

West Bend, Wis.

WEST BEND NEWS
Wednesday, March 7, 1928

A TRIP TO CALIFORNIA IN A D. 1852

Looking through old papers recently, John Klessig, the clerk of the court, found the journal of his step-father, Ernst W. Jaehnig of Fillmore, on a trip by ox-team to California in 1852. The writer, who was among the first settlers of Fillmore and ran the brewery which existed there in pioneer days and supplied the north-eastern part of Washington county with the cheering amber fluid, was engulfed in the gold rush, joining a party who made the trip to California by ox-team. He kept a journal on his trip, in which he made daily notations of whatever seemed worth while recording, and sent it in a letter to his parents at Fillmore. It is written in German, and the present writer translated it into English as closely as possible, hoping that it will be of unique interest to the readers of the West Bend News. The translation follows:

Volcano, Amador Co., Calif.,

February 16, 1855

Dear Parents:—I am taking up the pen to again write you of our trip from Wisconsin to California. You tell me that you did not receive the letter with my first account of the trip, and because there is not much to do just now, as the water course used for washing gold is dried up, I will write it down once more, hoping that it will reach you this time.

I started on my trip with three companions on March 23, 1852. We bought three yoke of oxen, a wagon and some provisions, which cost us \$277.00. Traveling was difficult, but four young fellows like we get through everywhere, if they only stay well, which we did. I wrote up the entire trip in my journal, the number of miles we traveled each day, at which places we stopped for grazing and watering the oxen, and the strange things we saw. If you take a map, you can follow us better.

On March 23, 1852, we started out from Waukesha, Wisconsin. The weather was fine but the road was poor. We made 9 miles and at night we slept for the first time in our wagon. We had a little rain during the night.

March 24 we came to Mukkauke, a small place, and to East Town. We made 14 miles that day and spent the night between East Town and West Town, two little places.

March 25 we arrived at Elkhorn, a city, and stopped for the night two miles out, on the other side of town. During the night we had a heavy thunderstorm. We made 15 miles that day.

March 26 we came through Delavan, Elm Grove and Sommerville, little places which are not far apart. That night it got very cold. The road was bottomless and hardly passable. Made 10 miles.

In the afternoon of March 27 we passed the state line between Wisconsin and Illinois. In the evening we reached the city of Canton, where we stayed overnight. Made 20 miles.

March 28, Sunday morning, we traveled 7 miles and remained with a farmer till Monday. Here we met a number of Englishmen who also were traveling and whom we joined.

March 29 at noon we arrived at Rockford, a large city. We went 12 miles farther and spent the night at a farm home. Made 20 miles.

March 30 we traveled as far as Donsonville, where we nighted. From the Wisconsin state line up to here the country is prairie. Made 15 miles.

March 31 we came to Dryson, a pretty city, where we for the third time crossed the Rock river. Had to pay 45 cents bridge toll. The weather was very raw and cold, and towards evening it began to snow. The next morning the ground was covered with half a foot of snow. Made 18 miles.

On account of bad weather we remained at the place on April 1 and the following day we arrived at Sterling, where we stayed over night. Made 16 miles.

April 3, after traveling 5 miles, it began to snow and the wind blew in our faces. We hardly knew in what direction we were going. We had to unhitch at the first farm house we reached. It snowed till toward evening, when the snow was a foot deep. Later it began to rain, and in the night it froze. We remained here until April 6.

April 6 we made 10 miles and again spent the night with a farmer.

April 7 we came to Albany, a small city on the Mississippi river. We crossed the river and at the same time the boundary between Illinois and Iowa. Paid \$1.50 to get across, and after going 2 miles farther, we reached Comanche, where we stopped. We had alternately snow and rain during the entire day. Made 12 miles. The part of Illinois, which we passed through, is prairie land and contains rich farms. We always could buy cheap feed for our animals and provisions for ourselves. But after we had crossed the Mississippi, everything was expensive. Copper money is not to be seen in Iowa, the smallest coin they have is the nickel.

April 8 we struck a very bad road and had to ford a river four feet deep. Traveled 15 miles.

April 9 the road got still worse. In the morning we came to a bridge over a river, the boards of which had been washed away by the water. We put four boards across and shoved our wagon along, the oxen had to swim across. The river was about 8 feet deep in the middle. We rode on for 3 more miles and remained overnight with a farmer. Made 10 miles.

April 10 we struck more poor roads and crossed the Wozsoyimon river on a ferry boat, for which we paid 55 cents. Traveled 14 miles that day.

April 11, Easter Sunday, we remained with a farmer to rest up a

little. The weather was pleasant.

April 12 we rode 19 miles, and April 13 we arrived at Dayton. We stopped overnight about 5 miles on the other side of the town. Made 17 miles.

April 14 the roads continued to be poor and we made 14 miles. Because the roads were so bad, we decided to take a rest for a week.

April 20 we arrived at Iowa City, quite a pretty city. At noon we had a very dangerous ferry boat ride across the Iowa river. There were two wagons and four yoke of oxen to be ferried over, which was too big a load for the boat. When we were two-thirds across, the boat began to sink, the oxen became unruly and with wagon and all jumped from the boat into water five or six feet deep. But with quick help they landed safely on the shore. We drove on for 2 miles and took our things from the wagon to dry them.

April 21 we made 11 miles and spent the night on the open prairie. This country is very little settled, and as night overtook us unexpectedly, we had to stay where we were.

April 22 we drove 14 miles, and remained overnight in the woods. Hay is very scarce, and corn costs 50 cents a bushel.

April 23 we made 15 miles. Bought hay at 75 cents per hundred pounds.

April 24 we rode 15 miles over prairie. At night we put up with a farmer whom we paid \$1.00 for hay for a yoke of oxen.

April 25 we drove 14 miles over very bad roads.

April 26 we made 15 miles on more bad roads. Feed was expensive.

April 27 we drove 16 miles and spent the night this side of the Mouna river. We crossed it on a ferry boat, paying 70 cents for passage.

April 28 we made 16 miles, the roads not being very good. On the 29th we made 21 miles, and on the 30th 24 miles over prairie. The grass began to grow.

May 1 we rode 15 miles over prairie and passed a dead ox and a dead horse left along the road by California gold seekers.

May 2 we made 19 miles, and May 3 we came to a little place called Indiantown. Here we had to cross a river the banks of which were so steep that our wagon had to be let down on a rope. Made 14 miles.

May 4 we drove 17 miles and came to the Nishbadury river which we crossed on a ferry boat, paying 20 cents for it.

May 5 we made 19 miles and stopped for the night six miles out of Kanesville.

May 6 we arrived at Kanesville, where we remained until the 8th. Here we bought provisions and everything else we needed for the trip. Kanesville is the last place on the route to California. The next settlers to be found are Mormons, of whom you have heard already. At noon we arrived at the ferry, 11 miles from Kanesville. On account of heavy rains we had to remain here until May 10. I sent you a letter from here.

May 10 at noon we boarded a ferry and crossed the Missouri river, for which we paid 80 cents. We drove 2 miles farther and spent the night. This was the first night on Indian territory. Now the real journey began.

May 11 we drove 19 miles and passed the night on the bank of a small river, where we found good grass and wood.

(To be continued)

See Mattie
Platte River, Rock River, Vermilion
Entry 1207

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(First Continuation)

May 12 we made 8 miles and reached the Elkhorn river which we ferried, the fare being \$2.00. We went another mile and remained overnight. Because there was danger of Indians, we formed a cluster of 60 wagons. Each wagon had to have a guard. The Indians are very much after killing and robbing the whites. That same night an Indian was shot. He was about to steal a horse. The day before an Indian shot and killed a white man about 6 miles from here. The white and his wagon were about half a mile in the rear of the main body when he met six or seven Indians who asked for bread. He refused to give them any, whereupon one of them jumped into his wagon. The white whipped his pistol from his pocket to shoot. The weapon refused to go off. Another Indian shot him with an arrow and all fled. The unfortunate died an hour later.

May 13 we drove 12 miles and came to the Platte river, which we followed for nearly 800 miles, sometimes near the bank and again a distance away. Here a troop of emigrants on the previous day had a fight with Indians, in which one white and four Indians were killed.

May 14 we made 20 miles and nighted near the Platte river. Grass, water and wood were fairly good. Today we nearly had a fight with Indians, and it would have gone bad with them if we would have caught them. About a mile away from us were three guards whom the Indians had attacked and tried to rob. A man suddenly ran up to us and asked for help. We were ready and armed ourselves as well as possible. There were about 200 of us. Some had to remain to guard the wagons. We hurried as much as possible. When the Indians saw us coming they fled toward the Platte river, both sides of which are covered with dense woods, in which they hid themselves. We counted about 50 of them, and as there were only three of us in our squad, we did not think it advisable to follow them because we did not know how many more might be in the woods. We sent some shots after them but they were too far away to mortally wound any.

May 15 we drove 15 miles and spent the night near the Platte river. Had rain all day, also a hail storm.

May 16 we advanced 15 miles and came to a river called Lob Fork. There was a ferry but we did not cross and remained on the north side. We forded a small river called Luten Glass, 15 feet wide. It was cold and windy all day. There was plenty of wood, grass and water.

May 17 we drove 17 miles and forded the Beaver river, 36 feet wide. Remained over night at a place which at one time was inhabited, probably by Mormons. Nothing remained of it but ruins and a few graves.

May 18 we made 14 miles. There was plenty of grass and water but no wood.

passed the Beaver river, four rods wide and easy to ford. Here a young fellow fell from the wagon and broke an arm. In the afternoon we forded the Lob Fork river. This river is 50 rods wide and three feet deep, the bottom consisting of quicksand.

May 20 we made 16 miles. Grazing was good, but there was no wood nor water.

May 21 we rode 16 miles and forded the Prairie river, which was difficult. Passed two graves of persons who died of cholera in 1849. The weather was stormy all day.

May 22 we drove 18 miles. Wood, grass and water were good. Forded the Wood river, which was easy.

May 23 we made 20 miles. Wood and feed were good, but the road was quite poor.

May 24 we advanced 21 miles and forded several small rivers. Feed, wood and water were poor.

May 25 we progressed 22 miles, forded the Buffalo river and came to the Platte river. There was no wood, and water and grass were poor. The weather was fair.

May 26 we traveled 24 miles and found fairly good wood, water and grass.

May 27 we made 19 miles and forded the Skunk river, which was easy. Wood, water and grass were good.

May 28 we rested.

May 29 we advanced 19 miles and passed over the Farmer swamp. We found two springs with good water. There were six graves near, four fresh and two old. Forded the Mestauers river and remained overnight. Found the last firewood for 200 miles ahead. Now we had to start to use "buffalo chips" for fuel, which lay about in enormous quantities but which also steam enormously when it rained on them. We now had only four wagons left and passed the boundary between the territory of the Pawnee and the Sioux Indians. I am sending you a picture showing how the Indians hunt buffalos. They get so near them on their fleet ponies that they can kill them with bow and arrow. We sometimes saw buffaloes in big herds, and they provided us with many good meals.

May 30 we drove 20 miles and forded four little rivers. Found little grass but plenty of water. The weather was warm.

May 31 we made 19 miles and forded three small rivers. Today Henry Adams, who with his wife and brother-in-law was a member of our party, lost an ox. He fell dead on the road. Grass and water were good, but the road was very sandy.

June 1 we rode 18 miles and forded three little rivers. Grass and water were very good.

June 2 we advanced 18 miles and forded two little rivers and the Castle river which is 18 rods wide. This river is hard to ford, the banks are very swampy and the water is four feet deep. Found good feed, but the roads were sandy.

June 3 we drove 24 miles and forded a river. We had to go 20 miles before we found water for our animals.

June 4 we progressed 22 miles and forded a small river. There was little grass and the road was sandy.

June 5 we made 22 miles with little grass and sandy roads. The night we spent near Chimney Rock, of which I am including a picture. It is a tall rock which rises from an extensive sandy plain and from the distance looks like an old castle.

the Platte river. Water and grass were good.

June 7 we drove 19 miles. Grass was good but water was poor.

June 8 we traveled 22 miles, forded a river and again found firewood, also grass and water. The roads were good.

June 9 we made 15 miles and arrived at Fort Lawrence. This is a fortress on the south bank of the Platte river. It was stormed by the Indians in 1854. Most of the inhabitants were Frenchmen who live and trade with the Indians, and 552 United States soldiers. Eight Germans were among them.

June 10 we drove 18 miles and came to the Black Hills. Had very poor roads which led up and down over rock hills. Saw several broken and abandoned wagons. Wood, water and grass were good.

June 11 we made 11 miles, and on the 12th we advanced 24 miles. Water and grass were good.

June 13 we rested and went hunting. We shot two deer which are very plentiful, also rabbits and wild sheep.

June 14 we traveled 17 miles and came near the high mountain, of which I am enclosing a picture. This mountain is covered with perpetual snow. Feed was poor and the weather was cold.

June 15 we made 15 miles. The road runs near the Platte river and is very sandy. Grazing was poor.

June 16 we advanced 23 miles. The road leads through deep sand and sandstone mountains. Grass was fairly good but there was no firewood nor water.

June 17 we drove 16 miles. We came to three ferry boats, on which emigrants coming from south of the Platte river are taken over.

June 18 we made 20 miles. Passed several mineral springs with poisonous water which kills man and beast if they drink of it. Night came and we had no water.

June 19 we drove 12 miles and forded several small rivers. Water and grass were good. The country about is very unhealthy, there are graves to be seen everywhere, also dead animals. The ground is covered with saleratus, and all over are ponds with water that looks like lye.

June 20 we traveled 21 miles and came to the Sweetwater river which is a branch of the Platte river and which we followed for nearly 100 miles upstream, fording it several times.

June 21 we made 15 miles and passed Devil's Gate. Here the river runs between rock walls 400 feet high.

June 22 we progressed 23 miles and passed several springs with poisonous water. Oxen get ill from grazing around here, the ground is covered with potash, at places two inches deep.

June 23 we drove 23 miles. Had a heavy thunderstorm with rain and hail. Passed a swamp called Ice Spring, the water of which is poisonous. By digging two feet into the ground, ice is struck. Since we passed the mineral springs, we saw a lot of dead animals along the road. Our animals today also ate of the poison grass, and by night we had three sick oxen and one cow. But we cured them with vinegar and other medicines which we brought along. Animals drinking of poisonous water or grazing in the neighborhood get bloated, blood runs from mouth and nose, and they die within a short time.

June 24, St. John's Day, we rode 15 miles and forded several rivers. Water and grass were good, and it rained or snowed all day. During the night it

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(Second Continuation)

June 26 we drove 21 miles and came to the place where the roads part. The one to the right runs 49 miles through a sandy desert without water or grass, and the one to the left leads to Salt Lake City, where the Mormons settled. We followed a third road, which is new, and found good grass and water.

June 27 we went 4 miles and found plenty of firewood, water and grass.

June 28 we drove 25 miles and spent the night near a little river. The road was rough and rocky, which was bad for the feet of the animals.

June 29 we made 15 miles and came to the Green river. Here are three ferry boats owned by the Mormons. The river is 18 rods wide, 10 to 12 feet deep and the current is swift. Paid \$6.00 to take three wagons over, the cattle had to swim. There was a store at the place, but prices were very high. Bought a drink of brandy, for which they charged 25 cents and which almost choked me.

June 30 we progressed 26 miles and forded several small rivers. Grazing was good.

July 1 we made 23 miles and again came to the old road which runs through the desert. Spent the night at Hams Fork, a river 5 rods wide and 4 feet deep. Grass was good but the road was very hilly and full of rocks.

July 2 we drove 20 miles, forded several small mountain streams and passed over a mountain 4 miles high. The descent on the other side was very steep. It was a very dangerous road. Water and grass were good.

July 3 we made 20 miles over high and stony mountains, dangerous for the wagons. We also forded several rushing rivers, which was difficult, and came to the Bow river which we followed upstream for 80 miles. Here is a beautiful valley with fine grass, and here we celebrated the Fourth of July and remained till the 5th. During the night we had a thunderstorm with a cold wind and snow. It got so chilly that it froze. On our entire trip through the mountains it was cold or frosty.

July 5 we drove 18 miles and crossed the Thomas river on a bridge. The bridge was built by a Frenchman who lived with the Indians and married a squaw. He has four children. The bridge toll was \$1.00 for each wagon.

July 6 we progressed 10 miles over mountainous roads. We met a party who returned from California to the States. We now have finished half of our trip, 1206 miles.

July 7 we drove 23 miles and came to the most remarkable place on the way to California. It is called Swamp Spring and contains 40 acres dotted with mineral springs; the water is warm, some sweet and some bitter or sour, and as soon as it comes out it turns into stone. About a mile away is another spring with hot water coming out of a rock and rising about 4 feet into the air. This water is hot enough to boil eggs in 5 minutes. About 2 rods away is another spring with ice cold

volcanoes. Here is a trading post inhabited by Frenchmen and Indians.

July 8 we made 25 miles and came to a parting of the road, the road to the right going to Oregon and the road to the left to California. The roads are very mountainous and rocky.

July 9 we drove 19 miles and forded several small rivers. We came to a mountain 9 miles long. Water and grass were good.

July 10 we rode 15 miles, and on the 11th we rested.

July 12 we made 25 miles. Had no water all day. The road was very poor. Went down a mountain 9 miles long and at places almost perpendicular.

July 13 we traveled 23 miles and forded several small rivers. Today our party was increased—a daughter having been born to Mr. and Mrs. Henry Adams. The family remained behind for several days, but the other two wagons proceeded on their way.

July 15 we advanced 26 miles and passed several mineral springs of warm, sweet water.

July 16 we again made 26 miles and passed the Pyramid Circle, a valley surrounded by beautiful rock formations, white and blue, 100 to 200 feet high and rising from the level ground. Seen from a distance, they look like the buildings of a city. A mile away the Salt Lake road again joins the California road.

July 17 we drove only 4 miles and rested. Had good grass and water.

July 18 we advanced 18 miles and forded several small rivers. The road was rocky and mountainous and our animals suffered from sore feet.

July 19 we made 25 miles and found good water and grass.

July 20 we drove 15 miles and passed several mineral springs. Stayed over night near a place with half a dozen hot springs, the water of which was so hot that we could not put a hand in it. The surface is covered with about 3 inches of potash. Nearby are springs of good water and so cold that it is not possible to drink it as it comes out.

July 21 we drove 21 miles. The road was full of rocks, but water and grass were good.

July 22 we made 11 miles and rested until the 24th to give the sore feet of our animals a chance to heal. They hardly could go any farther.

July 24 we drove 24 miles and reached the Humboldt river which we followed downstream for 358 miles. The water of the river in its upper course is fairly good, but it gets worse the farther it comes down. The ground everywhere is covered with potash. The Humboldt river rises in the Goose river mountains and for about 400 miles runs through a dreary desert, in which it finally disappears.

July 25 we made 25 miles, the road being very dusty.

July 26 we drove 24 miles, the road being fair and grazing good.

July 27 we made 25 miles. Had to cross the river five times on account of the high rock walls hemming in its course. The road was rocky, but we found good grass.

July 28 we traveled 24 miles on poor roads and dangerous for wagons. Grass and water were good.

July 29 we made 23 miles, always along the river, with high snow covered mountains on both sides. But the heat in the valley was almost unbearable.

July 30 we rode 22 miles. Today we left the river and did not see it for 14 miles. The road and grass were good.

found grazing good.

August 2 we made 20 miles. All along the road we saw graves. We passed two graves which were a gruesome sight. One was dug into, presumably by Indians who are still very wild around here. They go entirely naked. The other grave was scratched open by wolves or prairie dogs.

August 3 we progressed 21 miles on dusty and sandy roads. Met people from California, who came to meet relatives.

August 4 we drove 16 miles on sandy and bumpy roads. During the night we had a severe thunderstorm with rain and hail.

August 5 we made 25 miles. Had no water for 20 miles. The road was very sandy. Grazing was fairly good, also the water.

August 6 we drove 24 miles, and 18 miles on the 7th, passing the last springs of good water for 80 miles. Loaded about 10 gallons of water on our wagons. Now we are close to where the Humboldt river disappears in the desert. Grass and water are very salt.

August 8 we rode 12 miles. Made hay for our animals to be fed in the Great Desert which extends for 45 miles. We took three medium sized bundles for each head.

August 9 we advanced 6 miles and found some grass, but it was salt. In the afternoon we drove 8 miles farther and came to a small lake, in which the water of the Humboldt river sinks and is lost. The water is very salt, and the shores are covered with salt one and two inches thick. We drove 2 miles off the road and spent the night. Here we found many people who prepared for the trip across the desert. There were several dug wells from which the travelers provided themselves with water for their animals. The water contains salt and sulphur. We were now prepared for desert travel, we had three bundles of hay and 1½ pail of water for each animal.

August 10, at 8 o'clock in the morning, we started out and drove until 1 o'clock in the afternoon. Then we stopped and gave our animals some water. The road so far was fairly good. At 2 o'clock we moved on and drove until 6 o'clock in the evening. We rested and fed the cattle. Two hours later we again were on the way. The road was so sandy that at times half of the spokes sank into the sand. We came to a trading post, where water, whiskey and similar wet goods could be had. Water was sold at 75 cents a gallon and brandy at \$3.00 a quart. We now passed trading posts every three miles. At 12 o'clock midnight we again fed our animals. The road was very sandy. We have a lame ox and fear that he will not come through. At 2 o'clock in the morning we were going again, and at 8 o'clock we safely arrived at the Carson river. Here we again found good grass and water. The trip through the desert had come to an end. It was a hardship for man and beast. I am including a picture of the desert. Dead cattle lie so close along the route that a person almost can step from one to the other. We now had traveled 1735 miles and had 276 miles more to make, from here to Sacramento. It is almost the most difficult part of the trip, over the Sierra Nevada mountains. We therefore decided to sell our wagons and animals. There are always plenty of buyers from California here, and we were sick of driving oxen. We sold the entire outfit for \$275.00. After resting for a few

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froze half an inch of ice. Had to go through snow two and three feet deep. Spent the night near the Snow Mountain, of which I am enclosing a picture. June 25 we made 18 miles and went over the South Pass, over the highest road between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Spent the night at Pacific Springs and saw the first water running toward the Pacific. Water and grass were good, but there was no firewood.

(To be continued)

1928, Nov. 21

days, we continued on our trip on foot, each carrying his bundle of belongings on the back.

August 14 we walked 20 miles; on the 15, 25 miles; on the 16, 27 miles; on the 17, 23 miles; on the 18, 25 miles; on the 19, 36 miles; on the 20, 20 miles, when we arrived at a little place where gold mines had been opened up. We therefore decided to end our travel for the present. It took us 102 days from the Missouri river to this place, and 151 days from Wisconsin, that is the trip across the plains.

I will close now, hoping that this letter finds you enjoying good health and well-being.

Your faithful son,
Ernst W. Jaehnig