

Oregon Historical Society

Manuscripts

J. M. Harrison

Wooster, Ohio.

ORHS

On the morning of the 1st of April, 1846 in the little village of Birmingham, Iowa, might have been seen an unusual bustle and stir for that small place. Friends and relatives came in from the surrounding country, to witness our departure for the far off Oregon.

My father had been making preparations for some time previous, for the journey westward to the Pacific. Having new wagons constructed and our whole outfit of the best possible material, two wagons were heavily laden with provisions for the journey, and another for the use of the family, camp equipment, etc.

The reader may ask what induced people at that early day to emigrate through a wilderness of over two thousand miles to those far off regions.

So early as 1842 there was considerable talk in the western states in regard to Oregon. Glowing accounts were given in regard to its mild and healthy climate, and an idea prevailed that a liberal grant of land would be made to all those emigrating to that section of the country.

This, together with the fondness of adventure so characteristic of the American people; there was not wanting, those that were willing to cast their fortunes in those far off regions. So, early in the day teams were brought into requisition and everything being in readiness friends were bid adieu; some accompanied us however for some distance. Our route lay through the South part of Iowa and the Northwest part of Missouri, crossing the head waters of the Charitan and Grand Rivers at that time a sparsely settled region.

The inhabitants were such as we generally find on the outskirts of civilization, they generally cultivated but little ground, their chief occupation

^{Research}
(Minnie J. Mathis Collection)

See PRHS, entry # 182

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being the hunting of game and wild honey. The children would generally mount the fence on our coming in sight, to get a good view of us, and on our nearer approach would break and run like wild deers.

The roads in this section were exceedingly bad, we often had to construct temporary bridges over small streams, which retarded our progress very much.

On arriving in the vicinity of Savannah and St. Joseph the country improved very perceptible. We saw large farms and everything betokened thrift and plenty. Here we were detained several days waiting for more company, not deeming it safe to proceed, with less than forty or fifty wagons. Crossed the Missouri River on the 25th of May and on the 26th organized a Company, elected a Captain, Sargeant of guard and also passed by-laws for the government of the Company.

This was all very well, but the living up to it and complying with the rules and regulations, was quite another thing, as the sequel will show.

After crossing the Missouri River, we were fairly in an Indian Country. We were without the pale of civilization. The space of two thousand miles of plains, sands and deserts, inhabited by numerous tribes of Savages, lay between us and our final goal. Hence the apparent necessity for us to unite for our common good and safety. On calling the roll we were found to be sixty-five (men) strong exclusive of women and children. Our company was named "The Iowa Company." We had in all forty-one wagons and about five hundred head of stock.

On the 27th everything being in readiness we took up our line of march in regular order, the rule being for the wagon that was ahead the day before, to fall into the rear each morning.

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On being strung out on the high rolling prairies we made quite an imposing appearance.

All were in high spirits, our teams were in excellent condition, and everything seemed to augur well.

But, alas, who knows what a day may bring forth, little thought was there, that there was amongst us those who must stare starvation in the face, leaving their bones to bleach on the wayside, and others to be left fatherless, and in widowhood, by the hand of the wily savage.

The roads were in good condition and we got along finely, indeed it was a beautiful sight to see the long string of white covered wagons moving slowly and majestically over high rolling prairies, covered with verdure of the deepest hue. Little girls might be seen tripping along gathering flowers, and occasionally might be seen a deer or antelope gazing with wonder at our little caravan. Indeed here was nature in all its grandeur and loveliness. Nothing of note occurred until our arrival at Little Blue River. We found it swollen and experienced considerable difficulty in fording it. We had to raise our wagon beds, one wagon was turned over in the stream, with a woman and two children in it, and came very nearly drowning before they could be rescued. Several men plunged into the stream and with great difficulty, and at the hazard of their lives, righted the wagon, but not before the inmates were badly strangled; the cover being firmly secured to the box, the inmates could not be relieved until the wagon was righted. The Company laid over here one day, to give the families an opportunity to do their washings.

Some of the men went out hunting. Near the camp was a pond of water where some ducks were. A man by the name of Clymer, in shooting a duck, the ball after

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passing through the duck glanced upward and struck B. Stark, our captain, in the shoulder. Mr. Stark was on the opposite side of the pond and out of sight of Mr. Clymer. Upon examination the wound did not prove to be serious, the ball being easily extracted. From here our route lay pretty direct to the Platte River which we struck near where Fort Kearney now stands. We were now getting well into the Buffalo Country, numbers of which we saw at a distance and so eager were the men to kill Buffalo, it was with great difficulty we could keep enough men to attend to the teams and loose stock. Our course here lay up the Platte on the south side over the level plateau. There was something peculiar about the atmosphere in this section. It was with the greatest difficulty that the men could keep awake during the day. The ox teams would go to sleep in walking along with their teams, and on horseback you would soon find yourself bobbing. What little timber or brush there was along the river, was nearly all on islands that could not be got at. So we had to use all Buffalo chips as a substitute for fuel; it answered very well especially if we could obtain some brush to mix with it.

On striking camp our wagons were formed in the shape of a half moon, with the tongue of each (after the first) run between the wheel and bed on the near of left side of the next; forming a corral where we could guard our stock at night, and it could also be used for a breastwork in case of an attack. Our camp fires and tents were arranged on the outside of the wagons. At night our stock was driven into the corral formed by the wagons, and a guard placed around the open space. Although we seemed to be getting along very well, we had some discontented spirits in our midst, that were continually finding fault, nothing could be done to suit them. Matters of this nature became worse

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every day, and it soon became evident that we were going to have a split in the Company. There are many men that will do very well while they stay at home, but let them start out on a long journey of this kind, where they may have to put up with many annoyances, vexations, and inconveniences, and they soon show their true natures; or in other words it will turn them inside out.

We had seen no Indians, nor the sign of any after leaving Blue River. But it afterward became evident that the sulking Savage was on our trail, only waiting for an opportunity to pounce upon us, may be because they saw no Indians, thought there was no danger. On our affixing about opposite the forks of the Platte, we found some water and camped, the more discontented portion of the Company, moving off a short distance, to themselves. This threw the guard into confusion, so there was no regular guard that night. During the night there was a considerable shower of rain, and in the after part of the night the cattle took a stampede; they would run from the camp for several miles and stop, and then take a fresh start and run direct for the camp, at times we were in great danger of being run over by them. At a distance their running sounded like distant thunder; and on their approach the earth seemed to tremble under their tread.

Several of the men mounted horses and pursued them but they seemed to be unmanageable.

At dawn of day, all the men that could be spared from camp went out to look up the stock, which was brought in about breakfast time, all that could be found. Upon making a count found there was about sixty-five head missing. As soon as breakfast was over, a number went out again to look up those still missing; myself and Mr. William Trimble, traveling with the W. G. Graves

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family, started out together; not expecting to go far from camp, we took no firearms. We had gone but a short distance when we found fresh cattle tracks and tracked them to where they took the road, east, toward the states.

We followed on for several miles, when I remarked to Mr. Trimble that we had better go back and get our guns. He replied it would not do to turn back now, that if we did we could not get our cattle. Being only a lad at the time, I gave way to his judgment. We began to urge our horses on, and the further we went the faster we rode, and did not overtake our stock till near sundown.

Although we had seen no Indian, we had indubitable proof that the Indians had had our cattle, as several of them had marks of arrows shot into them to make them run. Mr. Trimble remarked that we had better travel till dark, and then stop and let our horses graze an hour or two, and then by traveling at night, reach camp early next morning. The sun had gone down when Mr. Trimble, on looking ahead said, "Yonder is some of our boys now." Upon looking ahead I said, "I believe there is." Just after making the above remarks we descended into a low piece of ground something like a swale, some of the cattle gave a snuff and ran out of the road, on the side I was on. As I rode out to drive them back, the Indians rose up from the grass all around us, in the form of a circle, one rose up by my horse and grabbed the bridle. I made an effort to break loose, but in an instant about half a dozen more were around me. After getting me off the horse they commenced tearing off my clothes; to this we demurred and a lively scuffle ensued, the result of which was, we were not able to sustain the demurrer. In the meantime they commenced shooting arrows at Mr. Trimble, he made several attempts to break through their lines but was unsuccessful. At last an Indian just behind him dropped on one knee and shot

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him in the back; he fell instantly, his horse was so frightened they could barely get hold of it, by closing in on it. They had barely secured Trimble's horse when an Indian stationed on an elevated piece of ground gave a whoop, at which they all ran and left me. I could not imagine what caused them to leave me so suddenly but commenced arranging my somewhat scanty wardrobe, and started toward our camp. On gaining higher ground saw two of our men approaching. It was not getting dusk so that objects could not be seen any great distance. The Indian stationed, on the lookout, had discovered the whites approaching and gave the alarm; they were the same we had seen just before the Indians surrounded us, but on the Indians rising up around us, I supposed the objects we had seen ahead were Indians also. Upon approaching our men, they were somewhat surprised to meet me on foot and in that condition. Upon informing them what had occurred, they did not deem it prudent to attempt to obtain Trimble's body, as the Indians on discovering they small number would probably attack them also. The Indians in all probability were lurking in the vicinity, watching our movements. They informed me that Captain Palmer with a Company of Horsemen from Oregon, on their way to the states was camped about eight miles distant. So I mounted on behind one of the men; and they urged their horses on at a lively pace for Palmer's camp.

On reaching Palmer's camp one of his men, and one of ours volunteered to go on that night, to inform our camp of what had occurred. Next morning by the break of day Captain Palmer's Company were up and saddled, when we all started to obtain Trimble's body. Upon reaching the scene of the action of the previous day, we found two puddles of blood, some arrows, our whips, also some buttons off my clothes, but could discover nothing of Trimble's

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body. The Indians had probably returned and scalped him and then taken his body with them to have a war dance around it.

Contains Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

Further instructions and explanation by tomorrow's mail

Cour contemplated work will be entitled

Twenty-three Years in the Pacific and Territories

beginning with a brief account of the journey overland in '46.

Yours Respectfully,

J. M. Harrison

Harper & Bros.

New York.

After spending a half day, in unsuccessful search for Trimble's body we started on our return. Captain Palmer's Company volunteering to escort us back, for which they deserved and had our thanks. We saw no Indians during the day but saw their signals a number of times on the opposite side of the river. Late in the afternoon we saw a big cloud of dust ahead, the Company halted and carefully examined their firearms; Captain Palmer detailed some of the men to take charge of the pack animals, he himself going ahead to try and make out whether it was friends or foe that were approaching us.

He soon after signaled us to come on, when it turned out to be some of our men coming to meet us. We were now in a fair mood to chastise the red man if we could have found him, but circumstances forbid our attempting to follow him. Emigrants with their families cannot well divide their force to follow Indians, and this the Indians knew full well. After traveling all night we arrived at our camp early in the morning after an absence of two

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days and nights, our family decided on returning to the states not having enough cattle left to continue the journey, Captain Palmer agreeing to escort them as far as there was any danger.

Mr. Trimble left an interesting family consisting of his wife and four children to mourn his untimely death. In fact it was felt to be a great loss to the whole company.

at this early day ox teams alone were used in crossing the plains with wagons, as it was generally thought that horses could not stand it to work and subsist on grass alone; though of late years it has been quite common for both horse and mule teams to cross the plains. Some on being short even put cows in their place; they made a very good substitute.

We traveled up the south fork of the Platte about twenty miles to where we crossed it, we found it very deep fording but by raising our wagon beds we succeeded; the bottom being quicksand which made it more dangerous, but luckily all got over in safety.

We soon left the south fork and struck the north fork of the Platte at the mouth of Ash Hollow; from here our course lay up the north fork of the Platte on the south side, to the Black Hills. Shortly after leaving Ash Hollow we came in sight of Chimney Rock. I never learned its height but it was in plain view of us some three or four days travel. Some fifty or sixty feet of its top has since fallen down. Just below Scotts Bluff we met a company of men on horseback from California. Our company stopped to learn the news from that section of the country. One of their men tarried some time conversing with our company. On starting, his Spanish spurs made considerable noise at which a dog ran out from under a team, barking. One of the axes broke and in an instant all but two or three of the teams were

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going at full speed over the plains in every direction; the women and children screaming, the teamsters whooping at their teams together with the rattling of the wagons, made a terrible noise and confusion. Most of the teamsters had gathered around the returned Californian to hear the news, when the team stampeded. One wagon bed with a woman and three children in it was thrown off the running gear and left sitting in the road and every spoke taken clean out of one wheel, one man and child were run over by a team, and strange to say were not seriously hurt.

A Mrs. B.-----was standing by their team at the time when it started to run, when with courage so peculiar to western women, she seized with one hand the horn of the old Duke the near wheel ox, and with a stick in the other hand striking Drab the off ox in the face, they went flying through the air for a time but by perseverance the help of old Duke and Drab holding back, the lead cattle had to give it up and stop, some of the teams ran until they had to stop from sheer exhaustion. After gathering up our teams with the exception of one wagon wheel being smashed up and the teams rather the worse for their run, we had sustained no serious damage.

For some time after this we had to use great care and watchfulness to keep our teams from stampeding, at the least unusual noise they were ready to stampede; they had not forgotten their fright by the Indians at the forks of the Platte.

Large herds of Buffalo were daily seen and antelope in great numbers, the latter were generally very shy, the hunter would slip out toward them after approaching as near as he thinks it practical. He lay flat down out of view and put a red piece of cloth or red handkerchief on the end of

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his ramrod and waves it about gently which attracts their attention, they soon began to walk up toward it to get a better view, after it approaches near enough the hunter fired and generally killed his game. Along the Platte we passed numerous villages of prairie dogs, on our passing they would stand on their hind feet and at the mouth of their burrows barking at us, on shooting one of them they generally fell back in their hole, so we would seldom get one. We arrived at Ft. Laramie on the third day of July and camped about one mile from the fort, in the fourth we were visited by a large war party of Sioux (They were on their way to fight the Pawnees) they came up to our camp under full speed singing and whooping, presenting a hideous appearance. The chief made a speech to us in which he stated they had never shed the white man's blood and professed great friendship for the whites. There was an Indian trader along with us at the time who acted as interpreter. Our company prepared a dinner for them, preparing a large quantity of coffee well sweetened, (an Indian has a great liking for sweet things) with bread, meat, etc., after which the pipe was passed around and they all seemed to be in the best of humor, we also gave them a considerable quantity of powder and ball, they promising to kill Pawnees with it, the Pawnees having killed one of our men.

In traveling up the north fork of the Platte we saw immense numbers of Buffalo, at times the country was black with as far as the eye could reach, in one instance we had to stop the train to let them pass for fear of being run over by them, they were traveling north, the teamsters would crack their whips at them, and fire guns and on they went neither turning to the right nor the left. After leaving the Platte the Buffalo became scarce, the last

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we saw on the Sweetwater; we would occasionally see a Buffalo pate with horns attached, as far as Fort Hall on Snake River, at which place old mountaineers told us they were quite plentiful some fifteen or twenty years before. Crossed the north fork of the Platte near where we struck the Black Hills, we found the road quite rough and bad through here. Struck Sweetwater near Independence Rock, this fork where the road passed near by it, was covered with the names of travelers who had passed by it. Not far from the rock was a lake of alkaline substance resembling saleratus very much. A short distance from Independence Rock was the Devil's Gate where the Sweetwater had worn its way through the Sweetwater Mountains, we walked down into the passage of the river, and looking overhead it looked like we might jump from one wall to the other, it was so narrow at the top. A part of us climbed up the mountain and had a magnificent view of the surrounding country; these mountains are nearly all rock, we saw signs of the mountain sheep in rocky craggy places, where it was with the greatest difficulty we could ascend. Some of our party killed a Big Horn or Mountain sheep here; they have extremely large and heavy horns shaped very much like that of our domestic sheep. It is said on jumping off a precipice, they strike on their horns. Our Company by this time got divided up into small parties, though generally not any great distance apart. While traveling up Sweetwater a war party of Arapahoe Indian about five hundred in number came across a party of six wagons and made some attempts to rob it. Some of the young braves reaching over from their ponies and cutting through the wagon cover pulling out whatever they could lay their hands on. The chief rushed up calling out to and striking them on their backs with the flat of his sword, they soon desisted, the whites thinking it

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best not to shoot unless there was not another alternative. The Sweetwater is the warground of the Snake, Crow, Blackfoot, and Sioux Indians; where many sanguinary conflicts have taken place between them.

We had now been on the way nearly two months from the Missouri River, and met two small parties, one from Oregon, the other from California, which was all the whites we had yet seen, with the exception of a few at Fort Laramie. Everything that would give us any word or news from other companies, was examined carefully, we would often find a piece of paper on which some one had written stating where they had passed and any incident of interest. The most common way was to write with a pencil on a Buffalo skull and stick it up near the roadside. We were now getting in full view of the Wind River Mountains and Firemounts Peak all covered with snow, which was a grand sight for most of us, to see snow in July and August.

On leaving Sweetwater and going over to the south pass of the Rocky Mountains so gradual was the ascent and descent we could hardly perceive when we were on the summit.

Near the summit we passed Pacific Spring the first water flowing to the Pacific, thence to Bit Sandy and Green River, found the latter stream very rapid and dangerous to ford, but all got across without any serious mishap. Our most direct route from here would have been by the way of Green Woods cut of f but there being on it a long stretch without water we decided to go the more circuitous route by the way of Ft. Bridger on account of there being more grass and plenty of water by that route.

Our teams were now beginning to fail and we found it necessary to favor them as much as possible the roads being very heavy in places often traveling

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for miles through deep sand and long stretches without water, the nights were quite cool and the days uncomfortably warm.

In the evening after supper was over a violin or other musical instrument was brought forth to pass away the time as there was only one or two young ladies in the company, the boys would often have what they termed a stag dance.

We found Ft. Bridger a small stockade used as a rendezvous for trappers and for Indian trade, we here saw a small band of domesticated mountain goats and sheep. From here to the Bear River Valley the road for the most of the way passed through a rough mountainous country. After entering Bear River Valley the road was comparatively level to Soda Springs. The most remarkable of these springs was one called Steamboat Spring. It made a hissing noise very similar to the escape pipe of a steamboat. Some of them had the form of a cone or crater on a small scale probably formed by a sediment from the water. Some of these cones were vacated being entirely dry, the ground in the vicinity of these springs on passing it sounded like it might be hollow underneath, many of the company professed to relish the water but I could not drink it. The Indians and trappers were in the habit of collecting in this vicinity when the emigrants were passing to trade with them, one of our company bought a very good pony for which he paid one cotton shirt, fifteen loads of powder and ball, and a small butcher knife, costing in all about two dollars in the states, there were the Snakes or Shawnees they were quite friendly and anxious to trade. The second day after leaving Soda Spring we arrived at Fort Hall on Snake River. This was a Hudson Bay Co. Fort and carried on a considerable fur trade with the surrounding Indian tribes. Shortly after leaving Fort Hall we came to where the California road turned

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off, a number of our company took this road the most of these we believe intending to turn off ^{on} the Applegate route to the Willamette Valley, but by some means most of them kept on for California, a number of whom perished from starvation in the Sierra Nevada Mountains near what is now known as Donner Lake.

The most of our company kept on the old emigrant road ^{passing} Snake River near Salmon Falls and thence to the Boise River striking it a few miles above where Boise City now stands. The Snake River country here for about two hundred and fifty miles is a sandy desert country, its chief productions being sage brush and rattlesnakes. The river is generally difficult of access being shut in on either side with high bluffs of basaltic rock.

Some ten miles above Clarks Ferry on Snake River are Falls said to exceed the Falls of Niagara in point of height but a far less volume of water. In a number of places we saw considerable bodies of water rushing out of these bluffs in places equal to a small river. Upon reaching higher land from ten to thirty miles from the river it is less barren there being considerable bunch grass and some scattering juniper, hare, sage hens, and antelope are occasionally seen. The margin of the small streams running from the mountains are skirted with willow also cotton wood in places and occasionally meadow land is found where wild hags are out for the Oregon Overland Stage Company now connecting ~~km~~ with the Central Pacific Railroad at Kelton.

The road here was extremely wearisome for both man and beast, the sun's rays reflecting from the rock and sand made the heat very oppressive but the nights were comfortably cool. Some thirty miles from Clark's ferry and about one and a half miles from Clover Creek station are some hot springs they are

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about three-fourths of a mile from the stage road in this vicinity we saw considerable evidence of volcanic action, we noticed in one place where the earth had been hove up at an angle of about thirty degrees with a large fissure in it of considerable length. About four miles east of Rattle Snake Station is another hot spring, there are probably many such in this section of the country. On entering Boise River Valley we saw many Indians they had numerous fine horses. A favorite past time with them seemed to be in chasing hare on horseback. A number of them would mount their horses armed with their bow and quiver; they have being numerous there was no trouble in starting one. After jumping one up they would all pursue it, one Indian leading out a little in advance of the others. The hare on being closely pursued would soon dodge behind sage brush and track on another course when some of the Indians a little behind would take their turn in pursuit. The hare, dodge which way he might, found himself hotly pursued and in a short time would begin to fag, when an Indian would string his bow sending an arrow through its body.

Our route lay down Boise River to its junction with Snake River where we crossed over to the south side of the latter stream near old Fort Boise. Our teams being very much fagged we traveled by east stages along this stream there being plenty of grass with wood and water convenient. Some twenty miles below Boise City and about opposite Middletown on the south side of the river is the seat of the Ward massacre in the summer of 1854, where all but two lads (who were left for dead but afterwards came to and made their escape) some forty persons in all men and women and children were massacred by the hand of the ruthless savages. It appears they had been annoyed by the

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Indians for some time when while they were moving the Indians being considerably reinforced made a final charge, the men being few in number were soon killed or mortally wounded the women in endeavoring to soothe their dying husbands and brothers were ruthlessly taken away and subjected to the most brutal outrages such as savage demons alone could perpetrate. The savages after satiateing their beastly desires relieved the suffering agonies of their victims by dispatching them with the tomahawk and scalping knife. Two of the boys, the eldest about fifteen years old made their escape, neither one knowing of the escape of the other after wandering some time they were found by some soldiers from Fort Boise. The soldiers together with a number of emigrants that were encamped near Fort Boise went in company to the scene of the massacre and succeeded in capturing a portion of the Indians engaged in the slaughter some of whom they killed in capturing the others, those captured were taken to the scene of the massacre, rude gallows were soon erected and the offenders hung. Their bodies left hanging as a warning to all others in the vicinity. These gallows stood until about a year ago when they fell down. The bodies of the whites were all gathered up and put in one grave near by. The body of one young woman was found in the bushes a considerable distance from the rest, the woman bore evidence of torture that would make your heart sick.

On visiting this grave in October last, it brought very vividly before our minds many incidents of bygone days how we ourselves came near meeting with a similar fate. Here lie the mortal remains of those who no doubt left their homes with bright visions of the future they had passed through many trials on the way, worried and fatigued traveling through the burning

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sands of Snake River and no doubt believed they were about through the worst part of their journey when they met with their horrible fate. Other massacres have taken place, one near Salmon Falls another in the vicinity of the hot springs on the south side of Snake River together with many individual lives at different times. It would require volumes to describe the many encounters and conflicts of the early pioneers with the Indians in the Boise and M Owyhee country but these are things of the past; the red man has had to yield to the superior powers of the pale face.

Paulina (a noted Indian chief of the Shawnee tribe) the scourge of the mountains has gone to the spirit land, he contended till the last remnant of his followers quailed at the fall of their might chief and sued for peace.

Note: Whether this article written for Harper and Brothers was ever finished and published, I do not know, but I do know that J. M. Harrison, my grandfather wrote and published two books, one called Harrison's Guide and Resources of the Pacific Slope, embracing Washington Territory, giving a minute description of its lands and facilities for settlement, land laws, climate, resources, etc. Published by C. A. Murdock & Co., printers, 532 Clay Street, San Francisco, 187 6

Also a book of information, and Settler's Guide for the Pacific Slope, including the states of California, Oregon, Nevada, and the territories of Washington and Idaho, with a description of the peculiarities of each. Describing minutely all the more important bodies of the Public Lands on the Pacific Slope, Facilities for Settlement, Markets, Health, etc. Published by C. A. Murdock & Co., Book and Job Printers, San Francisco, 1875.

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Carlotta Lang Quinn.