

How many miles from St. Jo.?
Summary

This is the log of Sterling B. F. Clark who left his Pennsylvania home in search of California gold in 1849. Clark records a difficult, but common sequence of travel from St. Joseph. He mentions common landmarks, but gave no details about them.

Kathy Bunsie
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How Many Miles From St. Jo?

THE LOG OF STERLING B. F. CLARK
A FORTY-NINER

With Comments by Ella Sterling Mighels

TOGETHER WITH
A BRIEF AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF
JAMES PHELAN, 1819-1892
PIONEER MERCHANT



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INTRODUCTION

"**H**OW Many Miles from St. Jo?" This is the burden of the following story which was chronicled day by day by one of the Forty-Niners who belonged to the Vanguard of the West. Yet it was not from "St. Jo" that this Forty-Niner originally set forth, but from far-off Rutland, about 1200 miles to the eastward in the Green Mountain State.

It was at Rutland, Vermont, that Sterling B. F. Clark was born in 1825, the eighth child of his parents. He was of Revolutionary stock, of New England ancestry on both sides, and a descendant of High Clark who had settled in Connecticut as early as 1640.

One of Vermont's chief industries was quarrying, an industry in which the Clark family extensively engaged; but as many members of the family had died young as a result of inhaling marble-dust, Sterling Clark

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himself determined to escape from this menace to his line. He therefore took up the study of surveying, printing, and presswork, and educated himself for the profession of teaching, and finally for the law. When thus equipped, he said farewell to marble-cutting and went to Albany, New York, then to New York City, thence to Philadelphia, arriving, at last, at Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania, a town nestling in the Alleghanies, on the banks of the "Blue Juniata."

Here he became editor of a country paper published nearby at Huntington. Later he taught school in the vicinity. It was at Hollidaysburg that he met Rachel Mitchell, "the lady of his dreams." Rachel Mitchell was a young woman of rare beauty who had twice been chosen by Presidents of the United States to lead the grand march at promenade concerts given at Bedford Springs, the fashionable watering-place of the day. Her father, a Phila-

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delphian, was the principal of the Hollidaysburg school, and she assisted him in his work with the younger pupils, a task for which she was eminently fitted.

When the news of the discovery of gold in California flashed over the country, Sterling Clark resolutely determined to "go West," Asking Rachel Mitchell "to wait" for him; he set forth on his long and difficult journey towards "St. Jo," there to join his fortunes with the thousands seeking their way to the Land of Gold.

Here is his Log, which has been preserved all these years to tell his story and how he made his way. The Log is reproduced verbatim, retaining its spelling of proper names, changes having been made only as regards capitalization and punctuation. In the instances where words have been supplied for the sake of clearness, such additions have been indicated by brackets.

E. S. M.

THE LOG

MONDAY, March 11[12]th, 1849. Left Hollidaysburg, Pa., 10 o'clock P. M., in company with Captain Joseph Taylor to go to California. Arrived in Pittsburgh, Wednesday morning. (A coach ride, Standard.)

Left Pittsburgh Thursday 15th on board the steamboat Consignee. [Saw] sunk steamboat Caroline. Visited Wheeling, Va., Cincinnati, Ohio. Was tied up to two trees above Cairo. Arrived the 23d at St. Louis. Started next day, Saturday, at noon. Visited Missouri Lodge I. O. O. F. Arrived at St. Joseph 31, Saturday — myself sick and confined to room. Left Pittsburg company; lost ninety-five dollars by it. Joined Evans' Wheeling company. Started 26 Apr. Broke down a/c 3 tongues. Reached Bluffs 27 [28] Apr., Saturday. 7 miles. Broke down, got stuck and helped out 12 or 15 times. Had to unload our wagons 3

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or 4 times. Started for Wolf River, 29th. Reached there 1st May. Reached Agency 3 o'clock Wednesday. Unloaded and started for St. Jo. $21 + 7 = 28$ miles.

Reached St. Jo 4 May on Friday.*

Started Tuesday night, 8 May, reached Agency Wednesday, 9 May. Started Thursday, 10. Made 6 miles. $28 + 6 = 32$.† Gathered weeds to cook supper and breakfast. Encamped Friday, 11. Started in morning Sunday, after being helped by a friend and four yoke of oxen. Made 7 miles and got stuck again. Had to unload all our wagon. $32 + 7 = 39$. Prairie gently rolling. No wood. Very bad water.

(Ob.) We have 2 yoke of oxen, 5 mules and a good horse, and yet we balk at every

* Evidently, from the Log, a false start was made, as he first arrived at St. Joseph on March 31.

† This, as well as any subsequent errors in additions or calculations of mileage, follows the original manuscript. The corrected total mileage is given in the Summary on page 30.

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hard place. Our mess is composed of Evans, Clark, Dubois and Irvine.

The Wheeling company are 3 or 4 days' travel ahead of us, probably 60 or 70 miles. We shall probably have to throw away half of our load before we go two hundred miles further. Pleasant weather. No game yet. Had thunder-shower to-day. Health middling. — (*Vide*). Letter to [name illegible] for last 10 days' record.—

Saturday, 12th May. Stuck in one of the ravines or swampy runs of the prairie. Had to unload. Made 14. $39 + 14 = 53$.

Sunday, 13th, made 19 miles. Not much trouble. $53 + 19 = 72$. (*Ob.*) Truly we are now where the flowers spring up unsown and die ungathered and waste their sweetness on the desert air. Rattlesnakes very plentiful.

Monday, 14th. Very heavy thunder-shower this morning. 4 o'clock P. M. came about 12 miles. $72 + 12 = 84$.

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Tuesday, 15th. Made 18 miles. $84 + 18 = 102$.

Wednesday, 16th. Crossed Nemahaw. Not large. Drove behind the government train 28 miles. $102 + 28 = 130$.

Thursday, 17th. Crossed the Big Blue River in morning. Water $3\frac{1}{2}$ ft. deep. Made 18 miles. $130 + 18 = 148$.

Friday, 18th. Made 22 miles. Crossed Little Blue. $148 + 22 = 170$.

Saturday, 19th. Made 20 miles. Crossed Little Sandy. About 40 have died on this and on the Independence road with a species of cholera. $170 + 20 = 190$.

Sunday, 20th. Came 11 miles and encamped at 11 o'clock for the remainder of the day. $11 + 190 = 201$.

— Wednesday, 9th of May, at Wolf Creek saw a box in a tree which contained the dead body of an Indian child. —

Monday, 21. Made 21 miles. Came upon

Saturday 19th made 20 miles
crossed Little Sandy
which to have died on their way
the Independence road with
a special of cholera

~~17 of 20 = 190~~ 17 of 20 = 190
Sunday 20th came 11 miles
and camped at 11 o'clock
for ~~the~~ the remainder
of the day 11 + 190 = 201

Wednesday 4th of May
at Wolf Creek Saw a box
in a tree which contained the
dead body of an ~~Indian~~
child

Monday 21 made 21 miles
came upon the little blue swamp
at night upon it 21 + 200 = 221

Tuesday 22 made 23 miles
on the bank of the blue swamp
at night upon it the road

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the Little Blue. Encamped at night upon it.
 $21 + 201 = 222$.

Tuesday, 22. Made 23 miles on the bank of the Blue and encamped at night upon it. The road as far as the eye can reach is one continuous string of wagons. We are traveling now in company with four other wagons, two from Mo. and two from Ill. Passed Government train this night.

No rain of any consequence since last I spoke of the thunder-storm. Weather sometimes very pleasant, constant wind. $23 + 222 = 255$.

Wednesday, 23. Left the Little Blue at noon. Encamped without water except what we had in our canteens. Made 20 miles. $255 + 20 = 275$.

Thursday, 24. Made 18 miles and encamped upon the Platte. No wood. Violent thunder-storm. Water six inches in the tent. Spent two hours in the vain attempt to build