

# Stewart, George R.

## The California Trail, An Epic With Many Heroes

...in '49 the diarists wrote of continuous trains six miles long. In a single year the numbers so increased that for ONE person who traveled the trail to California in '48 FIFTY traveled it in '49. (Chapter Nine "49 , THE CALIFORNIA TRAIL , AN EPIC WITH MANY HEROES, by George R. Stewart, McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., NY 1962, Mid-Continent Library), p 217...Young men left wives and little children, convinced that they were acting in the best interests of the family. Doctors and lawyers, abandoned good practices. Hundreds of farmers mortgaged their land.

Page 218 - Thus one man wrote he had little confidence in gold, but had read Irving and Copper, and had acquired a strong passion for travel and adventure." Another stated that he went " wishing to regain my health," as well as gold.

p. 220, Stewart - Moreover, the country was somewhat depressed economically and was in a disturbed and excitable state as an aftermath of the Mexican War. Thousands of young men had returned from the army and had not yet settled into jobs. Many of these had failed to see active service and were still eager for adventure.

Yes, we might call it " The Year of Madness," or "The Year of the Greenhorn."

p. 221- "Sometimes there was fanfare, especially for large organized parties leaving the cities. Thus there was the Sagamore and Sacramento Company of Lynn, Massachusetts, fifty-two young men, including one that was seven feet tall. The company took departure from Boston by parading down State Street. A band led the march. Each member wore a gray uniform trimmed with silver braid, and was armed with rifle, revolver, sheath knife, and saber. Each made -to-order wagon (one for four men) moved behind four horses resplendent in silver-plated harness, and from the rear of each wagon, as the height of absurdity, projected a swivel gun. "

p. 221- Stewart "In early April a thousand emigrants were reported at Independence. By the middle of the month newspaper editors were expressing the fear that excessive number of animals would eat up the grass along the trail. But even yet no one had an idea how large the migration would become. A man writing home thought that the whole number would be between three and four thousand! But on April three thousand were reported at St. Jo alone.

p. 222 - There were many guide books published..."Probably the best book available, and it was vague and misleading in places, was a curious little volume by Joseph E. Ware, THE EMIGRANT'S GUIDE TO CALIFORNIA. The author had got this work together hastily, so that it could be published early



in '49, in St. Louis. Ware had never been to California and did not so claim. He had compiled his data from talking with Solomon P. Sublette, one of the famous fur-trading family, who had captained one of the California parties in '45."

p. 223 - "It was a time of good feeling, and you could expect a cup of coffee at almost any campfire..A youngster from some little Western farm could gape at the fine uniforms and dazzling equipment of the big companies from the Eastern cities.

But the Eastern boys could have learned a great deal, and some of them did, by looking at the Western companies and talking with the men. There were, for instance, some Missourians from Jackson County, where Independence was the county seat. They formed one of the biggest companies, having seventy wagons, about 250 people, with many women and children. At least two of their men had been over the trail before- the captain, Benoni Hudspeth, and the guide, J. J. Myers, who had been Chiles's horsemen in '43. Since that time he had spent five years trapping in California, and had crossed the Sierra Nevada at several places. That would be a train to watch, and Hudspeth and Myers did not mind giving advice.

Another Missouri company was from Ray County, just down the river from Independence. Its "pilot" was Milton McGee, who also been one of Chiles's horsemen.

Other old-timers were there. Edwin Bryant, who had had a successful experience with a pack train in '46, was trying it again, this time with 150 men in his party. Bumbling "Colonel" Russell, of '46, was once more a captain. Young Billy Graves, who had been with the Donner Party, was acting as a guide for the party of Pittsburghers. Another party from that same city had the excellent good fortune to hire James Stewart, who had never been to California, but had years of experience on the Santa Fe Trail, and knew everything about handling mule teams.

You could read enthusiasm in the names painted on the wagons - "Live Hoosier," "Wild Yankee," "Rough and Ready," "Enterprise," "Gold-Hunter," Company names were: "Wolverine Rangers," "Ophir Company," "Boston and Newton Joint Stock Association," "Granite State and California Mining and Trading Company," "Washington City Company," "Colony Guard," "Helltown Greasers," "Spartan Band," "Banner Company."

p. 224 Stewart - Late in April a few companies began edging forward, not starting exactly, but jockeying into position. They moved westward a day's journey or two, not depending on grass, but on grain that they carried along....they were excellently prepared to take care of themselves....One of these companies was from St. Louis, captained by G. W.



Paul. Another included William Kelly, an I... journalist, who was out to get a story rather than to mine. Also in this advance guard were Russell's company, Bryant's pack train, and Stewart's Pittsburghers.

On April 30 Paul and his St. Louisiana were at the Big Blue (Nebraska) nearly two hundred miles along.

Page 226 - Stewart - The story of '49 can thus be told largely in terms of the differences between it and preceding years. It was, for instance, a wet season. This made the grass slow to start, but brought it along rapidly after it once started. There was rich grazing for oxen and mules over all the prairie country. but the rains, which continued through May, made a muddy trail and heavy hauling. Every little stream crossing resulted in an hour or so delay and frequently a broken wagon. Each company did just enough to get its own wagons across, and the next company frequently had to do the work all over again.

Page 227 Stewart - The overcrowding can be easily exaggerated. Some have written that the trail was a solid line of wagons. Actually if all the wagons of '49 had been organized into a single close-spaced train, they would have extended for some sixty miles - a long distance, but only a small fraction of the whole.

The crowding was certainly bad enough, and continuous lines of five hundred wagons were noted. Sometimes the congestion was eased by two or more lines moving, and sometimes imprudently racing, on parallel trails. But this was really of little advantage, since there was sure to be before long a bottleneck through which only one wagon could pass at a time.

The chief problem of crowding was not on the trail, but at the campgrounds. "This evening," wrote one diarist, " we have somehow got into a perfect nest of emigrants. If I was to guess, I would say there was one thousand head of cattle within a mile of camp."

pp 228-229 Stewart\_ Overloading the wagons caused lightening the load within a few days. "The more efficient the company, the sooner it recognized the necessity. The Pittsburghers, under their experienced captain Jim Stewart. starts on April on April 28 and dumped on the next day! They unloaded "a considerable amount of clothing, a fair-sized library, two bushels of beans, two pigs of lead, half a keg of nails, implements of husbandry (a plow among the number), and a lot of mechanical tools."....Fort Kearney vicinity became a vast dump.



## KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

Certain abbreviations, symbols and figures are used in footnotes, indexes, endnotes and text. The below key defines their corresponding meanings

- (x) - An "x" following a page number in the Index indicates more than one entry for cited surname, town, state or country will be found on the page; e.g., 165(x).
- (-) - A dash (-) between page numbers in the index denotes that the citation is repeated on each intervening page; e.g., 150-154.
- (?) - A surname or given name followed with a question mark, in brackets, indicates that the passenger name (or residence) may have been listed incorrectly in the original source. For example, William Speai (William Spear?). In all cases the first listed spelling represents the name as it appeared in the original source. The secondary spelling, in brackets, denotes the original listing was obviously incorrect, or translation impossible. The bracketed name is the author's translation.
- - Denotes surname or given name not listed in original source. For example, — Smith. Where one or more letters of a name were missing this is reflected by a corresponding space. As an example, "John J\_nes." This could be interpreted as "John Jones."
- \* - Indicates additional data on subject or individual will be found in a footnote.
- sic - Exactly as written, even though incorrect (quoted).

Arch. - Archibald  
bro. - brother  
Capt. - Captain  
chldrn - children  
Col. - Colonel  
Co. - Company  
dau. - daughter

Dr. - Doctor  
Esq. - Esquire  
fam. - family  
Gen. - General  
Gov. - Governor  
Hon. - Honorable  
Lt. - Lieutenant

Maj. - Major  
Rev. - Reverend  
Sec. - Secretary  
Sen. - Senator  
Sgt. - Sergeant  
svt. - servant  
svts. - servants

## CALIFORNIA WAGON TRAIN LISTS

### INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI (April 5, 1849)

On the morning of April 5, 1849, a number of small companies were encamped Santa Fe roadside, awaiting a sufficiency of grass to enable them to start to California. Several days the weather had been very disagreeable. Several of the emigrants, exposure they had to undergo, were sick and considerable fear was manifested by consequence of reports of deaths from cholera in the vicinity. One emigrant, supposed to be from North Carolina, named Robert Umberfield, died on the evening of April 4 at the campsite. He was alone, and intended emigrating with the first emigrant group below.

The first wagon train group listed as being in this area on April 5, 1849 was from Lower Sandusky, Ohio. It was composed of John M. Smith, J. A. Johnson, L. E. Boyd, Caldwell, Isaac Sharp, J. W. Stevenson, John Stuben, George Taylor, Grosvenor and Henry Loveland. Their train consisted of three wagons, sixteen mules, capable of accommodating fourteen persons, goods for nine months, and all arms. Some of the foregoing group planned to locate in the California gold fields while others, when they obtained a sufficiency of the "dust," would return to Missouri. Near the above train was a company from Cincinnati, composed of Joseph Lange), Abram Sanborn, William Crawford, and James Wood. This company had a wagon, six mules, a tent, and provisions for six months.

The next company found in quarters was from Knox County, Kentucky, composed of A. E. Pogue, J. G. Pogue, E. F. Arthur, John P. Thatcher, T. J. Woodson, H. Woodson, R. Hale, with attached wagon train members consisting of Fulkerson, John Mills and James R. Fitts, of Lea County, Virginia.

In the vicinity were camped two small companies, one from White County, Indiana, composed of William Orr, L. M. Burns, Dr. H. B. Russell and P. S. Russell; and another from Henry County, Indiana, which was composed of J. B. Harris, J. Font, L. Laughlin, and Hutchinson. Each company had a tent, wagon and oxen.

The Bellevue Mining Company, from Sandusky County, Ohio, was in the vicinity. This wagon train had formed themselves into a joint stock company with discovery to be equally divided, share and share alike, at the expiration of two years. They had provided themselves with four light wagons, to be drawn by mules and oxen, and tents and provisions for nine months. Members of this train were:

N. S. Cook

C. Close

S. H. Cook



P.T. Sharp	A.G. Yotter	R. Burleson
S. Dean	J. Findley	R.B. Burleson
C. Smith	A. Raymond	Isaac Banta
H. Holm	H. Conklin	C. Durham
B. Fox	William Sharp	Peter G. Sharp
J. Scroford		

Camped near the foregoing train was a small company consisting of J. Hamman, of Sandusky County, Ohio, and P. Y. Hough and S. N. Turvill, of Erie County, Ohio. This small group intended to join with a larger train for safety.

A two wagon train from Anderson County, Kentucky was also in camp. This group was comprised of Charles N. Ford, John M. McBrayer, James B. Miller, A. J. Miller, F. M. Miller and H. Taylor.

The next group in the vicinity traveled in a single wagon and it was composed of:

James Quinton (of Nashville, Tenn.)	William Beatty (of Nashville, Tenn.)	Thomas J. Stum and two sons (of Nashville, Tenn.)
M. Smith (of Rutherford County, Tenn.)	W.M. Clark (of Rutherford County, Tenn.)	John Harris (of Rutherford County, Tenn.)

Preparing to move out of the camp area was a three wagon train composed of the below Virginia residents. Pulling their wagons were eighteen mules.

R.W. Crenshaw (of Lynchburgh, Va.)	R.A. Webber (of Lynchburgh, Va.)	W. McClanahan (of Lynchburgh, Va.)
D.C. Ward (of Pittsylvania Cty)	C.A. Hunt (of Pittsylvania Cty)	W.W. Pestross (or Peatross) (of Pittsylvania Cty)
Dr. Thomas Gillard (of Pittsylvania Cty)	Thomas J. Brown (of Campbell County)	Capt. J. Clements (of Franklin Cty)
J. Kean (of Franklin County)	Mr. Scott (of Franklin County)	A.B. Clements (of Franklin Cty)
E. Kean (of Franklin County)	Dr. J. Haynes (of Franklin County)	John T. Cole (of Henry County)

Two small companies from Illinois were also camped on the Santa Fe roadside. The first consisted of J. Tackaborry, G. Young, John Rees, William Easley and James Dow, from Tazewell County; the second company, composed of Elisha Bassett, Julius Benedict and Lorenzo Kendall, from Bureau County.

The last train camping in this area on April 5, 1859 was made up of New York residents as follows:\*

C.C. Lagrange	J.W. Smith	E.H. DeGracie
M.A. Richard		

#### INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI (April 6, 1849)

In a camp, about two miles west of Independence, was a wagon train of residents of Cincinnati, Ohio. The group was organized into messes of five, were provided with ten wagons, twenty tents and five marquee, and calculated to commence their trip to the West with eleven mules to the wagon. Two of the wagon bodies were made of sheet iron, and were capable of being used as boats; as such they had been tested, and found capable of

(\* All members of this train were from Albany, New York and they intended to make the journey as

bearing twenty men, or 2,500 lbs of freight, at the same time drawing only four in water. This group was organized under a military regulation concept, for the protection in making the trip to California. Two hundred weight of bread and twenty pounds of bacon were the individual allowances authorized for the journey, and provisions for twelve months, after their arrival in California, had been shipped by way of California. The foregoing wagon train was made up of the below individuals:\*

J.H. Levering (President)	Mr. L.M. Rogers	Mr. C. Mohr
W.B. Norman (Vice President)	Mr. J. Johnson	Mr. E.A. Stokes
David Kinsey (Treasurer)	Mr. S. Whitehead	Mr. C. Long
S.T. Jones (Secretary)	Mr. T.W. Kinsey	Mr. J.P. Harley
A.H. Colter	Mr. A.G. Kinsey	Mr. P.K. Urner
John Bell	Mr. M. West	Mr. W. Kerr
Mr. J. Bird	Mr. G.J. Gullford	Mr. R.W. Cook
Mr. H. Ruffner	Mr. R.L. McGowan	Mr. F. Moreland
Mr. A.T. Perry	Mr. S. Withington	Mr. F. Hamlin
Mr. A.J. Vorhees	Mr. J.W. Anderson	Mr. J. Graham
Mr. A.F. Gove	Mr. T.A. Bishop	Mr. J.D. Benedict
Mr. A.B. Nixon	Christopher Bell	Mr. Charles Eberle
Mr. J. King	Mr. J. Pearson	Mr. W. Wilson
Mr. N. Graves	Mr. H. Helm	Mr. H. Urner
Mr. A. Johnson	Mr. G.W. Fosdick	Mr. J. Eistner
Mr. J. Talbert	David Scott	Mr. W.B. Diver
Mr. G.W. Litter	Mr. H. Probasco	George Martin

On April 6, 1849, on the Santa Fe road, about four miles from Independence, a company of fifteen men from Summit County, Ohio were making ready to move out on the Cincinnati wagon train. The Summit train was organized as a joint stock company; it consisted of three mule drawn wagons. Members of the company were:

John Decker	H.S. Long	Jonathan R. Gilbert
A. Kellogg /sic/	L.P. Buckley	R. Abbey
J.O. Garrett	Ira Rose	P. Fisher
L. Wistendorf	C. Gressard	J.L. Gilbert
George Ayliffe	G. Carr	E. Steinbacker (or Steinbecker)

In the same vicinity a company of thirty-five men from Wayne County, Indiana, were in camp and preparing to move out. This train was composed of seven wagons, nine months of provisions, and mules and cattle sufficient to make the trip. The company was organized and governed by a constitution and by-laws. All gold found in California was to be mutually shared and in case of the death of any member of the company, his widow or other lawful heir was to receive the share he would have received. The company was composed as follows:

William V. Davis (President)	A.B. Knobe (Recording Secretary)	Thomas William (Treasurer)
Robert Houston		Henry Miller