

[March 16, 1849, in company with Jerry Sheppard, Henry Seamon, William and Ambrose Palmer, G. W. Thissell went on board the steamer Zanesville, at McConnellsville, Ohio, bound for California. The steamer's destination was St. Louis, Missouri. At St. Louis they boarded the steamer Winfield Scott, bound for St. Joseph. At St. Joseph Mr. Thissell became ill and was left behind. He then made his way into the interior of Iowa where he worked for nine months as a carriage maker. On March 6, 1850, with Bob Gardner, Sam and Ike Harris, he departed from Bellefontaine, Iowa, bound for California. Their outfit consisted of 4 yoke of oxen, one yoke of cows, one saddle horse, one wooden-axle wagon and provisions enough to last one year.]

[At Council Bluffs Thissell and party joined the "Chambers Train" (John D. Chambers, captain). Train consisted of 36 wagons, 250 head of work oxen, 20 head of milk cows, 30 head of saddle horses.

- 51 May 16.—The sun rose from behind great, black clouds, which were rolling up like mountains. This is the land of thunder and lightning. No place on earth equals this for hail and rain, flashes of lightning, and peals of thunder that make the earth tremble.

For two days we have traveled through rain and hail, mud and water, sometimes knee deep. No dry wood to be had to get supper. The buffalo chips are wet, and will not burn. Nothing to eat but crackers and raw bacon.

The country is level, and as far as the eye can see the road is lined with emigrant wagons, covered with white muslin. On many of the wagons are mottoes, such as, "Off for California," "Pike County, Missouri," "Prairie Flower," "California or Bust." The majority of them came from Missouri, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Illinois, and there are but a few trains of mules or horses. Eighty per cent of the wagons are hauled by the faithful ox, from two to four yoke to a wagon. The driver, with his long whip, walks, walks by the side of his team from morning till night. At the word, the faithful leader will go through water and mud, or plunge into a rapid stream, or climb the steep and rocky mountainside. Thus the driver can take the ox team where the mule or horse would not go.

- 52 [Picture - "Up the Platte River."]

- 53 One of the oddest little creatures we found in our journey of two thousand miles was the prairie dog, about as large as the poodle dog. As they sat up on their hind legs, all over the prairie, they resembled a miniature kangaroo. The dogs were so quick it took the best of marksmen to kill one fifty yards away. Many of the men were positive the dogs could dodge the bullets. They were very fat, and we tried to eat them, but could not get them down.

May 17.—The sun looked out from behind the mountains of great black clouds for a moment, and then sank back. It was a dark, gloomy day. The thunder roared, and vivid flashes of chain lightning ran along the ground. Still on and on we plodded, through water and mud, the rain pouring down in torrents, while every man was wet to the skin. This is the worst day's travel we have had since we left home.

- 54 When we arrived at Loop Fork, it was bank full. There was no ferry there, and some of the men went up the river eighty miles to find a crossing. There were over three hundred men anxious to find a crossing. The river was ten feet deep, about forty yards across, and very sluggish. For thirty-six hours we cut and dragged willow brush to pile into the river. Fifty men swam the stream and piled brush in on the opposite shore, until the brush met. Then we swam our cattle across, while the men pulled the wagons over on the floating willow bridge. The last wagon had scarcely reached the bank when the water took the bridge away, and the next train must cross as best it can.

Loop Fork is the home of the buffalo. Not a tree to be seen. Thousands of buffalo were quietly grazing less than a mile away. For days the road was lined with buffalo

heads and skulls bleaching in the sun. (On Loop Fork, in 1853, the writer's oldest child was born, who is now Mrs. M. E. Brown, of Acampo.)

May 20 was a perfect day. The sun shone bright and warm. We had camped for the night. The wagons, thirty-six in number, were drawn up in a circle, the cattle in the center for protection.

The evening was calm. Not a leaf stirred. All nature seemed to be in repose. The guards were at their posts.

The small hours of the night drew on, when peal after peal of thunder burst upon our ears. The heavens were aglow with the flashes of lightning. The rain and hail poured in torrents. The cattle swayed from side to side, bellowing and goring each other. All hands were called out on guard. With one wild and
55 mad rush, two hundred and fifty head of work oxen went crashing over the wagons, trampling one man, George Pike, to death, and wounding several others. Many of the cattle were not recovered.

After two days of delay, we were on our journey again, traveling through broad prairies and over rolling hills covered with waving grass, like fields of grain.

To our right and left were thousands of antelope. These were hard to kill, our company killing only six on the journey. Here and there could be seen a white wolf sneaking away from some vacated camp-ground with a piece of buffalo meat that had been left there.

May 21.--This morning we had an exciting time. Three buffalo ran into our camp. All hands rushed for their guns, but not until twenty balls had entered his hide did one of the buffalo come to the ground.

In twenty minutes his hide was off and his carcass in the wagons. At night we jerked the meat. This is done by driving four small forks of wood into the ground. A frame of sticks is then made. The meat is cut in thin strips, then dipped in hot brine and hung over the sticks. A small fire is made under the frame, and from the heat the meat is quickly dried. This is called jerked buffalo meat. On this the emigrants lived fine.

56 Every emigrant, before leaving for California in '49-'50, equipped himself with some kind of a gun, with which to protect himself from the Indians, as well as to shoot wild game.

Hence there were firearms of all descriptions,--double and single-barreled shot-guns and smooth-bore and double-twisted rifles. The favorite gun was the old Kentucky rifle, with a barrel three feet long, that carried sixty balls to the pound.

Then there was the blunderbuss of the War of 1812. Jim Stoaks selected a blunderbuss. It was short, light, and handy. It was a dangerous looking gun. It looked as if it would kill everything it was pointed at. It was a smooth bore and carried a half-ounce ball.

Stoaks loaded it for Indians when we crossed the Missouri River. Days and weeks passed, and no Indians needed killing.

The most ferocious thing we saw on the plains, except a band of friendly Indians, was a herd of buffalo.

Jim became impatient to try his gun, and turned it loose on the buffalo. They were not one-fourth of a mile away. Jim got under the bank of a creek and crept up

57 to within fifty yards of them. He took sight with both eyes open, and, shaking like a trembling aspen leaf, he pulled the trigger.

It was flint lock, and it missed fire. Jim picked the flint and took aim once more, expecting to blow a hole clear through that buffalo.

There was a roar, then a crash, and Jim landed in the bed of the creek, while the gun lay on the opposite bank. When the smoke cleared away, Jim looked for his buffalo, and was just in time to see the herd go over the hill a mile away. Not a hair on their hide had been hurt.

Should Jim Stoaks live to be as old as Methuselah, he will never forget the buffalo he did not kill.

May 24.—Sunday. The sun shone warm and bright. The little birds chirped and sang their sweet songs. The gray and black squirrels jumped from bough to bough.

58 A clear mountain stream went rippling by. On this beautiful stream we had camped for the day. What a Sabbath in the midst of the wilderness! No ringing of the church bell, no prattling of the voices of happy children as they go to and from the Sabbath-school, but here we are, two hundred and fifty impatient and restless men. Some target shooting, others hunting, some washing, mending, and sewing on buttons, others reading or playing cards (for sport), while a few of the old patriarchs were holding prayer-meeting.

All were happy and gay. Alas, what a change soon took place! The cholera appeared in the train, and almost every day we buried a man.

I shall never forget the scene and the experience of last night. Not a man closed his eyes in sleep. During the night Hi Dudley, Jake Snider, and Ben Ferguson died. The sick and dying are in every tent. No doctor to be had, and but little can be done. We had no cholera remedies except Ayers' Pain Killer, and that gave no relief. Many were sick only a few hours, and then died. No hope of relief until we reach the mountains, where we will have cool nights and pure, cold water.

The wagons are full of sick men. The train will scarcely stop long enough to bury the dead. The only thought is to reach the mountains and get away from the cholera.

To-day a man overtook us and begged the captain to stop the train and send men back to help bury some dead, but the majority of the men refused to do it, so the train rushed on, traveling all night.

May 26.—We buried six men in one grave. Nothing to mark their last resting-place but a pile of loose stones at the head and foot.

59 The emigrants on the south side of the Platte River are crossing over at Ash Hollow. They, too, have the cholera. Every man is panic-stricken. Last night five wagons pulled off and left the train. The road is lined with emigrants night and day, striving to get in front. The death-rate is fearful. We find fresh-made graves at nearly every camping-place. Turn back you can't; go forward you must.

It was a common occurrence for the emigrants to take their guns and look for a cut-off. By this they could save many miles of walking, for many emigrants walked nearly the entire distance from the Missouri River to California.

On June 4, Arthur Fisk and Silas Rhoads had taken a cut-off; they missed their bearings and were lost in the sand-hills. For two days and nights they wandered

over the plains. Many of the cattle and horses were never found. In less than one hour the storm had passed. Ruin and destruction lay in its wake.

June 15.--We camped on Platte River. The day was cold and gray, and a gloomy one for all of us. We found a man dead in the river, lodged against a drift. We dug a grave by the water's edge, and with long poles we rolled him in.

63 Two Indian arrows still remained in his body to show the cause of death. There was nothing to tell who he was except a small Testament in his pocket, in which was written, "Robert Vanclave, Bellefontaine, Iowa."

June 19.--To-day we reached the base of the Rocky Mountains, and bade adieu to the land of thunder and lightning, hurrican and cyclone, desert and garden, river and plain.

What scenes we have witnessed! What suffering and hardships we have endured!

Land of the savage, through thy fields of waving grass, over thy hills of sand, across thy barren, sandy plains, through thy sage-brush thickets, we have dragged our weary bodkes along. We have slept beside they stagnant pools, fought thy bloodthirsty inhabitants, bufied our companions in thy loose sand, food for the wolves. Land of sorrow, adieu.

June 20.--Here we are, five hundred miles from the Missouri River. Now every heart leaps with joy as we behold the fort, for it is the only house we have seen since we left the Missonri River. The fort is built of logs, and will garrison one hundred soldiers.

64 Fort Laramie is located on Laramie River, at the base of the Rocky Mountains, and at the junction of the north fork of the Platte River.

Fifty soldiers were stationed here. They kept a ferry, and charged us twenty-five dollars to take a wagon across.

From here our route lay up the south side of the Platte sixty miles, where we crossed back over the Platte River. At this point the river is rough and rapid, and we found much difficulty in swimming our cattle across. Some of them we had to pull over with ropes. Some trappers and Indians had canoes here, five of which were lashed together, with poles across them. On this the wagons were taken across the river. The water was cold as ice, and ran very rapidly. One man was drowned here to-day,-- Andrew Long, of Edyville, Iowa. Here we enter the mountains.

Our route lies up the north fork of the Platte River. To our left and in the distance rises the famous Black Mountain, in after years known as Pike's Peak.

[On Independence Rock Mr. Thissell saw the names of William Palmer and Henry Seamon.]

around in the hills, without food or water.

They killed a small buffalo calf and broiled the meat on the coals. When almost exhausted, they came out on the level plains. Their eyes were red and bloodshot, their tongues swollen and thick, and they could scarcely talk.

60 Faint and weary, Fisk sank to the ground and could go no farther. Rhoads left him and went in search of water. Near by he found a stagnant pool, and filling his boot with water, he carried it to Fisk, who soon revived and made an effort to walk.

Rhoads carried the guns and a piece of meat. They reached the pool of water, and in the distance saw an emigrant train that came within a mile or two of them, then turned to the right and left them. They filled their boots with water and started for the trail. Soon they saw another train pass by. They fired off their guns, but the emigrants, thinking they were Indians, paid no attention to them. Faint and weary, they made one more effort to reach the emigrant trail, but soon sank to the ground. The stagnant water had made them deathly sick.

Night set in. The air was cool, and with sage-brush, they made a fire. Two of their company on horseback, who were looking for them, saw the fire and went to their relief. They were taken to the camp, and the next morning Fisk died. Rhoads was ill until we reached Salt Lake City, where he remained with the Mormons.

June 6.--We broke camp at daylight. The stock had no water or feed last night. At ten we camped on Squaw Creek. This is the ill-fated camp where James Crockett, of Arkansas, while en route for Oregon in 1847, shot and killed an inoffensive squaw. The Indians at once sent the squaws to the mountains, and in less than twenty-four hours the train was
61 surrounded by more than three hundred Indians, demanding the man who had killed the squaw. There were only fifty white men in the train, and they could go no farther.

After three days of parleying with the Indians, to save the entire train, Crockett was surrendered to them. With yells of triumph the savages dragged him from the camp. In plain view they danced and yelled with hellish glee, torturing their victim with all the means known to the savages of the forest. Then they skinned him alive, and, when the spirit had left the body, and they could inflict no more pain, they tied his remains to a wild Indian pony and turned it loose on the plains. Then the Indians let the train proceed unmolested.

June 10.--We camped fifty miles below Fort Laramie on the Platte. The day had been a perfect one. Hundreds of wagons were in sight. Thousands of men were camped within a few miles of us. Everything was calm and serene.

62 Horror! What is it that so suddenly causes man and beast to tremble? A long, ominous roll of thunder swept up out of the distance. It was evident a hurricane was approaching. The heavens had grown intensely dark. Great, black clouds, like mountains, rolled up in the northwest. A faint, moaning wind stirred the tops of the trees. There was now and then a drop of rain. A cold, shivering chill pervaded the atmosphere. In fact, we all felt the air was withering cold. A brilliant glare of light burst suddenly upon us. The heavens seemed thrown open from end to end. A broad lake of quivering fire lay in the clouds, as dark as pitch. Only for a second, then on and on came the ever-increasing, rattling roar of thunder, that shook the very earth. The rain and hail poured in torrents. The tents were torn from their fastenings. The beds and clothing were buried in ice and hail six to seven inches deep.

The men sought shelter under the wagons, that were blown over like paper houses. The cattle and horses fled before the storm in wild confusion, and scattered for miles