

ACROSS THE PLAINS IN '54

A STORY
FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE
OF
EARLY EMMIGRATION
TO
CALIFORNIA

BY
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PREFACE

In the preparation of this little book I had no thought of authorship; but simply to give a straightforward narrative—one that can be easily understood and appreciated by the young for whom it is intended. I make no apologies for the manner in which the different events have been brought together. I collected most of them while residing in California some years ago, and the big train spoken of, I remember when a small boy of ten. Some of those who formed a part of that outfit may still be living; if so, I hope that if this little book should fall into their hands they will pardon the mistakes, as so many years have passed and gone since then.

THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER I.

Henry and Albert, Two Neighbor Boys, go to Council Bluffs to Join a Party of Emigrants Going to California.

It was in the spring of 1854, a party of emigrants were collecting at a certain place on the Missouri River for the purpose of going to that far-famed country whose name had become a household word, namely, the Golden State of California.

I, Albert Mayhue, was at the time only twelve years old. My mother had been a widow two years.

I had three sisters: Molly, the oldest, had been married two years; Lucy, fourteen years old, and little Alice, aged ten, was my playmate. We were not very well off but succeeded in making a comfortable living by cultivating a small farm.

One of my neighbor's boys, Henry Zimmerman, lived with an old aunt, Mrs. Matilda Strong. We all called her Aunt Tildy. Aunt

mother said, "Now, girls, don't sing such mournful songs as that. Don't you see Albert is crying?"

I told her it was because it reminded me of home, for I had heard my mother and sisters sing it so often.

"Your oldest sister's name is the same as mine," said Molly, "but I think Lucy and Alice are so much prettier names than mine."

"No one likes his own name," said Mr. Hendrix; "my name is William and I think it is very homely and very common."

"It's common all right," I said, "but I am partial to it for it is my father's name also. My mother thinks Emily is the ugliest name in the world, but I think it is the prettiest because it is my mother's name."

"That's right, Albert," said Mrs. Hendrix, "I see you think a great deal of your mother!"

After singing a few more songs, and Henry had played several tunes on his violin, for he had carried that loved instrument with him, tied on his saddle horn, all the way from home, it was growing late and we retired for the night.

CHAPTER III.

The Emigrants Cross the River—Little Molly Comes Near Drowning, but Albert Plunges in and Saves Her—the Boys go Hunting and Kill Two Fine Bucks.

It was the first of May when we began to cross the Missouri River. Mr. Hendrix was well satisfied that it would be impossible for all the wagons and stock to be crossed in one day, so he made no preparations.

Henry, and I, and Jim Brown, our newest acquisition, busied ourselves helping others to get their wagons on to the boat. We worked all day and only crossed about half the wagons and teams. The riding horses were driven in and made to swim.

Just across on the west side a little town had been started a short time before, and the young fellows of this settlement took delight in helping and rendered considerable service.

Early on the following morning the crossing was resumed; and by noon most of the wagons

and teams were over. Mr. Hendrix told Jim and I and Henry to drive the cattle up near the camp to be ready to cross as soon as all the wagons and teams had been ferried over. The intention was to drive them up to the river two or three hundred yards and start them in; small boats with three men each were to take them over, one to row the boat and the other two with whips to drive and keep them going.

As soon as dinner was over we—Mr. Hendrix having already hitched up—drove one wagon down to the river, then leaving Mrs. Hendrix to see to that one, returned for the other, and while the boys and I and both the girls kept the cattle together, he crossed the river; and then returned to help us. Three or four of the other men also stayed on the east side to help with the cattle. Mr. Hendrix fetched one of his horses back and saddled up to assist also. When everything was ready we started the cattle up the river. One boat was returned to take the men and horses over that was kept to take the big herd, then take to the big boat, and the two small boats would keep the cattle going while the men and the saddle horses were ferried over, and landed just after the herd.

As soon as the cattle were started in the river they began to balk. There were ten men and two girls doing all that lay in their power to do but it seemed we could never start them in; when one got in a few feet it would turn and keep the others back. This was kept up for half an hour, until finally the old bell cow took the lead and soon was swimming for dear life.

The river was high and still rising. The old cow that wore the bell seemed to know what was wanted and never turned but kept straight on. Most of the others followed her, but a few of the younger ones turned back and showed a determination to go back to the Eastern shore. I and Molly had ridden into the river close together; she was a little in the lead, and just to my left. We were getting to pretty deep water. Her pony being smaller than mine was now breast deep. It was just here her pony stumbled over something imbedded in the sand and fell forward throwing her over his head into still deeper water. She went out of sight instantly. I was stunned for a moment, but recovering as quickly I placed one foot on my horse's neck and leaped over his head and

I caught hold of her arm and attempted to touch bottom but failed. As I arose holding to her I heard shouting and screaming. Mr. Hendrix was making for me as fast as his horse could come, but Henry, being much nearer, reached me first, and catching me by the coat collar pulled me around so I could touch the ground and keep my head out of water. I still had hold of Molly's arm and when I found I could reach the bottom and walk on it and keep my mouth above the water, I gathered her up onto my shoulder. Henry wanted to take her, but I said no, that I could get along all right now, and soon waded to shore. As I set her down on a hillock, I whispered, "You little darling girl, I would have saved you or drowned in the attempt."

"I know you would, Albert, and I love you." And, dear reader, that love has kept bright and shining for more than fifty years. Molly was only a little girl of ten, but she had the spirit of a woman.

Her sister now came and led her to the boat. The men had got the stray cattle started across the river again. Seeing those on the other side and some just ascending the bank they took heart and caused no more trouble.

I caught my horse, and mounted him and then caught Molly's pony that had strayed quite a little way off. We were soon all on board and pulling for the opposite shore.

Mrs. Hendrix was very anxious about Molly. She was very much frightened at the start, but when she saw her baby, as she sometimes called her, was safe, she soon got over her fright.

When the boat reached the other shore, she rushed on board and gathered Molly in her arms and carried her to the wagons that had not yet been taken to camp; for camp had not yet been established.

As soon as we landed we mounted our horses and rounded the cattle up and held them together until Mr. Hendrix had told us what to do with them.

He pulled out to one side and began to unhitch his horse; I could see what he was doing, and told the other boys I was going to help establish camp. They said, "Go on, we'll attend to the cattle."

I and the old gentleman soon had the tents pitched and everything in them that was needed. Then I mounted old Steady again and

It was now drawing toward night, and pretty soon Mr. Hendrix came out to where we were and told us to drive the cattle out about half a mile west and let them go; he didn't think they would stray very far away. We drove the cattle out and returned to camp.

That night two of the settlers came to our camp and inquired for Mr. Hendrix. "I am the man," he told them; "What can I do for you?"

"Those cows and bulls out here aways are yours, are they not, Mr. Hendrix?"

"Yes, they are mine."

"What will you take for them and sell us the whole herd?" they inquired.

"Why, I haven't thought seriously about selling. What will you give?"

"Well, now since you seem inclined to talk business we will go out and see some of our neighbors and give you an answer tomorrow." The men then walked away.

When the cattle buyers left, Mr. Hendrix went around among the men and wanted to know when they intended to make the final start. Not being organized, no one knew what the next man intended to do. Everything was at loose ends; but a meeting was agreed upon

and in half an hour all the men and some of the women were assembled at Cap Edwards' tent and talking over the prospects of the final start.

"Now, men," said Mr. Hendrix, "I have come to the conclusion not to drive my cattle across to California. They will be worth a great deal to me in that country, but I am afraid they will be a great hindrance to all of us. They are sure to get sore footed and can't possibly travel up with the horse teams.

Everyone agreed that was the "case" as they put it. Some were for going on; others wanted to lay by a few days. They argued the grass was getting better all the time and that there would be no time lost by laying over a few days longer. It was finally agreed that all those who had small teams might start in the morning and camp up at Grand Island and wait for the others. So on the following morning sixty wagons started, and the balance waited for Mr. Hendrix.

As we were going to lay by for one whole day, Henry, Jim and I, concluded to try our hand at hunting. We mentioned the subject to the old folks and they were very willing for us to go. In fact, fresh meat was a luxury none of

us had indulged in for some time. So the three of us saddled our horses and started up the river. We had been told by some of the boys of the neighborhood that deer could be found up the river about six miles. This was as good as we wanted, and we traveled along in great glee.

Three or four miles took us out of the settlement, and now, we began to look for signs. We rode slowly for a mile or two more before we saw any sign of game of any kind. The first sign we saw was turkey tracks, but we saw no turkeys.

We now concluded to separate. Henry took the left next to the bluffs; Jim the center and I the side next to the river. We had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile in this manner, when I heard a gun shot quite a distance to my left, and I was sure Henry had found something to shoot at. I had hardly made up my mind to this when I heard another shot much nearer. I rode along slowly for perhaps one hundred yards, when I heard a crash in the brush to my left. On looking in that direction I saw a pair of velvety antlers not fifty yards away. Turning my horse a little to the right so as to have a cross shot I took aim at what I thought to be

just below the head and pulled the trigger. Something tumbled and began to thrash the brush. I turned and rode in that direction as quickly as I could and there lay as fine a buck as one might wish. I got down and hitched old Steady and fell to work dressing my game.

Now, for the sake of the boys who may read this story, I will tell them how a deer is dressed when it is dressed right. It is almost impossible to hang a deer up if it is any size, before taking out the entrails, so you have to do all the work on the ground. A deer should be stuck exactly as you would a hog. Then cut off the head and shanks, then take out the entrails just as a hog is dressed and you are ready to hang it up. This is the way I did my buck but when it came to hanging it up that was a different matter altogether. I found I couldn't lift it at all.

Just then I heard someone coming through the brush, and looking up there stood Jim looking as though he had caught a large fish and let it get away. He said, in a doleful kind of way, "That is the very buck I've been after for the last fifteen minutes."

"I expect so," I said, "for it was scared when I shot it: it was looking for you." "Well,

let's hang it up and then go and find Henry, for I think he has one also."

It was a heavy job for the two of us, but we managed to hang it up after a fashion; then Jim tied his handkerchief above the deer, partly for a sign to find it by and to keep off the predatory birds. I led my horse to where Jim had tied his. Then we mounted and started on our hunt for Henry.

We had gone perhaps half a mile, when we heard another shot in our front, not more than three hundred yards away.

We struck the edge of the prairie in a few minutes and on looking along the opening between the bluffs and timber we saw Henry stooping over and walking slowly along as though he had lost something and was looking for it. We gave a yell and started toward him in a gallop. He straightened up and came towards us.

"Did you get anything?" I asked.

"Well not the last shot; I can't find any signs of a hair being touched and I guess I'll let him go; but I did kill a pretty good one back here a ways."

"Where is your horse?" I inquired

"I hitched him back where the deer is lying."

"Why! Didn't you hang it up?"

"No, I couldn't," he said.

We turned and followed Henry back to where his deer was lying and there lay the largest buck I ever saw. It looked as large as a two-year-old calf.

After the greatest effort we managed to lift it on to Henry's horse; then we returned to my deer and put that on my horse, and then we were ready to start for camp.

"Jim!" said Henry, "How would it do for you to go on to camp and tell them of our luck? We'll have to walk, Albert and I, and you have nothing to carry." Jim was willing enough and started ahead.

Henry and I plodded along on foot leading our horses, for they were too heavily loaded to bear our additional weight.

Having started out early in the morning it was not yet past noon, but was approaching close to the noon hour. We were pretty hungry by this time, and as our horses were loaded, we would not think of stopping for lunch.

About two o'clock we reached camp; but

crowd going to try their hand at hunting, for Jim had told them of our success.

When we drew near our camp the girls came out to congratulate us on our good luck.

"Why, Henry," said Molly, "You and Albert are hunters from away back."

"Yes," said Henry, "We could kill a 'yellephant' if we had him tied down so he couldn't move."

"Why, were these deer tied down?"

"No, but we took advantage of them, and slipped up and shot them before they knew we were around."

"Well, that is the mark of a good hunter," she said.

"Well," Henry said, "We were in good luck and that's about all."



CHAPTER IV.

The Emigrants Reach Ft. Kearney and Employ Jim Bridger and Young Will to Guide Them to California—They Meet With Indians, but the Crowd is Too Large for Them to Attack—They Reach California in Safety and Scatter Out to Find Employment—The Hendrix Party Go Up Feather River.

Mr. Hendrix was pleased, and said he guessed we might keep the whole outfit in meat if we had nothing else to do.

Henry and I were both very fond of hunting and a proposition like that suited us to a "T."

Our kind employer had been out all day with the buyers of his cattle, looking at and appraising them, and had finally come to an agreement and the deal was made. So Henry, Jim and I had lost our jobs.

"Now, Mr. Hendrix," said Henry that evening, "We will have to pay our board, and we may as well start in right now."

"No, boys!" said the kind old man, "You need not do anything of the sort. I want you with use anyhow, and when we get to California, I can give you all the work you will want to do for some time, and your board for this trip can be counted out when we settle up for your work. How will that suit you?"

"First rate," we all said in a breath. So that matter was settled and nothing more was ever said about it for better than a year.

That night it was agreed to by all parties, we would make our final start the next morning. Our venison was skinned and salted down for use along the road, although the girls and their mother boiled a large kettle full that night, for cold lunches.

The next morning early we started, and arrived at Grand Island, but our friends of the forward train were not in evidence. We pushed on, and the fifth day out from the Missouri we found them at or near Fort Kearney.

When we drove up an animated scene presented itself to our view. We had been hearing shots fired from the time we were in hearing and when we came close enough to see what was going on a few men were on horseback firing at a target stuck up out on the prairie.

The men were running their horses as fast as they could go and when one got opposite the target he would fire, often missing altogether. But there was one young long-haired fellow that would hit the board every shot. We learned soon after he was a Government scout. Jim Bridger was there also, and had been hired by the emigrants to guide them across the plains to California or as far as the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and young Will Bridger called him to act as scout. He was training seven or eight of the emigrants to aid him in the scouting. This scouting was done to guard the train from sudden attacks by the Indians.

Bridger was in command of the train to see that it was brought quickly into proper shape for defense.

The next morning the entire outfit started. Our little train was in the rear, because of our numbers. The wagons were all numbered so that each teamster knew just what to do in case of attack. Each knew by the number of his wagon which way to turn. The odd numbers turned one way, and the even numbers the other way; and in this manner a corral could be formed quickly and the stock would be inside

The way it was done is this: No. 1 takes the right side; No. 2 the left and every even number follows that one; then the odd numbers take to the right and follow the first wagon. If the ground is level, each leading wagon makes a weep around in a wide circle, then draws back toward the road, and meets the other wagons and as soon as the teams are taken out, cross tongues and tie them together with ropes, or chains. The two rear wagons never leave the road, but turn slightly to the right and left and crowd their wagon as near at the rear ends as possible. Thus is a pretty strong corral formed in a very few minutes with teams all inside, that Indians on their ponies can't break.

We had proceeded up the Platt several days, when one day the scouts brought in eight or nine scalps they had just taken from Indians they had killed not one mile from the train. Bridger had heard the firing, and taking five or six men with him after corralling the wagons, they rode quickly to the scene of action for he had seen the "Redskins," as he called them, before any shots were heard. The women and children were badly scared at first, but when the scouts returned and said there were only

ten, and they had killed all of them, their fright subsided. We then moved on some little distance and camped.

It appeared that our trouble was not over. One of the scouts did not get in until very late, and we could gather from their actions that Indians were still in the vicinity.

The next day, as we were moving along, word came that Indians were just ahead and Bridger had the wagons corralled in a short time. This time they came, and the women were scared worse than ever. Some of them screamed and cried, while others more cool, tried to keep them quiet. Nellie and Molly were scared, but kept quiet. Not the least sound was heard from any of the Hendrix family. I thought more of them than ever. This, of course, was while the Indians were coming, but before they began to circle our corral Jim and Henry and I had taken our places in the line that was formed around our outfit.

It was said those scalps that were taken the day before were tied on a wagon tongue at the front end of the train, but I never saw them, being at the rear all the time.

The Indians circled around our corral and then moved off to the top of the ridge a

of a mile away, then stopped and seemed to consult over the proposition half an hour, then mounted their horses and rode off. Some of the scouts followed them for some time, but came back and reported the Indians had left entirely. This was good news to us.

It seemed this "Will" was a "crackerjack", for I think if it had not been for him the entire train—men, women and children—would have been massacred and burned, but Bridger was as good as he; the two together made a "team."

We continued our journey for some four or five miles farther, then camped.

A day or two after that we camped in a place where buffalo were plenty.

Will and four or five of the emigrants went out and drove several almost into camp, and killed three or four so close to camp that it was like going into one's own corral to kill beef.

I think after we reached the Bitter Creek country, a new route was selected, on account of Indians; this route took us, it was said, some seventy-five or a hundred miles north of Salt Lake City. At any rate we had no trouble, until some time after we passed Salt Lake Valley; then one evening five or six Redskins rushed in and tried to stampede our horses, but

Bridger and the young fellow mounted their horses and got after them on the double quick. They killed two, but the other three made their escape. This was the last time we were troubled with Indians or anyone else.

Finally, after almost eleven weeks on the road, from the Missouri, we made our last camp east of the Nevada Mountains; and there our scouts proposed to turn back, but we would not hear of such a proposition. We, and especially the women, wanted them to continue the journey with us to California. They agreed. We told them it would cost them nothing; so that evening we had a grand dance. Our camp was a lovely one; the ground was smooth and level, and large pine trees stood here and there all over the camp, with no underbrush to obstruct the view.

I was in my element and dancing was my delight. Young Bill couldn't be induced to try; he was the most bashful young fellow I ever saw. I and Molly, and Henry and Nellie were in the third set; Henry was one of the fiddlers until then. Jim danced one set with Nellie and one with Molly, but Molly, for some reason or other, did not like him very well.