

TO CALIFORNIA IN 1850.

Isaac Julian Harvey
1816-1899.

Travels to Missouri in 1839 and
The Journey to California in 1850.

This journal was written by Isaac Julian Harvey in
1897 at the request of his grand daughter Miss
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Trip to California in 1850.

I advertised for 12 mechanics to go to California, via Oregon and work and give me one half of the net proceeds for 12 months after our arrival in the country. I soon got my number and I crossed the Missouri River at St. Joseph the 20th of May 1850. We travelled with the cholera for 1000 miles. None of my company had any touch of it. I had two horses at the start for my own use to hunt grass and water ahead of the teams. I had three and 5 pair of cattle to each. We shipped our wagons and clothing, etc. to Cincinnati and thence to St. Louis and then to Carrolton up the Missouri river. Going up the Missouri River we were crowded with passengers for California and the boat had many cases of smallpox. When we landed at Carlton one of my men John Mills, a big Scotchman broke out with the disease. I made arrangements to leave him to be cared for as it was only about 50 miles to Utica up Grand River where I intended to camp for 10 or 20 days to buy more cattle and visit my fathers family. I bought oxen enough to start with the wagons and our luggage so we bid John goodbye. I told him the road and where he could find us when he got well. It was drizzling every day. After we had gone 8 or 10 miles over rolling prairies some of the boys saw a man pop over a ridge with a blanket over his head. We stopped the teams and rode back to see and sure enough there was John Mills in the rain and a fully developed case of smallpox. I asked him if he was crazy. He said "Not much" made up my mind that I was not going to stay there by myself so I just started on the wagon tracks. I thought I could make your camp sometime that night." The teams were waiting so John got in a wagon and we drove on until evening and then camped for the night. Next morning we all started in good shape, John Mills no worse. That evening we located near Utica, south of the west branch of Grand River about 50 miles south of my fathers in Grundy County.

I stopped two days to arrange things before I started for Grundy

County. I returned in 10 or 12 days and found Mills sound and well and none of the others affected. I found my folks all well except Bro. Evan. He was assessor of the county and was laying off when I got there. He assisted me in buying stock and I sold 80 acres for \$3.50 per acre that I paid \$2.50 per acre in 1839 and took my pay in cattle and top prices.

About the 1st of May we started for St Jo on the Missouri River. Drove very slowly watching for good grass. On the 20th of May we crossed the river and started for Oregon and California. Good roads and plenty of grass. We got out about 200 miles at noon as we always eat lunch and turned to see our teams. We had for seven days been meeting teams coming back and reporting the cholera was very bad up the Platte River. Well, one wagon had lost its camp kettle and I was waiting for a returning wagon to buy one. While we were eating one of the men called to me that there were two wagons on the return. I went down to the road ahead of the teams and waited for them to come up. When they got to me there was only one driver, a young man not over 20 years old driving both teams. He was crying and making such a fuss that I had great difficulty in finding out what was the matter. Finally I got the teams stopped and him quieted so that I could understand him. He said his uncle in the hind wagon was dead and had been since yesterday and his father was in the front wagon nearly died last evening. No one would come near him to bury his uncle so he had driven all night. I ordered him to drive out on a nice grassy knoll and unhitch his cattle as they were starved. About crazy he obeyed me like a child. I returned to my camp and reported the facts and requested them to follow me down to the wagons and we would dig a grave and bury the dead man. They got shovels as each wagon had a spade or shovel as part of the outfit. I located the grave and they had it about dug and some of them went after the dead uncle. About this time the young man broke loose a wonderful howling

and said his father was dead also so they enlarged the grave and put both men in side by side. I quieted the young man and gave him something to eat and let his team fill up. We helped him hitch up his teams and he started for Missouri greatly improved. We returned to our wagons and hitched and I saddled one of my saddle horses (had 2) and let the other follow along. I always went ahead in the afternoon to find a good camping place which required three things, wood, water and grass. Before I left the wagons it was very plain that my crowd all had the blues and we met another returning crowd of several wagons who had been as far out as the South Platte. Among them was a man by the name of John Renfro that I had bought Pre-emption from in 1879. He advised by all means to turn back as everybody was dying of cholera and told me of several of my acquaintances, Nordike and Scott close by me in Missouri. My men talked with the crowd with long faces. I was wondering by myself what to do, return back through the cholera about as bad as in front, my business all disarranged and my outfit worthless. I finally made up my mind to go ahead as far as I could and make the round trip if my health and strength permitted. As soon as my mind was fully settled and determined on going through and nothing else my energy and confidence returned to me and I was cheerful and jolly from that afternoon through the entire trip home. That evening and night was a gloomy time with my men but I did not let on and was jolly and determined on my course of action. Next morning at hitching up time I gave orders as usual. The men drove up the cattle and hitched up the teams and then stood in 2 and 3s in close conversation. I let them talk around some little time then I quietly said "Boys you have been consulting among yourselves yesterday afternoon and nearly all night and all this morning. I do not care very much what you have decided and one thing certain

I do not propose to oppose any of you or all if you wish to go back home. You can have one team and plenty of provisions to take you. As for the other two wagons and teams I am going to try and get through with them. If you leave me I can get two drivers. You know I have two saddle animals and I now can tell you that I have \$500.00 in gold and I am going through if I can, no turning back with me. If any or all of you wish to continue the trip I will do all I can to get you through and spend every dollar I have if necessary. You have all heard what I said. It is now for you to decide for yourselves. Return if you prefer but after this not one pound of provisions can any of you have to return on and no team while I am alive." I waited some time, perhaps half an hour. It was Jim Kinsey's day to drive in the lead as the teams led day about. I said to Jim, "Lead off" as though I knew he would. He slowly went up to his team and started them headed for Oregon or California. I rode along the line and told the boys not to be so slow as we are half an hour behind time and they fell in behind Jim Kinsey. Told Jim to move on as everything was ready. Jim started up and everyone followed and by noon all were jolly and said they would go through or die in the attempt. From that day on we were known as the jolly crowd. There was a team and 4 men that followed us up the Platte River, very nice young men. Their captain was taken with cholera very bad. The boys worked hard all night with him and he pulled through and when we got to South Platte he was riding his horse and bossing his team.

South Platte is wide and very changeable bottom, quick sand. Many teams had great trouble in crossing. I had five pair of cattle to each team and ordered two men on each side of a team so as to keep them straight and not to allow them to stop. If one of them

fell down in the quicksand keep the others going and pull them out. I rode in front and we went across without any trouble, only the boys were wet up to their waists. One or two fell down and got wet all over - that was only fun for the others. The Brown team started in after seeing us cross so easily. Brown on his horse ahead but he had only one driver wading to keep the team moving. After about half way across he stepped into a deep place and went all under and some of the team did the same. The wagon stopped and was settling in the quick sand. Capt. Brown was a very profane man and he rode back in a perfect rage, ordered all hands out in the water to help straighten the team and every man to a wheel and he off his horse lifting at a wheel himself. I rode back and directed and helped on the off side of the team and we got across on a beautiful meadow and hundreds of teams. We soon set our tents and sent the stock to grass which was in great abundance.

As soon as Capt. Brown got across he was taken with a chill and all hands did everything they could but the cholera had him in the worst form. In two hours he was scarcely nothing but skin and bones, vomiting and purging continuously so long as he had the strength. He lay unconscious until about 2 o'clock and then quit breathing. I did not have any hope of his recovery after I looked at him when he was taken down about 10 o'clock that evening. It was a beautiful clear evening, so common in that country. I strolled out among the emigrants, many sick and some dying. You could hear the lamentations of wives and children, some few men sobbing. I am by nature very sympathetic although I had schooled myself for the last month to control myself to help bury the dead and see men dying nearly every day. That evening I broke down but was all alone, no one to be affected by my weakness. About this

time I heard a young girls voice - she was singing a little childish song. I followed the sound and found a girl cleaning up her few dishes and baking bread for tomorrow and her father lying in the tent recovering from a fever. Her mother was dead and she and her father had started for Oregon with 2 pair of oxen and wagon. I found him a very intelligent man and I got over the blues and returned to camp to see that Capt. Brown was past hope and the boys said he was gone. Next morning we buried him. The three others proposed to me to leave their wagon as it was rather heavy and give me four steers and 2 yoke of cattle to haul their grub and luggage to Portland, Oregon. I consented and we all got through. I will here mention we bid Kit Carson goodbye as he was going south to get out of the cholera. We had traveled several days together but he would not travel or camp near the emigrant trains - said he would prefer fighting Indians than ^{to} travel behind emigrant wagons with their goods tied up ^{to} the bows loaded, falling down and going off every few days. One morning just as a large train was finishing breakfast a young man was setting on a wagon tongue had loaded his pistol and capped it. His thumb slipped off the cock and shot him in the breast and he fell over dead, never spoke. Carson and I were about 20 yards away and we got there just as they were raising him up. His father, mother and several brothers and sisters were around him - the mother weeping over him and all the family. We turned away and Carson said I have been telling you all the time these emigrants not knowing how to use firearms were more dangerous to themselves and everyone around them. This is the same Indian fighter and guide to Gen. Fremont in 1845. (He and old Jim Beckworth of Buckworth Valley in Plumas County) I herded cattle with him in 1852 and 53 and I

knew all of his book before he wrote it. We all moved on in good health. Plenty of cholera as over in a Hollow we found 28 fresh graves, among them one of my best friends a tanner in Trenton, Missouri - Scott Noradyke. Everybody was more reconciled to seeing death. I rode off the road 2 or 300 yards to a wagon and tent and saw before I got to them 2 men shoot their pistols at a mark. We saw a fresh grave and another grave dug already for use. I entered into conversation with them and they told me four of them had started for California and pledged themselves to stay together and help each other and bury the dead as long as they could. The fresh grave there is one of us and the unoccupied grave is for another of us in the tent breathing his last. As soon as he is dead and buried we intend to move on if the cholera does not catch either of us before we get started. I asked them how long they had been there and they said 4 or 5 days. I rode on and they resumed their shooting. I mention this circumstance to show the kind of men crossing the plains in those early days. The bravest of the brave, kind hearted, honest and full of energy. As a rule the cowardly did not start and the sickly dared not so to take them as a body of men they have never been surpassed in any way, physically and mentally as time has proved.

We travelled up Wind River by Court House Rock, up Sweet water through the south pass. I was looking for a narrow gorge of mountains just wide enough for a wagon and team to squeeze through. One afternoon I left Sweetwater to my left looking for grass for camp. Camp on the river and drive the stock up the mountain to good bunch grass, the best grass for stock I ever saw. I did not find any just to suit me. Looked south across Sweetwater, as I supposed about a mile off so I started to cross over. When I went to cross

the small creek, while my horse was drinking I saw the water running to my right. For a few seconds I was the worst lost man in America - when did I cross Sweetwater and get turned around. I knew I started out on the north side and had been traveling up stream to my left. All of a sudden it occurred to me that I had passed through the south pass and this was the water from the famous Pacific Springs leading to Green River. I was through the South Pass and did not know when I went through. I was then on the Pacific slope and crossed over and found a good camp.

I went north of Salt Lake City as the mormons were down on Missourians generally and many Missouri trains got into trouble. If their stock got into gardens or any fields they were fined heavily. It was charged that the mormons would turn the cattle in on purpose to make trouble. I knew many emigrants that were ruined and had to work their way to Oregon or California. I went across Bart River, one of the most beautiful valleys I ever saw, - miles up and down the valley the waving wild flax about three feet high in full bloom, a beautiful blue.

At Fort Hall on the south bank of the south fork of the Columbia River, called Snake River, the Hudson Bay Company was in full blast. The store and all the buildings were surrounded by heavy adobe walls, 10 or 12 feet high, about 6 feet thick, heavy doors closed the entrance and all their buildings inside were forts for defense. They only let in a few of the wild tribes at a time and put a few of the head men and women in the guard house as hostage for the good behavior of the tribe while the trading was going on. They traded with them through a long window, only a limited number allowed inside the corral at a time. Capt. Grant, an Englishman was in command and had been for many years. He had a squaw