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Springfield, Illinois

WEEKLY NORTH-WESTERN GAZETTE
GALENA, ILLINOIS, TUESDAY, MAY 7, 1850

From the Jeffersonian
Letter from California
Stockton, San Joaquin River
January 27, 1850

Dear Parents,

January 27, 1850

* * * I arrived at this place on the 30th of Dec. last, after a long and very wearisome journey of nine months, Oh, how little did I think what a terrible trip I had before me, when I left home, but I suppose you would like to hear some of the particulars of my journey.

* * * I wrote last from Fort Laramie. We proceeded 300 miles further, before the animals began to show that they felt the journey. So we (I speak of emigrants generally) had to commence to lighten the loads. We put our clothes in sacks, and threw away our trunks and one bbl. of pork. My wardrobe was split up for fire wood, in fact, we put out everything that we thought we could spare, but we have since found that, if necessity says so, people can do with very little.

We then proceeded very well til we came to the Desert. There our real trouble commenced. We were persuaded, as the season was far advanced, to take a new road which was represented to be much shorter and better. We afterwards found the distance to be about 500 miles farther, and such roads as none but a Californian has ever seen.

I really think there were hours when the wheels scarcely touched the ground on account of rocks.

You have heard of the American Desert - Where we crossed it, it was 70 miles wide, with no kind of vegetation, except a few wild sage plants which were so very bitter that no animal will eat them. The most of the wagons were so heavily laden, that they could not take a sufficient quantity of hay. We had to take all we could in the wagons, and travel through a very barren country for 100 miles before we really struck the Desert, so that our animals were quite weak to commence with. We traveled day and night - started on the Desert early on Thursday morning - about four o'clock in the afternoon we came to a well; took in what water we could; took some food, in great haste, watered the oxen, and pushed on. On Friday at noon, the cattle began to fail and soon after, to drop down and die; for we got no water again till Saturday night, except from a sulphur spring, and very little of that. I had been quite sick the week before and the Doctor said I must keep as quiet as possible, and remain in the wagon; but the oxen were so tired that I had to take to my feet, and walked from 4 o'clock until 1 in the morning, when the women were so worn out, that the train had to stop till day-break. At the first streak of dawn, we moved on, but before

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[purposely omitted from Platte River Road Narrative]
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sunrise, we found it was no use; the oxen could go no further with the wagons till they had food and water. We fed them hard bread and flour, to enable them to reach grass and water, which was 7 miles from where the wagons were left. Part of the men went with the oxen, and the rest took buckets, the women remaining to guard the wagons. The men with the buckets returned about sundown; they could get no water but from salt boiling springs. The weather was quite warm, so the water was still hot when it came, but it was, without exception, the best drink I ever had! We had not had a drop of water for two days. It would have made your heart ache to hear the children cry for food and drink, and, yet we did not dare to give them our hard bread, or salt pork; for that only made the matter worse. On the third day, the men with the cattle returned. By traveling by night, and resting by day, the oxen could soon perform their usual tasks. So you see we weathered that storm with much less loss than we expected. Many of the emigrants lost their entire teams, and were forced to pack through; but our time had not yet come. Many teams were destroyed on the Humboldt river by the Indians shooting the oxen. The last night of August, our train encamped and sent out the oxen with a guard of four men. My husband was one of them. After dark as we were sitting around the campfire, we were startled by cries of "Help", "Indians", "murder", "I am shot", "the cattle are gone", etc. Every man sprang for his gun. Albert was unarmed. I sent him his rifle, and in less than 5 minutes, there was not a man in camp. You may imagine what a night we women spent. We had no fears of Indians, for they are too cowardly to attack a camp - The wounded man was brought in, and they recovered the cattle, before daylight. I suppose there was scarcely another train so fortunate. But it was so soon discovered, that the Indians, to save themselves, left the cattle - so we escaped again. Then came the pass in the Sierra Nevada mountains. It was about 5 miles over - They divided the loads as equally as they could in the wagons, and put 12 yoke to each. It took a long time to get over, as the ascent was so steep we had to let the oxen rest every two or three yards. We succeeded in getting over very well. As it grew late in the season, the feed run short and the cattle again began to fade. We found that we had another desert to cross, but there was plenty of water, which we had learned to appreciate, I assure you. Our wagon had become the worse of the wear, and Albert had an opportunity to get a better one, by adding another yoke to our oxen and 3 more men to our company. So you see I had enough to see to my welfare. When we were about 200 miles from the settlement, it was tho't best for Albert to go ahead to procure mules to help us over the desert. He started on the 16th of October on foot. We were to proceed as fast as possible, and he would meet us. We proceeded very well till the last day of Oct., when it commenced raining for the first time in 7 months. When the rains begin, they fall continually for the next 4 or 5 months, so that our prospects were now poor indeed. The 1st of Nov. we were to start on the desert. We had plenty of hay and water, and we expected to get along well, but alas when daylight came, we found 8 ins. of snow on the ground. All we could do was to push ahead, but we could make no progress, as the roads were so full of snow that the oxen would cut their feet on it. When they went through they would sink to their shoulders in the mire. It took all day to go 4 or 5 miles. It was snow under foot, and sleet overhead. Dear

little Emily kept in the wagon and I walked beside it, expecting every moment to see it overset.

I think for one week there was not a dry thread on me, and everything in the wagon was perfectly saturated, and I could not change my clothes if I would. Everything was going from bad to worse, and we could only struggle on. It was our only way. And no Albert came! I was nearly frightened to death for fear the Indians had killed him. I found out afterwards that it was full as bad with him as myself. He could not get back or forward. I tried to keep up my courage, for it would do me no good to fret and would only worry the men, who were kind and did every thing they could for me -

On the 3rd of Nov. we encamped at dark. It was very cold, and I got my supper and went to bed. I could have wrung the bed clothes. Emily began to cry with cold - that almost broke my heart, and I cried too. The dear child wound her arms round my neck, and said "Don't cry Ma, and I wont cry either." - I raised up three times that night to wring the water from my hair. The day at last dawned, and I rose and went to work. I found one yoke of oxen chilled to death. After breakfast, Mr. Forester said to me, "Three of us have concluded to pack - we leave you our oxen - get through if you can." I was thankful for their kindness. We then went to unloading the wagons. Messrs. Forester, West and Pratt put all they could in sacks to carry on their backs, and throwed the rest away. I left all I could possibly dispense with as I thought, but I was mistaken - two large sacks of clothes, all the bed clothes I could spare, my tent, bed, bolsters, stove, all iron ware, and a sack of coffee. I now started with a light heart, thinking surely I can get through, but before an hour passed, another yoke of oxen died, and I was left in the mountains, in the midst of snow, sixty miles from a house, with only two yoke of weak oxen. The next day, a gentleman from St. Louis, a Mr. Warren, offered to put my oxen with his, and take my provisions and family in his wagon, and leave mine. I thankfully accepted. The morrow came, but everything was worse. We were out of the snow, but it rained in perfect torrents. The mud was nearly knee deep. We could get no fire; our provisions had grown low, the cattle were nearly exhausted, and everything looked dark enough. By trying very hard, I made out to boil some coffee. We sat down to eat our hard bread; but my heart was too full. I raised a mouthful to my lips, and burst into tears.

Mr. Warren sprang to his feet and said, "Mrs. Brush what do you say to leaving the wagons and going to the settlements?" I said I would be very glad to, but what shall I do with Emily. He replied, "I'll take care of her." I asked Mrs. Barber if she would go with me, she said yes, and we were off. Mr. Warren strapped Emily in a blanket upon his back, and she was ready for her journey. Mr. O'Neill of Mt. Carroll carried two blankets for Mrs. Barber and me to sleep on. We climbed the hills, waded rivers, tramped through mud, and slept without shelter for three days and nights, and at last saw in a beautiful grove a little mud cabin. We were in the valley of the Sacramento. In about

four days the men came in from the wagons compelled to abandon all except a few things which were packed upon the oxen that were left. I had but one ox left, he brought me a few clothes and died the next day from fatigue.

Dear friends is it not hard to get to California? Do not let anyone come if you can hinder it, particularly overland. No one who has not witnessed it could conceive the amount of destruction of property. It is estimated that not one tenth of the animals that leave the States live to get through. If it had not been for assistance from government hundreds would have died in the mountains. To those who were sick and unable to get through, the Government took provisions and made them comfortable for the winter. You recollect Mr. Roberts and family who left Galena. They are in the mountains unable to get in this winter, young Mrs. Roberts was too unwell to walk and the rest would not leave her. (At Fort Laramie, Harvey Moss lost his wife, Mrs. Winlac takes charge of the children, they passed us on the desert.) There were plenty of little children put in sacks and thrown across the backs of mules, for the sake of getting here - all you could see was their little heads peeping over the mule's backs. But to return to my own affairs, I remained at the ranche a week when Albert came. He had met with great difficulty on account of the high water and bad roads. He brought three mules but it was too late, everything was lost. Our men joined with another company and built a flat boat, on which we descended the river about three hundred miles to Sacramento City, there we waited several days for a boat to take us to Stockton. While at the city we boarded at Mr. Winters of Elizabeth, paid \$10 a day board. They have a large tavern, that is, it is about the size of your dwelling and that's very large for this place. Six hundred and fifty dollars a month to eat. We are now you see in Stockton, and are living in a house. Very few can say that in this city of tents. Our home was brought ready made from China and is a real Chinese cottage; it consists of two rooms, one of which I occupy and the other a family from Tennessee; there is no windows but the doors are half glass. We pay sixty dollars a month rent for our room. George Brush boards with us. There are but five American families in the place, mine included. Last April there were no inhabitants here, the population now numbers 2000 residents and a great many transient people.

There is any amount of gold here. I saw a lump today which weighed 23 pounds solid gold; it came from the Maccalinia diggings.

Mrs. Miller of the Broadway House is dead. James DuPui went out with three of his company and never returned, they were probably killed * * *

Your affectionate daughter

Mary E. Brush