

ANSELM HOLCOMB BARKER

1822 - 1895

Pioneer Builder and Early Settler of Auraria

His diary of 1858 from Plattsmouth, Nebraska
Territory, to Cherry Creek Diggings, the
present site of Denver, Colorado.

With
a number of keepsake rarities

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he traveled to Plattsmouth, Nebraska Territory,³ and established a wholesale and retail store, one of the largest in Plattsmouth.⁴

On September 20, 1858, Barker left Plattsmouth for the Cherry Creek settlements with a train consisting of six wagons.⁵ They followed the Ox Bow Trail from Plattsmouth to where it joined the Oregon Trail near a large island, shown on early maps as Big Island, in the Platte River. Then they traveled over the famous Oregon Trail along the Platte River to the forks, branched off on the Emigrant Trail which ran along the South Platte to the mouth of Cherry Creek. Barker, in his autobiography, remembered the following men who accompanied him: William Slaughter,⁶ Bart Kennedy,⁷ George Griffith, David Griffith, George Salsey, a man by the name of Garrison, William Stocking, Andrew Slain, John Hoover, William Liston, Fred Kockerhans, Jerris Richardson, Eli

³In 1842, John C. Fremont attempted to descend the Platte River, but it was too shallow. He stated in his government report that the Indians called it the "Nebraska or Shallow River." The Secretary of War read the report and suggested the name of Nebraska for the new Territory west of the Missouri which included part of the present States of Kansas, North Dakota, South Dakota, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and all of Nebraska. Nebraska Territory was created in 1854. It became a State on March 1, 1867, although its geographical area was much smaller by that time.

⁴Plattsmouth, Cass County, Nebraska, dates back to 1811, when Manuel Lisa passed through there on May 11th of that year. The Plattsmouth Town Company was organized in November, 1854; it was incorporated on March 15, 1855. River traffic up the Missouri and the Platte created a boom for the town, and caravans moving west made it an outfitting point. Ground was broken for a railroad in 1869, and shops were built there by the Burlington Railroad.

⁵William Green Russell and his party had reached the mouth of Cherry Creek on June 24, 1858, and had succeeded in finding gold in the South Platte River. This was the first organized party to come to the Pikes Peak region in search of the precious metal.

⁶William Slaughter later was associated with Henry Allen and Richard Sopris in real estate and mining. They had an office on the west side of Ferry Street, between 3rd and 4th Streets, in Auraria.

⁷Bart Kennedy was later killed by Indians at the head of Chicago Creek, south of Idaho Springs, Colorado.

Dickerson, Hank Bassett, William Gullion, William Dermitt, John Calvin and French Louie.⁸

At Fort Kearney they were joined by nine other wagons from Kansas and Missouri, making a total of fifteen vehicles accompanied by about forty-five men. On their journey they came in contact with several bands of Indians. One they encountered contained about four thousand red men camped on the north side of the river. Some crossed to the emigrant train to beg, and stole three ponies. It cost Barker and his companions thirty dollars to recover the horses. Barker described the journey as follows:

Some 250 miles below the mouth of Cherry Creek we met a party of men from Lawrence, Kansas and Georgia on their way home from the mouth of Cherry Creek. They had started from Lawrence, Kansas, sometime in July for the mouth of Cherry Creek by the way of the Arkansas River, and had been prospecting around the foot of Pikes Peak and had crossed the divide between the Arkansas River and the Platte and had been prospecting around about the mouth of Cherry Creek and had found some gold and had divided up

⁸The Plattsmouth Company made up the first long train that traveled up the Platte River. It consisted of fifteen wagons; six were from Plattsmouth and nine were from Kansas and Missouri, the latter joining at Fort Kearney. The following men were listed by Professor Frederick J. Stanton as being among the Plattsmouth Company: A. H. Barker, Joseph Harper, Bart Kennedy, David Griffin, George Griffin, William M. Slaughter, Fred Kucherhautz, William Liston, Miles Fellowes, Jerris Richardson, Ransome Smith, William Dermitt, Andrew Slain, French Louey, William Gullion, D. Hoover, and — Stocking. John and Luis Reithman were a day ahead of them all the way. See: Stanton, Frederick J., "The Founders of Denver and Their Doings," *Trail Magazine*, May, 1922, Vol. XIV, No. 12, pages 3-13. This was an address given by Professor Stanton on January 25, 1881, at the first annual reunion of the Society of Colorado Pioneers.

BARKER DIARY

September 20, 1858 Loaded up and started.³⁷ Traveled ten miles and camped on Turkey Creek, a beautiful little stream.³⁸

September 21, 1858 Traveled 16 miles and came to Pawnee Creek and camped. A tremendous thunderstorm came up and passed over without any damage.

September 22, 1858 Hitched up and traveled 4 miles to Salt Creek.³⁹ Took breakfast and then bought 2 yoke of cattle. Went 2 miles and camped at Mr. Otist.

September 23, 1858 Traveled about 20 miles over a beautiful rolling prairie and camped on a beautiful mound near the south cottonwood.

September 24, 1858 Friday. Traveled about 18 miles on this road. Came across a wild ox. Beefed him and had a splendid piece of steak for supper and the balance to take along.

September 25, 1858 Saturday. Morning cloudy, very smoky, cool and heavy air. Mr. Slaughter and myself mounted our mules and started to overtake Mr. Stocking's train.

³⁷Barker's party started from Plattsmouth, Nebraska Territory.

³⁸In editing this diary, to make it more readable, the spelling and punctuation have been corrected.

³⁹Salt Creek, about thirty miles from the Missouri River, had a good rock bottom and was easy to ford. There were few settlements along the stream, which empties into the Platte River near Ashland, Nebraska.

Traveled over a beautiful prairie lying high and level, then traveled on until about noon. Came to the Platte Bottoms and by looking up the Bottom in the distance some six miles we could see the train, so we concluded to let our mules pick some grass and here laid down and took a rest. Then saddled up and went back to meet the trains. I think the distance that we traveled today will be about 25 miles.

September 26, 1858 Sabbath. Beautiful morning. Clear and cool. All well and in good spirits. Slaughter and myself saddled up and started to overtake Stocking's and Griffith's teams. We traveled about 12 miles and came to the place where they had camped. We pulled out after them and traveled about 25 miles from one camp and over good grass. Found all hands well and in good spirits. Then we took chunks of something to eat. Drank some water that we had on hand for 2 days, then pulled out to meet our boys. Water was out of the question. We went back about 10 miles and met them. Just before we got to them Keplingner started to hunt water. We left the road and started for the Platte River, and Keplingner could not find us. So he traveled all night and just before daylight came into camp, and [in] a little time saw the teams of Slain and Hoover.⁴⁰

September 27, 1858 Monday. Morning cool and cloudy. Looks like rain. Traveled about 12 miles, overtook Stocking and Griffith's team and found plenty of water. Took dinner, rolled on until 6 o'clock, then camped for the night

⁴⁰Andrew Slain and John Hoover, two members of the group.

right below the old Pawnee Village⁴¹ right opposite the Grand Island.⁴² A beautiful country and good grass.

September 28, 1858 Tuesday. Morning clear and pleasant. Breakfast being over and all ready, we rolled out, passed over the old Pawnee Village and the old Mission and over a beautiful rolling bottom prairie a distance of some 10 miles. Stop for dinner opposite a large body of timber on the Grand Island. There is some very beautiful timber on the Island. This country is susceptible of a large settlement, and as far as I have been on this route there is a good natural grade for a railroad. We broke one of our wagon tongues about 8 o'clock the morning after we started out. We soon fixed it all right. We traveled about 18 miles, camped, had supper and laid down to sleep all in peace.

September 29, 1858 Wednesday. Morning fine and clear. Yoked up and rolled out at 6 o'clock. Traveled along up the Platte in sight of large bodies of timber on the Island until about 1/2 after 10 o'clock and turned out for dinner a distance of about 10 miles, just where the road leaves the river. This country is a beautiful country on the Bluff. The bottom is rather narrow and sandy

⁴¹Pawnee Village, an old site of the Pawnee Indians, was located on the Platte River about 127 miles above its confluence with the Missouri River. At the time of Lewis and Clark (1804-1806), the Pawnees numbered about ten thousand. The tribe consisted of four divisions which became united shortly after 1804, and were known as the Grand Pawnees. They lived in the area near the present town of Fullerton, in Nance County, Nebraska.

⁴²Early maps of Nebraska show this as Big Island. It should not be confused with the present town of Grand Island established in 1866, when the Union Pacific Railroad laid down its tracks. The name of the town, and some of the buildings, were moved from a village farther south which had been founded in 1857 on the bank of the Platte River opposite a large island known to French trappers as *La Grande Ile*.

and broken by the spurs of the bluffs coming down in the bottom. 12 o'clock. Dinner. Eat. Cattle yoked and started. Traveled 2 miles. Saw a mule in the Platte River. Griffith, Slaughter, Keplingner, Fellows and myself went down and waded about one half mile and Griffith lariatied him, brought him up to the camp, and lariatied him out. He was branded with a Spanish brand. This is a fine farming country. Plenty of timber on Island and lots of sign of game—antelope, elk, turkey, etc.

September 30, 1858 Thursday. Morning cool and clear. Weather fine. Breakfast over, rolled out at 6 o'clock. Slaughter, Griffith, Keplingner and myself all started to the high ground to hunt. We started up about 20 antelope, and Griffith and myself wounded 2 and killed one. George and myself quartered it, packed it on our horses and started for the camp. Found them just about sundown. They had traveled about 20 miles and camped just by a grove on the Platte, supper being over, beds made down, all hands ready to turn in, and guards to their post for the night. I am very tired after traveling all day.

October 1, 1858 Morning clear and nice. Hitched up and struck out on the road—Griffith and myself and Slaughter and Slain. They soon returned without seeing anything. But Griffith and I traveled about 8 miles and saw where a buffalo had lain down. We were looking for him and saw a herd of about 25 antelope. While we were looking for them we saw a very large bull buffalo walking about one hundred and fifty yards

from us. So we both shot him and wounded him, and we loaded up and shot him another round. Then he broke out on a run and we after him. We ran him about 8 miles, gave up the chase and started back to camp. When we got to camp they had traveled about 15 miles, met about 54 wagons—government wagons—and had fallen in with an old trader from Fort Laramie with 6 or 8 wagons and his squaw.⁴³ They met a man right from Cherry Creek. He had some specimens with him.

We are in sight of the Fort [Fort Kearney] and supper is almost ready.⁴⁴ After supper all laid down to rest except the guards.

October 2, 1858 Saturday. Hitched up and rolled into the Fort and met several companies—one from Iowa route, and one from Omaha and the Bluffs [Council Bluffs] and Florence. Several more on the route will join us tomorrow. Traveled about 12 miles and camped on the

⁴³Fort Laramie, located near the junction of the Laramie River and the North Platte River in what is now Wyoming, was a prominent post on the Oregon Trail. Troops were kept there to protect the emigrants. It grew out of an early fur trade post erected in 1834 by Robert Campbell and William Sublette and first known as Fort William. Another nearby post, Fort John, was named for John Sarpy, a member of the American Fur Company. Fort Laramie, which replaced both of these, was purchased by the United States government in 1849, and became a military post. It was abandoned in 1890, and is now a National Monument.

⁴⁴Fort Kearney, built on the Missouri River in 1846 at the present site of Nebraska City, was named for General Stephen Watts Kearny. The name of the fort was misspelled, and remains that way by statute. In 1848, it was decided to abandon that fort and build one farther west to protect the emigrants along the Oregon Trail. Lieutenant Daniel P. Woodbury chose the location in June, 1848, and with a force of 175 men began the construction of several adobe brick buildings. This post was located on the south side of the Platte River opposite the upper end of Grand Island. During the Civil War, the fort was manned by volunteers, including some former Confederate soldiers who were called Galvanized Yankees; they were reinforced in 1865 by a troop of Pawnees. The fort was abandoned in 1871, after the railroad had displaced the wagon train.

bank of the Platte where it is about one mile wide, seven or eight miles above the Fort.

October 3, 1858 Sunday. Morning cool and a little cloudy. Traveled about 10 miles and camped on the bank of one branch of the Platte by a grove on the Island. Met 3 teams from Salt Lake—government teams with some officers with them, and some packers just behind them from Bridger [Fort Bridger],⁴⁵ some 250 men from Salt Lake, 150 cavalry, lots of dragoons, and lots of mule teams. After dinner six or eight of us went out on horseback and killed a large buffalo. Three of the boys went over the river, shot 3 more and packed over some of the meat. All right in camp, the guards out, the beds made down and boys all to bed.

October 4, 1858 Monday. Morning clear and fine. Pulled up about 8 o'clock and rolled on until noon, a distance of 8 miles. Rested one hour, then rolled out and traveled six miles more near Plum Creek.⁴⁶ Camped for the night and all to work at jerking our buffalo meat.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Fort Bridger, established in 1843 by James Bridger, was located about one hundred miles east of Salt Lake City, and was a prominent early-day post. In 1857, the United States government leased it, and it served as a station stop for wagons, pony express, and stagecoaches. Troops were stationed there from 1857 to 1878, and from 1880 until 1890. It is preserved now as a museum.

⁴⁶Plum Creek empties into the Platte River about twenty miles west of the present town of Kearney, Nebraska. There was a pony express station and a trading post called Plum Creek located on the south side of the Platte River on the Oregon Trail. After the railroad arrived, the settlers moved across the river and named their new town Lexington in memory of the Battle of Lexington. In 1867, the Cheyenne Indians, led by Turkey Leg, their chief, wrecked a west-bound freight train by tearing up a bridge. They scalped the crew, broke open the cars, took the contents, then tied yards of bright calico to their ponies and rode off across the prairie.

⁴⁷This is a process whereby the meat is cut into long slices or strips and dried in the sun.

October 5, 1858 Tuesday. Morning cool and cloudy, has the appearance of fall weather. Grass getting dry somewhat but very good yet. Met several men on the road and several Indians. Saw an Indian kill 2 buffaloes. We traveled about 18 miles and camped on the bank of the Platte.

October 6, 1858 Wednesday. Morning cool and windy. Rolled out and passed the Cheyenne lodges. Lots and gobs of them came to beg of us and we saw several of them moving up the Platte. We camped in a grove of timber on the Platte, a distance of twenty miles without discovering 3 ponies missing. Suppose them to be stolen.

October 7, 1858 Thursday. Morning cold, a very heavy frost. Hitched up and started. About 1/2 mile one of the boys broke an axletree. We got a cottonwood pole and spliced it. Rolled ahead about 8 miles and camped for dinner in the cottonwood close to the Platte at a trading post or mail station. After dinner rolled out and traveled about 8 miles and camped on the Platte close to a grove. Lots of deer sign and buffalo sign. Plenty of Indians prowling around. Plenty of good wood. All in good health except Liston. He is some better. He has had a chill. Guards out and beds made.

October 8, 1858 Friday. Cool and cloudy. All ready to roll out. Started and came about 8 miles and turned out for dinner and water. The grass rather dry but does first rate. Met the mail and sent a letter to my wife. Traveled about 8 miles in the afternoon and camped.

October 9, 1858 Saturday. Morning cool and rainy and quite disagreeable. We camped about 4 miles from the mouth of South Platte. Rolled on about 16 miles and camped on the South Platte. Grass burnt off [next line of diary was obliterated]. But at the place where we camped was tolerable.

October 10, 1858 Sunday. Morning cloudy and cool. Rained a little last night, laid the dust and made it better traveling. Started about 8 o'clock, passed a trader train and traveled along by burnt prairie. All well except Richard. He is better. We are within about 30 miles of the upper crossing. The timber is scarce and the grass good where it isn't burnt. We traveled about 7 miles and stopped for dinner. Rested about 1½ hours then rolled on. Traveled about 10 miles and camped for the night. But little timber on the road. Platte road very good, cattle all look fine and the boys all in good spirits. Stocking's train travels by themselves. We had a great badger fight and Finley shot him. At noon the other boys overtook us—2 of them. We met some packers from California and traveled with some of Myers and Russell's teams and some teams from Salt Lake. Hackityes [Hackedy's] teams loaded with goods, 6 mules to the wagon.

October 11, 1858 Monday. Morning cloudy and looks like rain. Started about 7 o'clock and rolled on about 10 miles and camped for dinner at the crossing of the South Platte, a distance of 10 miles. No grass nor timber. I had a headache very bad and don't feel very well. [Next line was obliterated.] today at noon. We trav-

eled in the afternoon about 6 miles and camped for the night. Good grass and water but no timber. Next thing was to place the guards on watch, and all laid down for the night.

October 12, 1858 Tuesday. Morning clear and fine. Started on our journey and traveled about six or eight miles and met three teams and 14 men right from the Diggins [Cherry Creek Diggings]. They lived at Lawrence, K.T. [Kansas Territory]. They said that they could make it pay first rate. They were returning to K. T. and planned to come back in the spring. Then we traveled on about 2 miles and stopped for dinner. Then traveled about 8 miles and camped for night.

October 13, 1858 Wednesday. Started at 8 o'clock and traveled over some very bad sandy road. Traveled about 10 miles, took dinner and then traveled on until 5 o'clock. Camped for night, and supper being over the guards were then on guard. Traveled 8 miles.

October 14, 1858 Thursday. Morning cool and clear. Breakfast being over, all loaded up and started on. Passed over some sand points, then came to good road and traveled about 8 miles. Camped for dinner, then started and traveled over a barren prairie about 8 miles and camped close to the mouth of Pole Creek.⁴⁸

October 15, 1858 Friday morning. Started at 7 o'clock, traveled about 8 miles and camped for dinner on the bank of

⁴⁸This was Lodgepole Creek, which empties into the South Platte River just west of the present town of Julesburg, Colorado.

the Platte. Then rolled on, traveled about 8 miles and camped by the Platte close by some little islands. Good grass and water and plenty of driftwood for fires.

October 16, 1858 Saturday. Morning cool and some little cloudy. Rolled out and Kennedy and myself went to hunt a deer that Kennedy killed. Could not find it. Started south and found a beautiful little stream. Came on and overtook the train, took dinner and then came on. Four of the boys went across the Platte and caught 4 steers and drove them into camp. Then we came on until late in the evening, crossed Beaver Creek and camped just above on the Platte close to the Platte.⁴⁹ 16 miles.

October 17, 1858 Sunday. Morning cool and a beautiful day. Rolled out about 8 o'clock and camped for dinner about 8 miles, close to a dry creek.⁵⁰ Took dinner and then rolled out and traveled about 8 miles more and camped close to Bijou Creek.⁵¹ Alkalie water.

October 18, 1858 Monday. Morning very cold and heavy frost. After breakfast loaded up, rolled out, crossed Bijou Creek and traveled about 8 miles. Camped on the prairie some 2 miles from the Platte on the sand ridges. But little grass. Hitched up and rolled on about 2

⁴⁹Beaver Creek empties into the South Platte River from the south near the town of Brush, Colorado.

⁵⁰This was Badger Creek, which empties into the South Platte River from the south, between Brush and Fort Morgan, Colorado.

⁵¹Bijou Creek empties into the South Platte River from the south through several channels, with willows along the banks. At that time the creek was about ten feet wide, and very shallow, being about one foot deep with a quicksand bottom.

miles. Came to the Platte and found plenty of grass and timber. Camped for the night.

October 19, 1858 Tuesday. Morning cool and weather fine. Traveled over some bad roads and made about 16 miles. Camped on the Platte. Good grass and timber. Plenty of timber.

October 20, 1858 Wednesday. Morning cool and pleasant. Started about 7 o'clock and traveled about 4 miles. Killed an antelope and went on until noon. Made about 8 miles, took dinner and found gold. Then started and made about 8 miles. Killed a deer and camped for the night close to the Platte. Lots and gobs of deer.

October 21, 1858 Thursday. Morning cool and somewhat cloudy. Looks like snow. After breakfast hitched up and started on. Traveled about 8 miles and came to the old St. Vrain's Fort.⁵² Camped for dinner and had plenty of wood and water and good grass. Quite a ledge of rocks opposite the old Fort across the river. The river makes a turn to the south and there appears to be more timber along the river. Long's Peak is right west of the Fort, and we can see the peak south of us.

⁵²Fort St. Vrain, built about 1837 or 1838 by Bent and St. Vrain Company, was located on the right bank of the South Platte River about a mile below the mouth of St. Vrain Creek. It stood about halfway between Fort Laramie on the Oregon Trail and Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River. This site is about four miles northwest of the present town of Platteville, Colorado, and about forty miles north of Denver, Colorado. The post, sometimes called "Fort Look-out," "Bent's Fort on the Platte," and "Fort George," was generally known as Fort St. Vrain in honor of Colonel Ceran St. Vrain. The first permanent settlement in that area was made in 1859 when Miles, Stocking and Company operated a "Miner's Ranch," where those going to the mines could leave their stock and procure information about the various mining regions. In October, 1859, some of the settlers organized St. Vrain County.