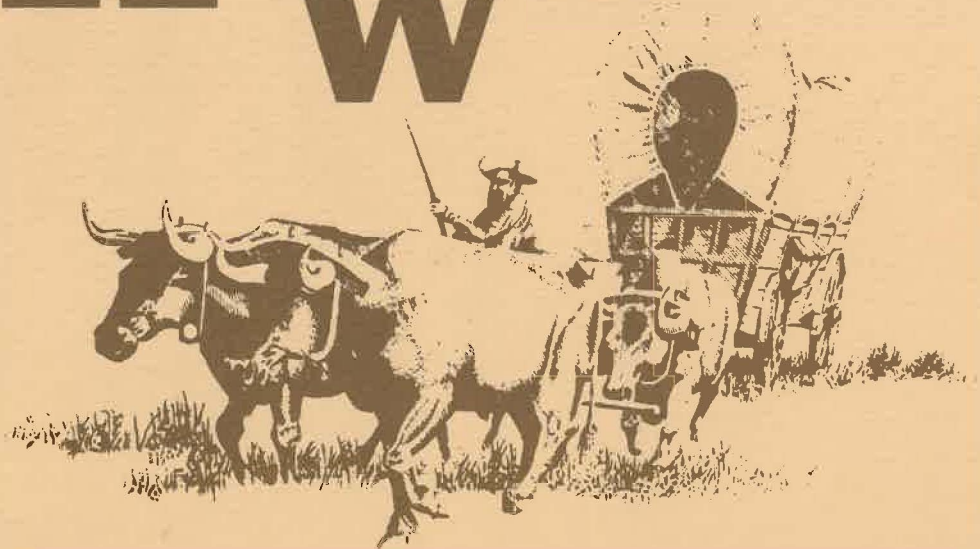


# H eaded W est



## Historic Trails in Southwest Wyoming

Oregon-California Trails Association  
10<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention  
Rock Springs, Wyoming

# **Headed West**

## **Historic Trails in Southwest Wyoming**

edited by  
Mike W. Brown and Beverly Gorny

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Authors Russel Tanner, Terry Del Bene, Dave Vlcek, Lynn Harrell, and Mike Brown work for the Bureau of Land Management in southwest Wyoming. Carla Aamodt is a student at Yale University who worked as a volunteer for the BLM through the Student Conservation Association.

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## Table of Contents

The Fur Trapper.....	1
Discovery of South Pass.....	5
Jedediah Smith.....	9
James Clyman.....	14
Jim Bridger.....	17
Fort Bridger.....	19
Fremont's Survey of South Pass.....	25
Pony Express and Overland Mail.....	28
Ghost Towns, Gamblers, and Gold.....	33
Trails Map.....	34
The Grave of Charlotte Dansie.....	36
Granger.....	39
The Names Hill Historic Site.....	43
Salt Wells Stage Station.....	47
The Great Medicine Trail.....	49
Emigrant Springs on the Slate Creek Cutoff.....	54
Snowbound on the Trail.....	58
On the Trail to Disaster-The Donner Party in Wyoming.....	66
Cutoffs and the Parting-of-the-Ways.....	70

# The Fur Trapper: An Assessment

*by Carl Briggs and Duff Chapman*

Few figures in history have freely chosen a more difficult and hazardous existence than the beaver trappers - the storied mountain men who formed such a vital, dynamic, and colorful segment of our nation's growth and prosperity. They entered an unknown land of mystery and danger and hostility. They battled the ever-trying elements, contended either peaceably or savagely with the inhabitants, and toiled back and forth across some of the most awesome terrain on the entire American continent. Let's take a brief look at the character of this man.

There are divided opinions on the basic human characteristics of trappers. Kit Carson insisted that a strong feeling of brotherhood existed among them. Joe Meek said it was every man for himself and to hell with his fellow trappers. These are probably opposing ends of the spectrum. Harvey L. Carter says the two opinions demonstrate no more than the psychological differences between two individuals: "Numerous instances supporting each man's point of view are to be found in the literature of the fur trade," but it's reasonable to expect the great majority held sway in between.

"Carson has furnished us with a good description of the carefree life of the trappers when they had money," Carter said. "This was the way they rewarded themselves for the privations and exertions of their lonely and strenuous life when they were actively engaged in getting furs. The same pattern was followed by the cowboys of the later frontier."

Carson put it this way: "In April, 1831, we had all safely arrived at Taos. The amount due us was paid and each of us having several hundred dollars passed the time gloriously - never thinking that our lives were risked in gaining it. Our only idea was to get rid of this 'dross' as soon as possible but, at the same time, have as much pleasure and enjoyment as the country would afford. Trappers and sailors are similar in regard to the money that they earn so dearly, daily being in danger of losing their lives. But when the voyage has been made (and they have) received their pay, they think not of the hardships through which they have passed, spend all they have and are ready for another trip..."

Bernard DeVoto said, "Almost daily immersion in the glacial waters of mountain streams eventually stiffened their joints, but otherwise a trapper sick enough to be mentioned had a hangover or the 'venereals', which he got from a squaw who had got them from one of his predecessors."

Out there in the wilderness, if there was no reason to apprehend Indians, these few lonely men - these "thousand men of no moment," he called them - would feast on fat cow, ribs, and marrow bones... "no man with tableware more than his belt-knife, gravy, juices, and blood running down his face, forearms and shirt. He wolfed the meat and never reached repletion," eight pounds at a sitting... "No stomach ever rebelled and no appetite ever palled."

"Buffalo meat was a complete diet...abundant fat eaten with the lean...practically their sole diet, and no hardier people ever lived. No scurvy, no sick trappers." Then, "there in the winesap air of the high places, the clear green sky of evening fading to a dark that brings the stars within arm's length... the firelight flares and fades in the wind's rhythm on the faces of men in whose minds are the vistas and the annals of the entire west... It is the time of fulfillment, the fullness of time, the moment lived for itself alone..."

If DeVoto was harsh and earthy in his descriptions, as he often was, he also loved his mountain men. He was born in their shadow and no one of this century understood them better or respected them more: "Skill develops from controlled, corrected repetitions of an act for which one has some knack. Skill is a product of experience and criticism and intelligence... A mountain man's life was skill. He not only worked in the wilderness, he also lived there and he did so from sun to sun by the experience of total skill - as intricate as any ever developed."

Harvey Carter said, "The mountain men...were the counterparts of the astronauts of the second half of the 20th century...the western wilderness of that day was as unfamiliar to the average person as the outer space being explored today."

Osborne Russell said a mountain man's equipment was "a horse and saddle, a couple of blankets, bridle, a sack of six traps, an extra pair of moccasins, his powder horn and bullet pouch and a belt to which is attached a butcher knife, a wooden box containing bait for beaver, a tobacco sack with pipe and implements for making fire, with sometimes a hatchet fastened to the pommel of his saddle."

Personal dress varied depending on season and climate, but generally consisted of skin breeches cut off at the knees and wool blanketing sewn on, moccasins, leggings, shirts, caps, mittens and robes, all made by himself or his Indian wife. All these, as well as his tipi - that most efficient of all dwellings - bags, and bedding were made of the hides of buffalo, antelope, deer, elk, land otter, and sometimes bear or even rabbit.

They generally lived in small groups in cottonwood or evergreen groves for shelter during storms.

Many of the trappers, perhaps most of them, took Indian wives. Some of the women, along with their children, were abandoned when the trappers returned home - lest the men be scorned by "civilized" people as being "squaw men." More than a few mountain men remained faithfully married to the same woman all their lives, and sired their children with love and devotion.

The women, as they were trained since childhood, looked after the "home." They were incredibly strong, courageous, and usually much better kempt than their husbands. And they always kept the bed of buffalo robes warm for their men even in the deepest and coldest nights of winter.

The annual rendezvous was a time of release and replenishment. Trappers gathered together at a favorite "hole," a comparatively small and sheltered valley, places with names like Sweetwater, Pierre's Hole, Ham's Fork, Jackson's Hole, Green River, Horse Creek, Brown's Hole and Wind River. There they swapped their accumulated skins for supplies - food, powder, lead, liquor (if raw alcohol could be so classified), traps, knives, clothing. They joined with friends they hadn't seen for a year or two, including more than a few Indians, and they all knew each other. Safe in their numbers from attacks by hostile Indians, they ate and drank and gambled and fought and laughed and danced and raced their horses. They shot their guns at targets and sometimes at each other, then they'd drink and eat some more. And when it ended, when the quickening fall winds signalled a new trapping season, they broke into parties and bade farewell to their comrades. A long winter of toil and danger and bitter, aching cold lay ahead of them.

Once arrived at the remote area of their destination, small base-camps were established and the trappers worked out of there alone, each setting his own line of traps. Whenever he found a dam or a slide or a lodge, or a freshly cut tree, he'd approach from downstream and set his trap underwater. He'd prepare a stake by peeling off all its bark and cutting a notch. The butt of the stake was passed through a ring attached to a chain on the trap and pushed down into the bed of the stream. He prepared a second "bait" stick by dipping the tip into a container of castor, a powerful scent, and push that into the ground so that its tip leaned above the open trap. The trapper waded back downstream to avoid leaving human scent. He'd circle around and ride on upstream to another beaver site and set his second trap, and so on until his "string" of six was in place.



The beaver, attracted by the scent, was drawn closely until its foot went into the trap. Hurting and frightened, the animal dove deep and headed for its lodge. The ring at the end of the chain would anchor itself in the notch on the stick. Unable to reach the surface, the beaver drowned - before it had time to gnaw its own foot off.

DeVoto said, "The mountain men were a tough race, as many selective breeds of Americans have had to be; their courage, skill, and mastery of the conditions of their chosen life were absolute or they would not have been there. Nor would they have been there if they had not responded to the liveliness of the country and found in their way of life something precious beyond safety, gain, comfort and family life."

Everyday life at the base-camps of the small trapping parties was quite different than the carnival atmosphere of the rendezvous. "Solitude had given them a surpassing gift of friendship and simple survival which sharpened their wits... Talk was everything. In this hour of function there was the talk of friends and equals...till at last the fire sank. The mountain man rolled up in his robe or blanket, loaded rifle beside him and knife and pistols within reach, and might lie awake listening to the wind and water and the coyotes. He might wake a few hours later, kick fuel on the embers, and roast another half dozen ribs, eating alone while his companions slept and the horses pawed at the end of their pickets...then sleep again until a greyness ran with the wind across the sky, in the shuddering cold of a mountain dawn...it was time for breakfast on buffalo meat and the day's hazard of hunt or trail. It was a good life."

But Charles L. Camp perhaps came closest to touching on the meaning of the mountain men in relation to lasting greatness that was national in scope and substance. "The moving force in his career was an intense love of the freedom of the wilderness. He...typified that class of borderers who were never satisfied with a patch of land if there was a chance of finding something better a thousand or three thousand miles farther on..."



# Discovery of South Pass

by Guy Reynolds

Until the early 1800's South Pass was unknown to white men. While many Indian tribes, from the north, east, south and west, used it regularly, no Spanish or French explorer had come that far north, or west. After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, President Jefferson succeeded in gaining Congressional approval for exploration of the new territory by the Corps of Exploration, "for purposes of commerce," under the leadership of Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Leaving America's westernmost outpost, St. Louis, May 14, 1804, they laboriously hauled a keelboat to the headwaters of the Missouri, camped for the winter near present day Great Falls, (near the extreme north of the American Rockies). Descending the Snake and Columbia Rivers they finally reached the shore of the Pacific on December 3, 1805.

There are several claimants to the "Discovery" of South Pass. One, by conjecture and supposition, Andrew Henry, "may" or "could have" crossed, eastbound, in 1811. Henry was one of the incorporators of the Missouri Fur Trading Company in 1809. In 1810 he, with Manuel Lisa and Pierre Menard, headed north from St. Louis toward the Yellowstone and reached Fort Raymond at the mouth of the Big Horn. The following year they crossed Bozeman Pass, were attacked by Blackfeet over several months and the group scattered. It is known that Henry built cabins on the Snake, and students of the Mountain Men speculate that he "could have" reached the Wind River by traveling down the Green and east over South Pass. The possibility stems solely from a speech made before the U.S. Senate in 1850, by Senator Thomas Hart Benton. Benton declared "He (Henry) was the first man that saw that (South) Pass." It's in the Congressional Record, and served Benton's political purpose, at least.

*The expedition of Lewis and Clark had shown that the northwestern territory of the Louisiana Purchase abounded in furs. But the exact extent of the new acquisition was not definitely known. Certainly it included the immense watershed of the Missouri, and if the Purchase did not extend through to the Pacific, the right of Lewis and Clark's discovery gave America first claim there. If the mouth of the Columbia was now American territory, as John Jacob Astor assumed, the commerce of the Orient would provide a rich market for the furs of this territory.*

*In 1808, Astor secured a charter from the state of New York creating his American Fur Company. He immediately*

*set about establishment of a trading post at the mouth of the Columbia River. The business would be carried out under the name of the Pacific Fur Company. Astor organized two expeditions, one to go by sea in the vessel Tonquin, and the other by land along the Lewis and Clark route. The Tonquin arrived at the mouth of the Columbia River in March, 1811, and shortly thereafter a post named Astoria was established. The overland party under the command of Wilson Price Hunt, a partner in the Pacific Fur Company, left St. Louis on March 12, 1811, crossed the Continental Divide at Union Pass in the Tetons, and arrived in Astoria on February 15, 1812, covering a distance, by Hunt's estimate of 3500 miles.*

There is no question about the discovery by a party led by Robert Stuart in 1812. That July, Stuart, a 27 year old Scot who had experience with the British Northwest Company and had been recruited by Astor as a partner in the Pacific Fur Company, was ordered, with six men, to carry dispatches, (which included word of the destruction of the Tonquin), east to Astor.

After crossing the Blue Mountains the party traveled up the Snake River as far as Jackson Hole. There a Snake Indian who had been one of Hunt's guides told them of a trace south of Union Pass which was not only shorter but devoid of mountains. After mishaps and rambling they followed the western base of the Wind River mountains, secured provisions and a pack horse from other friendly Snakes, and followed the Indian trail. They crossed the Big and Little Sandy Creeks to reach the source of Pacific Creek and crossed South Pass on October 22, 1812. Winding down into the beautiful open land of the Sweetwater River, they passed the sites later known as Devil's Gate and Independence Rock and survived a difficult winter on the bank of the Platte River by building a cabin.

The party arrived at St. Louis April 30, 1813. Except for their wanderings in the Jackson Hole area, the route they followed would, with only minor variations, become the famed Oregon Trail. On May 15 the Missouri Gazette reported:

*By information received from these gentlemen, it appears that a journey across the continent of N. America, might be performed with a wagon, there being no obstruction on the whole route that any person would dare to call a mountain in addition to its being much the most direct and short one to go from this place to the mouth of the Columbia River. Any future party who may undertake this journey, and are tolerably acquainted with the different places, where it*

*would be necessary to lay up a small stock of provisions, would not be impeded, as in all probability they would not meet with an Indian to interrupt their progress; although on the other route more north, there are almost insurmountable barriers.*

Although Stuart's journal noted this wide, accessible pass through the Rockies, there is no record that South Pass was seen by another white man for the next 12 years.

The third "claimant" - according to some writers was Etienne Provost. His story is told more fully in a following article. Provost had been to New Mexico and returned to trap the Green in 1823 as a partner of Francois Leclerc, (one of the Astor/Hunt men who accompanied Stuart in 1812). While other historians disagree, this venture provides the source for the "discovery claim", as reported by Chittenden, in *The American Fur Trade of the Far West*. "Tradition among the traders and trappers always ascribes the discovery of this pass to Provost, and there is little doubt of the fact; but of the positive truth there is none. The date of discovery was probably late fall of 1823."

There is no challenge to the fact that Jedediah Smith, Thomas Fitzpatrick and James Clyman crossed South Pass in 1824. The party had been sent west by Ashley in the Fall of 1823. It was on this trip that Smith was mauled by a grizzly. The attack laid open Jed's scalp, removed an eyebrow, and all but tore off one ear. Clyman dressed and sewed up the wounds and reattached the ear using needle and thread.

After they wintered with Andrew Henry near a camp of Crow Indians near present day Dubois, Wyoming, the restless Smith, in February, wanted to get his party to cross the mountains and get into virgin territory away from the other trappers. The direct route from the Crow camp to either the Snake or the Green Rivers was along Hunt's old route over Union Pass.

Smith's party tried to go over Union Pass but had to turn back because of the deep snow. Back at camp, Clyman spread out a buffalo robe, covered it with sand, and made the sand into heaps to represent the different mountains. Using the sand map, the Crow Indians showed the party how they could go to the Green River without having to cross Union Pass.

With the help of Clyman's map, Smith's party saw that they could circle the more open south end of the Wind River Range and reach the Green River that way. Thus, they crossed South Pass in March 1824.

Once the report of the crossing was carried to Ashley, the Pass came into general use by the trappers.

While historians still quibble over, "Who was the leader, Smith, or Fitzpatrick?" and, since Henry continued to be closely involved, throughout the era, "Why didn't he send his men over South Pass? - or, tell Smith-Fitzpatrick about it?", and, "Since Leclerc had gone east with Stuart, wouldn't he have told his partner, Provost, about South Pass?", the facts remain:

South pass was opened, west to east, in 1812 - and the story was published. It was definitely re-crossed, east to west, in 1824 - the men who did it told, and guided others in the years that followed. And, through South Pass - the West was opened!



**The South Pass Summit on the Oregon Trail.**

*BLM photo*

# Jedediah Smith (1799-1831)

by "Doc" Gene Chamberlin

For over 80 years after his early death Jed Smith was almost forgotten. With the publication of Harrison Dale's Ashley-Smith Explorations in 1918, Jed emerged as one of the most fascinating of all the Mountain Men. The list of feats he packed into 32 years make better known figures pale in comparison.

While many historians have studied and argued the finite points and exact locations of his transits, and Jedediah Smith Society members honor him with near "cult" devotion, Clampers Carl Wheat and Francis Farquahar have put most of the arguments into the clearest perspective. We've quoted Farquahar's History of the Sierra Nevada:



**Jedediah Smith**

*Photo courtesy Wyoming Centennial Commission*

*"Before following his subsequent movements, let us become better acquainted with Jedediah Strong Smith. He was only twenty-seven years old in 1826, yet even then he was one of the most experienced among that extraordinary group of mountainmen; that would include such famous names as Jim Bridger, David Jackson, William Sublette, James Clyman. He was highly respected not alone for his physical prowess, but for a moral character almost unique among his associates. Born in south central New York on January 6, 1799, and one of fourteen children, he received a good education and was especially well grounded in the Bible. At the age of twenty-three he went to St. Louis and enlisted with the Ashley-Henry expedition to the Upper Missouri. During the next few years, until his sadly premature death by Indian arrows on the Cimmaron in 1831, he came to know more about the Far West than any of his contemporaries. Jedediah penetrated into the very heart of the Hudson's Bay Company domain; he was a pioneer of South Pass, and was hard on the heels of the discoverers of Great Salt Lake. So, when in 1826, the new firm*



*of Smith, Jackson and Sublette sought new beaver country away from the rivalry of the overworked streams of the Rockies, Smith was clearly the man to lead it. The most likely region seemed to be the unexplored country to the west and south, and in choosing this Jedediah became the first American to lead an overland party from United States territory to Spanish California. As a consequence he was also the first to cross the barrier of the Sierra Nevada - not from east to west, but in the opposite direction."*

Since many of Smith's activities in the Rockies, his encounter with the Grizzly, corporate ventures, etc. are related in the stories of others, like Clyman and Fitzpatrick, who participated with him, this "telling" of his story has been restricted to his most significant, personal exploits.

Upon leaving the Cache Valley on August 15th, Smith said he had no intention of going to California. He explained that the lack of good beaver streams kept him going until the party realized that it was closer to the missions for supplies than by retracing their route.

South of Utah Lake they picked up a route along the Sevier River, to Clear Creek, across plains and hills to Beaver River, flowing west, then the upper waters of the Virgin River, to the Colorado River in present day southern Nevada. They went down the east side of the Colorado to the Mojave Villages. Here they spent two weeks among what were then friendly natives. By this exploration Smith had linked the routes of the 1770's of Dominguez and Escalante from New Mexico and Francisco Garces to and from California.

In November, low on supplies and with half of his horses lost, the party crossed the river, found the Mojave River, followed it over the Garces route through the mountains to the San Bernardino Valley.

*"...and at last reached the haven of San Gabriel Mission in the Spanish settlements. There Father Jose Bernardo Sanchez welcomed them with kindly hospitality. However, when Governor Echeandia at San Diego learned of their arrival things were different. Instead of granting permission for the Americans to proceed northward by the coast, he ordered the intruders to leave at once by the way they had come. Jedediah, nevertheless, had no intention of abandoning his search for new beaver country. So, although he departed as ordered, instead of going back by the Mojave to the Colorado, he turned northward over the Tehachapi and entered the Central Valley.*

*The movements of Smith's party up to the time of leaving San Gabriel Mission in January, 1827, are well documented. Both Smith and his chief lieutenant, Harrison Rogers, kept diaries. Portions of these have survived and have been published."*

Excerpts of a letter to explorer William Clark, now a General and Supt. of Indian Affairs, by Smith from the Bear River Rendezvous, as published by Farquahar, tell the rest of the "California Expedition" story best:

*"I returned to my party at San Gabriel and purchased such articles as were necessary and went eastward of the Spanish settlements on the route I had come in. I steered my course northwest, keeping from 150 to 200 miles from the seacoast, a very high range of mountains being on the east. After traveling 300 miles in that direction, through a country somewhat fertile, in which there were a great many Indians, I made a small hunt and attempted to take my party across the mountain which I before mentioned, and which I called Mount Joseph, to come on and join my partners at the Great Salt Lake. I found the snow so deep on Mount Joseph that I could not cross my horses, five of which starved to death. I was compelled therefore to return to the valley which I had left, and there leaving my party I started with two men (Silas Gobel and Robert Evans), seven horses, and two mules, which I loaded with hay for the horses and provision for ourselves, and started on the twentieth of May and succeeded in crossing it in eight days, having lost only two horses and one mule. I found the snow on the top of the mountain from four to eight feet deep, but it was so consolidated by the heat of the sun that my horses only sunk from half a foot to one foot deep."*

A High Sierra pass had been crossed for the first time by white men.

While a number of historians had attempted to pin down exactly where they crossed the Sierra, which Smith named - as a whole - Mount Joseph, Dale Morgan and Carl Wheat concurred, (in 1943), that the third, and successful, effort took him over the Crest near Ebbetts Pass. His letter continued:

*"After traveling twenty days from the east side of Mount Joseph I struck the southwest corner of the Great Salt Lake, traveling over a country completely barren and destitute of*



*game. When we arrived at the Salt Lake we had but one horse and one mule remaining, which were so poor that they could scarce carry the little camp equipage which I had along. The balance of the horses I was compelled to eat as they gave out."*

They got to Cache Valley on July 2nd. Eleven days later Smith had eighteen men ready for return to California. Silas Gobel was with them; Robert Evans had had enough. Roughly following the route of present day Interstate 5, old U.S. 91, they reached the Mojaves in mid-August. They had heard of other Americans in the region, (most likely the Ewing Young group, which included James Ohio Pattie). These had had "troubles" with the Mojaves and had taken some horses.

For three days Smith found the Mojaves friendly, but when they tried to cross the Colorado on August 18th the Mojaves attacked. Ten men and two Indian women they had with them were killed. Silas Gobel was one of the slain.

After getting supplies at a San Bernardino Valley ranch Smith, with only six of his reinforcements, reached the men he had left on the Stanislaus four months earlier. When he took three men to Mission San Jose for supplies they were arrested and taken to Monterey under military guard. Finally, with help from American sea captains, they were given passports with the agreement that they would leave California. Their beaver pelts were sold, for \$2.50 a pound, to trader Captain John Bradshaw of the *Franklin*, and on December 30, 1827, with 315 horses, 47 traps, and 20 men, Smith started northward. Trapping on the San Joaquin, American, Yuba, Feather and Sacramento Rivers, they found beaver plentiful. Grizzly bears gave them more trouble than the numerous Indians.

In mid-April, near Red Bluff, they turned west to the Hayfork of the Trinity, then the South Fork, and finally the Klamath. Travel was slow. They finally reached the ocean after May 19th, and needed five weeks to reach the Rogue River. Trading for beaver and otter skins, they camped four miles north of the junction of the Umpqua and its north fork on July 13th.

The next day, after warning his men to be on guard against Indians, Smith, Turner and Leland set out to find a route to the Willamette. Despite the warning Indians were allowed to enter the camp where they fell upon the trappers killing 14 men. Two had deserted earlier. Only Arthur Black escaped and headed toward Fort Vancouver, which he reached August 8th. On his return Smith discovered the massacre, and although he was fired upon by the Indians, escaped. He, Turner and Leland arrived at

the Hudson's Bay Post August 10, 1828. Here Dr. McLoughlin ordered Alexander McLeod to take a party and accompany Smith to the massacre site to recover the furs and horses. They returned with much of the loot and some horses for which the canny Scot Factor paid Smith with a draft, \$2,369.60, after deducting the costs of the recovery party.

After spending the winter at Fort Vancouver, Smith and Black headed up the Columbia by boat in March 1829. Then traveling cross-country they met David Jackson on the Flathead River and, on August 5th joined William Sublette at Pierre's hole. That fall, with Jim Bridger as guide Smith led a large party into Blackfoot country and trapped a sizeable area of present Montana and Wyoming. After the Popo Agie-Wind River Rendezvous, in July 1830, when Smith, Jackson and Sublette sold their interests to Bridger, Fitzpatrick and partners, Smith returned to St. Louis and bought a house. Here, with two of his brothers, Austin and Peter, plans were made to take a trading expedition to Santa Fe.

Jonathan Trumbull Warner and Samuel Parkman joined them. By the time they left St. Louis, April 10, 1831, there were seventy-four men, with eleven wagons belonging to Smith, and eleven others to Jackson and Sublette. Fitzpatrick came along, agreeing to let the SJS partners outfit him in Santa Fe for the Rocky Mountain Fur Company's 1831 season.

By May 27th they were between the Arkansas and Cimarron Rivers, three days without water. Smith and Fitzpatrick rode ahead and found a dry waterhole. Fitzpatrick waited here for the party and Smith went ahead with the search.

About twenty Comanches were hiding at a waterhole, awaiting buffalo, when Smith rode up. Though Smith made peaceful gestures, they surrounded him. His horse shied and some Comanches fired, hitting Smith. He killed the leader of the party with the one shot he could get off. The rest attacked him with their lances, butchering him. His pistols, rifle, and some other possessions got to Santa Fe in hands of other Indians. From them the partners learned of Jed Smith's final fight. In just nine years he had achieved great success in the fur trade, survived hazards and threats few men could ever know, and opened vast new areas of the Far West. A giant among his contemporaries, whose character and perserverance are exemplary to those who dare today.

# James Clyman (1792-1881)

by "Doc" Gene Chamberlin



**James Clyman**

*Photo courtesy Utah State Historical Society*

James Clyman was born February 1, 1792 on lands leased by his farmer parents from President Washington. He learned to read, write, and "cipher". The family left Virginia when the land was sold after Washington's death and settled in Ohio where they endured the War of 1812. Afterward James left the farm, drifted into Indiana and Illinois, and learned surveying.

Clyman's biographer, the eminent Paleontologist and Historian, Dr. Charles L. Camp, a Clamper and XSNGH, had an abundant admiration for his subject. He, with good reason, cited that:

*"Clyman was an expert rifleman, hunter of grizzlys, buffalo, and - without a rifle - bees. As a young man, he cleared land with a mattock and axe, planted virgin soil with a hoe, built cabins and mills, and learned surveying. Learned to trap and skin beaver, paddled canoes, built bullboats and fires in a blizzard. Later, he served in the army as a Mounted Ranger and as Quartermaster, and operated a large, diversified California ranch."*

Camp also said:

*"He was lithe and quick, with superb powers of endurance, could outrun and outsmart Indians, had poetic and literary tastes and feelings. Read Shakespeare, Byron, and the Bible. Kept a diary for years and wrote verse and reminiscences in his hold age."*

He went even further, citing Clyman's

*"wisdom, enterprise, honesty, courage, self-confidence, love of adventure and independence of spirit" among other notable characteristics. (One gets the feeling Camp liked him. - Ed.)*

In the spring of 1823 Clyman visited St. Louis to collect his pay as a surveyor. He heard of the adventures of Smith, Ashley and others on the Yellowstone the year before, and signed on to recruit boatmen for the second keelboat expedition upriver. When word came that Andrew Henry needed horses they traded with Arikaras for three days, and then were attacked. Most of the men were killed, in what was called "the worst disaster in the history of the Western Fur Trade", but Clyman and Jed Smith escaped, and the river route was closed. In the fall of '23, headed west from Fort Kiowa over the Black Hills, with Smith and Fitzpatrick, Clyman's party recorded Jed Smith's encounter with the Grizzly, and noted, after Clyman patched him up, "The miracle was that the wounds did not become infected." Jim Bridger later explained this, "Meat just don't spoil in the mountains."

They spent early winter killing hundreds of buffalo, "jerking" or drying the meat over fires. They decided to try to reach the "Sage Hen River" (the Green) after the Crows showed them how they might circle around. As Camp tells, "It took the trappers over two weeks to make the trip. Clyman and Sublette, out on a hunt, nearly froze to death when they were obliged to spend a night on icy ground under one buffalo robe, with nothing for fuel but the "small and scarce" sage brush. Even in the woods, the blizzards blew their fires away. Provisions played out. An occasional beaver, buffalo, antelope, or mountain sheep gave but temporary relief. They were hungry enough to "eat large slices raw." For lack of water they melted snow, and the horses ate snow until Little Sandy River on the Pacific side of South Pass was reached. Here they found the stream seemingly "froze to the bottom." They had cut down through the ice with tomahawks until they could reach no farther. Clyman then pulled out one of his pistols and fired it into the hole. "Up came the water plentiful for man and horse." This was their rediscovery of South Pass.

After trapping the Green, and having difficulty with Indian horse thieves they headed back for the rendezvous in June. Clyman went ahead to seek a spot where the Platte would be navigable. He ran into Indians but evaded them. Smith had gone to find him but seeking evidence of Indian attackers and convinced Clyman had been done in, he returned to the others.

With a gun, eleven bullets, and plenty of powder Clyman decided to walk to civilization, not realizing the vast distance to be covered. He visited a Pawnee settlement. They robbed him of everything, and cut his hair with a dull butcher knife. After 700 miles of walking he fainted from weakness in sight of Fort Atkinson. There, ten days later, Fitzpatrick and others rejoined him.

In 1825, 1826 and 1827, Clyman was in the mountains, trapping and exploring with Smith, William Sublette, Fitzpatrick, Bridger and others. It is believed that he was with the party which rediscovered Yellowstone in fall, 1826, publicizing it better than Colter had done years before. Clyman had paddled a skin boat around Great Salt Lake, discovering that it had no outlet. Then, in later summer, 1827, Clyman left the mountains, sold his furs, and went into a primitive store business in Danville, Illinois.

During the Black Hawk War, Clyman served in a company with Abe Lincoln for a month. Then joining the Mounted Rangers, Clyman was in on the surrender of Chief Black Hawk. He served as assistant quartermaster until he resigned in May 1834. For the next 10 years, Clyman helped run his Danville store, operated a sawmill, bought land in Milwaukee (80 acres), and did surveying and marking of the road from Vincennes, Indiana, to Chicago. Developing a bad cough in 1843-44, Clyman went west looking for a cure. He joined Oregon emigrants as head of a company, with Mountain Man "Black" Harris as guide. With miserable rainy weather, they reached Independence Rock on the Sweetwater by mid-August, and late in October Clyman arrived at Fort Vancouver. After spending the winter ('44) in Oregon, Clyman took a party over the Siskiyou on the route opened by Joel Walker with Lt. Emmons in 1841. James Wilson Marshall was with Clyman's party.

After spending about ten months in California, Clyman and others left for the east with Caleb Greenwood as guide, experiencing the difficulties of Lansford Hastings' "cutoff". At Laramie, Clyman warned emigrants to avoid the Hastings Cutoff. Most went by way of Fort Hall, but the Donners and Reed believed Hastings' propaganda, and met their fate in the Sierra.

A winter in Wisconsin was followed by plans for return to California in 1848, before news of the gold discovery. Clyman reached Nevada leading a party of farmers from Indiana and Michigan. Here they met members of the Mormon Battalion, returning to Salt Lake, who told them of the gold discovery. They followed the new Mormon Road over Carson Pass to Sutters Fort.

James Clyman married Hannah Coombs who was with the party and they settled near Napa, moved to Sonoma and then back to Napa where they developed a ranch. While four of five children born to them died of scarlet fever, their daughter married a Rev. Tallman, and raised seven children on the property.

James Clyman died just a month before his 90th birthday, December 27, 1881. He was buried in the Tulocay Cemetery in Napa.



# 1804 - Jim Bridger - 1881

*by Earl F. Schmidt*



**Jim Bridger**

*Photo courtesy Utah State Historical Society*

Jim Bridger, a Virginian, came West from St. Louis with William Ashley's band of hunters and trappers in 1822. He served as a right-hand man to Ashley's successors, Jedediah S. Smith, Wm. Sublette and David Jackson, after 1826, until 1830, when he joined with Milton Sublette, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Henry Fraeb, and John Baptiste Gervais in forming the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. When keen competition for trapping areas, by 1836, forced the company to join forces with John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company, Bridger became associated with Lucien Fontenelle and Andrew Drips as a principal, until he turned his full efforts to trading at a post on the Black's Fork of the Green River in 1841.

When only 20 years old, in 1824, Bridger led a band of trappers in Bull boats down the Bear River to become the effective discoverer of the Great Salt Lake. Until he was convinced otherwise, he thought he had

reached an arm of the Pacific Ocean because of the salty taste.

Bridger's Fort was first described in 1842 by travellers. Louis Vasquez joined him as partner and half owner that summer. It became the second permanent settlement in what is now the state of Wyoming. While trade with Indians was the initial goal, the beginning of Westbound emigration caused him to send a letter to his St. Louis suppliers following his successful season of 1843, which read:

*"I have established a small fort, with a blacksmith shop and a supply of iron in the road of the emigrants on Black Fork of Green River, which promises fairly. In coming out here they are generally well supplied with money, but by the time they get here they are in need of all kinds of supplies, horses, provisions, smithwork, etc. They bring ready cash from the states, and should I receive the goods ordered, will have considerable business in that way with them, and establish trade with the Indians in the neighborhood, who have a good number of beaver among them. The fort is a beautiful location on Black's Fork of the Green River, receiving fine, fresh water from the snow on the Uintah Range. The streams are alive with mountain trout. It passes the fort in several channels, each lined with trees, kept alive by the moisture of the soil."*

Much of what is recorded of Jim Bridger's personal life comes from interviews with his daughter Virginia Bridger Hahn who was born July 4, 1849 and lived until 1933. Her mother, a Ute woman and Bridger's third wife, was described in the journal of 49er Wm G. Johnson of Pittsburgh: "Mr. Bridger made his selection from among the ladies of the wilderness - a solid, fleshy, roundheaded woman, not oppressed with lines of beauty. Her hair was intensely black and straight, and so cut that it hung in a thick mass upon her broad shoulders." The first wife, reportedly a Mormon from 'the States,' had borne him two sons, James and John , before they separated over 'religious differences.' The second, a Flathead woman, delivered 3 children, Josephine, Felix, and John. The fourth wife, a Shoshone, had 2 children, Mary Elizabeth born in 1853 and William in 1857. (Clamp note: With these "recorded" families it is very possible he could have rivaled Jim Savage with total wives and progeny.)

After selling out to - or being forced out by - the Mormons in 1853, Bridger retired to a farm he purchased in 1854, near Dallas, Missouri. For 27 years until his death, in 1881, he continued to file claims against the Federal Government for his losses of property, cattle, and possessions. Of the \$100,000 he claimed, \$6,000 was paid, in 1899, 18 years too late.



# Fort Bridger

by Earl F. Schmidt

In his *History of the Fur Trade of the Far West*, General Chittenden cites "Jim Bridger's Fort" as the "second most important outfitting point for emigrants from the Missouri River to the West". He ranked Fort Laramie first, Fort Hall third, and described "Bridger's...the first trader's post ever built for the convenience of emigrants". Chittenden regarded the Post's founding date, (he says 1843), as the "closing landmark...(the)...limit of a distinct period in western history", ...(era of exploration, mountain man, and trapper, ...which began with)... "the return of Lewis and Clark".

Edwin Bryant, whose journals carry so much significant detail related to California-bound travel during the era, reached the post July 17, 1846. His description of the locale, facilities and operation is quite comprehensive.

*"'Fort Bridger', as it is called, is a small trading post, established and now occupied by Messrs. Bridger and Vasquez. The buildings are two or three miserable log cabins, rudely constructed, and bearing but a faint resemblance to habitable houses. Its position is in a handsome and fertile bottom of the small stream on which we are encamped, about two miles south of the point where the old wagon trail, via Fort Hall, makes an angle and takes a northwesterly course."*

Bryan also mentioned that about 500 Snake Indians were encamped near the post with a number of traders from the neighborhood of Taos, and the headwaters of the Arkansas, who had brought with them dressed buckskins, buckskin shirts, pantaloons, and moccasins to trade with the emigrants. He also noted:

*"The emigrant trade is a very important one to the mountain merchants and trappers. The countenances and bearing of these men, who have made the wilderness their home, are generally expressive of a cool, cautious, but determined intrepidity. In a trade they have no consciences, taking all the 'advantages', but in a matter of hospitality or generosity, they are openhanded, ready, many of them, to divide with the needy what they possess."*

The Journal records meeting "Lansford W. Hastings and his companion Hudspeth" there. He also, "met Captain Joseph R. Walker...the

celebrated explorer returning from California where he had been a guide with Fremont" and reports that, "Walker...was driving 400 or 500 horses back to the States." (While he does not mention Miles Goodyear, could these have been the same horses Miles helped drive East?) It is interesting that so many men who played significant roles in the development of the West were at exactly the same spot at one time.

The present replica of Bridger's Post is operated as a living history exhibit by members of the Fort Bridger Muzzle Loaders Rendezvous. It conforms very closely to Bryant's description and the contemporary drawings made by both Howard Stansbury and W.H. Jackson.

In 1847 Brigham Young passed Bridger's with the first party of Latter Day Saints, enroute from Illinois to establish the State of Deseret in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake. Bridger was away at the time, but apparently served Young and his people as a guide and supplier during the first years of the Mormon Migration.

Bridger never gave up his work as a guide and trapper. Partner Louis Vasquez carried on much of the Post's business and made buying trips, but one of the two men was always present at the Fort. Captain Stansbury employed Bridger in 1849, "as a guide to help find new cut-offs for an Army route to California". He is highly complimentary in referring to "Major James Bridger, one of the oldest Mountain-men in the entire region...", but he tells that their departure... "was delayed...by absence of the partner...who was on a buying trip to Salt Lake City."

The growing power and wealth of the Mormons, coupled with their desire for independence and increasing hostility to the Federal Government, soon brought threats and coercion to force Bridger to "sell out" and remove a perceived threat to their gateway. Bridger was also seen as a personal threat and on one occasion when the 'Danites' were after him, he hid in an eagle's nest with food supplied by a rope until they left.

*The Life and Confessions of Bill Hickman*, who was known as "Brigham's Destroying Angel", related that, (in 1853), "it was rumored that Bridger was furnishing Indians with powder and lead to kill Mormons". Hickman was ordered to go with a posse to handle the matter. When they arrived at the Fort Jim was gone. No ammunition was found, but Hickman reported,

*"The whiskey and rum, of which he had a good stock, was destroyed by doses; the sheriff, most of his officers, the doctor and chaplain of the company, all aided in carrying out the orders, and worked so hard day and night that they were*

*exhausted - not being able to stand up. But the privates, poor fellows, were rationed and did not do so much."*

There are conflicting stories as to what followed. But, it appears Louis Vasquez did sign an agreement, on October 18, 1853, to sell the Fort and Bridger's (supposed 30 mile), Mexican Land grant, to the Utah Militia, or "Nauvoo Legion", for \$8,000, (\$4,000 down and \$4,000 due in 1855). In November the Mormons established a new settlement, called Fort Supply, twelve miles away on Willow Creek, and, in 1884, 'their' Utah Territorial Legislature created Green River County, surrounding it.

By 1857 relationships between the United States Government and the Mormon President/Governor Young had reached an impasse. President James Buchanan appointed a new Non-Mormon Governor for Utah Territory, Alfred Cumming, and an Army Expedition, 2,500 officers and men, was ordered to escort the new Governor and officers to Salt Lake City and insure their proper installation. On September 18, Colonel Albert Sidney Johnston left Fort Leavenworth in command. Supply wagons and troops were already spread out over the entire route. The first detachment established Camp Winfield, 35 miles east of Fort Bridger on Hams Fork of the Green, on September 28.

Winter arrived early, and the Mormon Militia conducted a continuing campaign of harassment. The Mormons attacked and burned trains of Army supply wagons, two while encamped on the Green at night, and one underway, at the site named Simpson's Hollow, for its hapless commander. With food and equipment in short supply troop morale was low. Colonel Johnston arrived at Camp Winfield on November 3, and immediately, on November 6, ordered an advance to take Fort Bridger from the Mormons. Storms of sleet and snow, with temperatures reaching to 16 degrees below zero, slowed the advance. It took the troops 15 days to cover 35 miles.

The last detachment of the Expeditionary force, commanded by Colonel Philip St. George Cooke, escorted Governor Cumming, the new territorial Chief Justice, David R. Eckels and other officers. The new Post Suttler, William A. Carter, was with them. His diary recorded:

*"Nov. 10th. - Last night was awful, the worst that I have ever spent. The wind blew a hurricane all night driving the snow in every direction. It was heart-rending to listen to the piteous cries of our famished mules as they crowded around our campfires begging for food in the most supplicating tones, and to think we had nothing to give them. When we awoke this morning the storm was still raging and the air dark*

*with snow. Mules were strewn about dead and some in the last agonies of death. It was difficult to get those that were alive to stand long enough to find and put the harness on. At least fifty living mules and horses were left in camp because it was impossible to drive them. The storm still raged furiously and we had fourteen miles to make after we got started, however, the wind was at our backs. All day it raged with demoniacal fury hurling snow at us and piling it in large drifts across our pathway. At last, late in the evening, we reached our prospective camp on Sweetwater and there among the willows found a spot where we were somewhat sheltered from the fury of the wind. We gave our starving mules the little corn and then shoveled away the deep snow and succeeded in kindling a fire. It was only by constant exertion in cutting willows, that we could keep ourselves from freezing. The night was unbearably cold, the temperature 20 below zero, and a great number of the stock died."*

The Mormons used the time to burn all the wooden buildings, leaving only a hollow square stone fortification they had built. (This was later roofed and used as the Post Guardhouse.) They had moved all families out of Fort Supply in September and retreated to Echo Canyon. Here they continued to harass Army Patrols until spring. Meanwhile Brigham Young asked Army Colonel Thomas Kane to travel to Washington and make a special appeal to the President. Kane returned by sea and over the Sierra, then to Camp Scott, the Army's winter HQ 1 1/2 miles from the ruins of Bridger's Fort, to escort Governor Cumming to Salt Lake City. There, on April 5, 1855, a politic Brigham Young accepted his authority. The Mormon War was almost over.

Bridger 'leased' all of his land - based on the government order, 1853, Hockaday survey, in 1857, to the Army for 10 years for an annual rental of \$600. No payment was made however until Bridger could prove the validity of his "Mexican Grant". In June 1858, Colonel Johnston formally designated the Post as an Army Depot, to be known as Fort Bridger, in honor of its founder. One of the first Post Commanders was Brevet Lt. Col. E. R. S. Canby, 10th United States Cavalry, who later met his death at the hands of Captain Jack during the Modoc War in California.

It is interesting to note that Fort Bridger is one of the few American Military Posts ever named for a civilian. While Jim Bridger never served in a military capacity except as a guide, he was early-on extended the 'courtesy' title - common to trapper and wagon train leaders - of "Captain". Army Captain Stansbury, in '49, 'promoted' him to "Major", and in

1860, when the English author, Sir Richard F. Burton, travelled through the Fort on the Overland Stage, he 'promoted' Old Jim to "Colonel" with a meaningful contemporary tribute:

*"The fort was built by Colonel James Bridger, now the oldest trapper on the Rocky Mountains, of whom Messrs. Fremont and Stansbury have both spoken in highest terms. He divides with Christopher Carson, the Kit Carson of the Wind River and the Sierra Nevada explorations, the honor of being the best guide and interpreter in the Indian country; the palm for prudence is generally given to the former; for dash and hardfighting to the latter, although, it is said, the mildest mannered of men. Colonel Bridger, when an Indian trader, placed his post upon a (Hapsaroke) on the north, the Ogalalas and other Sioux to the east, the Arapahoes and Cheyennes on the south, and the various tribes of Yutas (Utahs) on the southwest. He had some difficulties with the Mormons." (An understatement)*

Burton's first goal on reaching the Fort, incidentally, "was to replenish our Whiskey Keg".

The Post served as a remount station for both the Overland Stages and the Pony Express, and in October 1861, it was connected to Sacramento and Omaha by the new telegraph. All troops had been removed in mid '61 to serve in the Civil War, and Judge William A. Carter, the first 'sutler', then post-trader, and a veteran of service against the Seminoles in Florida during the 1830's, remained with his family as the defender of the Fort. Carter organized a volunteer company, some 40 to 60 men, largely from his own employees. With the support of Washakie, a sub-chief of the Shoshones, he gave protection to the Fort and its civilian neighbors - against other Indian depredations - until Company I, Third California Infantry Volunteers arrived in December 1862, to garrison the post.

Carter served as a Special Agent of the United States Post Office Dept. throughout the Civil War and made numerous stage trips, as far as the Pacific Coast, to assure protection for the mail against 'Rebs' and Indians. His holdings and interests grew. In addition to freight lines to the Missouri, warehouses, cattle and farm, he established express and freight service to the mining camps of Montana. His store sales were reported at \$100,000 per year in 1866, "and growing". General Rusling, Inspector for the Quartermaster, that year complained that Carter "had a monopoly, was not only overcharging the government, but was selling 2/3 of the produce of the reservation to other interests." However, he went on to state: "In nothing that I say would I reflect on the man's character and integrity."



With the discovery of gold and development of mines in the South Pass area the Judge grubstaked miners, and obtained title to a number of properties. He established three sawmills in the Uinta Mountains, and is credited with ownership of the first producing oil rig in Wyoming. It yielded a refined product suitable for illuminating purposes at the Fort. When President Grant offered to name him as the first Territorial Governor in 1868, he declined because it would disrupt his ties to home and family.

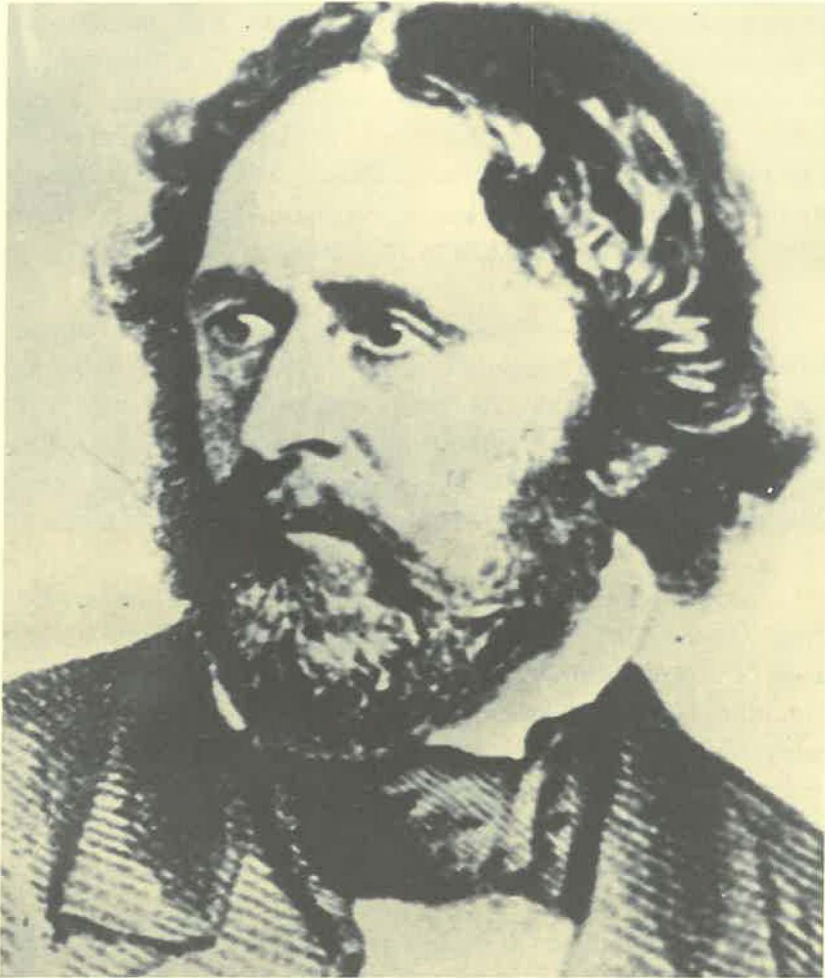
During 1868 and '69 the Union Pacific Railroad, guarded by troops from the Fort, was being built through Wyoming. While the roadbed was initially planned to go by way of the Fort, it passed 10 miles to the north, purportedly because one of the principal location engineers could not obtain a quart of whiskey there on a Sunday. The Judge immediately established a warehouse at "Bridger Station" north of the Fort, and throughout the period of the Army's action against the Indians, during the 1870's, his freight wagons left deep ruts, still visible today, as they hauled supplies to the Fort from "The Station and Town of Carter".

In 1890, following a recommendation made by the Inspector General in 1864, the post was abandoned by the Army. But, not before a complete water system was installed, as War Department files show, for the Post, in 1889.

Judge Carter died in 1881, but the operations at and around the Fort were continued by his family until its abandonment. Title to the famous old Post passed to his widow through a government patent in 1896, and Fort Bridger was held by members of the family until June 1928. By the gifts, and a nominal purchase, (\$7,100, raised by citizens of Uinta, Lincoln, and Sweetwater Counties), title to the Fort passed to the Historical Landmark Commission of Wyoming. The Fort Bridger Wyoming Historical Landmark and Museum was dedicated to public use in 1933, and the site has since been restored and maintained by the State of Wyoming.

# Fremont's Survey of South Pass

*by Guy Reynolds*



**John C. Fremont**

*Photo courtesy Utah State Historical Society*

From 1838 down to the Civil War the United States Army had a small but highly significant branch called the Corps of Topographical Engineers. Its total complement did not number more than thirty-six officers at any one time. Though they followed in the shadow of the Mountain Men, no other group of comparative size contributed so much to the exploration and development of the American West. The Engineers were concerned with recording all of the western phenomena as accurately as possible, whether main-traveled roads or uncharted wilderness. As Army officers they represented a visible evidence of the direct concern of the Federal government for the settlement of the West.

Most famous of all the Topographical Engineers was John C. Fremont. The principal foundation of Fremont's fame rests upon his two exploring expeditions of 1842 and 1843-44.



Fremont had married Senator Thomas Hart Benton's daughter, Jessie. Benton had been the editor of the *St. Louis Enquirer*. Since 1818 he had worked to secure Oregon for the United States. He believed that Britain possessed no legitimate claim below the 49th parallel. Searching for ways to aid his cause, Benton saw the possibilities inherent in a much-publicized Rocky Mountain reconnaissance by his son-in-law Fremont. Extreme secrecy was employed to prevent the true political object of the expedition from becoming known. There are few details on record of the way in which Benton secured an appropriation and persuaded Fremont's superior to send him to the Rocky Mountains.

Fremont's first expedition to the mountains began with an air of secrecy and restrained excitement. He left Washington on the second of May 1842. By the twenty-second he was in St. Louis where he made arrangements with Pierre Chouteau for his outfit. With him in St. Louis was Charles Preuss, an artist and topographer, and the man destined to make some of the more important maps of the western regions.

Leaving St. Louis, Fremont traveled by steamboat up the Missouri River. On the boat, he met Kit Carson. Of this first meeting, Fremont wrote, "I was pleased with him and his manner of address... He was a man of medium height, broad-shouldered and deep chested, with a clear, steady, blue eye and frank speech and address; quiet and unassuming." Carson was a veteran of the Rocky Mountain fur trade, well known among his fellow trappers, and much traveled over the mountain and plains region.

Fremont outfitted his party at Chouteau's station up the Missouri, and on the tenth of June the party began its march. The exploration party followed the Platte River across the plains. Several days ahead of them were the Oregon-bound wagons led by Elija White. The discarded excess gear of civilization made the trail an easy one to follow. Discouraged men turning back brought news of calamities, sickness and deaths.

At the forks of the Platte, Fremont divided the party. He, Preuss, and four others took the South Fork to Fort St. Vrain. Lambert led the larger group along the North Platte to Fort Laramie where Fremont and the others joined them.

Leaving Fort Laramie, they again followed the Oregon Trail along the Platte. In August they camped at Independence Rock. This great humpback of granite was measured by Fremont. It was 650 yards long and 40 yards in height. Except for one dwarf pine growing at its summit, it was bare, except for names that made it a record book in stone. Mountain men who had gathered around it gave the granite monument its name.

Indians, trappers, missionaries and the first emigrants headed for Oregon's Willamette Valley left their names in the rock. All the people of the trail felt a need to leave a record of their passing.

Leaving Independence Rock, Fremont's party followed the valley of the Sweetwater River to the granite ridge where the river had cut through to leave a passage called Devil's Gate, a waterworn cut about thirty-five yards wide and three hundred yards long. As they passed through it, they looked up at the steep granite walls towering four hundred feet above them.

On August 6, they left the Sweetwater Valley, passed through a rough canyon, and began to follow the river to its mountain beginnings. The morning of August 8 was another cold day for summer. After breakfast the men moved out under a cloudy sky and felt chilled from occasional showers and a wind that swept down from the distant snow-covered peaks of the Wind River mountains to the north. Fremont and Carson looked for the summit and their goal, South Pass. Even for Carson, it was difficult to tell just where the summit was located. The upward ascent was so gradual, so prosaic, and without dramatic vistas that it was hard to believe that they were nearing a pass. The grade was much too easy. This crossing of the Continental Divide was not so much a single place as a considerable area. Fremont thought it to be between two low hills that were no more than fifty or sixty feet high. The moment of recognition at the summit was so unimpressive that Fremont failed to make any observations of the exact longitude and latitude. Instead, he moved his party eight miles farther and camped on the Little Sandy River, where he then made his calculations for an exact position.

The approach from the mouth of the Sweetwater River had covered about 120 miles across a sandy plain which developed into a gradual grade to the summit. At the pass, the expedition was 950 miles from their jumping-off point at Chouteau's Landing at the mouth of the Kansas River.

Beyond South Pass, the expedition headed northwest to explore the Wind River Mountains. Fremont completed a brief investigation of the area to the west of the mountains, and on August 17th, started the party on a return journey to St. Louis.

# Pony Express and Overland Mail Routes Via South Pass

*by Rod Stock*

By 1859 stations had been established along the primary routes of travel from Missouri, Iowa and Kansas, west to Denver, Salt Lake City, and Sacramento. They were used by several freight and mail contractors, both private and military. The Mormons had also established mail stations across "Dakotah Territory" as early Wyoming was called, on their route to the Great Salt Lake valley.



**Pony Express Rider, W.H. Jackson**

*Photo courtesy Wyoming State Archives, Museums and Historical Department*

The first mail contract for service to the east from Salt Lake City was awarded to Samuel Woodson in 1850, and in 1851, George Chorpensing received a contract for his "Jackass Mail" wagons to carry mail west to Sacramento. Others succeeded Woodson (McGraw, 1854-57; Hiram Kimball's "Mormon Mail," 1857; Mills, '57-'58; and Hockaday and Liggett, 1858-59).

Russell, Majors and Waddel had military freighting contracts to serve Utah Territory posts prior to 1858, utilizing the Oregon and California Trails, via Fort Bridger. By late 1858 Russell was also freighting to the new town of Denver. In May 1859 he purchased the mail and freight

contract held by Hockaday and Liggett, and by July his company, the Leavenworth and Pike's Peak Express, was running mail/express stage-coaches between St. Joseph and Salt Lake City by way of Fort Kearny, Fort Laramie, and Denver. Russell also bought out Chorpensing in 1860, and he, Majors, and Waddell reorganized as the Central Overland California and Pike's Peak Express Company. Russell then obtained a government mail subsidy to inaugurate the Pony Express. They used the company's existing stations along the emigrant trail, adding change stations as needed, to start the service in April 1860. By using the telegraph from the east coast to St. Joseph and the Pony Express to Sacramento, communication to California was accomplished in about nine days.

When war broke out between the states in 1861, Congress ordered the Butterfield Overland Mail to move north to the Overland route. It was controlled by Wells Fargo and Company who were operating the western half of the route as the Overland Mail Company using the existing Russell, Majors and Waddell stations, equipment, and personnel.

With the end of the Pony Express in October 1861, when the East-West telegraph system was connected, the Overland Mail and Express became the dominant carrier west of the Mississippi.

In 1862 Ben Holladay assumed control of the Overland and shortened the route between Julesburg and Fort Bridger by establishing new stations, with telegraph connections, far south of the Platte-Sweetwater-South Pass route. It went through southern Wyoming parallel to the Union Pacific Railroad and present day Interstate Highway 80. In November 1866 Holladay sold his staging empire to Wells Fargo and Company for 1.8 million dollars in cash and stock.

With the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, the colorful Concord coaches and equally colorful drivers of the Overland Mail and Express Company passed into history.\*

(\*on east-west routes. Much of the equipment continued in service on other Western roads until the coming of the automobile.)

A listing of all known mail/express/telegraph stations used in transcontinental service through Wyoming follows.

**Bear River Station (Briggs Station):** Uinta County, Wyoming. P/X and Overland mail.

**Barrel Springs:** Uinta County. Possible Overland mail station and R.R. construction camp, 1868.

**Quaking Asp (Aspen Station):** Uinta County. P/X and Overland mail stop.

**Muddy Station (Muddy Creek):** Uinta County. An important P/X and Overland mail change station. (Only Judge Carter's Post Office and telegraph office was allowed at Fort Bridger).

**Fort Bridger:** Uinta County. Mail and telegraph stage stop only.

**Millersville:** Uinta County. Trading post, P/X stop, later Overland mail.

**Church Butte:** Uinta County. P/X station site later occasional Overland stop.

**Ham's Fork (Granger Station, Southbend Station):** Sweetwater County. P/X site one mile northwest of joining of two forks. Two mail/express station sites downstream.

**Martin's Station (Michael Martin's):** Sweetwater County. Trading post and P/X station.

**Green River Station:** Sweetwater County. On the Green north of the confluence with Big Sandy River. A major crossing point for emigrants. Probable site of "Old Lombard Ferry", a "home station" for P/X and stage drivers.

**Big Timbers:** Sweetwater County. An Overland Mail station and trading post for wagon trains.

**Simpson's Hollow:** Sweetwater County. Possible P/X station. Site of Mormon Militia attack on Army supply wagons.

**Big Sandy Stage Station:** Sweetwater County. On riverbank, west of Farson Junction, U.S. 191 and SR-28.

**Little Sandy Crossing:** Sweetwater County. P/X station, six miles N.E. of Farson.

**Dry Sandy Stage Station:** Sublette County. Original P/X and stage station on the Oregon trail.

**McCann-Ranch Stage Station:** Sublette County. Four miles north of Dry Sandy Station.

**Pacific Springs:** Fremont County. Early Mormon ranch with good water



later a P/X and Overland mail stage change station. Several historic ranch buildings remain.

**Burnt Ranch (South Pass):** Fremont County. Early Mormon mail station on the Sweetwater. Original P/X and Overland mail relay station. Also, a telegraph relay station. U.S. Army troops were garrisoned here for several years. Several historical buildings on private property. The Seminoe cut off from the East ended here and Lander Road west began.

**Rock Creek Station:** Fremont County. P/X and Overland mail station near Radium Springs. Later Lewiston Mining District.

**St. Mary's Stage Station:** Fremont County.

**Warm Springs Station:** Fremont County.

**Ice Springs (Ice Slough):** Fremont County. P/X station.

**Three Crossings Station:** Fremont County. P/X and later Overland mail stage "home" station.

**Split Rock Station (Plante's):** Fremont County. P/X and stage station.

**Devil's Gate:** Natrona County. P/X station, probably used after Independence Rock site.

**Sweetwater Station:** Natrona County. P/X and stage station at Independence Rock.

**Horse Creek Stage Station:** Natrona County.

**Willow Springs Station:** Natrona County. P/X and later Overland mail change station.

**Red Buttes P/X Station (Bessemer Bend):** Natrona County.

**Platte Bridge Station:** Natrona County. P/X and Overland mail stop. At Fort Caspar State Park.

**Deer Creek Station (Mercedes):** Converse County. Trading post, P/X and Overland mail station, telegraph relay and military garrison. Now site of Glenrock, Wyoming. A Mormon mail station and farm, abandoned in 1857 was located 3 miles south.

**Box Elder P/X. Station:** Converse County. 1860.

**LaPrele P/X Station:** Converse County. Foundation and dry well, preserved on private ranch.

**Bed Tick P/X Station:** Converse County.

**LaBonte Stage Station:** Converse County. P/X and mail stage station.

**Elkhorn P/X Station:** Platte County.

**Old Horseshoe P/X Station (Slade's):** Platte County. Mail and later telegraph station.

**Cottonwood P/X Station:** Platte County.

**Star Ranch (Ward's, Central Star, Sand Point):** Goshen County. Relay station for P/X and mail stage west of Fort Laramie.

**Fort Laramie Military Post:** Goshen County. Mail and stage stop only.

**Beauvais Ranch (Badeau's Ranch, Bordeaux's, Verdling's Ranch, "Laramie City"):** Goshen County. An 1859 U.S. Mail station, P/X station. Contract Overland mail station after 1861.

**Spring Ranch (Cold Springs):** Goshen County. A P/X and Overland mail station.

The following historically important Overland mail/stage stations on the 1862-63 southern Wyoming route from Denver to Salt Lake are listed by counties, as sites where some remains exist.

**Albany County:** Big Laramie Station and Rock Creek Station.

**Carbon County:** Elk Mountain, Bridger Pass, North Platte, Fort Halleck, Sulphur Springs stations.

**Sweetwater County:** Dug Springs Station, LaCledde Stage Station/Old Fort LaCledde, Black Buttes Stage Station, Rock Point Stage (Point of Rocks), Rock Spring Station, and Blair's Trading Post, Green River Stage Station, and Lone Tree Stage Station.



# Ghost Towns, Gamblers and Gold

*by Marsh Fey*

Between 1849 and 1853 thousands of gold seekers on their rush to California, unknowingly passed within a few miles of two extremely rich deposits - the Sweetwater Mining District in Wyoming and Nevada's Comstock Lode. The Sweetwater gold discovery in 1867 soon nurtured the bustling mining camps of South Pass City, Atlantic City and Miner's Delight. Over two dozen mines and hundreds of placer claims sprung up causing the area's population to soar over 2,000.

South Pass, the largest of the three bonanza communities, boasted of a main street nearly a mile long that supported five hotels, three butcher shops, saw mills, six general stores, several clothing stores, a sporting goods shop, a jewelry store and even a furrier. The roaring "night life" was enhanced with several restaurants, seventeen saloons and gambling halls, numerous "houses of ill-repute," all well-stocked by two local breweries and a liquor supply house. The remote city became a haunt for the outlaw Butch Cassidy.

Two million in gold was extracted in the five years of the first boom. This was terminated by a bust which swept the Sweetwater gold fields in 1872 causing the majority of residents to leave. Resurgences in mining activity continued over the years with the repeated efforts of thousands of hopeful prospectors who hoped to "strike it rich" at the next turn of a shovel.

South Pass City is noted for being both the "Birthplace of Women's Suffrage" and the home of Esther Hobart Morris, the "Mother of Women's Suffrage." This early feminist arrived in South Pass City in 1869 to join her husband, a miner and saloon keeper. Shortly afterwards she influenced Colonel W.H. Bright to introduce a bill in the first Wyoming territorial legislature to grant the right to vote and hold office to the women of Wyoming. The legislation was passed and became law on December 10, 1869. The following year Mrs. Morris was appointed to the office of Justice of the Peace. It wasn't until fifty years after the Wyoming bill, that the 19th Amendment was added to the United States Constitution. In 1960 a statue was erected in the national capital to honor the "crusading lady" from South Pass City.

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# The Grave of Charlotte Dansie

by Randy Brown

Robert Dansie and Charlotte Rudland were married in 1849. They were residents of Suffolk County, England, which is northeast of London. Robert was a blacksmith.

Shortly after their marriage the Dansies joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and then moved to Barkin, a town near London. The move was prompted by the disapproval of their families and friends of their new religion. Robert became a gardener and took care of the grounds and garden of a wealthy landowner in Barkin. By 1862 they had five children, and with them, but leaving behind the graves of two others, they left for America on May 12.

They sailed from Liverpool on May 14 aboard the clipper *William Tapscott* which had been chartered by the church to bring 850 English Saints to the United States. They arrived in New York on June 25 and docked the next day, finally arriving after 42 long days on the sea, a trip that adversely affected the health of many of the passengers.

A train had been chartered to take the converts on to Florence, Nebraska, the gathering point near Omaha for Mormons about to take the trail to Salt Lake. The Dansies were assigned to the company of Captain Ansel P. Harmon, who led one of six companies sent east from Utah that year to bring back Mormon emigrants. The Harmon Company consisted of 48 wagons and 500 individuals. The company left Florence on August 2nd.

John D. T. McAllister was elected president and chaplain of the company and unofficial journal keeper. McAllister had made several similar trips between Salt Lake and Florence in previous years to bring in Saints to the city and was now returning from his missionary work in Birmingham, England. From his journal we learn that there were eight deaths while the company camped at Florence and fifteen more, nearly all children, before the company reached their camping place on the Sweetwater below Twin Mounds on September 20. Who can imagine the thoughts of these mostly English converts virtually just off the ship from England's green and pleasant land as they gazed on the empty and barren country that would one day be Wyoming? It must have been a somewhat frightening experience for them, but for some, liberated from the horrors of England's industrial slums, any change, however alien, must have been welcome.

Charlotte Dansie was expecting the birth of an eighth child, but we do not know how far along the pregnancy was by September. She had suffered during the voyage and her health had continued to deteriorate during the wagon journey. On the night of the twentieth the baby was born prematurely and lived just long enough for his parents to name him Joseph. A grandson was told the story of the night by his mother, one of the Dansie children who was present when Charlotte died.

*"I have heard my mother say that grandfather told her that before grandmother died, she was in such pain that she told him she could stand her suffering no longer and asked him to pray to God that she might be released and return to her maker. Grandfather did pray and it was only a matter of minutes until both she and the baby died."*

The journal of John D. T. McAllister reads as follows:

*"September 21, Sunday. At 7 1/2 o'clock a few of us went ahead to dig a grave for the body of Sister Charlotte Dansie, wife of Robert, age 32, who died early this morning of a "Miscarriage" and general debility. One mile brought us to the Summit or pass. Three more we made the Pacific Springs, one mile farther we crossed the Pacific Creek and dug the grave on the right of the road, while digging the grave, Captain Harmon rode up and informed us that Caroline Myers, aged 25 was dead. She died of Billious fever\* just after the wagons left camp. We widened the grave for both bodies. We stopped there three hours then traveled 11 miles to Dry Sandy. Made 16 miles today."*

Robert put a strand of blue beads around Charlotte's neck and from the family's belongings tore the top off a large trunk hinged with brass images of the British lion. The trunk lid was placed over the face and body of Charlotte before the grave was filled. The baby was buried in the arms of its mother who lay beside the body of Caroline Myers. After the burial a large rock was placed over the grave.

The Harmon Company arrived in Salt Lake on October 2nd. In December Robert married Jane Wilcox who had also been with the Harmon Company. They had nine children. In all, Robert and his two wives, Charlotte and Jane, had thirteen children who lived to have families of their own by which the Dansie clan has continued to multiply and prosper in Utah and Idaho.

Some of Robert's children later attempted to locate Charlotte's



grave but without success. In 1939 some members of the next generation, armed with the McAllister journal, made another attempt. When they reached Pacific Springs they found a Mexican sheepherder camped nearby. They asked him if he knew of any old graves in the vicinity. He told them that some other sheepherders had dug into a grave he had noticed close by, but when they found that three people had been buried there, two adults and a baby, it had been covered back up. Questioned further it soon became evident that the man himself had dug up the grave and becoming frightened he confessed it and then produced a string of blue beads that he had found in the grave. The beads were recognized as those placed by Robert around Charlotte's neck before her burial. When they were shown the grave, scrap metal from the trunk, copper rivets, brass hinges and lock with the image of the British lion, and old pieces of leather were scattered around the grave. All this evidence led them to believe that the grave of Charlotte, Joseph, and Caroline Myers had finally been identified. Little more than a month later the present monument and fence was installed and dedicated by over 80 members of the Dansie family one of which was 81 year-old Sarah Ann Dansie, Charlotte's only surviving child, who had been four years old when she stood over her mother's grave so many years before.

In 1958 President Eisenhower authorized the Secretary of the Interior to convey one and one-quarter acres of land at this place to be used as a Grave Site Memorial to Charlotte Rudland Dansie. The Dansie Family Organization now has a deed to this property.

The words quoted on the monument below the picture are from the Mormon rallying anthem "Come, Come, Ye Saints" and were written by William Clayton of the 1847 Pioneer Company that led the way into Salt Lake Valley. Clayton wrote the words while camped in Iowa 43 days out on the journey from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters in 1846. The fourth verse is as follows:

*And should we die before our journey's through,  
Happy day! All is well!  
We then are free from toil and sorrow too;  
With the just we shall dwell.  
But if our lives are spared again  
To see the Saints, their rest obtain  
Oh how we'll make this chorus swell -  
All is well! All is well!*

\*Note - Billious fever, given as the cause of Caroline Myers death, is acute inflammation of the liver, and is a symptom of many illnesses.

# Granger

*by Russel L. Tanner*

The first Euro-Americans in the region may have been Spanish explorers as early as the late 1600's, or French fur trappers in the mid-to-late 1700's; they left no record, and their presence is only romantic speculation. The first documented white visitors were members of General William Ashley's trapping expedition, who arrived in 1824. This group included such notable trappers as Thomas Fitzpatrick, Jedediah Smith, James Clyman, James Beckwourth, and, of course, Jim Bridger. The first of the fur trade Rendezvous was held in 1825 on Henry's Fork, a tributary of the Green River about 30 miles to the southeast of the confluence of the Ham's Fork and Black's Fork Rivers. Undoubtedly all these, and other famous fur trade characters passed by here, and indeed, the two streams are named for two of Ashley's less renowned trappers, whose first names seem to be lost to history.

The 1834 Rendezvous was held along Ham's Fork. The American Fur Company encampment was at the confluence of the two streams immediately in the vicinity of Granger. The Rocky Mountain Fur Company and various groups of free trappers and Native Americans, principally of the Nez Perce, Bannock, and Shoshone tribes, were camped along Ham's Fork between present day Granger and Opal.

Exploration by fur trappers and traders resulted in the discovery of the major trails that would later bring hundreds of thousands of emigrants to Oregon, California, and Utah. The earliest route of the trail to Oregon, according to historian H.M. Chittenden, crossed South Pass and the Green River, and from the confluence of the Black's Fork and Ham's Fork Rivers, followed Ham's Fork north, crossing the Bear River Divide. Thus, even prior to the establishment of Fort Bridger in 1843, there likely was an encampment, if not a permanent settlement of some kind, at the spot where Granger now exists.

Starting in the early 1840's, American settlers bound for Oregon crossed this way. When Jim Bridger established his post, the trail up Black's Fork saw even more use as travelers visited the last source of supplies and repair work between South Pass and the Snake River country. Emigration to Oregon slowly increased into the later 1840's, and in 1847, members of the Church of Latter-Day Saints under the leadership of Brigham Young, began their migration to their promised land in the Salt Lake Valley of present-day Utah. The discovery of gold in California's Sutter Valley brought even more new settlers from the east in 1849. Throughout the 1850's, the Granger area was criss-crossed by several emigrant trails and stagecoach and freight wagon routes.

Throughout the latter half of the 19th Century, various military contingents passed along Black's Fork enroute to and from Fort Bridger, protecting western commerce and migration. One of the most substantial, and in many ways the strangest, military operation that occurred in Wyoming was the so-called Utah Expedition of 1857-58. Misunderstanding, suspicion, and malice all contributed to a situation that led President James Buchanan to order 2500 troops to suppress a suspected uprising and purported secessionist movement on the part of Mormon settlers in Utah. Many incidents and encampments of the various Army dragoons, infantry, and artillery, and of Mormon militia forces took place in the vicinity of Granger. The incident was eventually settled without bloodshed, but it remains an example of the tensions extant in the years immediately preceding the Civil War.

World traveler Sir Richard Burton passed this way in 1860 and described a stagecoach way-station that was apparently upstream from Granger on the Ham's Fork. This station was probably operated by Russell, Majors, and Waddell, the company which also originated the famous Pony Express in 1860. Although the Pony Express operated for only eighteen months and was only marginally successful, it is deeply embedded in the mystique of the American West. The site of a station on the Pony Express is also reputed to be someplace up Ham's Fork from Granger, and another is said to have been located about ten miles to the east, though neither has been precisely located.

Ben Holladay, a noted western entrepreneur, foreclosed on mortgages Russell, Majors, and Waddell owed him and took over the stagecoach and mail delivery operations between Missouri and Salt Lake City in 1862. Holladay soon moved the stage operation from the Oregon Trail over South Pass to a southern route which became known as the Overland Trail and follows the general vicinity of a route also called the Cherokee Trail. The Cherokee Trail was named for two parties of Cherokee Indians who passed this way in 1849-50 enroute from their reservation in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) to the California gold fields.

Holladay established a swing station near the confluence of Ham's Fork and Black's Fork to change horses on the stagecoach and to raise hay and provide other services along his freighting, mail, and stagecoach route. The South Bend or Granger Stage, Station still stands before you in Granger, and is an important site on the National Register of Historic Places. The noted western photographer William Henry Jackson worked for a few months as a teamster for Holladay and spent three weeks at the station in 1866. Jackson was present in 1932 when the stage station was given to the State of Wyoming, and he recalled his visit here some 66 years earlier.

During the Civil War, U.S. Army troops were again present in the region as troops of the California and Nevada volunteers under the command of General Patrick Connor garrisoned stage stations along the Overland Trail and escorted traffic along the Overland Trail.



**South Bend or Granger Stage Station**

*Photo courtesy Russel L. Tanner*

The Overland Stage and Mail Company was sold by Holladay to Wells Fargo & Company in 1866. Wells Fargo operated the stagecoach venture until the Transcontinental Railroad was completed through the central Rock Mountains in 1869.

The name “Granger” was first applied to the settlement at the confluence of the Black’s Fork and Ham’s Fork Rivers in 1869 when a Post Office was commissioned there and a man named Lafayette Granger was appointed Postmaster. Other reports indicate that the community may been named for an Army General named Gordon Granger, but that information hasn’t been substantiated.

In any event, Granger has been an important railroad town since it began as a construction camp in 1868. During the days of steam power, water from wells along Ham’s Fork was softened and stored in a large tank to feed the locomotive engines pulling Union Pacific trains. Diesel

fuel eventually replaced steam to power locomotives and the big water tank in Granger was torn down.

The Oregon Short Line Railroad was completed in 1884 to provide rail service to Portland, Oregon and to agricultural settlements in Idaho. Granger was the division point between the UPRR main line and the Oregon Short Line. The community has remained an important rail town by virtue of this strategic location. During World War II, as many as eight section crews operated out of Granger, maintaining trackage to the east, west, and north. Locally, there are stories of German espionage plans to blow up the railroad division point at Granger. Whether it has been documented or not, such a plan certainly could have been an effective means of stopping the critical flow of military personnel and material during the war.



# The Names Hill Historic Site

by David Vlcek

Most people equate the Names Hill Site with the historic inscription, "James Bridger, Trapper, 1844" crudely incized on a sandstone rock face south of present-day LaBarge, Wyoming. But few recognize that they are standing in the middle of one of the most important historic "districts" along the entire Oregon Trail system. Everything from Native American Petroglyphs to 1880's surveyors inscriptions, and more, can be found at Names Hill.

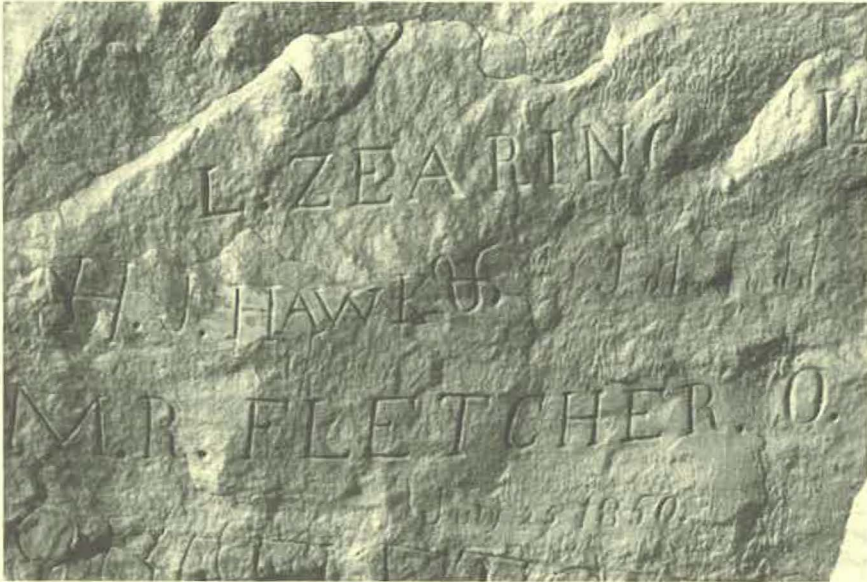
Why? Emigrants had just crossed the Green River on the Sublette Cutoff-the most difficult river crossing along the Oregon Trail system. The gentle descent from Steed Canyon on the east bank of the Green allowed wagons an approach to the river. But in June or early July when emigrant wagons would have made the crossing, high water fed by snow-melt from countless mountain streams made the crossing of the Green treacherous. In response to the danger, mountain man Jim Bridger established a ferry across the Green River, demonstrating once again his entrepreneur abilities. The Mormons also ran a ferry at Names Hill, so the site represents a mid-nineteenth century example of yankee competition, the foundation of our free enterprise system. If the emigrant lacked the sometimes high prices charged for a ferry across the Green River, a ford was available for their use upstream. Downstream of the ford, a series of emigrant graves and burned wagon remains provided cruel testimony of the failure of some emigrants to safely negotiate the crossing.

A veritable village supporting emigrant use became established at Names Hill in the 1850's. Winfield Scott Ebey described what he saw there in 1854:

*"Visited the camp at the ferry and found as the saying is all sorts of people- American traders, Frenchmen, Mormons, Loafers, Dandies, Gamblers, Idlers, Grog shopkeepers, Half Breeds and whole breed Snake Indians. All kinds of talk, from the "Palovor" of the Johnny Crapiane (sic), the grunting guttural of his copper colored friend, to the course and ribald buffoonery of the Gamblers and Loafers. Boasting and bragging the order of the day as well as whiskey drinking and an occasional rowe. This about life at Sublettes on Green River."*

Ebey also is one of few emigrant diarists to describe what we now refer to as "trail registers". Again, in 1854 he recorded:

*"The forenoon was spent by some of the boys in painting their names on the smooth face of the rocky bluff which here runs paralell to the river at a few hundred yards distant."*



**Names Hill inscriptions**

*BLM photo*

Today, the Oregon Trail registers are one of the more unique, fragile and interesting of trail-related sites found. Few were made; most are heavily damaged and vandalized. Because of the historical significance of Names Hill, it was enrollen on the National Register in 1969. Despite its National Register status, the site had never been recorded. In 1990, the Bureau of Reclamation funded the first (and only) extensive recordation of the inscriptions at Names Hill. Historian Don Southworth and his colleagues at Brigham Young University recorded over 2,000 inscriptions at the site.

The earliest inscriptions at Names Hill aren't Oregon Trail-related; indeed, they weren't even made by euroamericans. Native Americans, probably Shoshone Indians, carved two sets of petroglyphs into the rock face at what was to become Names Hill. One petroglyph panel contains several human figures, two horses, a human figure astride a horse, and a circular "shield" motif pecked into the soft sandstone. Horses were first introduced into Wyoming about 1780; this panel postdates the late seven-teenth centry. Another petroglyph panel is an elaborate "scene" contain-ing several individuals, a tipi "village", a row of guns and a Native Ameri-can astride a horse. This panel is thinly incized into the rock face and contains an emigrant inscription dating to 1854 superimposed over the Native American scene. The panel must have been executed after the introduction of the gun to Native Americans (post-1840?) but before 1854.

Is the “village” depicted here the village at Names Hill described by Winfield Scott Ebey in 1854?

The earliest euroamerican inscriptions at Names Hill belong to one John Danks and carry an 1827 date. Preceding the emigration by some fifteen years, Danks must have been a trapper working this portion of the Green River in the days of Jedediah Smith. The next inscription dates to May 4, 1830 and was made by J. Ames, also presumably a trapper. Then beginning in the 1840’s, the use of Names Hill as an Oregon Trail register takes off. For example, between 1845 and 1855, over 110 entries that include the year of passage of an emigrant party were made.

A hiatus of use is noted between 1860 and 1875. The Civil War, coupled with completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, disrupted the Westward Migration along the Sublette Cutoff. The settlement of the upper Green River valley and the first systematic land surveys in western Wyoming are reflected in dozens of 1880’s and 1890’s inscriptions at Names Hill. Today, the site visitor may be puzzled when he reads the following inscription written in axle grease or wagon tar, “J.C. Guthrie, U.S.S. of California, oct 1880”. What is a Naval man doing in Wyoming in 1880? However, when one encounters additional wagon tar entries such as: “P. P. Melick, Chainman, U S Survey, 1880” it becomes clear that a series of entries relate to an 1880’s United States Geological Survey crew (ran out of California) who were laying out the first surveys of the townships in southwestern Wyoming.



**J.C. Guthrie inscription**

*BLM photo*

Many other Oregon Trail-related sites found in the area include the Green River Ford upstream of the ferry crossings; The Mormon Ferry, The Mountain Man Ferry (run at least in part by Jim Bridger), numerous unmarked emigrant graves, burned wagon sites, the Sublette Cutoff proper and later nineteenth century historic sites. Historic research is needed to document, locate and identify many of these sites, or artifacts associated with them. Enough history is present in the greater Names Hill area to keep scholars busy for many years to come.

Names Hill possesses many fascinating segments of Wyoming's (and the Nation's) historic past. Pre-emigration rock incizings include Native American petroglyph panels and 1827 and 1830 trapper inscriptions. Literally hundreds of Oregon Trail-related dates, names, places of origin and destination, and Wagon Tar writing from the U. S. Geological Survey in 1880, are recorded there. Sadly, many hundreds of modern day entries are carved over the nineteenth century historic inscriptions, destroying them. So much vandalism has occurred within the last thirty years that, unless something is done, modern grafitti will eventually obliterate all the historic period inscriptions and we will have lost one vital, beautiful and fascinating link to our past.



# The Salt Wells Stage Station Archaeological Project: An experiment in history

*by Russel L. Tanner*

The Salt Wells Stage Station lay lost and forgotten to history in the Wyoming desert for over 120 years. In 1982, Bureau of Land Management archaeologist Dean Decker noticed the word "house" on an 1874 General Land Office plat for land roughly half way between Rock Springs and Point of Rocks. Decker was aware that the Salt Wells station along Ben Holladay's Overland Stage and Mail Company route should be in this general vicinity. He visited the site one autumn day and recognized a foundation ruin barely visible in a clump of brush along Bitter Creek. Artifacts scattered about the surface of the ground—cartridge casings, purple glass fragments and bits of ceramics, all appeared to date earlier than any homestead or railroad vintage historic sites in this part of Wyoming.

Decker concluded that the site could be the Salt Wells station on Holladay's Overland route. A few weeks later he mentioned the site to historian Mike Massie, then of the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office and Russ Tanner, an archeologist then associated with Western Wyoming College. Both Tanner and Massie had visited other confirmed station sites on the Holladay Overland route and were generally familiar with the structures and associated artifacts. The three visited the site in the spring of 1983 and agreed that probably was the Salt Wells Stage Station.

In 1985, Tanner returned from graduate studies at the University of Wyoming and began archaeological and historical study of the purported Salt Wells station as a thesis project. Tanner's assumption was that a discernible pattern of artifact types and distribution should separate a stage station from other historic sites of similar age. If such patterning did indeed exist for stage stations similar patterns may also exist that would be helpful in discerning the function of historic sites even though they may be contemporaneous.

Tanner's hypothesis is based on three underlying assumptions concerning the archaeological record: 1.) that the record reflects patterned human behavior; 2.) that the record has been 'transformed' over time by cultural and physical processes (i.e. transformational processes); and 3.) that the underlying pattern of human behavior can be retrieved by sorting out the intervening transformational processes. This process can be an arduous task given the physical processes of erosion and aggradation, bioturbation, frost heaving and other natural phenomenon, as well as illicit artifact collecting and digging that can affect the evidence left by past



occupants of a particular site.

In 1987, while studying notes from historic surveys in an adjacent township A. Dudley Gardner, an historian at Western Wyoming College came across a reference to the Salt Wells Stage Station. The surveyor had noted that the "old Salt Wells Stage Station" lies at a specific coordinate northwest from a section corner high on a bluff a couple miles from the site though to be the stage station. This information constituted the first piece of contemporaneous historical data pinpointing the location of the stage station. Thus the location Tanner had been working on was confirmed as the location of the Overland routes Salt Wells station.

Controlled collection and mapping of artifacts from the surface of the site in 1986 indicated a seeming abnormally high number of horseshoe nails concentrated in places around the foundation ruin. Thus far this is the only bit of evidence the surface collection yielded in support of the hypothesis that a stage station would have a different pattern of artifacts and artifact distribution from that known from homesteads and other historic sites in the intermountain west. Analysis of the artifact assemblage from the surface is continuing.

Excavation at the site has progressed over the past five years though at a relatively slow pace. To date several test units have been excavated outside the building and a portion of what appears to be the stable, located on the northwest side of the building has been excavated. This part of the building has been noticeable clean of most types of refuse. The floors seem to have been regularly swept since fine materials such as corn and coffee beans were recovered from along the walls. No evidence of bone and similar organic garbage was recovered in this part of the building. Horseshoes, leather, wire, two knives, a broom, a piece of rope and an 'Old Cabin' bitters bottle were recovered from the apparent stable room.

One tentative conclusion is that the Holladay Overland stations were much better constructed and maintained than earlier stations such as those described by Mark Twain, in *Roughing It*, and by British adventurer Sir Richard Burton. OCTA members will be assisting Tanner and other archaeologists in the ongoing excavation project immediately preceding the Convention in Rock Springs. The archaeology workshop at the convention will feature an overview of the field schools findings and the meaning of artifacts recovered in their historical context.

# The Great Medicine Trail and the War of Succession

by Terry del Bene

*"I froze my ears while mounting guard, till they were hard and white as a turnep. There were thirteen of us guards, and all but three or four froze thier ears some froze thier feet and some thier hands." (Hervey Johnson, January 1, 1864 as quoted in Unrau 1979:78).*

Military duty in the far west always was difficult. Soldiers were called upon to perform mind-numbing duties in adverse conditions far removed from American population centers. Disease, hostile Indians, hostile civilians, bad food, boredom, hard work, strict punishment codes, and harsh climates were the soldiers' lot in life. These basic facts did not change during the Civil War years. However, the War of Succession did place an importance to the maintenance of the lonely western outposts previously unknown.

On April 12, 1861 Secessionist forces fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. Despite the fact that there had been several shooting incidents between Federal troops and state militias in the months previous, this normally is accepted as the start of the Civil War. In the western territories which now encompass Wyoming<sup>1</sup> hostilities with Indians had been an established fact for several years. While the level of conflict remained fairly low the massive influx of emigrants along the Oregon-California trail had spurred the Indians to take an increasingly hostile attitude.

At the start of the Civil War both Richmond and Washington recognized the strategic importance of California. It was imperative to the overall success of the war for both governments to control this gateway to the Pacific Ocean and its gold fields. If the South could win California they would have ports to the rest of the world which could not easily be blockaded. If the North could retain California they might be able to field a Western army which could attack Texas by way of Arizona or Mexico. The gold fields were needed by both sides to fund the arming of the huge national armies which were then gathering in the east. California would be a valuable source of manpower for the coming conflict.<sup>2</sup>

For President Lincoln effective coordination between Washington and Sacramento needed to be maintained. Initially the Oregon Trail route served that vital purpose but by the start of the war Indian raids had forced the Overland Stage to a more southerly route. The army attempted to

maintain segments of the telegraph line which used the Oregon trail as is reflected in the figure of the South Pass station which accompanies this chapter. The first message sent along the completed telegraph system confirmed California's support of the Union.

Prior to the start of the war western outposts were undermanned. Part of the political jockeying in the pre-war years had been to keep the standing army to a minimum. This army was scattered among scores of small outposts, usually greatly outnumbered by the potential forces which hostile Indians could muster.

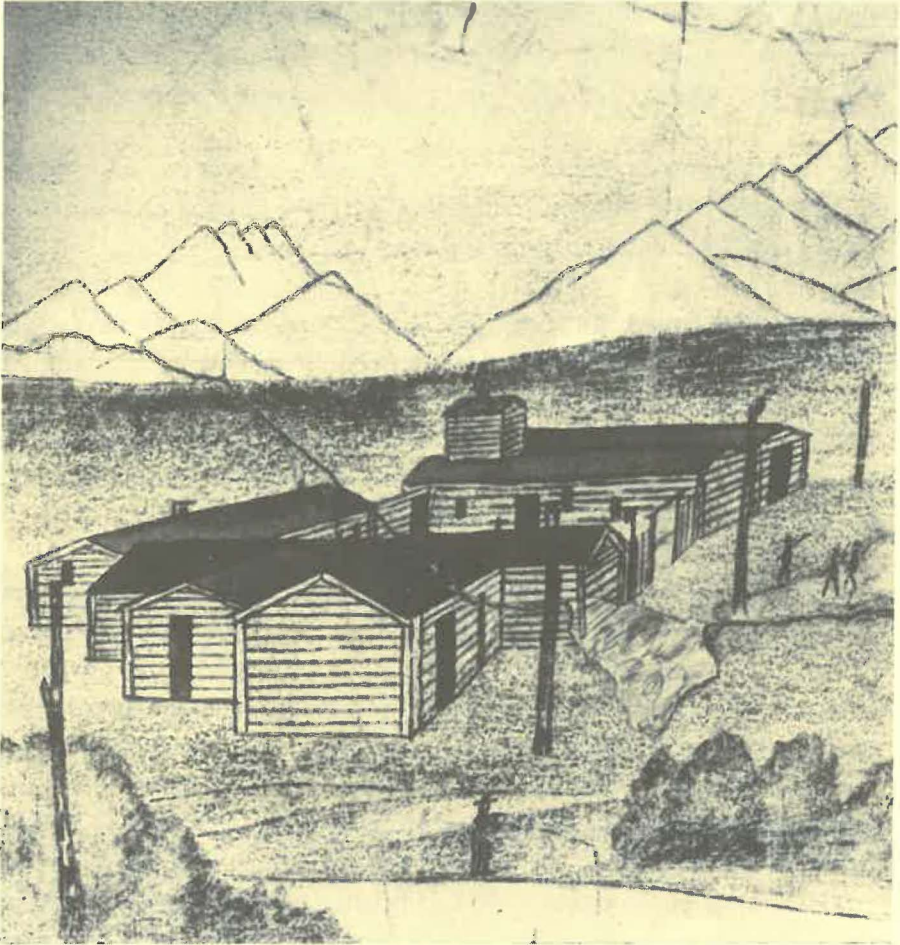
The war in the east created a high demand for trained soldiers. Accordingly the small outposts in Wyoming were reduced. The Indians were quick to realize the vulnerability of the remaining posts, stage stops, and emigrant trains. Indian attacks increased through the early stages of the war. Most of these attacks were performed by Shoshone and Ute warriors, not the Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapaho.

President Lincoln sent a personal message to Brigham Young asking for Mormon troops to serve as guardians of the trail. The only organized body of Utah troops to serve in the Civil War protected the trails between South Pass and Salt Lake City. These troops were relieved by Ohio and Kansas volunteers. Additionally a large Federal troop concentration under Patrick Edward Connor began a controversial occupation of the Salt Lake City area.

In August of 1862 the Santee Sioux killed approximately 400 settlers in Minnesota. The impetus for this uprising was the failure of the Sioux to receive the full compensation for lands lost as a result of the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty. The spark was a dare between a small group of Indian youths. The result would be the senseless deaths of scores of Indians and settlers as well as the reinforcement of the western military departments.

This uprising forced the government to rethink its decision to reduce troop strength in the west. The signing of the Homestead Act in 1862 and the Conscription Act in 1863 would serve as the impetus to send thousands on the long journey to the Pacific. These people needed protection. Volunteer units from Utah, Wisconsin, Colorado, California, Ohio, and Kansas all would be dispatched to Wyoming during the course of the war. Some of these units volunteered to fight Indians while some had enlisted to fight Confederates. The Indians would find that these volunteers were a different breed than the professional soldiers who had served in the territories previously.

The most curious group of reinforcements sent to Wyoming were the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, and 6th U.S. Volunteers. These were infantry units comprised of Confederate prisoners who served under Federal officers. These units were raised in eastern prisoner of war camps. The U.S. Volunteers called themselves “Galvanized Yankees” and would serve well the government they once had been in rebellion against. Troops from



**Pencil drawing during Civil War of typical stage/telegraph station  
by Francis Molleman, 11th Kansas Volunteer Cavalry.**

*Photo courtesy Wyoming State Museum.*

other states found themselves in the unusual position of serving alongside men they had enlisted to fight.

Additional manpower was provided by local recruits, such as famous mountain man Jim Bridger, who served as a scout. Native Americans also served the Federal Government.

The volunteers evidenced significant dash in the accomplishment of their duties. The rumors that the Confederacy was behind many of the Indian attacks, a charge more imagined than real, served to convince the



government to take a more aggressive stance. Affairs in the west were to be prosecuted as vigorously as the Civil War in the east.

In October of 1864 the 3rd Colorado Volunteers under the command of the hero of Glorietta Pass, Colonel John M. Chivington, attacked and massacred roughly 200 peaceful Cheyenne Indians at Sand Creek. The reason for this senseless attack appears to have been that the enlistment of the volunteers were about to expire and they had yet to see action. Having no overtly hostile Indians to test their military prowess upon the Colorado Volunteers attacked peaceful Cheyennes who were flying a Federal flag.

After the Sand Creek Massacre the Indian war became general along the trails. It was now clear to most tribes that the fight would be one for the survival of their people and their cultures.

Miles of telegraph wire were ripped up. Dozens of stage stations were burned. Small wagon trains were attacked. Patrols were attacked. There even was an attempted assault on the fort at Platte River bridge station. In the resulting battle of Platte River Bridge in 1865 Captain Caspar Collins was killed attempting to relieve a military wagon train in distress. Casper, Wyoming bears the name of this individual.

During 1865 the Overland Trail segment between Fort Collins and the Green River was considered the most dangerous portion of the trail. Here Col. Preston Plumb and a few hundred troopers tried to maintain order. At one point the Indians had captured all the stage horses across a two-hundred mile segment of trail. The cavalry had to impress its own horses to help keep the stage running and in order to cut down on losses switched the stage runs to hours after dark.

The government was slow in mustering the volunteers out of service, especially the "galvanized Yankees." Many would serve in the Powder River Campaign of General Patrick Connor. Eventually the kind of winter campaign favored by Connor combined with the kind of attack on the Indians' economic system which was used so successfully against the Confederacy would return the Plains and Rocky Mountain region to a reduced state of hostilities. The American people, apparently tired of killing after over four years of Civil War forced the government to seek more peaceful solutions to dealing with Indians and the settlement of the west. The military was once again reduced to a shadow force.



Never again would so many tribes work in concert to resist the Federal Government. However, the end to the conflict would not occur for another 25 years at a place called Wounded Knee.

1. The modern state of Wyoming was all or in part included with Nebraska, Idaho, Utah, and Dakota territories during the Civil War.
2. Californians served on both sides of the conflict. When California units were filled many Californians helped fill the enlistment quotas of other states. For example, Company I of the 2nd (Loyal) Virginia Volunteers was made up largely of Californians.

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*Forts in Wyoming along Overland and Oregon-California Trails*

**Compiled From:**

**Map of the Military District**

**Kansas and the Territories (1866)**

Fort Laramie

Fort Caspar

Fort Halleck

Fort Bridger

Fort Saunders

Camp Mitchell

Camp Marshall

# Emigrant Springs on the Slate Creek Cutoff

*by Carla Aamodt and Lynn Harrell*

The Emigrant Springs site is a register of historic emigrant inscriptions located along the Slate Creek-Kinney Cutoff of the Oregon Trail in southwestern Wyoming. It contains inscriptions from the latter half of the 19th century and is the largest and one of the best-preserved emigrant inscription registers in the area.

The inscriptions at Emigrant Springs were first recorded by historians Charles Kelly and Paul Henderson. Their 1936 recordation of the site consisted in the compilation of a list of the names of the emigrants and visitors who had painted, incised or otherwise emblazoned their names on the cliffs which shadow the north and east sides of the spring which gives the site its name, although it is uncertain precisely which cliff faces Mr. Kelly and Mr. Henderson recorded.

The Emigrant Springs site (48LN40) was recorded by a BLM crew in 1989. The site consists of 198 legible names and six legible initials scrawled across several cliff faces. The names are inscribed on several cliff faces extending a little more than 1 km east to west.

The history of the Emigrant Springs site and the Slate Creek-Kinney Cutoff is intimately tied to the history of the Oregon Trail and especially that portion of the trail known as the Sublette or Greenwood Cutoff.

In the later years of the 19th century the emigrants had a choice of various routes as they continued their journey west from South Pass. From that point on to where the Oregon Trail and the California Trail split afforded the emigrants the greatest choice of routes. The various routes included the Fort Bridger detour, which dipped to the south then came back up north just west of the Bear River, and shorter alternatives to this route including the Lander Road, the Sublette Cutoff, the Slate Creek or Kinney Cutoff, the Hudspeth cutoff and so on.

Apart from the Bridger road, the most important and well-known of these routes is and was the Sublette Cutoff. This cutoff takes off from the Oregon Trail after South Pass at the "Parting of the Ways" and rejoins the trail after crossing the Hams Fork Plateau near Cokeville, Wyoming.

The Sublette route made emigrant travel more efficient and became eventually the most popular route to the west. This trail was most

heavily used during the Gold Rush years of 1849 and 1850, when speed of travel was essential for the would-be miners and prospectors hoping to stake early claims on the rich ore lodes of the west.

There was only one problem with the Sublette Cutoff and this was the “waterless expanse” from the trail’s crossing of the Big Sandy River to the banks of the Green River, a forty-three mile (according to a later emigrant) stretch of trail with no water (Stewart, p. 60). This long stretch of land became known as the Little Colorado Desert. It was this desert crossing which would in 1852 (Stewart, p. 304) lead to the creation of the Slate Creek or Kinney Cutoff.

*To take the new cutoff you followed the trail toward Fort Bridger down along Big Sandy to within a few miles of where the stream joined the Green. Then you cut across the angle between the two streams, a distance of about ten miles, and came to the Green at a spot where a ferry was operated at times of high water, and where there was a ford at times of low water. Then you went on west, along Slate Creek, until you rejoined the main cutoff. (Stewart, p. 304).*

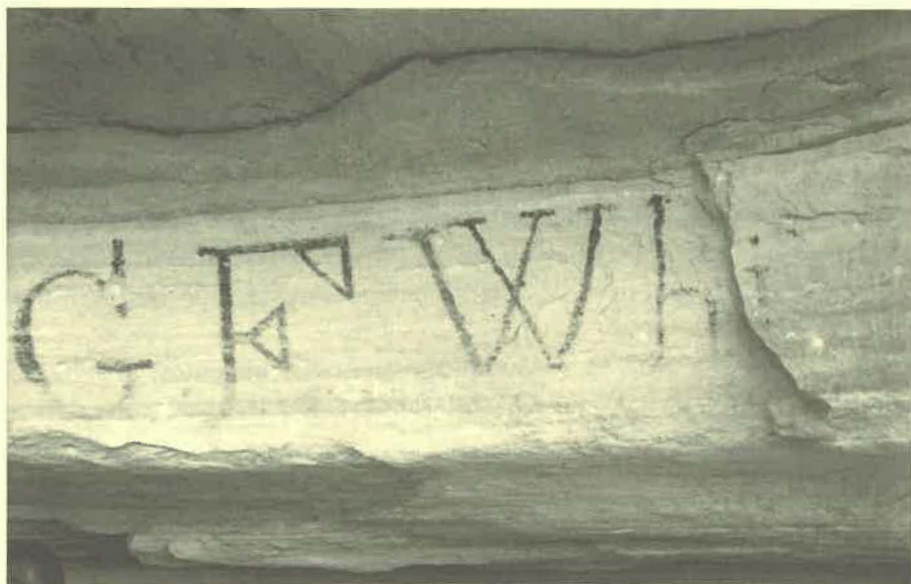
The Slate Creek-Kinney Cutoff, without increasing the total mileage, shortened the waterless portion of trail to a manageable ten miles, an integral step in easing the difficulty of travel along this stretch of trail.

Like the Sublette Cutoff or Greenwood, this cutoff also has two names. The names can be used interchangeably, however, the two names are often applied to different sections of the cutoff. The name Kinney Cutoff often refers to that section of the cutoff east of the Green River, and the name Slate Creek Cutoff is given to that section of the cutoff from the western bank of the Green River to the cutoff’s junction with the Sublette Cutoff.

The Emigrant Springs site is located nearly at the meeting of the Slate Creek Cutoff and the Sublette Cutoff. As often happened along the Oregon Trail, the Slate Creek Cutoff apparently split up as it approached the cliffs of Emigrant Springs. There are at least two distinct alternative paths of the trail as it nears the Emigrant Springs site. One path stays at the base of the cliffs and follows directly along the banks of Slate Creek and then Emigrant Creek. This route passes Johnston Scout Rock, a large boulder which broke off the cliff face and, during the emigrant era, was inscribed upon by emigrants including the “Johnston Scouts.” The other variant along this portion of the Slate Creek Cutoff stays on top of the

cliffs until right at Emigrant Springs the trail comes down a slope along the cliffs. In addition, along this cliff-top route there are several other places at which the trail made the descent to the basin with its spring.

Emigrant Springs became an important camping spot because its spring provided clean clear water. Although the Slate Creek Cutoff was designed specifically to decrease the mileage of the Sublette Cutoff's waterless stretch, Slate Creek-adjacent to Emigrant Springs-was mostly a help to oxen which were able to withstand the muddiness of the often shallow creek. The emigrants themselves probably did not rely on drinking the water of Slate Creek as the creek was never very large and could provide limited supplies of water at best. The creek may also have contained alkali and other salts which are common in this part of Wyoming. During the BLM recordation effort, it was noted that Emigrant Creek and that part of Slate Creek near the site both consisted of gullies about 4 meters deep with muddy bottoms and occasional pools of water. Emigrant Springs was a welcome oasis and a good resting place.



**Inscription painted in axle grease.**

*BLM photo*

The majority of the inscriptions (182 out of the 198 inscriptions with full surnames) were carved into the soft sandstone rock face of the cliffs. These carved names vary greatly in the quality of execution displayed. Some of the names appear to be chiseled deeply and carefully with sharp implements such as nails. Other names appear as if they were scratched hastily into the surface during the time the wagon trains were loading up for the next leg of their long journey. Two of the very carefully carved names were also filled in with red paint (Thomas Clark and E.S. Simonds), most of which is now worn off and remains as a stain in

the rock. The carvers of those two entries and twelve others painstakingly smoothed the surface of the cliff face before carving their names into the rock.

The remaining names of the site were not carved into the rock, but instead remain on the surface of the rock, painted or caked on by their creators. Ten of the names were written in a thick black cakey substance which is surmised to have been axle grease. Traces of other names written in axle grease are common at the site, but unfortunately, time and the elements have worn away many of these other inscriptions. One name (Jello DeWitte) was written in what appears to be pencil. One other (Cap. S. Kennedy) was simply painted into the rock with some sort of paint, or perhaps a thinner version of the thick axle grease used elsewhere.

The Emigrant Springs site with its more than 200 inscriptions on the northern portion of the site alone represents one of the most important, largest and well-preserved emigrant register sites in the United States. The Slate Creek-Kinney Cutoff represents an important turning point in the development of the Oregon Trail as it was a relatively short route from South Pass to the Bear River divide region which also contained potable water. The Emigrant Springs site was an important stopping point along this route for travel weary emigrants who welcomed the site's spring. Because the Slate Creek-Kinney Cutoff was a comparatively late development in the history of the Oregon Trail, the Emigrant Springs site's importance lies especially in the understanding and information which can be garnered about later emigrant travel to the west.



# Snowbound On The Trail

*by Mike W. Brown*

Cholera, childbirth, Indian attack, drowning at river crossings, accidents, cannibalism. There were lots of ways for emigrants to die on western trails. The largest, single disaster befell two parties of Mormon converts who were pulling handcarts in the late Fall of 1856. That time it was weather that was the killer.

The Mormon Exodus of 1846-47 to Utah was only the beginning of emigrant travel on the overland route (also known as the Mormon Trail) to Utah. Thousands of converts followed in succeeding years. Besides religious freedom, moving to Zion offered the hope and opportunity of economic freedom, especially for displaced and poverty-stricken victims of Europe's Industrial Revolution.

Moving from Europe to Utah was expensive and not all converts had the money. The LDS Church's Perpetual Emigration Fund financed expenses for tens of thousands of eager overseas emigrants. 1855 saw a grasshopper plague in Utah, so available funds were short. An earlier plan which cut expenses for emigrants was given the "green light" and the great handcart treks of 1856-1860 were underway. Instead of large wagons, handcarts held lighter loads and were pulled by humans replacing expensive draft animals.



**An artist's conception of a handcart company.**

*Drawing courtesy Utah State Historical Society.*

4395 converts arrived in the United States during the winter 1855/56. The people landed at New York and went by train to Iowa City, Iowa - the outfitting and jumping off point. The first three handcart "companies" of 1856 made it to Salt Lake without major incident. They followed the Missouri River from Iowa City to Florence, Nebraska; there they followed the Platte and North Platte Rivers into Wyoming to Fort Laramie continuing on the river system to the Sweetwater and up the Sweetwater to South Pass. From South Pass they went to Fort Bridger and from there to Salt Lake following part of the Hastings' Cutoff which the ill-fated Donner Party took in 1846.

The fourth (the Willie Company) and fifth (the Martin Company) groups of handcart pullers ran into the same problem the Donners did - snow. The 500 people making up the Willie Company left Florence, Nebraska on August 18th, 1856 followed by 576 people in the Martin Company on August 25th who were in turn followed by 385 people in wagons.

The last half of August is much too late for traveling 100's of miles overland by wagon and by foot and expect to reach Salt Lake. Winter comes earlier in the mountains and higher elevations of South Pass. Indeed, the Willie Company had a general vote at Florence and with the exception of one clear-thinking man (Levi Savage), voted to continue on to Zion. For a lot of bad reasons which were hotly debated later, over 1000 emigrants continued their journey in the face of common sense and impending winter.

A fast-traveling group of Mormon Missionary organizers who were headed west to Salt Lake overtook the Willie and Martin Companies. Although the missionaries had traveled the Trail themselves at least once east to west and back again, they encouraged the emigrants to press on even though they knew what could be in store. The Missionary leader Franklin D. Richards purchased 100 buffalo robes at Fort Laramie and left instructions for them to be distributed to the emigrants upon arrival. The missionaries continued to Salt Lake at good speed and arrived on October 1st. Richards immediately met with Mormon leader Brigham Young to apprise him of the situation.

In the meantime, early winter storms blasted eastern Wyoming and the cold, exposure, overwork, short rations, and bad decisions began to take their toll.

One man in the Willie Company, John Chislett described the events,

*"...Cold weather, scarcity of food, lassitude and fatigue from over-exertion, soon produced their effects. Our old and infirm people began to droop, and they no sooner lost spirit and courage than death's stamp could be traced upon their features. Life went out as smoothly as a lamp ceases to burn when the oil is gone. At first the deaths occurred slowly and irregularly, but in a few days at more frequent intervals, until we soon thought it unusual to leave a campground without burying one or more persons."*

The Martin Company was several days and miles east of the Willie Company, and consequently were in an even worse predicament than the others when the bad weather hit. Members of the Martin Company made several errors in judgement, such as crossing a freezing river on foot rather than pay the toll (they had the money) and throwing away the buffalo robes purchased for them at Fort Laramie because they were too heavy to pull in the handcarts.

Once the emigrants realized their mistakes, it was too late to do anything about them. They knew that help was on the way from Salt Lake, several hundred miles away. However, courage, stout hearts and their faith in God, didn't stop winter's relentless grip and the deaths increased. Their journey to Zion had turned into a death march. For a lot of reasons - some good, some bad - and a bit of plain old bad luck, about 1000 people were trapped on the high plains of Wyoming in danger of dying to the last person.

By early October, the story of the Willie and Martin Handcart Companies had become three separate stories - the plight of the Willie Company east of South Pass, the Martin Company who were even further east between Fort Laramie and Devil's Gate, and the rescue efforts originating out of Salt Lake City.

When Brigham Young got word of the plight of the handcart pilgrims on the eve of the Mormon Church's semi-annual conference, he wasted no time with indecision. Addressing members of the Church, Young called for immediate action in no uncertain terms,

*"...It is to save the people. This is the salvation I am now seeking for. To save our brethren that would be apt to perish, or suffer extremely, if we do not send them assistance. I shall call upon the Bishops this day. I shall not wait until tomorrow, nor until the next day, for 60 good mule teams and 12 or 15 wagons. I do not want to send oxen. I want good horses and mules..."*

...In addition to teams, supplies, and food, Brigham called for “40 good young men who know how to drive teams, to take charge of the teams that are now managed by men, women, and children who know nothing about them...”

By October 7th, the first rescue group left Salt Lake consisting of “sixteen good four-mule teams and twenty-seven hardy young men headed eastward with the first installment of provisions.” It’s important to note that people in Salt Lake realized the magnitude of the situation and kept a steady stream of wagon, supplies, and help headed east. By the end of October, just a few weeks later, some 250 teams were on the road.

One member of the first rescue group, Harvey Cluff, wrote,

*“...Nine miles brought us down to the Sweetwater river where we camped for the night. On arising in the following morning snow was several inches deep. During the two following days, the storm raged with increasing fury until it attained the capacity of a northern blizzard. For protection of ourselves and animals, the company moved down the river to where the willows were dense enough to make a good protection against the raging storm from the north. The express team which had been dispatched ahead as rapidly as possible to reach and give encouragement to the faltering emigrants, by letting them know that help was near at hand...”*

The 500 people making up the Willie Company were no longer 500. As they struggled westward on the Trail, each morning there were fresh corpses to bury. People were dying from the effects of exposure, short rations, over exertion, and lack of adequate clothing. Captain Willie had left his charges and pressed on ahead to find the help he knew was on the way. John Chislett described conditions back at camp,

*“...The weather grew colder every day, and many got their feet so badly frozen that they could not walk, and had to be lifted from place to place. Some got their fingers frozen; others their ears; and one woman lost her sight by the frost. These severities of the weather also increased our number of deaths, so that we buried several each day.”*

On October 21, the first rescuers arrived and in Chislett’s words,

*“Shouts of joy rent the air; strong men wept till tears ran freely down their furrowed and sun-burnt cheeks ... Restraint was set aside in the general rejoicing, and as the*

*brethren entered our camp the sisters fell upon them and deluged them with kisses."*

Half of the rescuers pressed ahead to find the Martin Company while the remaining half bolstered the Willie Company people and got them on their way. By no means was the danger past. In fact, a few days later while camped on present-day Rock Creek east of Atlantic City, 15 people died in a single 24-hour period and were buried together in two graves.

The Willie Company continued on their journey west, meeting the supply trains headed east. With few other incidents, the Willie Company made to it Salt Lake City on November 9th. One individual story, though, stands out and embodies the determination of the emigrants. One young Scotch woman - Margret Dalglish - continued to pull her handcart despite offers to load her meager possessions in a wagon and ride in relative comfort to Salt Lake. She toiled her way through snow and cold until the group came to the overlook of the Salt Lake Valley. Seeing the end of her journey of thousands of miles from Scotland, she took her handcart loaded with all her earthly goods and pushed it over a cliff, and walked into the valley owning only the clothes on her back.

The Willie Company's arrival in Salt Lake was cause for a huge celebration before the harsh reality set in. 67 of 500 people were dead, and many other survivors had lost fingers and entire limbs to frostbite. And there were still over half the emigrants somewhere out on the plains.

The last of the handcart emigrants of 1856, the Martin Company and the Hodgett Wagon Train, were in dire straits in October. Winter struck with a vengeance. Clothing was short, rations were short, people were dying of exposure, and there were hundreds of miles left to travel to reach Salt Lake City.

When the first rescuers out of Salt Lake reached the first emigrants near South Pass, they split forces. Half of the rescuers continued east on the Trail to find the Martin Company (still several days away) and the other half accompanied the Willie Group to Salt Lake. Meanwhile, a steady stream of men and wagons loaded with supplies was headed east out of the Salt Lake Valley to reach the beleaguered emigrants. It was fast becoming a matter of simple logistics - getting enough provisions to hundreds of people faced with extinction.

Rescuer Harvey Cluff wrote,

*"... On arriving at Devils Gate we found the express-*



*men awating (sic) our coming up, for as yet they had no word as to where the companies were. Here we were in a dilema. Four or five hundred miles from Salt Lake and a thousand emigrants with handcarts on the dreary plains and the severity of winter already upon us ..."*

The first rescuers finally found the the emigrants 65 miles east of Devil's Gate at Red Bluffs where they had been trapped by a blizzard. And they were in pitiful shape. Dan Jones recorded what he saw,

*"... A condition of distress here met my eyes that I never saw before or since. The train was strung out for three or four miles. There were old men pulling and tugging their carts, sometimes loaded with a sick wife or children - women pulling along sick husbands - little children six to eight years old struggling through the mud and snow. As night came on the mud would freeze on their clothes and feet. There were two of us and hundreds needing help. What could we do? ..."*

The rescuers bolstered spirits and encouraged the people along the Trail. Their immediate goal was to reach Devil's Gate where the decision would be made to continue or attempt to hole up for the winter. There are dozens of stories of individual heroism and courage of their trek through the snow.

Between the crossings of the North Platte and the first crossing of the Sweetwater, 65 people died. Once they arrived at Devil's Gate, they camped in a sheltered cove 2 miles west away from the famous landmark. That spot is known as Martin's Cove today. More people died at the Cove and many others were near death. Because of the logistical problems involved in supplying a small city throughout a long winter, the decision was made to press on. A small group of men were chosen to stay behind throughout the winter at the stockade at Devil's Gate to guard the possessions which were left there until Spring.

Ephraim Hanks, one of the rescuers, described the horrors of tending to the wretched travelers,

*"...Many of the immigrants whose extremities were frozen, lost their limbs, either whole or in part. Many such I washed with water and castile soap, until the frozen parts would fall off, after which I would sever the limbs with my scissors. Some of the emigrants lost toes, others fingers, and again others whole hands and feet ..."*

One young girl went to bed with her family, only to awaken screaming in pain in the night. A man was eating her fingers while she slept. He was dragged off in the snow, began eating his own fingers, and was found dead the next morning. That one incident which occurred at Willow Springs is the only documented instance which approaches the unthinkable actions of the Donner Party - cannibalism.

Through sheer perseverance and logistical support from Salt Lake, the emigrants finally made it to the Valley. On November 30, 1856, they arrived in Salt Lake.

Even with the aid of food and supplies, the deaths continued on the final leg to Salt Lake, so many in fact that there is not an accurate count to this day. The figures range from 135 to 150 fatalities in the Martin Company alone. Add to that number the 67 deaths recorded in the Willie Company and uncounted deaths of the Hodgett Wagon Train, over 200 people or about 1 out of 6 perished. It was the greatest single tragedy in the entire history of the western migration.

Like so many other human foibles, even before all the emigrants were safely housed in Salt Lake, people in the Valley started looking for someone to blame for the tragedy. Someone definitely had to be at fault, but who exactly? A few whisperings of criticism reached the ears of Brigham Young that it was the leadership of the Mormon Church to blame. A dynamic leader and not given to taking criticism, Young exploded.

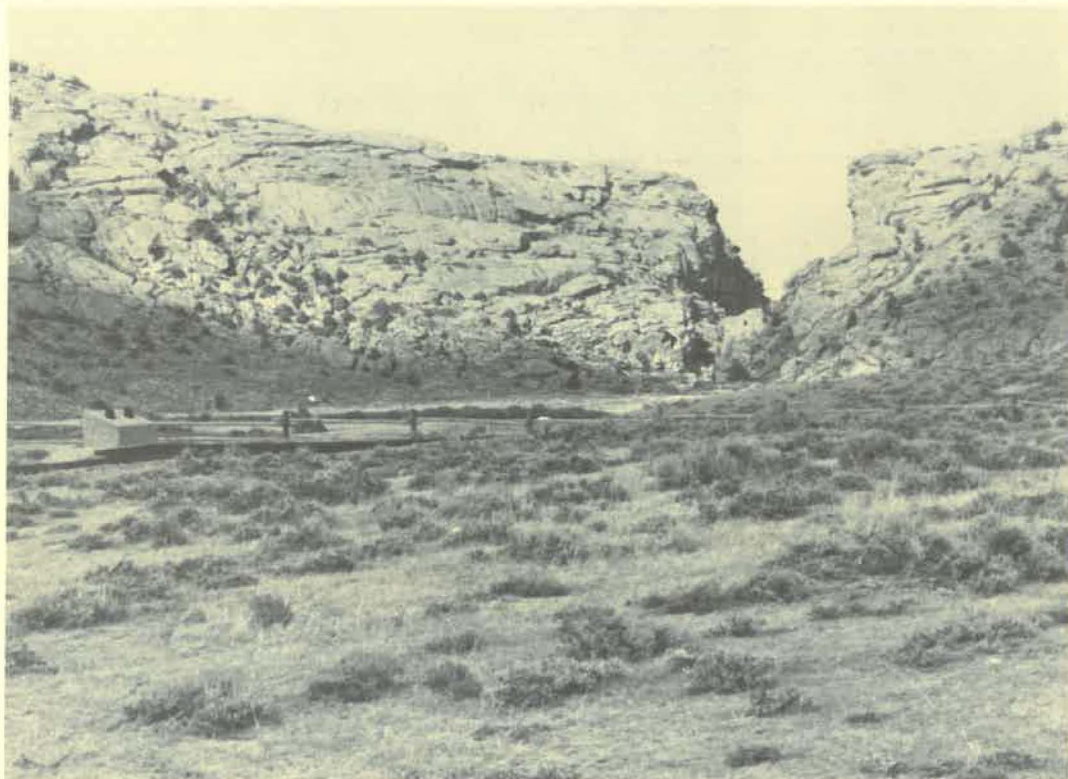
In a speech given at the Tabernacle on Temple Square, he didn't mince words,

*"... If any man, or woman, complains of me or of my Counselors, in regard to the lateness of some of this season's immigration, let the Curse of God be on them and blast their substance with mildew and destruction, until their names are forgotten from the earth..."*

In reading Brigham's words, it must be remembered that 1856 was the eve of yet another fight for Mormon survival - the Utah War of 1857 when Utah was "invaded" by soldiers of the United States. In some ways, he was the leader of a sovereign nation who was struggling to hold his people and his country together. He could not afford dissent in the ranks.

Probably the best summary of the entire 1856 Handcart Disaster was written by Wallace Stegner in *Collier's* magazine, July 6, 1956,

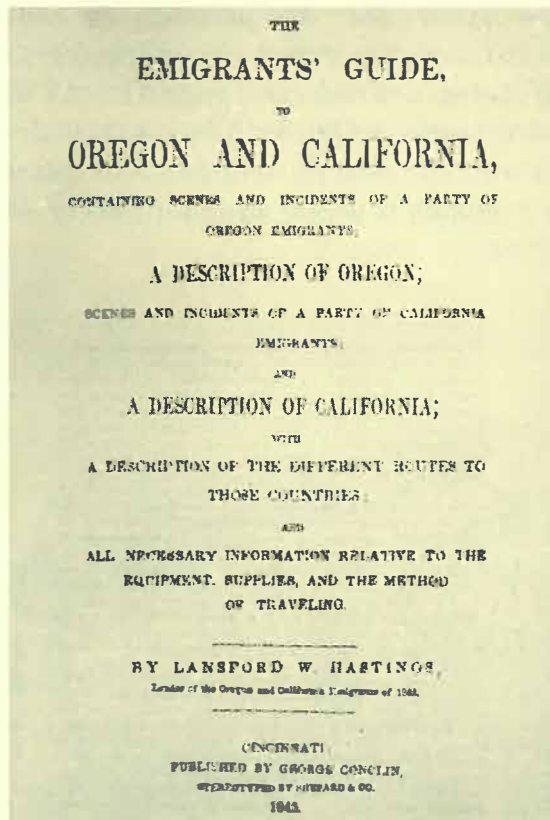
*"Perhaps their suffering seems less dramatic because the handcart pioneers bore it meekly, praising God, instead of fighting for life with the ferocity of animals and eating their dead to keep their own life beating, as both the Fremont and Donner parties did. And assuredly the handcart pilgrims were less hardy, less skilled, less well equipped to be pioneers. But if courage and endurance make a story, if human kindness and helpfulness and brotherly love in the midst of raw horror are worth recording, this half-forgotten episode of the Mormon migration is one of the great tales of the West and of America."*



**Devil's Gate on the Sweetwater River was one of the major landmarks on the Oregon Trail. Martin's Cove, where the members of the Martin Handcart Company and rescuers from Salt Lake "holed up" for a few days is just off the left edge of the photograph about 2 miles west of the cleft in the rock which was carved by the Sweetwater River. Martin's Cove is on private land and permission is required to visit the site. In 1976, the BLM built an interpretive site which is just off Highway 220 north of Muddy Gap. Several signs tell the story of Devil's Gate and Martin's Cove. This photo was taken when the site was under construction.**

# On The Trail To Disaster - The Donner Party In Wyoming

by Mike W. Brown



Most people are familiar with the “end” of the Donner, or Donner/Reed Party in the winter of 1846/47. It was (and still is) the most famous incident of cannibalism in American history. The very horror of being snowbound in the Sierras helped spur the growth of various cutoffs on the Oregon Trail. In addition to death by cholera, childbirth, Indians, and a multitude of accidents, being eaten by your companions was added to the list of hazards of overland travel.

The “story” of the Donner Party in Wyoming is a story of chance meetings, poor communication, bad decisions, coincidence, uneasy feelings, bad luck, and perhaps simply “fate.”

To many historians, the outcome of the Donner Party was a culmination of small isolated mistakes. According to Dr. Gary Topping in an article in the *Utah State Historical Quarterly*, “If ever a group was doomed at the beginning it was the Donners.”

Other theories say that the Donners were doomed when they purchased Lansford W. Hastings’ *Emigrants Guide to Oregon and California*. In a



brief aside in his guidebook, Hastings stated, "The most direct route, for the California emigrants, would be to leave the Oregon route, about two hundred miles east from Fort Hall; thence bearing west southwest, to the Salt Lake; and thence continuing down to the bay of San Francisco, by the route just described." At the time of writing, Hastings had not actually traveled the route across the Utah desert.

The nucleus of the group (which later became known as the "Donner Party") included two brothers, George and Jacob Donner, and James Reed. Each was wealthy, lived in Illinois, had a large family and they started out with three wagons each. One of Reed's wagons was literally a palace on wheels. It was a two-story affair heated with a stove. The wheelbase of the giant wagon was over 86 inches, as compared to an average width of 58 to 60 inches. The Reed wagon not only slowed the group's travel as it frequently fell behind the rest of the wagons, it was also a constant reminder of wealth to the poorer members of the group.

During the second week of May, 1846 they joined a large group of emigrants and left Independence, Missouri on their way west. Although wealthy and influential, the Donners and Reeds were just part of another party under the leadership of Lillburn Boggs, ex-governor of Missouri. On May 30th, Reed's mother-in-law, Sarah Keys, died and was buried along the trail near present-day Manhattan, Kansas. Continuing across the plains without incident, the travelers crossed into Wyoming.

One of those chance meetings that makes people later ask "What if?" took place on the night of June 27th. While camped at Ft. Bernard, a few miles from Ft. Laramie on Laramie Creek, mountain man James Clyman walked up to the campfire. Clyman was a legend in the history of the fur trade. He came west with Ashley in the early 1820's and knew the country as well as any man. Besides, Reed and Clyman were old brothers-in-arms, having served in the same regiment in the Black Hawk War. (Another comrade from that regiment, Abe Lincoln, also went on to make a name in history.)

Clyman had just come across the route **with** Hastings headed east and Clyman didn't think much of the new cutoff. He warned Reed and the Donner brothers to "stick to the main road" and not take the cutoff described in Hastings' Guide. Reed was unpersuaded. Afterall, he was holding the book in his hands. Many have wondered about the human nature involved at that fateful meeting. Do you believe a scruffy, dirty old mountain man who looked disreputable, or do you believe the well-written, recently published book you're holding in your hands?

One member of the party, journalist Edwin Bryant, decided he would



take Hasting's route. Bryant didn't want to be encumbered with wagons (heeding part of Clyman's advice), so he sold and traded his outfit for a string of pack animals and pressed ahead.

Compounding the dilemma of Clyman's warning, a few weeks later on July 17th Reed and the Donners were shown a letter written from Hastings at South Pass offering to "personally" guide emigrants across his new route to California. So, their minds made up, the party continued west. On July 18th they crossed South Pass and like so many emigrants before and since, camped at Pacific Springs. Meanwhile, Hastings had met another group, the Harlan-Young party, and was at Fort Bridger preparing to guide them across the Utah Desert.

On July 19th, the Reeds, Donners, and their fellow travelers camped at the Little Sandy crossing. Here the original group decided to split. The next day on the morning of the 20th, most of the families headed over to the Sublette Cutoff on their way to Oregon or California and the remainder of the original group headed to Fort Bridger. Typical of politics along the Trail, an election was held to determine the leadership of the party and George Donner was chosen as captain of the company. From that point on the group was known as the "Donner Party."

In his 60's, George Donner was more of a friendly patriarch than a dynamic leader. He was considered a kindly man who loved his family and many children. Some historians feel that the outcome of this election was one of those mistakes that added up to the final horror. Reed was also wealthy, but he was a younger, more robust man and perhaps better suited for leadership. The ratio of able-bodied men to women and children was also a factor in the group's eventual fate.

Another telling incident which occurred while the party was camped on the Little Sandy was the "adoption" of Luke Halloran. Halloran was "consumptive" and had been abandoned to die alone a few days before by the group with whom he was traveling. A charitable person, George Donner's wife Tamsen took Halloran in as one of her own and cared for him. Later, when Halloran died of his ailment in the Utah desert it turned out he wasn't a "penniless waif" as most of the party thought. \$1500 in gold was found in his belongings and he had willed the money to the Donners. Halloran's story has a bit of historical irony; imagine being left to die and then being rescued by the Donners.

Somewhere between the Little Sandy and Fort Bridger, young Edward Breen the son of Irish emigrants Patrick and Margaret Breen, fell from his horse and broke his leg. The recommended medical procedure for the broken leg was amputation, but the young lad refused it. His luck held

and gangrene didn't set in. A month later he was able to walk without crutches.

On July 28th, the Donner Party arrived at Fort Bridger. It was here that one of the most fateful errors occurred. Hastings was several days ahead of the Donners leading the Harlan-Young group across his cutoff through the Wasatch Mountains. And the going was next to impossible. Edwin Bryant was also ahead of the Donners with his pack string and he was struggling with the route. Bryant sent a letter back to Ft. Bridger to be delivered to his friends, the Donners. The letter told the Donners not to take Hastings' route. Jim Bridger and his partner Louis Vasquez never delivered the letter. Compounding the error of not getting the message from Edwin Bryant, the Donners didn't depart from Ft. Bridger until July 31st. They had rested there four days, time which would haunt them a few months later. Not receiving the message is still discussed to this day. Jim Bridger and Louis Vasquez stood to gain financially from emigrants using the proposed route, all travelers on the Hastings Cutoff would pass by the fort which was a business establishment. Leaving Ft. Bridger, the Donners headed towards Ft. Hall on the Main Trail and after traveling a few miles north they turned west, following a recent set of tracks which led them out of Wyoming into the tangled canyons of the Wasatch, and eventually into history.

# Cutoffs' And The Parting-Of The-Ways

*by Mike W. Brown*

In our information-rich society with television, radio, road maps, travel magazines and travel agents, it's hard to imagine going somewhere and not being really sure what the route had in store. But, 130-140 years ago, people traveled across the Sweetwater country on a narrow trail not really knowing what tomorrow, let alone that day, would bring. Even 70 years ago when the primary mode of travel in Wyoming wore a saddle and ate hay, people pretty much knew where they were headed and how to get there.

There's a place in southwestern Wyoming, northeast of Farson, where a single set of old wagon ruts abruptly splits into two distinct tracks. To call this point as being "in the middle of nowhere" is kind. The Parting-of-the-Ways has been called one of the most dramatic, historic sites in Wyoming. There's nothing to be seen for miles around except an unbroken expanse of wide open, sage-covered Wyoming rangeland and the two trails branching out from the parting.

One of the principal features on the Oregon/California Trail is the system of 'cutoffs' that crisscross southwestern Wyoming. Starting from various points along the Missouri, the trail to Oregon, California or Utah was long and filled with hardships. Emigrant parties couldn't start out until the weather broke and the mud began to dry. There was a narrow "window" of time within which parties could begin their journey with a reasonable expectation of arriving at their destination.

Another consideration besides the obvious reasons for taking a shortcut, i.e., saving time and/or miles, was the horrifying experience of the Donner Party who became snowbound in the Sierras. Even with the limited coverage of newspapers in the "States" and literacy rates among citizens, the tales of cannibalism and horrible suffering soon became common knowledge. No one wanted to repeat that experience.

Throughout the late 1840's and into the 50's, as more people followed the trail, more information was gathered for later travelers. This resulted in the growing number of cutoffs until there were even cutoffs of cutoffs. To the emigrants crossing the trail, a few days here and a few miles there added up. Making decisions about whether or not to "go for it" were difficult. Compounding all the questions were the emigrant guides that people sometimes carried.

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The point of separation for parties headed to different destinations

and facing the first cutoff is aptly called the Parting-of-the-Ways. Sometimes people started their trip in Missouri with a planned journey's end, only to change their mind along the route. The dilemma challenging people at the Parting-of-the-Ways is described on the Wyoming BLM Gift Catalog: "At this point (Parting-of-the-Ways) emigrants had to make the hard decision whether to save 46 miles of travel by taking the cutoff which bypassed the southern loop through Fort Bridger, but which also offered 50 miles of travel with no water source. The decision was based upon the condition of animals, emigrants, and supplies, as well as grass conditions reported along the Oregon Trail and the cutoff."

Coping with the Parting-of-the-Ways was often an emotional experience for people who had shared several hundred miles of trial and hardship, joy and sorrow, birth and death. One young woman, Sarah Davis, had this to say on July 29, 1850:

*"we started on and traveled a bout twelve miles we then cross big sandy it is hundred feet wide with swift current and vary muday we then parted with som (of) our company there mr crouses and one mr mire and mr hunter ... some of the best men I ever got acquainted with I think they went to california and us go to oregon we parted about noon we then on to big sandy and then camped for the night in a butifull place"*

### TRAVELING THE SUBLETTE CUTOFF

In the web-like system of Oregon Trail cutoffs which are abundant in southwestern Wyoming, the first one early travelers faced was the Sublette Cutoff. Extending from the Parting-of-the-Ways due west to the junction with the main Oregon Trail on the Bear River, the Sublette Cutoff saved more than 50 miles hard traveling for weary emigrants.

The Cutoff was first traveled by William Sublette in 1826. One of several brothers involved in the fur trade, William Sublette came west with Ashley in 1824. The route was known among the old hands of the fur trade and as those men became guides for later parties headed west, the trail was used more often. Tom Fitzpatrick led the DeSmet party across the cutoff in 1841.

According to Western historian George R. Stewart, the Sublette Cutoff was first used for wagons in 1844. Once at the Parting-of-the-Ways, the emigrants held a vote of the men (a technique used by many subsequent groups) to decide whether or not to take the Cutoff. The guide for this trip was an old mountain man, Caleb Greenwood. Consequently,

from 1844 until 1849 the route was known as the “Greenwood Cutoff.”

In 1849, one of the early “emigrant guides” was written and published by Joseph Ware, *The Emigrant’s Guide to California*. In describing the route, Ware calls it the Sublette Cutoff. Stewart notes that Ware had not actually been to California himself. He used information from John C. Fremont and William Sublette’s younger brother Solomon. Stewart also points out that the Cutoff was popular during the “Hurry Up Days” of the 49ers.

Traveling the Sublette Cutoff was not without its tradeoffs. Two main “disadvantages” were crossing 40-odd miles of high plains waterless desert between the Big Sandy and the Green River, and missing the opportunity to rest, resupply and refurbish at Fort Bridger. Following the Cutoff also gave emigrants some of the roughest country they had faced thus far. After crossing the Green River, the trail began a steep ascent west towards Hams Fork. On the plus side, however, many travelers found the higher elevations with trees and more abundant grass to be a refreshing change.

One traveler on the trail, 17-year old Eliza Ann McAuley recorded her experiences along the Sublette Cutoff in 1852. Sunday, July 4th:

*“...Four miles brought us to the forks of the Salt Lake and California roads. We took the Sublett cut-off, leaving Salt Lake to the south. Made eighteen miles today and camped on Big Sandy. Had to drive the cattle about six miles toward the hills for grass. It had been so windy and dusty today that some times we could scarcely seen the length of the team, and it blows so tonight that we cannot set the tent or get any supper, so we take a cold bite and go to bed in the wagons. The wagons are anchored by driving stakes in the ground and fastening the wagon wheels to them with ox chains...”*

Monday, July 5th: “...As we have a fifty mile desert to cross we lay by today to recruit the teams for it ... Still very windy, cold and disagreeable.”