

A172 Bland Collection of Harris JCHS
4F2 Family Correspondence, Volume I
1801-1860

Three miles west of Fort Laramie
June 7th, 1850

A. E. Harris -
D. Brother:

We arrived at the Fort today about noon and passed on to this point. We are now all in fine health and spirits. We intend remaining where we are, until Monday--this being Friday--to prepare for packing. We leave our waggons, that is we use the beds for pack saddles, and everything except sufficiency to cast us across. We do it from the fact that there (is) such a number of emigrants that it is frequently difficult to pass trains that move much slower than we. The road is literally lined with waggons--travel all day hard, or slow, and there are waggons all around us. As to coming to any correct conclusion as to the number of waggons on (the) road, it is impossible from the fact that we some days pass from 2 to three hundred waggons; often again at evening, when we have camped for the night, as many or more will pass us again; continually passing and re-passing here we have concluded to get clear of some of the crowd in some way by packing--we can frequently make (a) cut-off of a mile or more on the level country and of course in the hilly country the advantage will be more considerable. We are now approaching the mountainous country. The company that pack is Brackenridge & Co., Doctor Moore & Wiss, and those that started in my waggon. Brackenridge is a man of great energy, but I think if Detr. Moore ever had any, he left it at home; so far he has been a clog to the company, never ready to start at the proper time & with him always something out of fix.

From St. Joseph to this point is 657 miles; from St. Jo to Ft. Kearney 320; & from there to Ft. Laramie, 337 ms. So far a very good road; some places the sand makes it difficult pulling; some difficult hills (short & steep) also, but generally speaking the road is very fine. But "now begins the tug of war", as we are getting in the vicinity of the mountains, but I am confident we will make the trip without difficulty.

As I said before it is impossible to come to any conclusion as to the number of emigrants--though I can ascertain some-where near the number at the fort. I learn they keep an account of those that pass. We see persons traveling in every way; nothing uncommon to see men walking and carrying their "grub" on their backs, making better speed than any teams, not being detained for grass at all. I am confident some of the walkers (pedestrians) will make it better than, anyhow, pack mules or anything else; we passed a few days since a cart with an old Bull of the largest size in the shafts, with two cows yoked together for the leaders. The drover used the milk of the cows. He was from the State of Illinois. Hard on behind him was a man from Maine--measuring six feet, eight inches in his moccasins--riding a small jackass with two small jennets packed--a slow but sure team.

Game is very scarce on the plains. We only saw one small herd of Buffalo and at least five men to one Buffalo were chasing

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See Platte River Pool Narrative

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then. Therefore we have killed none at all, in fact we have killed no game except a few antelope, two or three black-tail deer, and some large rabbits.

The boys--Wallace and Pickering--seen generally of late in fine spirits; at first at times their faces were a little long.

Ed, I would write more, but I have so much to do you must excuse me. Give my love to Pa & Ma & the rest of the relatives.

My best respects to Mr. W. Douglass and family, and friends generally; except for yourself the love & best wishes of your brother,

M. J. Harris

There has, according to record kept here, 15, 145 men, 193 women, 192 children, 4, 219 waggons, 13, 891 horses, 4, 237 mules, 6, 313 oxen, 854 cows (passed by) up to the evening of the 7th of June.

I am yours etc.

M. J. Harris

Later.

There was an immense amount of suffering upon the plains this season. You can form no idea. Men that started with horses to make the trip in 60 to 75 days, when there are the fewest number of American horses will do to rely upon, lost all their animals--or some of which that did live until they got out of provisions were killed for food. We saw where several mules and horses were killed--jerked poor ones, at that! Sights could be seen daily that would draw tears from the hardest man in the States, but not tears from the emigrants, for a man soon becomes accustomed to anything and will scarcely heave a sigh to see his fellow mortal suffering the most intense agony. Gladly, though, would I have relieved the starving hundreds but it was out of my power, as we had just enough by being saving to last to the first village in the mines.

Twenty miles above the sink of the Humboldt River is the last grass which is quite convenient. The only place we could graze our stock on the river without miring them, and there was a great deal of danger there. This place is called the Meadows from the quantity of grass growing there. We left this Monday morning, of the 22nd of July & drove to the Sink, watered, (and) on across the desert to Carson's River by a little after sun-up of the 23d--a distance of 70 miles in 24 hours. I walked it at that without drinking a drop of water or eating but one meal in the trip--more than men can do when they first start from the States. I had plenty of water along, but near the sink it is very bad--in fact the whole of the river (is) salty, alkali, or something else very unhealthy to man and beast.

I wish you to say to Brother A. B. to make any use he pleases of my property there, and not to be in the least want of

Laeson's Meadows 2 Reatown

money when my property will bring it at ever so low a price, for I have no idea when he can get any from "out west"; but this I am satisfied of, sooner or later that I can make something out here.

Tallace and Pickering are both good fellows and are anxious to make a raise. I let them go it on their own hook, for I tell you men on the shares will not do, from the fact they dislike so much giving up half they make that it kills their energies. I, then, depend upon my own exertions for my "quills". I feel a pride in making something by my own honest industry.

You must excuse this unsatisfactory letter. I have no time to write more, as the express man wishes to leave in a few moments. Direct your letters to Sacramento City. I can get them from there more easily than anywhere else; though as yet I have not heard a word from home since I left, I know there are some letters in the city for me, but the express fail to bring them.

I have not been to the city yet, and will not go until the weather gets cooler. I am afraid of the valley in hot weather, but here it is very pleasant--the air, I mean--about one hundred m. N. W. of the City, in the depths of the mountains, and healthy too. I have not been sick in the least since I left home. However I got my feet poisoned soon after getting here, and had to "hang up" for two or three days. Crenshaw tried to make me believe that it was the effects of the scurvy, but I know the manner of my life would not admit of scurvy--and he not a Solomon no how--you must rest assured.

I wish I had time to write news, but I have not. I would have written sooner, but when I had opportunities of sending letters I did not have them written, and it is impossible to get a man to wait when you want him to.

Bill Cole is at work near here and has about a thousand dollars. I saw him the other day; he looks somewhat like a man; he offered me any amount of money wanted, under a thousand, but I did not need it, as I got in with all my animals and as much money as I left home with, though the animals are very low; near now three of the mules got in fat.

When you write, give me all the news; do not be afraid of annoying me with trifling details, as you in the States would call it, but write all, for a man that looks like he cares for nothing will take a deep interest in the smallest circumstances that occur at home.

I have just heard of the death of Gen. Taylor. I hope Fillmore will not be a John Tyler. I bought the New York Tribune the other day for one dollar, which contained the confession of Prof. Webster dated July the 8th.

Tell A. B. I'll write him a long letter some of these times. Give my love to Pa, Ma and all the relations, and my best respect to all my friends.

Your Brother,
M. J. Harris

The mines everywhere are crowded, particularly where you first
came to them, about Weaver & Hannington, but it is quite unhealthy,
the water being very bad in that section; was the part most made
their rise last fall.

M. J. H.

We get anything here that can be got in the States in the
way of provisions, though of course, at higher prices. Flour
is worth here 40cts pr. lb. though at the City not exceeding 10c.

Wallace & Pickering are fine & healthy.

M. J. H.

Written by Marcellus J. Harris to his brother, Dr. Edwin E. Harris,
while he was on his way to California from St. Clair Co., Mo.

Mrs. Hugh Barnett, St. Clair Co. Mo.

Dear Mother:

I take the present opportunity of write to let you know we are all well at present and hope these lines may find you all well.

We have got along verry well so far. we have had verry little trouble. we all agree first rate and see a heap. I seen where people has bin burried in the road and they had takeing up by the Wolves and tore up. I have bin well except one day I was sick--I eat too much meat. Except that we all have bin verry well. I would like to see you all mity well, perticular you and Marry. I would like to hear how you all are and how Tobe² and Jo² and Plas¹ is geting along a farming. We have bin on the road just six weeks, ten days, and we have jest got here. In ten days we will Be over half way. we are in among the foremost trains. there are only four trains a head of us. We are traveling with William Boon from hicry county. he has bin to California twist. this makes the third time he has bin there. he is a first rate man to travel with. Tell Jo to write and direct letters to Sacrimento Sity and then it will get there by the time I do. I would like to hear how you all are Now but i know I can't do it. Tell Marry I still think I will get them gold Beads I promised her and Mignola.³ it is geting lait and it is my Night to stand gard, so I must come to a close. No more at presant, But remain your affectionate Child,

Marcus H. Barnett

tell them all they must all write as soon as they get this letter, and dir ct their letters to Sacrimento Sity.

1 Mary Barnett (Mrs. Benjamin N. Cooke, mother of Ida Cooke Robinson)

2 Brothers of the writers: Tobe & Hugh Barnett. - "Plas" = William Barnett

3 Mignola