

J. N. Davidson
Letters, June 13, 1850
June 16, 1850
July 11, 1850

Wis
Mss
MR

East of Fort Laramie, June 13th, 1850.

My own dearest Mary,

And how is your dear self this morning? and our dear little son pet lamb --- Nelson? I hope you are well and happy and enjoying yourselves first rate. "Oh George how could you say so You know I can't enjoy myself when you are so far from me" Methinks I hear you uttering some such exclamation but I must tell you to be happy till the gold come without me and then you can be twice happy with me. But I must [blank] talking such nonsense and tell you where we are what are our prospects and what we have [blank] doing &c. &c.

Well we have got within 8 miles of Fort Laramie and will pass it to-day about ten o'clock, and if we have good luck we will be in the Mormon city of the Salt Lake before this reach [blank], or say about the 4th of July. Fort Laramie is 522 miles from Council Bluffs and somewhat over 900 from Fairplay, a pretty distance is it not between a man and his wife? From the fort to the Salt Lake is 509 miles and about 600 from the Salt Lake to the gold mines of California. So you see we have to travel yet about 1100 miles or about 200 more than we have come.

We have come from the Missouri river here in 21 traveling days and we should have been at the Fort last night had we not delayed somewhat on account of a woman who has the ague & fever. I told you when I wrote you from the Bluffs that we had joined with a company called the "Sabbath Keeping Company." Well we all crossed the Missouri on Saturday 18th May, in the afternoon. We drove out six miles in the Indian, or Nebraska Territory with a view of staying till Monday morning; but next morning (Sunday) fifteen of the 21 wagons of the Sabbath Keeping company hitched up their horses and traveled. We remained till Monday morning, and overtook the company

that day at 2 P.M. at Elk Horn ferry. We traveled with the company all that week; but next Sunday morning they left us on Prairie creek and all that remained was three wagons. We did not any more try to overtake the company as we was persuaded they did not wish to keep [blank] and also we knew we could do better by our horses by being in a smaller company. Thus then the three wagons of us went along together all that week and on Saturday afternoon we passed our company 4 miles. Next morning Sunday they again passed us and we have not seen them since. You may think it an imprudent step to go in such a small company; and I have no doubt you will hear awful tales about the Indians as we hear here; but I would say to you and to all who have friends on this route Believe them not. They are untrue, every one of them. I have seen any quantity of Indians and shaken hands with over two hundred. Have had them sleeping by our wagon all night when alone on the prairie --- have given them my gun to shoot with, and I have seen nothing with them but friendship. Shake hands with them and appear friendly and it lightens up their very countenance; but treat them indifferently and their looks are sullen. That a white man was found among the Bluffs scalped I believe to be true; but I do not believe ^{that} an Indian had any hand in the murder; and those who know the murdered man positively charge the murder on a white and ^{that} the scalping was done to make suspicion rest upon the Indians. But I say once for all turn a deaf ear to all such tales.

We have so far had a very pleasant trip, with the exception of some awful thunder showers, or storms, I should rather call them. You could form no conception of the awful grandeur and violence of a thunder storm on the Plains. It must be seen to be known. We have been pretty well supplied with fresh meat. We had an antelope and a Buffalo. How I

wished that you was with [blank] to have a Buffalo beef stake it was so nice we had some of the best soup of it I ever tasted in my life. The weather has been very cold for the season; much more so than I ever saw it. There are some women going to California and I have no doubt but the trip could be made a pleasant one even to a woman but they will have to be fixed different from anything I have seen on the road. When I come back for you and Nelson I will show you how to fix up to be comfortable. The Mormons fix the best of any people I have seen; but I think that their plan might be a little improved. We have traded off the old wagon and got one worth two of her only she is a little heavier. Our Pony got kicked and [blank] a pretty sore shoulder for a week or so but it is now getting better. The mare was sick a few days ago from drinking alkali water; but she too is getting well. The country through which we have passed was for 250 miles or so after crossing the Missouri the most delightful that the eye could look at but afterwards it became very poor barren and desolate. In 200 miles on the north side of the Platte there is but one solitary tree and but very few on the south side. The land is good for nothing and never can be [blank] I had almost omitted to tell you that we have seen a specimen of gold digging. We got some in the Platte. The whole of the river has less or more of it but the particles are so minute and quantity so limited that I do not think that ever it will be made available to wash the sand. Good morning Madam I will finish when I get to the Fort.

Fort Laramie June 15th.

We are now at the Fort safe across the Laramie fork of the Platte and a pretty hard time we have had of it. We had to take a wagon bed cork & pitch it for a boat. In this way we crossed the provisions

and wagons and swam the horses. The river is high and runs very rapid but after having the wagon bed ready we had little more trouble a few men have been drowned crossing but none since we came here. There is a man here in irons for killing his brother when gambling: and he is not expected to live from the wound he received from his brother. There is the most awful destruction of property by the emigrants that could be thought of. Wagons are cut up and burned which a few months ago cost \$125.00. The road is literally strewn with clothes, harness and things of every description. Ben Thompson sends his compliments to Thomas & desires me to say that we have got along better than he expected. I may say so too. Give Mr. Thompson my respects and tell him that we very much missed him ferrying across the river to-day. This Fort Laramie is not much of a place. Some seven or eight houses built of adobes or to speak more plain Spanish brick that is brick dried in the sun. I have not time to give you a description of our travels so far I must leave that to a future day; and in the mean time I would say that we have all been well and start for the Salt Lake in first rate health and spirits. John says to the boys that he is well and hearty. Compliments to Mrs. Everette and all inquiring friends. How is the old man's lead. My love to Margaret. Write me to Sacramento City immediately. Oh! how I long to hear from you. Farewell a while

I'll soon with gold return

Take care of yourself and Nelson. My dear little Nelson. Oh Mary you can not conceive how dear you are to me We are just about to start and I must close this hasty scrawl. I should have written you more from this place had we not been so busy all the day getting across the river. Crossing the main fork of the Platte to day a wagon and four horses went down stream all lost. Here we join the road from St.

Joseph's and Independence. I verily believe that it it is at present the most publick road in the United States.

I must now finish, my dear wife, by subscribing your very affectionate and loving husband .

George

P. S. I may write you from the Salt Lake and may not till I get to California.

Fort Laramie, June 16th, 1850
(Sunday).

My dearest Mary,

I did not know yesterday, till after I had sealed my letter that there were two post-offices here, of rather a different character. The one, they say, is a private concern, and will leave here about the 20th of this month, and will have the letters to the states in 10 days. Charge, 50 cts. per letter. The other is Government office, but will not leave here till near the end of July. I paid 50 cts. to have yours forwarded by the private express. This one I will put in the Government office and you will see which you receive first, as I am somewhat inclined to the opinion that the private conveyance is but a shaving shop of the Commander here.

I can give you some information to-day, in regard to the emigration to California, which I could not last night. There has passed this post up to yesterday, en route to California, 24,326 men, 461 women, 450 children, 6,655 wagons, 19,639 horses, 6,143 mules, 15,628 oxen, 1,905 cows, and still the crowd continues, at the rate of nearly 100 wagons per day.

I have not time to say much this morning as the man I am sending this back with will start in a few minutes, for we have passed Laramie and are now a few miles west of it. This, however, I would say for your satisfaction that last evening we found a splendid water proof tent which a company left who are going to pack through. It will make us a first rate cabin in the mines. It must have cost at home not less than \$25.00.

I was mistaken in telling you that the man who killed his brother is still in irons here. For some cause unknown to me they did not keep him. It is now clear that the man who was shot that I spoke of,

was shot by a white man and not an Indian. The murderer has fled -- no one knows where.

Since I wrote last evening I have seen a man from Missouri who went to California last year. He advises us not to go by the Salt Lake; but to go by Fort Hall. He says the road is shorter and better & feed plentiful. We are undecided as yet which way to go.

I have seen a man burried this morning, who came on the south side of the Platte. Some say his disease was cholera. There is more sickness among those who came by the way of St. Jos. and Independence than those who came by Council Bluffs.

The letter transcribed above, bears the postmark "Weston, Mo. Aug. 30." It was addressed to "Mrs. Mary Davidson, Fairplay, Grant Co., Wis.," -- now Mrs. Leavitt, matron, since 1881, at Doane College, Crete, Nebraska.

South Pass July 11th 1850

Dear father it is with feelings of no ordinary kind I take this opportunity of writing to you. O how to express my feelings is beyond my power but I must let you know how things is. My object writing to you from this place is to let you know that George is no more. He was taken with a violent attack of cholera from the effects of which he never recovered. on the morning of the third of July He was taken with the diarrhea which in a few hours would have ended his existence had we not procured medical aid immediately. the doctor stayed with us two day[s] and did all that he could and being eager to go on as we all are upon this road he left us saying that with care he would soon recover. but such was not to be the case he caught cold which caused a relapse which put him out of human aid. and on the morning of the tenth he breathed his last utterly unconscious of his own fate or the feelings of those around him

And now deare father do prepare the mind of poor Mary as much as possible for awful calamity

And now Magret and James do cheer poor Mary in the midst of her affliction

We are getting along very slowly feed is scarce for our horse so that we dare not drive hard Benjamin has been sick but is fast getting well

My feelings at this time can better imagined than described what awful feelings crowded upon my mind as we consigned his body to the parent earth

and now dishartned and left alone as it were to wend my way
without a friend to che[r] me in the midst of my troubele

but I must stop the teams are waiting at a more conveint time I will
be more perticular
I will write at salt lake

to John Nelson

Fairplay, Grant County, Wisconsin. -- Postmarked Weston, Mo.
August, 16.