Our Family

22 May 27th was the day set for the start. Uncle Sam was promptly on hand, quite early in the morning with his outfit--he had made the trip in 1849 and again in 1852, so he knew much better how to prepare. He had three wagons, two with oxen, a spring wagon with horses--for wife and daughter. One item in their supplies was 600 lbs. of bacon, not just for his crew, but to be sure to have grease if an animal got alkali. He had 100 head of loose animals, mostly cows. Besides his family he had three young men helpers:

Samuel Mewhinney, (Uncle Sam)
Maria Mewhinney, (Aunt Sis)
Teresa Mewhinney
John Mewhinney
Hugh Mewhinney
George Haven
John Newcomb
Enos St. John

23 As their company came to a halt, we hastily tossed a few more things in the wagon, then the good-bye's to the relatives left behind and then we were off. Uncle Sam's wagons first,

My Brother-in-Lwa Next,
Aurelius O. Carpenter,
Helen M. Carpenter,
Henry Wilson

Then our wagon and family;
Thomas McCowen,
Amily McCowen,
Emily McCowen,
Hale McCowen,
Blanche McCowen (nick named Kittie)
three months old,
Sam Fawcett.

The loose stock was driven in the rear. They soon quieted down, and seemingly accepted their fate as a matter of course and were anxious to follow as soon as the wagons would start, as though imbued with the spirit of the song that father was singing so often:

"Oh, California,
That's the land for me,
I'm bound for California,
The gold dust for to see."

We made rather short drives for a few days till the animals would get accustomed to their work. Our road was over fine undulating prairie, much the same as from where we started.

24 Rather hilly when we reached the Little Blue and Big Blue rivers. Toward evening Uncle Sam would ride ahead to select a camping place, Soon after passing Laramie a drove of buffalo was sighted; several of our marksmen went after them, and were fortunate to kill one. They came back for oxen to drag it to camp. Our company soon had all the meat they cared to take; just then another train came along that was glad to take what our company had left. We frequently camped very near the South Platte. One night there was furious wind that awoke every one. Aunt Sis peeked out from the wagon cover; she had a new silk handkerchief tied on her head but the wind whisked

it off and into the river.

We traveled along that river for several weeks, not a tree or bush--buffalo chips for fuel. Once we camped where the water was shallow near the bank, some of us tried wading very cautiously. It was then I learned how quick-sand acted. To stand still in the water one finds himself getting deeper and deeper by the sand steadily shifting from under foot.

We would lay by a day every eight or ten days, where it was favorable, or when oxen must be shod. Then washing and extra cooking done. While camping thus, other trains would pass, we in turn would pass them. Thus we often saw the same people. One little outfit we often saw, a cart made from the hind wheels of a wagon with a bed and the usual kind of cover, occupied by a man and wife, drawn by one yoke of oxen.

Once we saw a small cluster of trees on op-
25 posite side of the river. One day we passed the grave of a young girl; a board with name and age marked on it. A pile of stones nearly three feet high covered the grave; they must have been hauled quite a distance as no others were near that locality. That was all they could do to protect the dear one left behind. It was well they never were likely to know even that precaution failed. A few inches outside the rocks a hole about the size of a pail was dug, slanting to the grave.. A few miles further on was a grave near the road: a lot of the dirt had been dug out; if a body had lain there it had been dragged away. One evidence was plain--an Army button was picked up from the dirt.

Down a ravine at the left, some distance from the road was some tall cottonwood trees, several of them had long bundles attached horozontally to the limbs, up 30 or 40 feet. The puzzle was explained by one that said some Indians disposed of their dead in that way.

All buffalo too far away to ever get any more, so we had to be content with an occasional antelope. Late one afternoon, in the Black Hills, there was a terrific storm--thunder, lightning, rain and wind. The drivers tried in vain to make the oxen face the storm but at last had to let them turn around and stop.

Scott's Bluff was of yellowish clay, our road was at the right, the left was a perpendicular bank that served as the Plains Register; our names were inscribed there with hundreds of others that had passed. The bleached bones of cattle frequently along the way served for bulletin boards, and were eagerly picked up to learn
26 when other trains had passed--of course our mite was added. The cattle likewise had their bulletins; whenever nearing a dead animal, the loose stock would start on the run for it, circling around, pawing and making a perfect bedlam with their bellowing, each one striving to get its nose to the spot.

June 21st we were traveling along near the river in the usual monotonous manner. when called to halt and prepare to cross the river. It seemed queer to think of driving into the vast expanse of water, at least a half mile wide, although it appeared nearer a mile before we were across. The loads were re-arranged. Father had brought thin boards to use as a shelf to pile much of our goods on to protect, if possible, from the water. Men rode ahead as pilots to discover a safe passage, two men with every team, one on each side, or the oxen would have swayed with the tide, and a few times they were swimming. All our teams crossed without trouble. As the last ones were nearing the bank, Sam Fawcett on a mule rode off to one side and plunged into a hole; all we could see for a few breaths was legs of mule and man, but they struggled out, without injury.

Another train started to cross at the same time, but three hundred yards lower down, and got in such deep water that they drew out on a little island for an hour till help from our train piloted them safely to shore.

A few other trains were there that had crossed the day before, but were laying by to dry out, as every one had to.

The next day was our time. Some of the men
27 spent part of the day with their guns exploring around--no game to be found, but they brought to camp the bleached skull of a white person, all there was to show that one of our race had perrished far from home. No doubt death was caused by savages. There is as much difference in the color of human bones, as in the skin. The African and Indian are quite brown.

That day we strolled to some of the other camps. In Ingram's train was an old grandmother, sitting in a chair, too feeble to get out of the wagon, she said it was "too much trouble to help her out." The daughter and family were going to California, no one to leave her with, so brought her along.

The next morning we resumed our journey, then on and on with no special change for days. Then one afternoon a few Indians came from the hills, and rode by us for a time, wanting to sell moccasins and buffalo robes. Mother bought a beautiful robe then for a small one exchanged a bright patchwork quilt.

We had all the milk we wanted, just by miling. Uncle Sam had a great many cows whose calves were left behind. Before leaving Kansas a neighbor who had been to California, told us of something that proved to be a very palatable dish, especially when not convenient to cook. It was to parch corn nicely and have it ground at the mill--we had about a half bushel--it was fine with a little sugar and cream or milk.

At length we reachedthe North Platte--a bridge there--and $5.00 charged for each wagon. Not far from there on the hillside at the right was something we ran up to investigate, and
28 found it had been soda, or some other mineral springs; they had boiled over and the sediment hardened, one looked like a great well curb, but all were dry; the outburst had changed into the river.

The next interesting thing for us was, when father walking ahead of the train, found where another train had camped and left some chairs and a fine sheet iron cook stove; that was hailed with delight, so much more convenient than the oven and skillet.

We traveled and traveled, no way of telling how far, but it was supposed to be fifteen or twenty miles a day. We left the Ft. Hall road to the right, that was the road for Oregon. Then a long stretch of a cheerless alkali district, often puddles of alkali water that looked much like weak coffee. But a watchful eye had to be kept on the cattle to keep them from it.

So much of our road had been such a gradual uphill that only for our leader we would not have known when at the summit of the Rocky Mountains. We had been up and down hills, but this time as we went down, the streams were running in the opposite direction.

At length we reached the Sweetwater, a stream flowing from between mountains.
29 We camped there. The next morning some one strolled just a short distance up stream around a bend, and there right in the stream was the bloated body of a big ox.

I tell you, the water kegs and canteens were quickly emptied. We thought it everything but Aqua Dulce.

When we reached Ash Hollow, there were a number of graves of soldiers that had been killed
29 in a war with the Indians. The Government had placed heavy head boards at the graves. On one sister Helen wrote:

"He sleeps his last sleep
He has fought his last battle,
No sound can awake him
To glory again,
No sound can awake him
To glory again."

One afternoon we were much surprised to meet a train of eight wagons, drawn by horses, also a few loose ones. Both trains halted and the men had quite a conference. The newcomers were fleeing from Salt Lake! they told the great secrecy with which they had planned their trip. Some of their belongings had been taken quite a long distance and secreted until the final move was made at night, women and children in each wagon.

Emily M. Horton
Our Family
1922
(Newberry Micfofilm 2 - 27)