the Donner Party* by Rachel K. Largaard (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1956; many reprints) takes you to California with the Donner Party in the pocket of the very real Patty Reed. You get a unique view of life on the trail; the narrator of the story is a small wooden doll that Patty carried in her pocket rather than leave behind. Many of the books about the Donner Party concentrate on the tragedy of the snow-bound ordeal of starvation in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Unlike those books, this story gives more emphasis to the earlier parts of the journey. These experiences are

much more typical of what happened to most emigrants, although you do learn about the tragedy in a limited way. Dolly tells about events that are interesting and often fun, rather than disturbing. Dolly deals sensitively with the death of Grandma Keyes and the other hardships of the trail, but maintains a child-like spirit of hope that helped Patty to be one of the survivors. The story of this company of emigrants is one of the best known in American history and this book tells it at a level that young readers can appreciate, laughing with in the good times and sympathizing when the going gets rough and things look hopeless. Patty and her family learn the hard way that short cuts can sometimes create long problems.

Elizabeth Michaels' old-fashioned illustrations add to the "long-ago" feeling but also convey the sense of "being there." Any child who has especially loved a doll or other toy will understand Patty's devotion to Dolly, who really did travel with Patty and now lives in a museum, since Patty's pocket is long gone. As in all historical

fiction, the story is not perfectly accurate, but it is the kind of tale that will open a door of curiosity, causing you to want to read more. I especially like this book as a

"read-aloud," so you can talk about it as you go, but it is equally enjoyable on your own.

*Gentle Path* by Martha Olson (Salt Lake City: Northwest Publishing Inc., 1994) is for older teens and adults. It is a "romance" novel with an Oregon Trail setting. *Gentle Path* is the story of a girl, Elly, maturing into a woman. The experiences of the trail and the knowledge she gains help her make the transition. The author remains true to historical reality, but all the elements of "romance" are found in the book: a beautiful, independent, but confused young woman who goes West on her own to start a new life—but carries a bad (if undeserved) reputation; a magnificent hero in the form of trail guide with his own shadowy past; and a sinister villain who seeks to destroy the young lady. The author creates a cast of characters, particularly the women of the train, who figure importantly in the changes in Elly's life. Sometimes, however, the women seem a bit modern for the setting.

Daily events weave together believably. The reader will find sickness and tragedy, friendship, strong family bonds, selfishness, genuine kindness and a few extra love stories thrown in for good measure. Elly's co-travelers are both petty and remarkable, reflecting life accurately. The elements of mystery and intrigue also add interest. When at last Elly arrives in Oregon City, she still wrestles with her inability to accept a painful secret. The ending, though overdone and implausible (what romance ending isn't?) dramatically unites her with the man she loves. The book is relaxing reading, letting you escape into the heart and mind of a young woman struggling toward her own maturity and falling in love on the way.

Happy trails!

—Mrs. C.

## Buffalo Chips





*Ilene Hunter found this picture in a third grade class in Tolenas School in Fairfield, California.*



Pioneers and covered wagons often enter elementary classrooms through the pages of the Little House books of Laura Ingalls Wilder. Teachers and librarians are eager to expand this interest to the Oregon Trail Pioneers. As a retired teacher and member of OCTA, I enjoy presenting programs to the children on this subject. They are especially intrigued when I mention the possibility that Pa Ingalls could have continued onward from South Dakota and then we would have had a Little House in California (or in another of the states along the trail).

The one hour program consists of about 20 minutes of slides—covered wagons, log cabins (including Lewis and Clark’s fort and Mark Twain’s cabin) cabin interiors with log furniture, rivers crossings, winter snow scenes and summer prairies. In addition I show items meant to be touched—a tin lantern, candle stick, rag and corn husk dolls, coffee grinder, slate, wooden toys and an assortment of different sunbonnets and straw hats. We also sing a songs like “Yankee Doodle,” “Old Dan Tucker,” and “Old Suzanna.” The stories of the Wilder family’s travels lead into stories concerning California and Oregon families on the trail.

The libraries often suggest that children to come in pioneer costumes, so I, too, have a long dress, sun bonnet and high laced black shoes. If there is time and space we play some old fashioned games like Cat and Mouse, Drop the Bandana (update from “handkerchief”) or Rachel and Ruben.

One librarian planned a pioneer afternoon on Saturday—she invited a fiddler, two spinners, weavers and Girl Scouts making cornhusk dolls. We played games and danced the Virginia Reel. Children and parents agreed it was a good afternoon. and the library’s supply of pioneer books was almost completely checked out. This kind of program is easily adapted for any area. Just mention it to the Children’s Librarian or your local grade school. Parents, too, are interested to find there are organizations like OCTA.

—Ilene Hunter

**CLASSROOM OF THE QUARTER**

*Ilene Hunter is a former teacher who can’t stay out of the classroom. She volunteers in the schools in Davis, California, so Ilene and all the classes she visits win our Classroom of the Quarter award. Ilene is pictured here with Kaitlin Gregg at the Pioneer School in Davis.*

**Error on Convention Registration Form**

Luncheon Buffets are Wednesday and Thursday  
NOT Wednesday and Friday



# 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 Elko, Nevada, this summer. Page 1.
- ☞ OCTA Board meets in St. Joseph, MO. Page 3.
- ☞ Treasurer Jim Budde's Annual Report on OCTA Finances. Pages 4-5.
- ☞ Share the Strange Vicissitudes of Fortune with Robby Gunstream and friends. Page 7.
- ☞ OCTA has a new chapter in the works in the tall grass country of Kansas. Pages 9-10.
- ☞ Plenty of Chapter News. Pages 11-15.
- ☞ Announcements describe what's up. Page 16.
- ☞ Comments and Queries—letters to the Editor. Page 17.
- ☞ Lyndia Carter is back on the Reading Trail. Page 18.
- ☞ Buffalo Chips Rides Again!