

**The Diary of Jos. C. Buffum**

**Pittsburgh, PA**

**Sept. 13<sup>th</sup>, 1849**

31. Sab. Cold and blustering. Went to Church.

Jan. 1, 1849. Pretty cold. 2nd. Very cold. Snow drifts, went visiting Capt. Gleasons.

3. Returned home. Very gold and wind blowing.

4. Went to Keene, visited at Mr. Harts. Cars commenced running to Bellows Falls. Still very cold.

5. Very cold. Left home in the evening to take the Coach at 1 o'clock in the night at Col. Barkers. Played cards till the stage came.

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Jan. 6, 1849. Left Westmoreland at 1 o'clock A.M. with my wife for Hanover, reached Walpole  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 2. Charlestown 12 miles  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 5 A.M. Claremont 10 miles, Windsor 10 miles 10 o'clock. Sebanon at 1 o'clock P.M. Took the Pasumpsic cars  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 2 P.M. for Norwich, Vt., 4 miles, and arrived at Hanover. Still cold but rather moderating. Paid fare 2 seats to Walpole \$1.00, to Lebanon \$4.50, to Norwich \$0.20, to Hanover \$0.50. Took supper with Mr. Hibling. He is making arrangements to go to California in the spring.

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Sabbath 7. Comd keeping house. Weather milder. Rather short, for money just at this time expecting it every day, however, and my credit is good here. There are only about a dozen students here at the present. I have just commenced to study French, Prof. Brown tutor. It remains very cold up to Sat. 13. Having hardly thawed this month. Weather moderates some. Comd. to sleet in the evening.

Sabbath 14. Rained in the morn. Cleared off at 9 o'clock. Very pleasant and warm. Very windy P.M. and cooler. Listened to Prof. Sanborn in A.M. to; Rev. Richards P.M. Sanborn's discourse was upon sabbath schools, very interesting and rather poetical.

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20. Met with the Calafornia A. T., & M. Co. at the Dartmouth Hotel. They have already met twice but have not yet formed a company. But they having obtained the requisite number 25. I was elected one of the Directors of the Company. I had for a long time felt the influence of the tide of enterprise setting towards Cal. and the flattering prospects in that section of our country. I devoted all the time I could spare from my recitations to informing myself on the state of the country, its productions,



mineral wealth, etc., but had not yet met with a proper opportunity to go. It seemed to me that a company of this kind would meet my wishes exactly. Therefore my wife being willing I joined this company. The company effected but little this evening except receiving signatures. The bonds to be given a week from tonight. The principal subject of discussion is how shall we raise a sufficient fund to procure provisions ~~and~~ to ship them via Cape Horn. Adjourned. Weather still severe.

23. Directors met at Mr. Hiblings to consider the matter of raising funds. Made up a report of no progress. Weather milder.

24. Thaws and rains. Snow going fast. Waiting with great anxiety for a letter from my brother at Pittsburgh in relation to drawing some of my funds from him to carry me to C. and also for my present use; being very short indeed having expected some long before this. I have written twice to him during the past week. I have read with great pleasure Kendall's Sante Fe expedition as also Col. Emory's account of Gen. Kearney's expedition against the Alta California in 47, and also against New Mexico.

27. We had another Cal. meeting. Voted to pay in \$400 instead of \$200 instead of raising a fund by hire as money is scarce and cannot be got except at great interest and the Co. are opposed to selling shares as proposed at \$500 to expire in one year.

Feb. 3. Californians came together again and some gave their notes. The Cash to be paid in 2 weeks preparatory to shipment. Have lately been corresponding with Brother Davis about going to California. There is a Co. going from Pittsburgh of about 100 members. We have had fine sleighing so far this winter. Weather rather pleasant. Poetical moonlight evenings.

10. Returned to Westmoreland. Term not quite out. Preparing for California. Recd. of Brother a draft of fifty dollars; spoke with Prof. Sanborn in regard to going to California. He desired me to complete my studies as soon as possible; said I should be qualified to take any stand I pleased when I might finish my education. He desired me to take notes of the country to which I was traveling, its productions, minerals, etc., and lecture on my return. He desired to know what profession I would follow and told me what our class would read this summer. I told none of the



rest of the faculty of my intentions nor took up my connections at college. I may or may not go there if I ever return from California. The mines I believe were discovered in June 1847. All late reports confirm their richness and inexhaustibility. Some have returned with great quantities of gold and a great amount is on the way for the U. S.

25. This interval I have spent at home nothing of note having occurred. I have been busy getting ready for Pittsburgh and California. Mr. Wills of Walpole, Mr. Hagar, Buchminister and others of Keene, Webster and Dunbar of Westmoreland, 2 Dudleys of Chesterfield, etc. are gone or going soon. My wife's Brother David talks of going soon either with me or some other Co. I get letters from him frequently on the subject. I have today written to our Commissary about taking me on at New Orleans. I went to Saxon's River village day before yesterday and purchased a rifle to carry with me out there. I bought of A. Leonard of the snow 23 Dec. we find the weather quite moderate. Snow is getting scarce, the hills are bare some. Snows a little today but thaws some. Reading Ovid when I get time.

28. Although very anxious to get out for California yet it was with great regret that I bid my father's people fare well to set out upon so long and difficult a journey. I thought perhaps I might never meet them all again in this lower world and tears flowed freely as we parted. I now shipped this journal via Cape Horn and took a pocket journal with me.

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Jan. 15, 1850. I have just read my poor journal by the Brig. Ann from Boston where it was shipped with a box of goods that I left there in care of Cous. George W. Buffum. It was shipped in March '49. Before its arrival I had feared it was lost and had regretted sending it. However, it is safe now. I eagerly snatched those books with which I was so familiar and which reminded me of the halls of literature, together with those articles doubly dear to my heart for their having been so generously selected by near and dear friends; whose hearts were sad and whose cheeks were glistening with warm tears of regret as I shook the parting hand and bade them a long farewell perhaps forever to enter on the long and dangerous pilgrimage to the land of gold; those books and articles, memorials of the warm affection of friends, of the comfort and happiness of home, of my adolescence, and of days past and gone, yet fresh in memory calendar, I snatched and pressed to my lips, while my bosom heaved with real joy and



my soul was filled with almost extatic happiness.  
Nothing may seem strange in the course of a California fever.

Transfer of notes taken on a trip across the Plains and Mountains from the United States to California in the Summer of 1849 by way of the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains and Trucky river.

March 1, 1849. Having bid adieu to home and friends I started in company with my wife for Pittsburgh, Pa. Two short hours sufficed to accomplish our trip from Keene, N. H. to Boston by means of the fine Fitchburgh Railroad. We put up at the Massachusetts house. After arranging some little business there we left Boston at 4 P.M. in the cars via Worcester for New Haven and N. Y.

March 2, 1849. Took steamboat for N. Y. and arrived there on the next morning. Took the 8 o'clock train of cars for Philadelphia, arrived there at noon. It commenced snowing. Philadelphia is filled to over flowing with visitors on their way to the inauguration of Genl Taylor as Pres. of the U. S. of A. All the Hotels were said to be crowded. Stopped at a boarding house and left for Baltimore at 4 $\frac{1}{2}$  o'clock. Cars were jammed full. Took steamboat in the evening up Chesapeake Bay. We were delighted with the touching strains of music from a band which was going up to Washington to play at the inauguration ball. The boat ran aground in the night but got off without difficulty.

3. Arrived in Baltimore at daylight. Snows. Hotels are crowded. Took breakfast at the American called on my friend E. Chickery. Left for Cumberland by the cars. We were whirled rapidly over precipices among the mountains through tunnels across the verdant fields of Virginia and along the picturesque Potomac till we arrived at Harpers ferry. Dining here we left the scene (one of the most grand and imposing scenes furnished by nature's handiwork;) and arrived at Cumberland in the evening at 5. Supped and took stage for Brownsville.

4. Passed over the mountains and arrived at B. in the evening. Took steamboat for Pittsburgh. Was well received there.

5. Arrived there in the morning. Spent a few days in preparing for the trip to Cal. Left my wife at her father's and took passage on the steamboat De Witt Clinton for St. Louis. Stopped over night at Cincinnati over night. Attended



the theatre in the evening where I was robbed of my pocket manuscript. Next day proceeded on our trip. Very pleasant journey so far. River was high. Spring began to peep forth and Nature began to smile and look lovely. There is much interesting scenery on the Ohio but the scenery is more grand on the Missouri river. Arrived at St. Louis found a place of more importance than I had supposed it to be; is improving rapidly. Behind it are beautiful rolling prairies and opposite are the flats of Ill. Remained here some 2 weeks waiting for some horses I had sent into the country for. They having arrived we took steamboat, the St. Ange, for Independence. Cholera has broke out at St. Louis.

Apr. 4. Arrived at Independence found it thronged with emigrants. Proceeded to camp with Capt. Allen's party from Pittsburgh and camped some 2 miles back of the town in a grove near Capt. Abner T. Staples a Missouri slaveholder and farmer. Here we had a foretaste of prairie life, here we had an opportunity to review the steps we had taken and to think of the comforts we had left at home. After testing our skill at cookery and the strength of our constitution upon the cold wet ground we made preparation to leave by way of Sante Fee but abandoning that project for the want of sufficient number to awe the bold Camanches. Some thought best to go by the great south pass: a part was unprepared for that difficult journey and others getting mutinous and disliking their Capt. the Company broke up. Mr. Robert Baird and myself took lodgings at Capt. Staples and made an arrangement to go in company with 2 of his sons who were going out with 2 good 6 mule teams and plenty of provisions. Here we fared exceedingly well in a log cabin sleeping in the same room with the Proprietor and his lady and with others. This is frontier life. We arrived ourselves of an opportunity to be present at a slave wedding which was altogether a nice affair. They had a excellent wedding feast. There were some here of handsome complexion and light hair. As the grass is now springing up we prepared to move out upon the plains.

May 1. Cholera had already broken out here among the emigrants. Having completed our outfit we bid adieu to civilization and "rolled" out of town at 2 P.M. Our mess consisted of Michael T. Staples, Felix Staples, R. Wm. Childs, Saml. H. Irwin, Robert Baird and myself. We had 2 6 mule teams good-aged mules (6 is about the right age) 2 spare mules, young, and 2 riding ponies, good waggons between 4 and 5 thousand lbs. baggage. Cholera was increasing at Independence. There had been several deaths there. We were glad to get out upon the plains hoping to be free from the



pestilence. We learned last night that the town of Kansas had been so severely visited by it that the inhabitants had deserted the place. With all the usual preliminaries of teamsters breaking their teams in passing others stalled in the mud with a wheel or a pole broke and amid the moving multitude of emigrants we passed on 9 miles to Rice's and encamped for the night. We are now fairly upon the prairie. This is lovely plantation. Scarcely had we unharnessed and picketed our animals and partaken of our hasty supper when a thunder storm burst upon us and we crept beneath and into the waggons and slept till morning. Our mess had discouraged me from taking a tent but I now the need of one.

2. Taking a supply of corn from Rice's we moved on over the praires and passed some excellent plantations. The morning was fair but the road slippery and a great amount of breath was spent in shouting and swearing at the teams increasing bad runs, etc. At Sloans we took the left hand road which is a near but to the blue. We encamped about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile from the blue, picketed our animals and prepared our supper; then we took a stroll down to the Blue and caught some cat fish. This is a very pretty small stream, clam shells are plenty upon the banks. Buckeyes grow here. This is the very outskirts of civilization. We stationed a guard about our animals tonight. Friend Baird and myself were on the morning watch. Here while walking the rounds of the guard, while the stars were beaming brightly above me and all nature seemed hushed around in a death like stillness save the occasional tinkle of the bell as the pony shook the dew from his bushy mane, here in the spontaneous garden of Nature at the outskirts of civilization, my mind seemed freer than ever before and while reflection retraced the scenes of my past life calm contemplation portrayed my present self then wild imagination burst unfettered into the future.

3. When I arose this morning I discovered a prairie rattlesnake coiled beneath the blanket under my head where I suppose he had rested very comfortably but I soon put an end to his snakish career by separating his head to far from his body. This kind of snake is said to be as poisonous as the copperhead. They are much smaller than the common rattlesnake. The usual remedy for a snake bite here is to get drunk on whisky or some other liquor. It is said to be a cure. Having "caught" up (harnessed), we crossed the Blue took in some wood and passed on over the prairie a few miles and camped near a little run at the right where we caught plenty of small



fish and spent the afternoon in preparing our arms for immediate use as we are now in the Indian country. Here some of our party overtook us who had been detained at Independence after the time of starting.

4. Rains cold northeast storm. Passed about noon the camping place called Lone elm a solitary tree scarce another in the range of vision. Near night we came to Indian creek, passed over and camped on the other side. Here a great number of emigrants were encamped. A half breed lives here by the name of Rodgers who cultivates some land and is fencing in his grounds. Having travelled all day in the storm without food we were very cold and hungry. Some of our party in searching for wood came across some rails which they brought into camp and we soon had a fire and a comfortable supper. But Mr. Rodgers soon made his appearance and apprized us that we had made use of his rails and claimed a compensation for them. We paid him and then threw ourselves upon the wet ground and slept till morning. I met a Shawnee Indian who seemed to be pretty drunk. He pressed me to take a dram with him. He spoke broken English. He said a million thousand had gone to California. He said he would go there soon to hunt. He said his tribe had one 1000 warriors. Said their country was 100x35 miles. He boasted of his war feats and showed a deep scar in his leg from a wound caused by an arrow.

5. Here we took the right hand trail - a shorter cut by twenty miles than the old trail to the Wakarnpur. We came up to an Indian's hut and stopped to hold a talk with him. Passed Bull creek, fine water, steep banks; passed another small creek and came to the Wakurupee. Banks very steep. After about 3 hours hard labor we got our waggons all up and proceeded to camp beyond the timber at a late hour. 3 other waggons have joined us. One of the messes broke a pole from their wagon. We found water and camped. A  $\frac{1}{2}$  breed lives here; keeps cows; asked me up to tea with him but I declined going prepared to go on as we were. This is the most lovely portion of country I have ever seen surrounded by beautiful rolling prairies checked in every direction by lovely creeks slowly gliding amid the undulations of the prairie yet distinctly marked to the eye even at a great distance by the long lines of trees that grace their banks.

6. The bottom was very wet from recent rains and in crossing we broke another pole. Camped on the rising ground. Found water in holes but in a dry time it would be scarce here. Grass is first rate. We might have started 10