

Anonymous "Lake Erie"

HUNT

✓ FROM LAKE ERIE TO THE PACIFIC

✓ AN OVERLAND TRIP IN 1850-'51

LIFE ON THE GREAT PLAINS

A FEW WEEKS AMONG THE SAINTS

REPRODUCED FROM THE ORIGINAL
IN THE HENRY E. HUNTINGTON
LIBRARY AND ART GALLERY
FOR REFERENCE ONLY.
PERMISSION NECESSARY FOR
REPRODUCTION

See Photo Pin Rock Narratives

Entry 1031

Research
Minnie J. Metcalf Collection

My dear Root:

Jim has asked me to write a sketch of my overland trip from Ohio to "where rolls the Oregon" in 1850-'51.

Had Jim made that request twenty-five years ago, I think I could have given you a sketch that would be a credit to your work as well as myself. While many - I may say most - of the incidents that happened are still retained in memory, the details which would most interest are not so vivid in my mind as I would like, to give a clear, life-like description of crossing the great plains. Of the thousands who made this trip, I was in hope some one of them other than myself, would give us a pen picture of one of the greatest undertakings in this enterprising country of ours, and show coming generations what their ancestors, the princes of civilization accomplished to settle the great Western country that lay between the Missouri and the Columbia and Saero-Viento rivers and the shore of the Pacific.

As late as 1840 but few of the people knew much about the Pacific Coast, especially the northern portion between the Missouri river and Puget Sound. A few missionaries had gone around the Cape Horn from New England, and Whitman had gone overland from the same locality to Oregon, and Dana had spent nearly two years on the coast of southern California, going from Boston on a whaler, giving in his book "Two Years Before the Mast" a picture of life in southern California. Then there was the Lewis and Clark Expedition which left southern Ohio in 1802, going up the Missouri and crossing to the Columbia, and thence down to Astoria.

Of course, it was the discovery of gold in California that induced thousands to start for the new Edinboro by the sea and land.

In the fall of 1850 Capt. Hiram Smith, of

Findlay, Ohio, formed a company to cross the plains from Council Bluffs in 1857, called the Buck Eye Camp. He took them across the plains with a band of cattle in the early 40's. He was joined by Mr. Edwin Cooke, of Sandusky, Ohio. Mr. Cooke had also been a pioneer on the plains, having been on the Texas border when a young man.

The trip through Ohio, Indiana and Illinois was uneventful. At that time there was no road cut through the western portion of the first named state, and we traveled through a portion of the last county winding around the treest until we came to the Indiana line. The roads were good.

Some time in November we reached the Mississippi river at Rock Island, Mississippi. On the 20th of December we crossed the river on the ice at Le-land and went over to the English river in Washington

County, where we wintered.

In the winter we started for Council Bluffs, and arrived there in April. The country was sparsely settled. The capitol of the state was Iowa City, and Des Moines was but a small village. The last town laid out was Winterset, and it consisted of one log house with rows of stakes for a long distance in front of it. From Winterset to within a few miles of Council Bluffs there were no settlements, though on each creek was a house where men had put up hay.

The view of Council Bluffs and the Missouri Valley from the top of the hill we passed over before entering the valley, was a very beautiful one. We could see the winding of the Missouri river for many miles north and south. The valley in front was covered with small houses, tents, and dug-outs in the sides of hills. From these places of tem-

porary abode swarmed people by the hundred. Miners, who had been waiting for spring to open so that they could start for the "promised land" as soon as the grass was high enough to feed the stock. Here was an air of cheerfulness and hope on the countenance of the people which was pleasant to behold. The little town at the foot of the hill was not Council Bluffs, as we supposed, but called Hanesville.. We at once called for our letters at the Post Office, but were surprised to find that none for us had arrived. After inquiring for several days someone suggested that we call at the little log hut on the bank of the river, where there was another Post Office. We did so and found plenty of mail matter. We were informed that the town of old Council Bluffs was in the Missouri river.

The main portion of our company joined us

here, coming by St. Louis and the Missouri river on steamers as far as Fort Leavenworth. The stock was purchased near St. Joseph and Weston, Missouri, and driven to Council Bluffs. In a few days we were ready for the Plains.

Before we started the arrival of emigrants, with those already there, made Hannesville a very lively town. Everybody was busy getting ready. There was no discord. I didn't see a drunken man. The Mormons had some advantage over the Gentiles generally, as some of them had crossed the Plains. Orson Hyde, was the leader, and he appeared to be a man who knew what he was about. The Mormons held meetings on Sunday in a grove, which were largely attended by Gentile. But nothing seemed to matter except as to the best way to get to Salt Lake. The Mormons were well dressed. We young fellows noticed that the ladies were dressed very neat, though

they came out of dug-outs.

I shall never forget my feelings as I stood on the East bank of the Missouri and looked across to where the splendid city of Omaha now stands. The river flowed with a rapidity and force that astonished me, yet with an apparent gentle ripple. Near by was the remains of a bark canoe which had floated down, how far I could not even guess. On the side of the bank opposite stood a small log cabin with the windows and doors out. All the rest was a wilderness, so to speak. But what was beyond? I confess I had not the remotest idea.

We were nearly a day crossing the river. The ferry boat was quite small. We camped about a mile south and west from where we crossed. Next day we moved camp a little further west and prepared for the long journey. It was an ideal camping place. The

grass was high and water good. A small band of Otoe Indians paid us a visit. Soon after members of other tribes put in an appearance. I think we would camp again before making final start, and were visited by a band of Pawnees. These Indians seemed to be a little different from the Otoes. They were generally mounted and had their hair cut very close, except a comb like that of a rooster. Knowing they were on the steal we watched them closely. Before we got far from the river they stole a horse from one end of the train and sold it to a party at the other end. While getting ready we gave all the Indians a feast, killing a cow. They enjoyed the feast and appeared well pleased.

Of all the tribes we met it seemed to us that the Otoes were the most numerous and the Pawnees next. Besides the tribes mentioned we were visited

by the Omos, Umahas, Siouc and Cheyennes.

As our leader, Capt. Hiram Smith, had crossed the Plains with cattle and team, and returned with jack mules before the discovery of gold his great experience enabled us to get ready sooner, in better shape, than others who had never seen the Plains and understood the ways of travel necessary. Some of the steers were unbroken, and it was no small job to get them in working order.

We had but little trouble until we crossed the Elkhorn and Loop Fork Rivers, there being good ferries over each. We soon reached the Platte river, which was a rushing, muddy stream, with banks nearly full. At five days out the rains set in, making it difficult to travel. The gulleys were filled and in some instances we had to hurry a trifle, and as there was another train we wished to keep ahead of, we

worked with all our might. As we progressed up the valley the rains increased and the small streams were like rivers. At times we would be compelled to go miles with the water nearly up to the wagon beds. In one instance the rain and hail came with such volume that the trail had to halt until its volume was spent. Coming from the northwest three yokes of cattle in the lead were swung around with backs to the storm, compelling the driver to jump off and with his back against the wheel spoke prevent them from twisting out the tongue or capsizing the wagon, at some time standing in three or four feet of water. Meanwhile the loose stock would come thundering by, going the way of the storm, bellowing in a fearful manner. The Pounding of the hail and the roaring of the storm, the bellowing of the frightened cattle under full run with the storm, and the lightening was something frightful

to behold. The Platte being out of its banks in many places the drivers would frequently drop nearly out of sight. When one of the drivers would disappear the man behind him would run and stop his team and then pull him out. The road sometimes would run near the bank of the Platte river and covered with muddy water, the depth of which could only be found by trying.

But happily this state of things did not last long. After we reached Fort Kearney the weather changed to bright sunshine, with an occasional cloud, and a sprinkle. The buffalo could be seen crossing our path for miles and miles going north. They moved in a slow manner, grazing as they went. Following them was the big gray wolf. Every now and then we came across antelope, apparently keeping company with the buffalo. Of course we had plenty of antelope and buffalo

steak for two hundred miles or more. As we neared the South Pass our hunters killed several deer and they tasted good, but the meat was not near as good as the buffalo or antelope.

Seeing a very fine buffalo we thought we would like to get him, and so some of us decided to follow him to the hills north. The country we found rolling and too sandy to travel with ease. But we were sure we would tire him out; but when we had arrived at the top of one hill we could see him at the top of the other, and making as good time as we were. The result was that the clumsy, bulking beast was really getting the better of us, so we gave up the chase. Along the road were skulls of buffalo by the hundreds, that had been accumulating for many years. On many of them were messages to friends behind.

At Fort Kearney, which was on the south

side of the Platte, was the first sign of civilization we saw. As some of our party wished to send letters East, one of our men carried them across in his hat. He was compelled to swim but a short distance. The Mormons carried the mail from Salt Lake to Council Bluffs once a week.

The next place we reached that looked liked civilization was Fort Laramie, which like Fort Kearney was on the south side of the Platte. Letters were carried over by the boys, placing them in their hats and swimming.

As we neared the South Pass we could realize the fact that we were getting higher. The air was drier and the dust was driven north. The rains were less frequent and finally they diminished to a sprinkle. After we commenced to climb the Rockies we saw no more rain until we reached the Pacific

Coast.

After the trail crossed the North Platte we noticed that the road west was much deeper, showing that hundreds of people had come up from St. Joseph and Independence Missouri. While only an occasional team could be seen from front or rear, we knew thousands were on the way to the Pacific by various routes. All had to go through the South Pass.

The day before we reached the South Pass was quite blustery. The wind came from the south, accompanied by a small shower. Our train was stretched for an unusual distance and we received full benefit. We had passed the buffalo and antelope ranges, but the wolves were still quite plentiful. To give us a good-bye send off they attacked the dogs, driving them sometimes across the train, and vice versa. The thick dust, the whirling of the dirt and dust across the track by the south wind, the fight between the dogs

and wolves, the bellowing and loose cattle, and the yelling of the drivers was a fitting, scenic good-bye to the Platte Valley in entering the Rockies.

The next place of importance we arrived at was the Sweetwater river- a mountain stream about thirty yards wide at the Devil's Gate, South Pass. The road was gravelly, sandy and somewhat cut up. It looked as if thousands of teams had just passed through though we could see but few ahead.

Arriving there early in the day we camped, as grass was good and water plenty and in abundance. At this place there is an upheaval of the rocks about fifty feet high and three hundred feet wide and a fourth of a mile long. The whole pile is called Independence Rock, named so because a very large number of people bound for California in the early days had arrived there on the fourth day of July, 1849, and had

a large celebration. The largest rocks point east and to the main road, and at a first glance it has the appearance of being all a solid rock. This portion of the rock was covered with names as thick as could be placed. I noticed that of Col. Fremont which was among the first placed there. On climbing over the broken rocks to the summit, thousands of names could be seen, mostly painted on the rocks with tar. Some had used a chisel and these will last for all time.

From the Devil't Gate the Mountains began to appear formidable and gave us an idea of what we would have to encounter. As we were going to Salt Lake we left the California trail and took the Eastern one, which was not much traveled. In places it was quite rough. The day before reaching the summit of the mountains East of Salt Lake we

crossed a small stream an even hundred times. The work on this trail was done by the Mormons and would have been extensive.

After several days of hard travel we reached the summit of the mountains, apparently a dozen miles east of Salt Lake City. As our train stretched out on the top of the mountain we beheld the most wonderful sight so far seen in our travels. For a moment not a word came from a single member of the company - all were speechless at the grand scenery before us - when of a sudden the member of the Buck-eye Camp yelled at the top of their voices. The Salt Lake Valley was stretched before us. It was an ideal summer day, which added beauty to the scene. As far as the eye could reach, up and down the valley, nothing at first could be seen by a few log houses, and the winding of the Jordan - like a rivulet of

We followed down the valley near the hill, at the foot of which ran a stream of water about a yard wide, which was used at times for irrigation, until we landed under the cottonwoods in the heart of the village of Salt Lake. Along the sides of the street ran a stream of water, now and then entering a garden, and soon emerging again entering some other yard. It was clear and cool and tasted refreshing to us who had just crossed the country. Each family had four acres of ground, and on it was planted gardens which were well kept. All was quiet. There was no noise of vehicles. No markets, or marketing of goods, but very small stores not overburdened with goods of any kind were scattered around.

While resting in the cool shade, President Young came down in a carriage with three wives

silver between the cottonwoods which lined its banks. As the eye was cast to the right far in the distance appeared mountains, perhaps a hundred miles away, and last but not least, snugly situated under the hills at the right could be seen the city of Salt Lake. but few log houses were in evidence, but the green corn and vegetables were plainly visible. This meant to us some food to eat, after being on the Plains for two months. We thought of green peas, beans, corn. And we were not disappointed.

After a short rest we took from the wagons all the cattle but one yoke, and hitching a yoke behind the wagon for the lead and with a man at the head of each yoke we reached the bottom of the mountain in safety. Along the slopes of the mountain were small ditches of running water - showing irrigation.

stone, and Uncle Johnny was greatly cheered, and stepped around like a boy. Possibly Uncle Johnny had been "paying attention" to the little miss I had been escorting to the house.

About the first of August we broke camp and started on our way to Oregon. We crossed Bear river where it enters Salt Lake and took a north-westward direction towards the Lewis Fork of the Columbia, known generally as Snake River. The country was level and roads good. I well remember crossing a small stream some five yards wide which was quite warm, and the water had a sickly taste, but was healthy to drink or use. We camped for the night, but greatly regretted that we had not filled our kegs from a beautiful stream further back, The day was unusually warm and roads dusty and the warm medicinal water we were compelled to use was

.far from pleasant. To help the matter we mixed vinegar and soda with the water and so worried through the day, striking fine water at night.

Not far from this stream we struck the Raft river - a rather small stream to be called a river. At noon we met the first company from California. They were "jacking" through having no wagons, and numbered about sixty-six all young men who had probably crossed the Plains or went around Cape Horn or crossed the Isthmus in 1849, had made their "pile" and now were going back to their friends in the states. They were in the best of spirits and now rejoiced to see people from the "old country" especially the young ladies for they had been in a country where they were scarce. They also informed us that the Indians were hostile, one man had been killed, and

we should be on our guard. That night we "corralled" our team - placing the wagons in the shape of a horse shoe and putting our guns and pistols in first class order. It was an ideal place for an attack. Willows were thick near the road, and the mountains not far away, so that an attacking party had a great advantage. We all felt that we would soon be attacked, and made arrangements accordingly. Some of our boys, not being satisfied with the situation, concluded to see if any Indians were near. They slipped out of camp after dark and scouted the country, but found no Indians. On approaching camp they concluded to see what those on guard would do in case of an attack, and it nearly cost them their lives. The cattle stampeded and had they been a little nearer camp would have run over us in their mad rush, and tore things to pieces. Capt. Smith immediately took in the situation and checked

them by calling to them. The men on guard and those awakened were about to shoot when the voices of the scouts were heard in time to escape a volley. It was a close call, but things came out all right.

From what we could learn from the Californians we were liable to be attacked by the Indians at any time. On examination it was found that not half a dozen of our men were prepared for an attack. The guns were either in the wagons or placed where they could not be reached, and not even loaded. We spent nearly a half a day getting things ready for defense. That night we lay on our arms and when the first alarm came we were ready to meet the savages.

The reader may have a curiosity to know how the women acted in the face of danger, those who had been brought up in wealth and refined society in Ohio, and who for the first time in their lives had

to meet armed savages. Not one of them screamed, but showed as much nerve as the men. One quite stout lady who was with our company, had joined us on the road, got out a huge rolling pin and declared she could fight any Indian, and would fight with all her might right from the start. Happily we got through this country without seeing an Indian, but they had recently left for some reason we could not find out. They had made hiding places in the willows that bordered the road and it would have been hard fighting to meet them.

And what did they do in all time of trouble, privation and sickness? Some one may ask. I will say right here that they were equal to any emergency, and no man could have done better. In the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains mountain fever struck down the strongest and best men and they were

helpless. One morning there were but two or three men who could do duty. The camp could hardly move. Our women gave up their carriages and gave them to the men who were sick and did all the work of the camp. They could help yoke and drive cattle, help pitch tents, gather wood and sagebrush for fire - in short they did everything and nursed the sick.

At Salmon Falls we found quite a large camp of Indians, the name of the tribe I have forgotten. They appeared to be friendly. The next camp we made was over quite a ridge of mountains, and a fine camp it was. The river was broad and shallow, in fact it was divided, large streams flowing on both sides of our island. Some of our horses were either stolen by the Indians or had strayed back towards the falls. Some of the men went in search of them and found them in the possession of the Indians. The boys gave them some

presents, then they changed their minds and refused to give them up. When the boys reached camp there was considerable excitement, and that night some of them recorssed the mountains and rode into the indian camp at daylight. The Indians were astonished. Seeing that they were whipped they gave up the presents and the stock. Now humiliation was complete. Our party was led by Mr. Ed. Cooke, who thoroughly understodd Indians, having been on the Texas border in his younger days.

A few days through a good country had brought us to the California trail. As we were bound for Oregon we took the trail toward old Fort Hall on the Snake, which we could see in the distance. Following this trail a few miles we crossed a divide and struck the Columbia about ten miles below the fort. We reached the summit of the divide about four P.M.

The sight was the grandest we had seen. As far as the eye could reach could be seen the beautiful river, looking like a thread of silver winding around up and down the valley. The contrast was especially noted, the light colored soil of the valley with the winding stream, and the sun just above the horizon, throwing its light over the hills, trees, sagebrush, and green spots of grass on the banks, was a scene that filled us with delight. Descending the mountain for the first time we realized that the long looked for Columbia land was reached.

After a few days drive we left the Columbia for a time but striking it again further down. We crossed several streams finally reaching Dallas on the Columbia where there was a small steamer waiting to take us down to Portland. At last we had struck civilization - "where rolls the Oregon." The journey

of hundreds of miles was ended. Some of us had been on the road nearly a year and civilization was warmly welcomed.

Capt. Smith wished to send some of the stock over the Cascade mountains. I volunteered to go. It was really the hardest portion of the trip. A road had been cut over the mountain a year or two before we arrived and it was called "Barlow's State." It took nearly a week to reach ~~Milwaukee~~ on the Willamette river, near Oregon City. The town was a live one, and a rival of Portland. I visited its locality some years afterwards but not a house was standing on the site, while Portland was a large city.

The trip down the Columbia to Dallas was without special interest. At Grande Ronde valley we saw one of the most interesting sights of the journey,

The Indians were grazing several thousand horses and seemed friendly. The animals were of all colors and many of them were very beautiful.

After crossing the Deschutes, and many small streams that empty into the Columbia we arrived at Dallas, where a small steamer at the landing was ready to take us to Portland. Our trip was practically ended.

While the bulk of our company went down to Portland Capt. Smith wished to send some stock and wagons over the Cascade Mountains. I volunteered to go. Taking the back track for a few miles we struck out for the mountains and followed the road which was called "Barlow's State." It was the worst part of the journey. We were soon at the snow line of Mt. Hood. After a week's hard travel we landed at the busy little

town of Milwaukee, just below Oregon City. From there we went down the river to Portland. Many years afterwards I visited Oregon and found that Milwaukee had been abandoned, and there was not a house on the town site, while Portland was the largest city north of San Francisco.