

“Memories of a Forty Niner”

John E. Brown

1907

John E Brown
To California
1849

Morgan List
#100

MEMOIRS
of a
FORTY-NINER

From Independence

By his daughter
Mrs. Katie E. Blood
Parkersburg, W.Va.

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Memoirs of a Gold Seeker in "Forty-nine"

bright hopes never to be realized, but but. At dark, we stopped at a wood yard to bury the dead. A beautiful green spot high on the hill between two small budding trees, was selected to bury the poor fellow. Amongst strangers he died, and in a strange country we buried him. Quite a gloom was cast over us as the funeral services of the Episcopal Church were read. As we hear the impressive words, greatly are we impressed.

7/13 Friday morning, we passed Jefferson City, the capital of Missouri. It has not a thriving appearance, although a very westerly town. Neither is it as large as I anticipated. The Capitol stands on an eminence near the river's edge and is a very fine building. Being built of stone with single palisades, it has more the appearance of strength and durability, rather than beauty. We also passed Hannibal, the intermediate point of the land route to Independence.

The sick seem better and the excitement and dread of cholera is subsiding.

The nights are cool, and on Friday night it was very cold. In the morning, all on board were complaining of bad colds. In the midst of complaints, arose cries of alarm of fire. The stove which was red hot and heating to its utmost, fell over, and the men with great presence of mind threw water and wet blankets on it and thus extinguished the fire and saved the boat. I am not very well.

7/14 On Saturday afternoon, the piston of the engine broke, which caused a delay for repairs of three hours.

Sunday, April 15th. Just one month since I left home, and how many things have I seen, how many strange faces, and how my thoughts wander back to home and all that the word means—so much that is dear.

Alas! my face is turned to the West, and Fate, sad Fate pushes me along, all imperceptibly, to wealth or an untimely death among strangers, and perhaps an inveterate foe in the per-

son of an Indian. How thankful should we be that Providence has allowed us to live this long. An unprofitable life it has been, but we can turn to His holy word and find peace for the troubled soul. Many passengers forget the beautiful Sabbath and are drinking with noise as if they were not accountable beings. We passed a beautiful prairie this morning, which was dotted here and there with a little white shanty, the home of a western pioneer.

7/14 On Monday, we went at a good rate and passed a small town named Brownsville. 7/17 Tuesday, we arrived at Independence, landing in the morning, and we were the whole day in getting out our goods, and making camp on the brink of the river. Cooking supper seemed quite a difficult matter and night found us very tired. I spent a very uncomfortable night, but one watch was kept as thieves are the only expected visitors.

7/18 On Wednesday, we moved our camp one-half a mile beyond town by the Santa Fe road. Our waggon looked very trim and the mules in fine condition. My horse has been feeling fine for the long rest. I went into Independence in the afternoon and found it a great place of business. It is the trading-place of the Mexicans and hunters, who meet here every Spring and exchange their wares, and purchase goods. The town is full of waggon shops and from these is done a great business, and I am told much money is made. The town has a population of fifteen hundred people. Independence is to be our starting point and we will spend a week in preparing to make our journey. We formed our company and framed our Constitution. Stone, Taylor, Harris and myself agreed to furnish Atkinson with an outfit. We bought eight mules at Sixty Dollars each and were much pleased with our bargain. The mules were broke to harness every day, affording us much amusement as onlookers. They are very stubborn

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and it seems a question which two would pull together. Finally they mate, but not so the four. Each waggon is drawn by four mules. The forward ones kick the back couple and cause great commotion. This delay is annoying.

The waggons have been overhauled and flour bought and packed. We await here until Wednesday.

May 2nd. All was in readiness to start. I rode my horse most of the day, but took my turn at the four-in-hand late in the afternoon, driving six miles to Rice's where corn was bought. It is a most beautiful and fertile country. For miles around as far as the eye can reach over the plains, is a waving mass of green, dotted here and there with ploughed fields and cottages,—a beautiful sight for man to behold.

We remained in our comfortable camp all day ³/₄ Thursday, doing little jobs and quite enjoying the camp life. We take turns in caring for the stock and cooking, and at night each unroll their blankets, the waggons are placed on each side of the fire, and the mules are tied together, three feet apart. Only one man keeps a four-hour watch during the night.

We expected to start on ⁵/₄ Friday, but awoke to find our camp almost deluged in water by the night's rain. The rain continued and rendered the cooking of breakfast and duties most difficult and disagreeable.

We settled with the Treasurer, and found that each man's share is \$186.66. the whole outfit costing \$1120.00. ⁵/₅

On Saturday, I went with Taylor to town and bought several things. Received several letters, one from James Potter, of Penna. I became very unwell, caused from eating a very hearty dinner in town. The premonitory symptoms of cholera made their appearance, so Dr. Stone gave me a great quantity of laudanum, but without good results.

⁵/₇ I felt better on Monday, but much warmed, as there have been six

deaths in surrounding camps from cholera. The dread disease has surely taken a lodgment, and all thoughts are turned to checking it in camps.

⁵/₇ ⁸ The next day I felt better, so we broke camp and drove three miles, where we waited until Taylor drove up with the other waggons. I am unable to do anything, but the Doctor thinks I will get well with due care, but I feel very weak. *Not done*

When Taylor came, we drove three miles to a beautiful spring where we set camp, and we remained until all was ready to start. These many delays are annoying.

On Friday, May 10th, we struck camp and drove three miles to Little Blue, where we again sat down to wait until Saturday for Means and Wilson. I rode about two miles. I bought a Comanche pony for \$60.00 in order that one might ride her.

⁵/₁₁ On Saturday, Taylor and Harris went to Independence in the morning to purchase articles and get our letters, as this was the last chance of receiving any until we reach the mine. I sent by Taylor many letters, and he returned in the evening with a number from home.

The Buncombe Co., the Carson Co. and the Wilson Co. passed this evening, and we followed them in the early morning.

Sunday, May 12th. We rose very early this morning and found Taylor very sick. We regret breaking camp and following train, while Taylor is in this condition. Reynolds, of Buncombe was also taken ill with cholera, and we fear he is very ill.

Tuesday, May 14th. We made an early start in a very heavy rainstorm, and when out a mile, the tongue of my waggon was broken through by the stubbornness of the mules, and we were compelled to unhitch and make a new tongue, but caught up with the camp at night. Taylor is very ill with the cholera. I began to feel very unwell in the evening so Sunday we remained in camp as so many

Mon 5/7

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were ill. The Kentucky Company joined us.

Wednesday, May 16th we crossed the line of the U. States. We drove 12 miles to a very good camp and were joined by Schaffer of North Carolina. We passed a new made grave of an emigrant. The country is beautiful and green.

By Thursday^{5/17} we passed the Pioneer line but at dinner they passed us. One of the mules got loose and I had a fine ride in catching him. We drove to the forks of the road (one goes to Santa Fe and the other [right] to Oregon). We camped near an Indian hut which had been deserted in consequence of cholera breaking out in emigrant camps near by. We are all feeling better.

On Friday^{5/18} I stood guard for the first time, on the last watch, but did not see anything to shoot. Started early, and drove 10 miles to a ford of Bule Creek where we stopped three hours to grass our mules, and then driving several miles where we camped for the night.

On Saturday^{5/19} an axle tree of one of the Kentucky waggons broke and we were compelled to stop until noon when we drove 1 mile, crossing a creek, and here we stopped being detained a length of time in assisting each waggon up the steep bank, by taking two front mules and hitching on to mules of waggon behind. We baked bread for Sunday.

^{5/20} Although our men are opposed to travelling on the Sabbath, yet, we cannot be left behind the train. At noon we started in a very hard rain and a terrible gale of wind, which wet all of us. Dr. Stone was taken very ill and I was awakened to attend him and I gave him morphine and ippecac, and he became much better.

^{5/21} On Monday we had a late start and in consequence travelled only 8 miles. Finding water in the broad plain where we stopped until eight o'clock having had a hard rain and later going a few miles before mak-

ing camp for the night. I had felt very sick but was better at noon.

The next day we drove 10 miles to the crossing of the Kansas River, where we were compelled to camp in order to carry the whole train over in one day and be together.

^{5/22} On Wednesday we ferried the Kansas River, (called by the Indians, Kan) in three hours. I swam my mule and led two others rendering it very unsafe. Camped 2 miles from the river passing the line of Turner and Allan. Many Indians came into the camp and wanted to trade for liquor. A man named Faltsby of New York came into camp and was taken in by Col. Wilson's mess. Robert and Clayton Reeves with their sister came into camp after we crossed the Kansas. There are but few women travelling.

On Thursday the 24th, we left camp at 7 o'clock and drove 18 miles to Manacursa Creek where ^{W. H. ROOSE} we camped. The rain came down in torrents and our tents had 4 inches of water running through them. Wood from Buncombe is ill with symptoms of Cholera. The day and night were the most disagreeable since we left home.

On Friday^{5/25} after driving several miles we were detained to dig a road at either side of the bank of a creek.

^{5/26} Saturday we broke camp early and drove to a creek which was very high and we were obliged to build a raft to cross, which was not finished until dark. H. A. Wood died of Cholera, tonight, after two days illness. It cast a gloom over the whole Company, as he was liked by all. We buried him and marked his grave.

Sunday, 27th. We were very busy fixing our raft to cross the creek, and only crossed in the evening and camped on the other side one mile from the creek. ^{5/28}

But early Monday morning we made a start and drove ten miles when one of the Kentucky waggons broke down. Five of our men were

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taken ill with cholera and everything seems sad; misfortune hangs over us.

5/2 Tuesday the sick seemed better and we drove 18 miles without accident, and on Wednesday 20 miles on good roads.

5/3 Thursday we left camp at an early hour, but were detained a short time as a Kentucky waggon broke down again, and the rain came down in torrents, wetting us. Ten men are sick with the cholera, and I was quite unwell, being attacked with diarrhea suddenly. I swallowed 100 drops of laudanum in hopes of a cure.

6/1 Friday being a very wet day and exceedingly disagreeable we remained in camp to care for our sick, and give the mules a rest. The sick seem better but very ill.

Saturday, June 2nd. Part of our company went out to hunt a bear which had been seen near camp. About noon Morris Jackson of Sidney, Ohio, came into camp and told me (after having made himself known) that two of the Bushes, and J. Drum, of Shelby Co. Ohio, were with him so I immediately got my horse and rode over to the train, and found them. I had a most delightful afternoon conversing about Sidney and my old friends. We drove another mile to good grass and water.

6/3 Early Sunday morning, Capt. Lloyd, Ball and Locket of the Kentucky Company left us and returned home. This we regretted, but they decided part on account of so much sickness and the disagreeable weather. We left camp early and drove 12 miles through a very level country, with very little grass and no running water.

Near one of the ponds I found iron ore but of an inferior quality. It has the appearance of being magnetite. Drove 8 miles when the axle of the Kentucky waggon broke, and we camped for the night without wood or water.

6/4 On Monday, the 4th, we left camp at 6 o'clock, and drove about 16 miles to a creek where we stopped to feed

the mules. One of our waggons went on and had nothing for the men to eat. 6/5

Started at 5 o'clock and drove 16 miles to a creek. The land has the appearance of gold formation.

6/6 On Wednesday we broke camp early and drove about 12 miles to some grass, passing one small waggon which had gone ahead yesterday. After a rest we again started, driving 8 miles before we found good water. Camped on the banks of Blue Earth river where we were detained by rain, the showers being the hardest we have experienced. We camped near three ox trains, in one of which was Dr. Walker, the Messrs. Reeves forming part of their Company. 6/8

6/7 On Thursday and Friday we rose very early, driving 15 miles one day, and 12 miles the next. We met about 200 Indians of the Sioux Cheyenne tribe, who were in pursuit of Pawnees that we had met on the preceding day. The Pawnees had stolen some of their mules and horses, and they were greatly exasperated.

We made exchange of blankets and moccasins and saviets with them. I gave a saddle blanket for a Spanish style of saddle. We doubled our guard after their departure fearing a return of our seeming friends. The Country is not very fertile, neither is it well watered or timbered. Some of our Company saw 3 elks this morning. We drove 13 miles in the afternoon to the banks of the Platte. I went out 3 or 4 miles from the road today to kill antelope but did not succeed. I crawled near and just as I was in the act of shooting, it became alarmed and ran directly from me. In crawling I lost my Colt revolving pistol and did not discover the loss until I was 2 miles distant, and the circuitous route which I crawled determined me to pursue my course towards the waggons.

Saturday, June 9th. We left camp at 6 o'clock and drove on the river bank to Fort Kearney, a distance of 15 miles where we camped near the

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ri and spent the afternoon in writing letters to John Potter, of Potters Mills, Penna., and to Father.

Fort Kearney is still in an unfinished state, building since last fall. The huts are built of turf and the walls are about 2 feet thick. There is only one frame house, which is used as the Company's store. Col. Bonville is the Commander of the Fort and Major Chilton next officer in command.

On Sunday the 6/10, in the morning we held a meeting of the Company and determined to rest all power and authority in one man. A committee of three was appointed to draft regulations for the government of the party. They reported, and after reading, were adopted, with a few amendments. An election was held. Col. Wilson was elected by a vote of 24 to 17.

At 7 o'clock we started and drove 1 miles to a fine level place near the banks of the river. We found the wild cactus. The road lay in the bed of the river and it was very nice.

6/11 On Monday we drove 15 miles to a fine camping ground on the river bank. Saw a large train on the North side of the river, by the Council Bluff road.

6/12 Tuesday we made 2 miles on an excellent road there being scarcely a hill all the distance. On the left there was a range of hills extending parallel with the road, while to our right lay the river in its greatest width, dotted here and there with an island. The river is very high, yet shallow enough for our mules to ford.

6/13 Wednesday we left camp at a late hour, owing to our disagreeable situation. About dusk a rain and wind storm, a perfect hurricane, came up and came near overturning our tents. The rain was blown in our provision wagon, and wet the flour and sugar. The general feature of the country is about the same except the hills on our left present a rugged and broken appearance.

We have overtaken the Pioneer Line, owned by Turner and Allan, of St. Louis, which is progressing slowly.

6/14 Thursday we started at 6 o'clock, driving 15 miles for grass on the bank of the Platte. We did not follow the road but drove through the grass, it being easier on our mules. The hills to our left were much higher than the day before, and the river narrower. For the first time we found wood on this side of the river, principally cotton wood. We passed the Pioneer Line, and if nothing happens will keep in advance.

From a person returning to the States we learned there was much suffering, in the trains ahead of us, mules and oxen were giving out, on account of the insufficient grass.

We were 430 miles from Independence. We drove 8 miles further to wood and water.

6/15 Friday we left camp early driving 17 miles before noon, stopping here until 4 o'clock, then started again and drove 7 miles to fine water. Near the hill on our left we saw the first Buffalo. Chase was immediately given by our men who succeeded in killing one after an hour's chase. While they were dividing that one a large drove came in sight, and the exciting sport was again resumed, with more success, killing six of the finest. Then drove the herd toward the train of the Pioneers who killed a number. I was not engaged in this as I loaned my Comanche to Taylor who did splendid, considering he was an inexperienced hunter.

6/16 Saturday, 16th. Left camp late and drove 4 miles to the crossing of the Platte River, where we were detained some hours in crossing. The river at this place is about 1 and 1/4 miles wide, and quite shallow with the exception of one or two places, where the water ran into the wagon. It was with the greatest difficulty we crossed, the sand being cut in deep gulleys, causing the mules to sink and fall. The sand filled up the wagon