

1839 WAGON TRAIN JOURNAL TO OREGON CAPILLMAN



An 1839

Wagon Train Journal

TRAVELS

IN THE

GREAT WESTERN PRAIRIES

THE ANAHUAC AND ROCKY MOUNTAINS

AND IN THE

OREGON TERRITORY

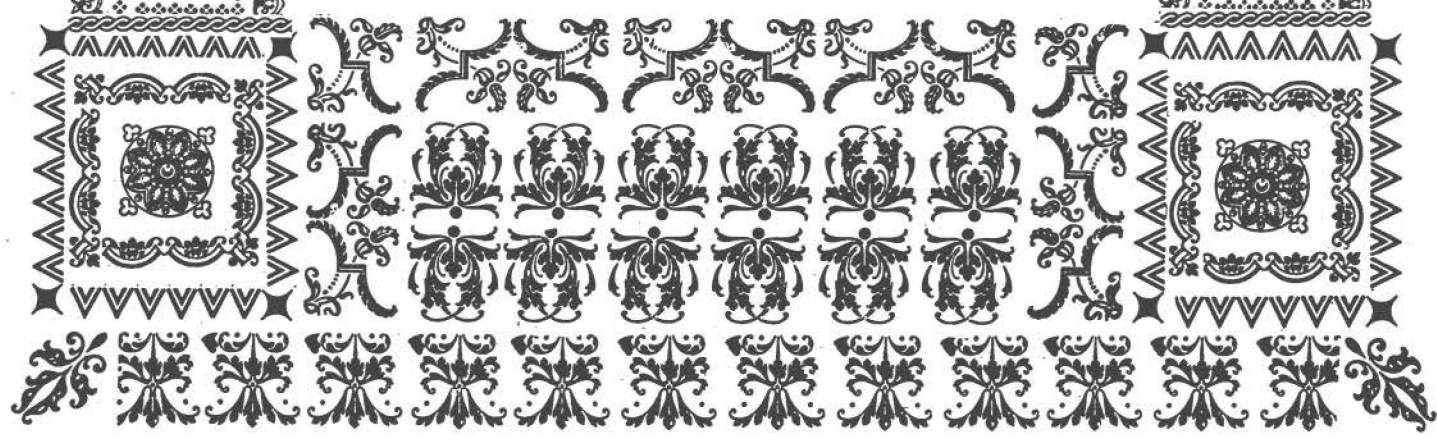
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Introduction

An 1839 journal brings an insight into the early American westward movement to the Pacific. The journal is a flowing story of one of the earliest wagon trips from Independence, Missouri to the Oregon Territory following the trail which was later to be known as the "Oregon Trail." In order for the United States to secure the Oregon Territory from the British, movement westward was necessary. At this time, the Oregon Territory was four years from becoming a provisional government and nine years from obtaining territorial status. The Applegate trail, which also was important to the settlement of the Willamette Valley, was established seven years later.

Thomas Farnham, who wrote the journal, was hired by Horace Greeley along with other eastern influences to make this trip and relate his experiences to those interested in moving West. Utilizing his gift for writing, it was not difficult for him to describe his experiences in incredible detail. His descriptions of Indian villages, their customs and dress, forts, landscapes, animals and personal hardships of the trip are of great interest and educational value to all.

History of our national westward movement has been recorded and published in many forms. I feel this book has a special importance and place in that history. This story has remained dormant for one hundred and thirty three years since its original publication. Now, during the 200th anniversary celebration of our country's freedom, it seems most appropriate to revitalize a story of this magnitude. It is my wish that the reader will receive enjoyment and pleasure from this book and will recognize its educational value.

The three people who assisted me in republishing this journal are: Dr. Gale Fletchall of Junction City, Oregon, who spent many hours in preparing and printing this publication from its original form, and my father and mother, Harold and Vernetta McCallum of Monroe, Oregon, who instilled in me an interest and value for America's past. To preserve and republish this important record of Oregon's history gives me great satisfaction.

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TRAVELS, &c.

CHAPTER I.

The Rendezvous--The Destination--The Education of Mules--The Santa Fe Traders--The Mormons--The Holy War--Entrance upon the Indian Territory--A Scene--An Encampment--A Loss--A Hunt--The Osage River--A Meeting and Parting--Kauzau Indians--An Indian Encampment--Council Grove--Ruins--An Indian and his Wants--Elk--A Tempest--Captain Kelly--A Comfortless Night.

On the 21st of May, 1839, the author and sixteen others arrived in the town of Independence, Mo. Our destination was the Oregon Territory. Some of our number sought health in the wilderness--others sought the wilderness for its own sake--and still others sought a residence among the ancient forests and lofty heights of the valley of the Columbia; and each actuated by his own peculiar reasons of interest began his preparations for leaving the frontier. Pack mules and horses and pack-saddles were purchased and prepared for service. Bacon and flour, salt and pepper, sufficient for 400 miles, were secured in sacks; our powder-casks were wrapped in painted canvass; and large oil-cloths were purchased to protect these and our sacks of clothing from the rains; our arms were thoroughly repaired; bullets were moulded; powder-horns and cap-boxes filled; and all else done that was deemed needful before we struck our tent for the Indian Territory.

But before leaving this little woodland town, it will be interesting to remember that it is the usual place of rendezvous and "outfit" for the overland traders to Santa Fe and other Mexican States. In the month of May of each year, these traders congregate here, and buy large Pennsylvania wagons, and teams of mules to convey their calicoes, cottons, cloths, boots, shoes, &c.&c., over the plains to that distant and hazardous market. And it is quite amusing to a "green-horn," as those are called who have never been engaged in the trade, to see the mules make their first attempt at practical pulling. They are harnessed in a team two upon the shaft, and the remainder two abreast in long swinging iron traces. And then by way of initiary intimation that they have passed from a life of monotonous contemplation, in the seclusion of their nursery pastures, to the blstling duties of the "Santa Fe Trade," a hot iron is applied to the thigh or shoulder of each with an embrace so cordially warm, as to leave there, in blistered perfection, the initials of their last owner's name.-- This done, a Mexican Spaniard, as chief muleteer, mounts the right-hand wheel mule, and another the left hand one of the span next the leaders, while four or five others, as foot-guard, stand on either side, armed with whips and thongs. The team is straightened-- and now comes the trial of passive obedience. The chief muleteer gives the shout of march, and drives his long spurs into the sides of the animal that bears him; his companion before follows his example; but there is no movement. A leer--an unearthly bray, is the only response of these martyrs to human supremacy. Again the team is straightened; again the bloody rowel is applied; the body-guard on foot raise the shout; and all as one apply the lash. The untutored animals kick and leap, rear and

plunge, and fall in their harness. In fine, they act the mule; and generally succeed in breaking neck or limb of some one of their number, and in raising a tumult that would do credit to any order of animals accustomed to long ears.

After a few trainings, however, of this description, they move off in fine style. And, although some luckless one may at intervals brace himself, up to an uncompromising resistance of such encroachment upon his freedom, still, the majority preferring passive obedience to active pelting, drag him onward, till, like themselves, he submits to the discipline of the traces.

'Independence' was the first location of the Mormons West of the Mississippi. Here they laid out grounds for their temple, built the 'Lord's store,' and in other ways prepared the place for the permanent establishment of their community. But, becoming obnoxious to their neighbors, they crossed the Missouri, and founded the town of 'Far West.' In 1838 they recommenced certain practices of their faith in their new abode, and were ejected from the State by its military forces.

The misfortunes of these people seem to have arisen from practicing upon certain rules of action peculiar to themselves. The basis of these rules is the assumption that they are the "Saints of the Most High," to whom the Lord promised of old the inheritance of the earth; and that as such they have the right to take possession of whatever they may be inspired to desire. Any means are justifiable, in their belief, to bring about the restoration to the "Children of God" of that which He has bequeathed to them. In obedience to these rules of action, any Mormon or "Latter-Day Saint" laboring for hire on a "worldly" man's plantation, claimed the right to direct what improvements should be made on the premises; what trees should be felled, and what grounds should from time to time be cultivated. If this prerogative of saintship were questioned by the warm-blooded Missourians, they were with great coolness and gravity informed that their godly servants expected in a short time to be in comfortable possession of their employers' premises: for that the Latter Days had come, and with them the Saints; that wars and carnage were to be expected; and that the Latter-Day Prophet had learned, in his communications with the Court of Heaven, that the Missourians were to be exterminated on the first enlargement of the borders of "Zion;" and that over the graves of those "enemies of all righteousness" would spring that vast spiritual temple that was "to fill the earth."

The prospect of being thus immolated upon the altar of Mormonism, did not produce so much humility and trembling among these hardy frontiersmen as the prophet Joe had benevolently desired. On the contrary, the pious intimation that their throats would be cut to glorify God, was resisted by some ruthless and sinful act of self-defence; and all the denunciations of the holy brotherhood were impiously scorned as idle words. However, in spite of the irreligious wrath of these deluded, benighted Missourians, the Saints cut timber wherever they listed on the domains that were claimed by the people of the world. And if the "Lord's hogs or horses" wanted corn, the farms in the hands of the wicked were resorted to at a conven-

ient hour of the night for a supply. In all these cases, the "Saints" manifested a kind regard to the happiness even of the enemies of their faith. For whenever they took corn from fields in possession of the world's people, they not only avoided exciting unholy wrath by allowing themselves to be seen in the act, but, in order that peace might reign in the bosoms of the wicked, even, the longest possible time, they stripped that portion of the harvest field which would be last seen by the ungodly owner.

The 'Church militant,' however, being inefficient and weak, the Prophet Joe declared that it was their duty to use whatever means the Lord might furnish to strengthen themselves. And as one powerful means would be the keeping its doings as much as possible from the world, it was, he said, the will of Heaven, revealed to him in pro-ungodly tribunals of this perverse and blind generation, should they reveal, for any cause, any matter or thing that might, in its consequences, bring upon the brotherhood the inflictions of those pretended rules of Justice, by the world called Laws. Under the protection of this prophecy, a band of the brethren was organized, called the "Tribe of Dan," whose duty it was to take and bring to the WLord's store," in the far West, any of the Lord's personal estate which they might find in the possession of the world, and which might be useful to the "Saints" in advancing their kingdom. Great good is said to have been done by this Tribe of Dan. For the Lord's store was soon filled, and the Saints praised the name of Joe. The Prophet's face shone with the light of an all-subduing delight at the increase of "Zion," and the efficiency of his administration.

The Missourians, however, were destitute of the Latter Day Faith, and of just views of the rights devised to those, who, in the Lord's name, should destroy his adversaries, and restore the earth to the dominion of millennial righteousness. Poor mortals and deluded sinners! They believed that the vain and worldly enactments of legislative bodies were to prevail against the inspirations of the Latter Day Prophet Joe; and in their unsanctified zeal, declared the Saints to be thieves, and unjust, and murderous; and the tribe of Dan to be a pest to the constitutional and acknowledged inherent and natural right to acquire, possess, and enjoy property. From this honest difference of opinion arose the "Mormon War," whose great events--are they not recorded in the book of the chronicles of the "Latter Day Saints"? Some events there were, however, not worthy to find record there, which may be related here.

The Governor of Missouri ordered out the State troops to fight and subdue the Mormons, and take from them the property which the "Tribe of Dan" had deposited in the "Lord's brick store" in the "citadel of Zion," called "Far West." It was in 1838 they appeared before the camp of the "Saints" and commanded them to surrender. It was done in the manner hereafter described. But before this event transpired, I am informed that the Prophet Joe opened his mouth in the name of the Lord, and said it had been revealed to him that the scenes of Jericho were to be reenacted in Far West; that the angelic host would appear on the day of battle, and by their power give victory to the "Saints."--And to this end he ordered a breast-work of inch pine boards to be raised around the

camp, to show by this feeble protection against the artillery of their foes, that their strength was in the "breast-plate of righteousness," and that they were the soldiers of the militant portion of the Kingdom of Heaven. There were moments of awful suspense in the camp of the "Saints." The Missouri bayonets bristled brightly near their ranks, and an occasional bullet carelessly penetrated the pine-board rampart, regardless of the inhibition of the Prophet. The Heavens were gazed upon for the shining host, and listening ears turned to catch the rushing of wings through the upper air. The demand of surrender was again and again repeated; but Faith had seized on Hope, and Delay was the offspring.

At this juncture of affairs, a sturdy old Missourian approached the brick store, pickaxe in hand, apparently determined to do violence to the sacred depository. One of the sisters in robed of white accosted him, and with proper solemnity made known that the "Lord of the Faithful" had revealed unto Joe, the Prophet, that every hand raised against that "holy structure" would instantly be withered. The frontiersman hesitated, but the hardihood characteristic of these men of the rifle returning, he replied, "Well, old gal, I'll go it on one hand any how." The awful blow was struck; the hand did not wither! "I doubles up now," said the daring man, and with both hands inflicted a heavy blow upon a corner brick. It tumbled to the ground, and the building quickly fell under the weight of a thousand vigorous arms. The confidence of the Saints in their Prophet waned, and a surrender followed. Some of the principal men were put in custody, but the main body were permitted to leave the State without farther molestation. We afterward met many of them with their herds, &c., on the road from Far West to Quincy, Illinois. It was strongly intimated by the planters in that section of country, that these emigrating "saints" found large quantities of the "Lord's corn" on the way, which they appropriated as need suggested to their own and their animal's wants.

The origin of the "Book of Mormon" was for some time a mystery. But recent developments prove it to have been written in 1812 by the Rev. Solomon Spaulding, of New Salem, in the State Ohio. It was composed by that gentleman as a historical romance of the long extinct race who built the mounds and forts which are scattered over the valley States. Mr. Spaulding read the work while composing it to some of his friends, who, on the appearance of the book in print, were so thoroughly convinced of its identity with the romance of their deceased pastor, that search was made, and the original manuscript found among his papers. But there was yet a marvel how the work could have got into the hands of Joe Smith. On further investigation, however, it appeared that the Rev. author had entertained thoughts of publishing it; and, in pursuance of his intention, had permitted it to lie a long time in the printing office in which Sidney Rigdon, who has figured so prominently in the history of the Mormons, was at the time employed. Rigdon, doubtless, copied poor Spaulding's novel, and with it, and the aid of Joe Smith, has succeeded in building up a system of superstition, which, in vileness and falsehood, is scarcely equaled by that of Mohamet.

Solomon Spaulding was a graduate of Dartmouth College.

On the 30th of May, we found ourselves prepared to move for the Indian Territory. Our Pack-saddles being therefore girded upon the animals, our sacks of provisions &c. snugly lashed upon them, and protected from the rain that had begun to fall, and ourselves well mounted and armed, we took the road that leads off southwest from Independence in the direction of Santa Fe. But the rains that had accompanied us daily since we left Peoria, seemed determined to escort us still, our ill-natured scowls to the contrary notwithstanding.-- We had traveled only three miles when such torrents fell that we found it necessary to take shelter in a neighboring school-house for the night. It was a dismal one; but a blazing fire within, and a merry song from a jovial member of our company imparted as much consolation as our circumstances seemed to demand, till we responded to the howling storm the sonorous evidences of sweet and quiet slumber.

*Memphis Park
Nov. 1, 1841*

The following morning was clear and pleasant, and we were early on our route. We crossed the stream called Big Blue, a tributary of the Missouri, about 12 o'clock, and approached the border of the Indian domains. All were anxious now to see and linger over every object that reminded us we were still on the confines of that civilization which we had inherited from a thousand generations; a vast and imperishable legacy of civil and social happiness. It was, therefore, painful to approach the last frontier enclosure--the last habitation of the white man--the last semblance of home. The last cabin at length was approached. We drank at the well and traveled on. It was now behind us. All was behind us with which the sympathies of our young days had mingled their holy memories.-- Before us were the treeless plains of green, as they had been since the flood--beautiful, unbroken by bush or rock; unsoiled by plough or spade; sweetly scented with the first blossomings of the spring. They had been, since time commenced, the theatre of the Indians' prowess--of their hopes, joys and sorrows. Here, by nations, as the eve of deadly battle closed around them, they had knelt and raised the votive offering to Heaven, and implored the favor and protection of the Great Spirit who had fostered their fathers upon the wintry mountains of the North; and when bravely dying, had borne them to the islands of light beneath the setting sun. A lovely landscape this, for an Indian's meditation! He could almost behold in the distance where the plain and sky met, the holy portals of his after state--so mazy and beautiful was the scene!

Having traveled about twenty-five miles over this beautiful prairie, we halted on the banks of a small stream as a place called Elm Grove.-- Here we pitched our tent, tied our horses to stakes carried for that purpose, and after considerable difficulty having obtained fuel for a fire, cooked and ate for the first time in the Indian Territory.

At this encampment final arrangements were made for our journey over the Prairies. To this end provisions, arms, ammunition, packs and pack-saddles were overhauled, and an account taken of our common stock of goods for trade with the Indians. The result of this examination was, that we determined to remain here a while and send back to the Kauzaus Indian mill for 200 pounds of flour. We were induced to take this step by assurances received from certain traders whom we

met coming from the mountains, that the buffalo had not advanced so far north as to furnish us with their fine hump-ribs as early by a week or fortnight as we had expected. Officers were also chosen and their powers defined; and whatever leisure we found from these duties, during a tarry of two days was spent in regaling ourselves with strawberries and gooseberries, which grew in great abundance near our camp.

Our friends having returned from the mill with for which they had been despatched, we left Elm Grove on the 3d of June, traveled along the Santa Fe trail about 15 miles, and encamped upon a high knoll, from which we had an extensive view of the surrounding plains. The grass was now about four inches in height, and bent and rose in most sprightly beauty under the gusts of wind that at intervals swept over it. We remained here a day and a half, waiting for two of our number who had gone in search of a horse that had left our encampment at Elm Grove. The time, however, passed agreeably. We were, indeed, beyond the sanctuaries of society, and severed from the kind pulsations of friendship; but the spirit of the Red Man, wild and careless as the storms he buffets, began to come over us; and we shouldered our rifles and galloped away for a deer in the lines of timber that threaded the western horizon. Our first hunt in the depths of the beautiful and dreadful wilderness! It was attended with no success; but was worth the effort.--We had begun to hunt our food.

In the afternoon of the 4th, our friends returned with the strayed animals. The keepers immediately fired the signal-guns, and all were soon in camp. Our road on the 5th was through a rich, level prairie, clothed with the wild grass common to the plains of the West. A skirt of black oak timber occasionally lined the horizon or strayed up a deep ravine near the trail. The extreme care of the pioneers in the overland Santa Fe trade was everywhere noticeable, in the fact that the track of their richly-loaded wagons never approached within musket-shot of these points of timber. Fifteen miles' march brought us to our place of encampment. A certain portion of the Company allotted to that labor, unpacked the Company's mules of the common-stock property, provisions, ammunitions, &c.; another portion pitched the tent another gathered wood and kindled a fire; while others brought water, and still others put seething-pots and frying-pans to their appropriate duties. So that at this, as at other times before and after, a few minutes transposed our little cavalcade from a moving troop into an eating, drinking and joyous camp. A thunder-storm visited us during the night. The lightning was intensely vivid, and the explosions were singularly frequent and loud. The sides of the heavens warred like contending batteries in deadly conflict. The rain came in floods; and our tent, not being ditched around, was flooded soon after the commencement of the storm, and ourselves and baggage thoroughly drenched.

The next day we made about 15 miles through the mud and rain, and stopped for the night near a solitary tree upon the bank of a small tributary of the Konzas river. Here fortune favored our fast-decreasing larder. One of the company killed a turtle, which furnished us all an excellent supper. This was the only game of any description that we had seen since leaving the frontier.