

Pioneer

Days

By Mary Jane Hayden

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you need never return for I shall look upon you as dead." He answered, "Well, if that is the way you feel about it I will not go." Mind you,—no word of this was said in anger, for we had never differed in our two years of married life, and so it was settled that we should go the next year to the California Gold Mines.

It was now December, 1849, two young men returning from California bringing each about a thousand dollars in gold, which was wealth in those days and which set the whole country agog. It was not so much the money they had as the glowing accounts of how easily it was to get the gold, one could pick it out of the rocks with a pocket knife. Is it any wonder we had a return of the fever.

THE START.

In the meantime, my babe had died at the age of two months and five days. We had sold our little farm and household goods, bought ten young oxen, two cows and a horse, a strong new wagon; and on the tenth day of March, 1850, we commenced our journey across the plains and Rocky Mountains.

Twenty-five hundred miles from Jefferson, Wisconsin, to Vancouver, Oregon, by our route. Through Wisconsin and Iowa traveling was necessarily slow as the frost was coming out of the ground and the valleys were full of water from the melting snow on the hillsides.

We stopped at hotels and farm houses until we reached Council Bluffs (then only an Indian Trading Post). On April first we crossed the Mississippi River and pitched our tents near the Mormon winter quarters, where we rested our teams and waited for the grass to grow. Here we finished laying in our supplies of bacon, flour, cornmeal, rice, sugar, dried apples, dried plums and peaches, coffee, tea, a very large cheese and hard bread; besides what we brought from home, such as hams, shoulders, butter and eggs. We also had five gallons of vinegar. (This

was before the days of canned fruits.) We had the best outfit in the train, I mean as to variety. Oh, I had quite forgotten the beans. Hard tack was very convenient. Wood was very scarce most of the way, a very little being along the Platte River, but plenty of buffalo chips until after we passed Fort Laramie and then only willows for wood. We sometimes used dry grass.

Council Bluffs had been the outfitting post for Mormons and other emigrants for a number of years, and they kept a good supply of provisions and groceries. They had a blacksmith shop and a tin shop, also made tents and wagon covers. We had to have a new tent as ours was too small and my husband was going to buy one, but they had none that I liked. In looking over the camp I found one that just suited me, but could not get one made like it as they had no pattern. I said that I could make one, but was ridiculed for the idea, but finally Mr. Hayden got the ozenberg and in two weeks we had a tent that I was very proud of. It had laped seams, too. I was greatly complimented for one so young, for I was not quite out of my teens yet. Mr. Copeland helped me to measure and sew the tent as I had planned and cut it.

When we crossed the Mississippi River we were in the Indian territory. (It was all Indian territory to the summit of the Rocky Mountains and all Oregon from there to the Pacific Ocean, but still, Indian territory). Before leaving Council Bluffs we thought it best to organize as a company, not only against the Indians, but ourselves, for people are not the same when removed from the restraining influence of society and law. Now when this was done we were ready to start, an organized company of ninety-five men and five women, with thirty-one wagons. The following is a copy of the laws by which we were governed on our long journey and they all held good:—

“CONSTITUTION OF THE WISCONSIN BLUES”

(Organized May 8th, 1850.)

Article No. 1—The officers of this company shall consist of a Colonel, Captain, Lieutenant and Orderly Sergeant.

Article No. 2—The duty of the Colonel is to take command of the company; in case of sickness or absence of the Colonel the duty shall devolve upon the Captain, Lieutenant or Orderly Sergeant, as the case may be. The duty of the Orderly Sergeant shall be to keep a list of the whole company, detail a guard, and appoint one man as Sergeant.

Article No. 3—That we will observe the Sabbath Day by laying in camp when circumstances permitted.

Article 4—That all controversies arising shall be arbitrated by three men, each party to choose one man from the company, and these two shall name a third, and their decision shall be final.

Article No. 5—This company shall have the power by a majority of its members to remove officers and to elect new ones.

Article No. 6—That we will admit no one into this company who has any contagious disease or has been exposed to the same.

Article No. 7—If any in this company should loose his team we feel ourselves bound to take such persons through to California.

Article No. 8—That Robert T. Hughson and Henry Callahan shall act as physicians to this company.

OFFICERS—Colonel, A. M. Scott; Captain, Isaiah Sherman; Lieutenant, John Moore; Orderly Sergeant, H. B. Smith.

Members—Josiah Smith, Jefferson County, Wisconsin; H. B. Smith, Gay Hayden and wife; Sumner Barker; Edward Copeland; Isaiah Sherman, wife

and child. In all, as stated before, there were ninety-five men and five women.

On May the 10th, 1850, having completed our arrangements, we bid good-bye to the barren hills of Council Bluffs and Kaneshville, also to civilization. Our route lay up the North Bank of the Platte River to Fort Larimie. Indians were numerous and troublesome in the way of begging and stealing, also watching for opportunities to stampede our stock. We had good weather from the start and soon came to the buffalo country where there was plenty of grass. This was a picnic for several weeks. Then we commenced to have a thunder shower every night.

The next morning the sun would be shining brightly, no mud and no dust. Our hunters used to bring in some antelope, which is the best of all wild game. Once we got a young buffalo cow which was delicious eating. We could see thousands of buffalo on the bluffs, but they were very shy, tho' very dangerous to encounter as a herd. In 1845 part of a train of emigrants was run over by buffaloes and badly wrecked. Several members were crippled. Mrs. Markham of Portland, Oregon, was badly hurt at this time, having several ribs broken. (I have this from a friend of hers.)

THE STAMPEDE.

Shortly after leaving Kaneshville we had a thunder storm every night somewhere between four and ten o'clock, but nothing unusual about it except the regularity with which it came. We had become watchful of the weather and early in June one day we thought we saw signs of a storm, and like good sailors, we furled our sails and went into camp early and made preparations for it. The cattle were grazed and put in the corral, everything ready, yet it came with such violence we were shocked. It was one of those blood-curdling thunder storms such as only Nebraska can produce. Such prolonged vivid

flashes of lightning and such thunder. It seemed as if the heavens and earth were striving for the mastery. I have witnessed many hard thunder storms in Maine, Wisconsin, Minnesota and other states; but nothing like Nebraska. It was not up in the clouds but right with us and lasted nearly four hours. When it had subsided and everything was still we had nearly all retired, (I was sitting on my bed in our wagon), when very suddenly the earth trembled and something struck our wagon with great force and it commenced to go over on its side. I caught the bows of the wagon to keep from going over onto my husband who had retired. In a short time (perhaps one or two minutes) everything was very quiet and we crawled out from under the wagon and found every oxen gone save one, which lay on his back close to our wagon with his horns in the ground and could not get up. The cattle had all stampeded, three hundred and forty head, and they all went over three wagons. Ours was the middle wagon. The one in front of ours had three people in it; my husband and self in ours, a widow and child in the rear end. The front wagon was not badly broken, but ours was a wreck, Mrs. Sherman's was badly broken also. It was estimated that over two hundred head of cattle went over us that night. Think of the weight of cattle on our wagons, they pressed the wheels down through the sod into the ground up to the hubs, then pushed it over, breaking the axles and twisting the spokes out, besides many other breaks. Mrs. Sherman's wagon had one wheel broken and many other breaks. This was all in the night and still raining. When the cattle went out they knocked down tents and caught the guards between them and carried them several rods and their blankets were picked up a quarter of a mile away. The cattle scattered in every direction. We could not trail them on account of the buffalo tracks.

We remained in camp ten days hunting stock of which we only found a part. Individually we found

five of our ten head. We were a hundred and fifty miles from any timber, save for a few young cottonwoods growing on an island in the Platte River which was very dangerous to cross on account of quicksand. We had no boat, but Mr. Barker and Mr. Copeland swam over and cut down several small trees and floated them to camp which they used to make wagon tongues, using the old ones to repair other breaks. Fortunately, Mr. Barker was a wheelwright and had brought a few tools in case we should need them.

Here is another one of the miracles:—As the herd went over our wagon they knocked down a large tent in which six men were sleeping, and trampled everything into the ground in the way of camp equipage, but no one was hurt. In relating this part of our experience I always say that if I was reading a book and came to such a revelation as this, I should throw it aside thinking it too much of a romance for me to believe. But I have a very realizing sense of it which I am not likely to forget. The six men who were in the tent were all English miners from the tin mines in England and one had been hurt, his skull having been trepanned. He was so frightened he had convulsions and died. This was the second death in our train, our Captain having died from drinking alcohol shortly after leaving Kanessville. After remaining in camp ten days hunting stock and repairing wagons we thought it best to move on. I don't remember the number of animals lost, but all lost some—from one to five. Five being our loss. Everyone was willing to live up to the constitution and any extra animal was put with another to equalize the teams.

IN GOD'S GALLERY OF NATURAL ART.

As we approached Fort Larimie the road became very sandy, which was very hard on the teams. On arriving at the Fort we replenished our teams which

took a great deal of our money. From Fort Larimie was new country. We entered the Black or Flint Hills which cut the cattles' feet so that many of them were very lame. Some few brought sole leather shoes which were put on with large tacks and was some help.

In a few days we came to the beautiful Sweetwater. The gateway to the Rocky Mountains. It is the most beautiful mountain stream of clear cold water I ever saw running between very narrow but very high perpendicular banks. Imagine the difference (if you can) between it and the muddy water of the Platte River. I thought the Platte Valley very beautiful, not nothing to compare with the Sweetwater Valley. One peculiar feature of this part of the valley is an immense granite boulder, oblong in shape, and estimated to be between seventy-five and one hundred feet high. This was at the north end and somewhat overhanging, on which was painted Captains Lewis and Clark's names with the date of July the 4th, 1805, and to our great disgust we saw where some vandals had put their names higher up. Surveyor Anderson of the Northern Pacific, tells of another rock of similar dimensions near the Yellowstone River, but which is of gray sandstone, on which Lewis and Clark had placed their names. But to go back to Independence Rock, some of our men paced around it and said that it was a quarter of a mile around. The end was overhanging, the east was very steep (almost perpendicular), the south end was much lower and the west side I climbed without help and spent a good portion of the day on it. A peculiar feature of this rock was two large boulders one much larger than the other, the size of a good sized garage and which seemed to lay so lightly that I could push it off with one hand. Another peculiarity about it was two very highly polished spots on it quite far apart. Some thought it was where lightning had struck. Lewis and Clark were here on the 4th of July, 1805, and named it Independence Rock,

so stated the inscription.

Our route lay up the north side of the Platte River, passed Ash Hollow, Scott's Bluff, Chimney Rock, Court House Rock, Old Fort Larimie, through the Black Hills to the crossing of the North Platte, up Sweetwater, passed Devil's Gate, Independence Rock and through South Pass, where a beautiful stretch of road lay before us. From South Pass we crossed the forty-mile desert to Green Soda Springs and Steamboat Springs. The water from one of those springs made a very pleasant drink by adding sugar. Steamboat Springs emitted puffs of steam like a high pressure steamboat.

Where Bear River turned south the road forked, the one following the river going to Salt Lake and California; the other crossing the divide to Fort Hall and Snake River. Water and grass were very scarce and much stock died. We came through by the way of Powder River, Grande Ronde, crossed the Blue Mountains, where we found many stranded, out of provisions and many sick who had lost all their teams. One man had two oxen and two wheels of his wagon, another had one oxen with a pack on him. Others lay in their tents sick, waiting for help which they were expecting from Fort Dalls on the Columbia River, also from Oregon City and Portland.

Here we divided our remaining provisions with the sick. I thank God that we had it for them. The next day the looked-for help commenced to arrive. One government team with supplies and a doctor from Fort Dalls. We left the next day and met others coming with clothing, blankets, groceries and medicine. They offered us help but we did not need any. They seemed anxious to be of assistance to all who needed it. I never knew what hospitality really meant until I came to Oregon and Washington. I have been an eye witness to cases like this. A family comes in late in the fall with an old wagon, one

or two yoke of oxen, a wife and many children, with only their worn-out camp equipage and would be taken into the family. This was the second family Mr. Brown kept through the winter with this understanding that they could stay with them, and he already had another emigrant family on his hands, which, with his own family of six; made three families, in one house of four rooms. The men could go out to find places to take up or to hunt work, and if they had no work they could work for him. If the men found land they wanted Mr. Brown gave them provisions to live on and seed to plant and helped them build their first cabin and then wait for his pay until they had raised a crop and could pay him. No interest was charged. And these people all lived just as well as their owner did. That is true hospitality. That is loving your neighbor as yourself. We received the same kind treatment from Mr. Brown when we got there and of which I will tell you later.

INDIANS.

It was hard to locate places as there were no state or county lines. We saw no Indians after leaving Fort Larimie until within fifty miles of Fort Hall. (There was nothing for them to live on), then they became very troublesome. When we came to the junction of the California and Oregon roads, about ten wagons of us took the Oregon road. There were three large droves of loose stock ahead of us besides the many trains of emigrants, all of which kept the grass short and the trail strewn with dangers which we were anxious to avoid. We traveled through one section of sandy roads where the crickets were so numerous that the cattle crushed them at every step. These, the Indians used for food, as they were very large. Another place a kind of small lizard was as numerous as the crickets. It was pitiful to see the little lizards, they were a light brown on the back and white on the under side and when hurt they

turned on their backs and drew their legs and arms up. They looked like a tiny little baby, really pathetic to see them.

Within forty or fifty miles of Fort Hall, which is now Idaho, we began to meet Indians every few miles. Sometimes a lone one, oftener two, but never more than three. The nearer we approached Fort Hall the bolder the Indians became, and one day Mr. Barker and I were traveling alone as the others were hunting stock, when three buck Indians stopped us in the road, held up their guns and asked for powder. We told them we had none (which was true), but they did not believe us and so proceeded to pull me out of the wagon when Uncle Sumner Barker applied his whip right vigorously, using some strong language which they understood, for most Indians would pick up a whip and swing it around and say, "Whoa Haw, God Dam". Prodding them with the long brad in the butt of the whipstock they let go of me. They would not have stopped but for the fear of other wagons being near. These same Indians undertook to strip Mr. Hayden and Mr. Copeland who were back hunting our cows.

The farther we traveled the deeper the dust, and we got into the habit of each team keeping by itself, and one day there came a young, clean, well-dressed Indian running and skipping along out of the hills and going up to Mr. Hayden (who was walking), greeting him in the most cordial manner and putting his arm around Mr. Hayden who returned the compliment, and thus they walked and tried to talk for quite a time, when the Indian stopped and pointing towards the wagon asked in Chinook how many wagons were coming before the sun went down. No one had spoken a word while the two were talking. I did not know what he said, but something told me what he meant and I answered by signs "twenty", by holding up both hands twice with all fingers and thumbs extended. He understood, for he immediately turned and run back into the hills. I have