
The Overland Diary of
JAMES A. PRITCHARD
from Kentucky to California in
1849

With a biography of Captain James A. Pritchard by

HUGH PRITCHARD WILLIAMSON

Edited by

DALE L. MORGAN

With an introduction, bibliography, and a chart of travel by
all known diarists west across South Pass in 1849 and illustrated
with a portrait, and two unpublished maps of 1849
drawn by J. Goldsborough Bruff

FRED A. ROSENSTOCK

THE OLD WEST PUBLISHING COMPANY

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upon which was a fine looking Mill owned by Rice. We stoped on the hill $1\frac{1}{2}$ ms. from the creek and put up for the night with the widow Adams—plain old fassion sort of folks. Distance 40 [miles].

SUNDAY 22D We reached Indipendence this morning at 8 Oclk A. M & continued to the river where we found the ballance of our company & Baggage. It was 6 ms from where we stayed last night to Indipendence & 3 from there to the landing. We commenced harnesssed up our mules & loaded in our goods & chattles and moved out one mile to a good camping place on the road towards Town where we encamped for several days. Distance to Indipendence 6 miles.

The whole distance from St Louis Mo. to Indipendence according to the sta[te]ment of distances as given to me by the inhabitance along the road—from place to place & from time to time which I presume to be correct as I got it from the most relyable sources—is two hundred & Eighty Eight miles. We were all ready to start on our trip across the plaines by the 24 of April but we were perswaded by the old settlers that, that was too early as we would find no grass upon the plaines for our Stock. In fiew of these statements we postponed starting till the 3 of May. And remained during the time encamped in and around Indipendence. But this advice we found to be extreamly detrimental to us. It served only to place us in the reare of a great number of large traines which we were compelled eventually to pass. We were prepared to take with us grane enough to feed our mules twice pr day for a distance of 400 miles. Therefore we Should have started at least 10 or 12 days sooner, which would have given us great advantages in the way of selecting good camping places

Indipendence is a handsome flourishing town with a high healthy situation, three miles from the Missouri River on the South side And Surrounded by one of the most beautiful & fertile countries of any Town in the Nation. The land is well

timbered with the most luxuriant groth of black Walnut Blue & Black Ash, Hackbury large Bur White & black Oak Buckeye[e] Boxelder Coffee nut [nut?] etc. Soil with that groth of timeber cannot help being abundantly productive besides it has a lime Stone foundation. Its geographical position is such that the climate is unsurpassed in the Union. The Emegrants were encamped in every direction for miles around the place awaiting the time to come for their departure. Such were the crouded condition of the Streets of Ind by long traines of Ox teams mule teams men there with stock for Sale and men there to purchase stock that it was all most impossible to pass along. And the California fever raging to such a fearful extent that it was carrying off its thousands pr day.⁶ Being all ready now to bid adieu to homes, friends, and happy Country, as it ware—for we were about Separating ourselves from the abodes of Civilization, its peace, comeforts, and its saf[e]ty, for a period we knew not how long, and to some for ever, to launch away upon the broad and extensive plaines, which Straches away and away, untill it fades from the sight in the dim distance, and bounded only by the blue wall of the Sky.

While thus laying round in suspence the reflections of home were forcibly crouding upon our minds the happy influences that we had torne ourselves from to enter upon a wild and in all probability a chimerical enterprize. In this state of suspence we had wandered along in search of grass for our Mules, and for the purpose of accustoming them to the use of the Larriet & the Stake—untill on the 2nd of May we found ourselves some 13 ms from Indipendance.

THURSDAY MAY 3RD 1849 W. W. Abbott of Burbane [Bourbon] Co. Ky haveing attached himself to our company on the evening previous, We were all ready this morning to take up the line of march—which did at an early hour. We crossed the state line at about 9 A. M. where we found a great number of Emegrants—among the rest was the large train commanded by Mr

Headspeath the great Mountaineerer.⁷ We were now on the large Prairie, and in the Indian Territory. These lands through here are very Rich indeed the road was fine all day. It Showered a little on us during the day. At 3 P. M. we reached the noted lone Elm, where we encamped for the night. This lone tree stands on the bank of a small stream, with no other tree or shrub in sight, all the branches have been cut from it by traders & Emegrans for the purpos of fuel. At this place we found some 40 or 50 Emegrant Wagons. Haulted for the night. Distance from Indipendance 34 miles.⁸

FRIDAY MAY 4 It was raining this morning and we did not start to [till?] 9 and in 8 miles came to where the Sante Fe road leaves the old Orregon trail. It still continued to rain and the roads became somewhat heavy. Still passing over high rolling Prairie we continued till 3 P. M. which brought us to a large creek, called Bool [Bull] Creek.⁹ There is an abundance of timber along its banks and bottoms. Just before we reached the creek we found one unfortunate fellow with the tongue broken square off at th[e] hou[n]ds of his wagon. We crossed the creek and encamped for the night. It had been raining all day & were wet & chilled by the exposure. We discovered a dead Oak close by and in a few minutes it was converted into a splendid log fire, by which we cooked our supper & got comefortably warm before bed time. We pased some 70 wagons today. Distance 18.

SATURDAY 5TH We left our camp this morning and travelled over rolling Prairie land crossing severall creeks withe steep banks and made a heard days march passing during the day some 80 teams, and late in the evening s[t]oped to camp at what is called coons point, on a small ravine with some timber along its banks Distance 28 ms.¹⁰

SUNDAY 6TH We left camp this morning early & travelled over country pretty much such as we did yesterday, in fact the general face of the country through here is pretty much alike. At 2 P. M. we reached a fine large creek called Shunganung. We found a

This Kentuckian Found Gold in '49, Then Returned to Missouri to Live

THE OVERLAND DIARY OF JAMES A. PRITCHARD, edited by Dale L. Morgan (222 pages, Fred A. Rosenstock, the Old West Publishing Company, Denver, \$15)

Reviewed by
John Edward Hicks.

THE gold adventurers of 1849 were a gay lot of young men, averaging 20 years, as they started on the long trek to California. Each day, as dangers and vicissitudes increased, the gay young men became more sober and more mature.

This is made clear in scores of diaries. Of the goldseekers who went by the northern route in 1849, diaries kept by 134 are known to exist.

An Observant Traveler

The diary of James A. Pritchard, just now published, adds little in the way of exciting incident to the gold-rush story. It does, however, describe in some detail the country through which the gold caravans passed. Some of Pritchard's report on the Missouri countryside and early settlers is reprinted here. The



James A. Pritchard, from the only picture known to exist.

value of the book is increased by a combination of more than usual skill in editing and printing.

Two of the men who participated in the production of the book will be present at an autograph party in honor of its publication, from 2 to 6 o'clock tomorrow afternoon at the Frank Glenn bookstore in the Hotel Muehlebach. Those present will be Hugh Pritchard Williamson, who wrote a biographical sketch of the diarist, his grand-uncle, and Fred A. Rosenstock of the Old West Publishing company of Denver, the publisher.

Hugh Williamson, an assistant attorney general of Missouri, notes in his sketch that James Pritchard had returned to his Kentucky home from the Mexican war ready for further adventures. When the country went mad over California gold Pritchard, now 32, left his bride, a poetess, at home. He found much gold in California, but, according to family legend, lost it in a

Gen. Sterling Price. He was in the battle of Wilson's Creek and was mortally wounded at the battle of Corinth. He was buried at the nearby hamlet of Coffeyville, Miss.

The publisher, Fred A. Rosenstock of Denver, is one of America's most notable antiquarian booksellers, a collector and publisher (as the Old West Publishing company) of rare western Americana. Dale L. Morgan, editor of the book, is an authority on western history, now with the Bancroft library at Berkeley, Calif. On a giant chart published in connection with the present book he has recorded the position at any given time of the 134 diarists who went by way of the South Pass.

of the Missouri countryside in his diary, it is scarcely surprising that shortly after his return to Kentucky Pritchard bought a 640-acre farm five miles north of Carrollton, Mo. Later he bought a place near Windsor City (now DeWitt) and for a decade enjoyed the life of a rural aristocrat. The home was called Rose Wild, probably so named by Mrs. Pritchard.

To Death in Civil War

Pritchard, a slave owner, was elected in 1858 to represent Carroll County in the Missouri Legislature. When war came, believing in the doctrine of states' rights, he joined the Confederate army, becoming a captain under

As a '49er Saw Missouri.

(From the diary of James A. Pritchard.)

ON the night of the 10th of April, 1849, I left my residence in the town of Petersburg, Ky., on the Steamer Cambria with my traveling companions & mules & wagons . . . for an overland route across the Rocky mountains to California, and arrived at St. Louis on the night of the 13th without any accident occurring or anything of moment transpiring.

Wednesday 18th . . . We reached Columbia, one of the neatest and handsomes little towns I have seen in my life. In this place there is a fine college or institution of learning. It is 14 miles from Columbia to River at Roachport, at which place we arrived by noon.

When we got to the river there were so many ahead of us, the ferryman told us that we could not cross for 3 days.

THURSDAY 19th . . . We Struck and crossed the Lamaine River passing on through fine country & well improved farms & clever People. By noon we reached the fine and extensive residence of the renowned Dr. Sappington the Daddy of all the Pills (Dr. John Sappington, who popularized the use of quinine pills for malaria) and with him we took dinner. I found him to be a very adroit & singularly eccentric Character, jocular & lively & rather quiscial possessing a high degree of hospitality and Gentlemanly demeanor. He is a large fine looking man about 6 feet high and looks to be about 70 years of age with heavy Suit of hair & it as white as Snow. His Beard was as white as his head and hung to his breast. His wife was a pleasant agreeable Lady and appeared to be much his junior.

Just through this region of country, its mostly Prairie, but the land is very fertile. The Farmers raise hemp extensively through here. This afternoon we saw 2 deer & a great number of Prairie

reached Lexington, a handsome Town, part of it is situated immediately on the Missouri River & part on the hill about 1 mile back. The lands around this place cannot be surpassed in either beauty or fertility. The timber is very heavy and of a fine quality.

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Independance is a handsome flourishing town with a high healthy situation, three miles from the Missouri River on the South side. And Surrounded by one of the most beautiful & fertile countries of any Town in the Nation. The land is well timbered with the most luxuriant groth of black Walnut Blue & Black Ash, Hackbury, large Bur White & black Oak Buckeye (e) Boxelder Coffee nut (nut?) etc. Soil with that groth of timeber cannot help being abundantly productive besides it has a lime Stone foundation. Its geographical position is such that the climate is unsurpassed in the Union. The Emigrants were encamped in every direction for miles around the place awaiting the time to come for their departure. Such were the crouded condition of the Streets of Ind by long traines of Ox teams mule teams men there with stock for Sale and men there to purchase stock that it was all most impossible to pass along. And the California fever raging to such a fearful extent that it was carrying off its thousands pr day. Being all ready now to bid adieu to homes, friends, and happy Country, as it ware for we were about Separating ourselves from the abodes of Civilization, its peace, comforts, and its saf(ety), for a period we knew not how long, and to some for ever, to launch away upon the broad and extensive plaines, which Straches away and away, untill it fades from the sight in the dim dis-

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Petersburg, Ky April 10, 1849-

From diary of James A. Pritchard