

E.C. Axton recollections in
Sweasey Family Papers

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Platte River Road Narratives
Entry 714

ENGLAND TO AMERICA

W. J. SWEASEY - ESTHER (CURL CROUCHER) SWEASEY

THOS. CURL CROUCHER - a noted surgeon of London-philanthropist
Alex died - and Thomas' sons -
died of cholera contracted while doing public spirited
philanthropist work during cholera epidemic in late 19th
Century. Funeral said to have been one of largest ever
in London.

1837 - Mr. and Mrs. Bassett - Mr. and Mrs. English - with
their families came on same sailing vessel from England
as the Sweasey family.

Started in February and landed in May 1837.

ROBERT OWEN and FATHER were close friends in England where
both were workers for the improvement of conditions of
workingmen.

"HEARTS HAVEN" - book -

GRANDFATHER Bought farm, then when in 1850 he started for
Calif. he sold off most of horses and kept cattle.
Was quite well off and had much to dispose of - so had
an auction which lasted two days. He persuaded HENRY
AXTON, who had married ESTHER, to dispose of his farm
and accompany him to Calif. Was married in 1848, and
with husband and little boy got ready to do so. Father
fitted out 4 wagons, 4 oxen to each wagon for his own
family and as soon as he let it be known that he would
take men along who must pay \$100 a piece, many accepted

with the understanding that Father was to lead. He bought up a lot of young cows. Every man was assigned some camp duty, all men taking "turn about" at watching stock at night. One man got wood and made fire. Another set up folding stove and folding tables, another to help with the cooking. A young woman, Susan Combs, had the duty of making bread, cakes and other pastry. One of the men made mush for breakfast, syrup being used on the mush. The men who drove the oxen were accounted as that being their share. Mr. Axton drove his own team on his own wagon. The folks had a good time, still some grumbled. Five of the men, MR. BEALE, MR. GULLET, MR. PRITCHARD, LYONS and [space left blank], were musicians and brought their instruments with them, thus affording many pleasant evenings with dancing was the result.

Many nice folks (Mr. Dexter and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Connor and 2 daughters) traveled to California independent of our company, but at the same time. Mr. Dexter had been to California and bought a home near San Jose, and returned to Indiana to marry and take his wife back to California with him. They had four horses to each of their wagons instead of oxen, and when the desert was reached, they became impatient of the slow pace of the oxen, and went on ahead, and when the Sweasey train reached the table-land at the top of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, after crossing the Nevada Desert, they found the Dexter-Mitchell train stranded, every one of their horses having been frozen to death in a storm at night, where the humans too nearly froze.

So the Sweasey folks pressed some of their cows into the service of the Dexters, -- using yokes and a wagon which had been left behind by some other "trekkers". The young ladies, of whom there were two in their train, Miss Rowena Mitchell and Joanna Connor, and the Sweasey sisters were always ready for a dance wherever the ground was level. Whenever the train stopped to camp, the large barrels carried by each wagon, were filled with water from the river near which they camped, so that the people need not drink of the small streams and springs along the road. These were so alkiline and impure that they caused cholera to both animals and humans, and the successful journey of the Sweasey train was undoubtedly due to this provisions with regard to drinking water. Across the Desert, the traveling was done during the night, they resting during the great heat of the day, the night travel beginning at 5 or 6 o'clock in the evening.

Henry Axton drank of the surface water just before we entered the Nevada Desert, and was in consequence very sick. I insisted on his getting into the wagon while I would drive the team. Finally after much persuasion he allowed me to do so, and I took the whip. Of course, our team was not in the lead, so the driving was easy outside of the fact that it meant to walk beside the team all night, keeping the oxen up with the others. When daylight came and the men saw me driving the team and learned why I was doing it, they scolded me well for not telling them and allowing them to do it for me.

During our journey, we passed many trains where the teams had given out, the animals lying dead and the wagons standing well loaded with provisions, etc., the people having gone on with just what they could carry. In some instances, principally on the plains near the Platte River, cholera was contracted from drinking impure water, and oftentimes every member of other trains died off like insects.

After getting to "The Divide" in the Rocky Mountains, a dear old lady, Mrs. Bolton, who had contracted typhoid fever, died, and in order to bury her, the men appropriated the bed of a wagon deserted by some other travelers whose animals had died, and from the lumber made a coffin in which she was buried, on "The Divide". This was the only death besides that of young Fauntleroy (son of Robt. Owens' daughter) who was drowned while fording Green River, driving the cattle across the river.

Each wagon in the train was numbered, also company owning the train. Too, the wagons were loaded in its bed with sacks of flour and other produce, and the beds of the women and children were put on top of their sacks.

Left Indiana April 1st, 1850. Crossed the Wabash River to Ill. Arrived in Weaverville, Calif. Oct. 5, 1850, 6 months and 5 days, where Mr. Axton and I stopped. Father, brothers and sisters continuing on their westward journey. I counted on picking up gold enough to take us back again to

Indiana. We failed to find the gold, but made good friends who gave us friendly advice, among them Mr. Boone, brother of Daniel Boone the famous pioneer of Kentucky, who asked us to share their home. We did so and passed a happy winter with this gentleman and his son - George and his son Daniel.

Mrs. Jacobsen took me and baby Will in to share her home, we sharing in the work.