

# Canvas Caravans

By

ELEANOR ALLEN

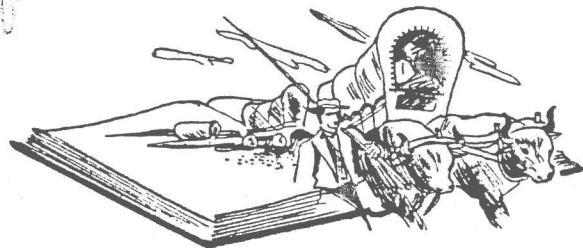
*Based on the Journal of  
Esther Belle McMillan Han-  
na, who with her husband,  
Rev. Joseph A. Hanna,  
brought the Presbyterian  
Colony to Oregon in 1852.*

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## Foreword

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THE recently discovered journal of Esther McMillan Hanna, wife of Rev. Joseph A. Hanna, reveals the experiences of the Hannas and the Presbyterian Colony as they made the six month's trek across the plains from Pittsburgh to Oregon in 1852. Spurred on by religious fervor, the Hannas journeyed to Oregon and established the second Presbyterian Church in the Oregon country at Corvallis, then called Marysville, on October 1, 1853.

Esther Belle McMillan was but 18 when she set out for the West with her young minister-husband. Within an hour after the ceremony at Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, they set out by steamboat for Oregon. They arrived at St. Joseph to convene as a Presbyterian colony and to make ready for the overland journey. The company consisted of 60 persons and 18 wagons.

A photostatic copy of this journal now rests in

the archives of Pacific University, Forest Grove, Oregon. This historic diary written in pencil within a small portfolio stands as a symbol of all pioneer women who followed along the Oregon Trail. Her experiences were the same as those of other brave women who put thousands of miles between home and family to dare the unknown Western wilderness. Her stifled cries were the cries of all women. Her humor, resourcefulness, her courage, and above all, her deep-rooted faith and vision symbolizes all American womanhood.

# Journal of Esther Belle Hanna

(1852)

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## One

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March 11: Left Pittsburgh in the steamer *Brilliant*, a very fine boat, good company. Had a very pleasant trip. Arrived in Cincinnati on Saturday, the 13th. Remained there over the Sabbath. Heard Dr. Rice preach in the morning and Dr. Laird in the evening. Much pleased with the appearance of Cincinnati, many handsome buildings and residences. Stopped at the Woodruff House, where we were made very comfortable. Met two old acquaintances, Mr. Bart and Mr. Lippincott. Had a pleasant interview with them.

Monday, 15th: Left Cincinnati in the steamer *River*, rather an inferior boat. Very much crowded. Over three hundred passengers in all. Feel very uneasy at times as to our safety; try to be calm and trust in our overruling Providence, but my foolish fears often arise in spite of all my attempts to quiet them.

Friday, 19th: This is the fifth day since we came on board. Do not expect to reach St. Louis until

tomorrow. Spend the time in various ways, eat and sleep, read a little and sew some. We have been reading Headley's "Sacred Mountain" and "The Sunny Side", a very interesting little work. There are several of our Oregonianites on board,—all young men. I have become acquainted with them partially and am much pleased with them.

Saturday, 20th: Still on the river and making very slow progress. Hope to reach St. Louis this evening. How slowly the time passes! How monotonous! The same dull routine day after day! There is some beautiful scenery along the Mississippi, huge rocks traversing one shore, the other with here and there a solitary pine growing out from their rugged sides, or lofty summits present a grand and imposing sight . . . .

Arrived in St. Louis this evening about 4 o'clock. Have stopped at the Scott House. Find everything very comfortable. Am glad to be on land once more! I feel thankful that we have been spared through dangers seen and unseen. Oh, that I may at all times trust in the Lord and feel safe under the shadow of His wing!

St. Louis from early days had been the starting point for emigrant and fur-trapping expeditions. Here was the trading post where trappers, half-breeds, gay Canadian boatmen congregated and revelled, while they bargained for trade with their rich fur pelts. Beyond were the green wilds, where the red men roamed in undisputed possession, except for the fur trading posts along the Missouri River. The stream of multi-colored life that

poured into this quaint city was like an avalanche. Caravan after caravan passed over the prairies of Illinois, crossed the Mississippi, then known as the Great River, and halted at St. Louis. Along the shores of the yellow Mississippi were gathered parties of emigrants preparing for their journey onward to Independence or St. Joe. Hundreds of tents near the ferry landing and extending far back from the river revealed the magnitude of this Western movement.

A motley pageantry choked the city of St. Louis this 20th day of March, 1852, when Esther Hanna and her husband, Joseph, arrived. Santa Fe traders, gamblers, and adventurers, mingled with the emigrants. Hotels were crowded to overflowing. In the blacksmith's shops horses and oxen were being shod for the perilous trek across the plains. Emigrant wagons rumbled through the streets with women and children peering out eagerly at the never-ending kaleidoscope of color surging past them. Picturesque hunters with their long hair streaming over their buckskin-clad shoulders, watched the white-topped wagons with keen interest. Indians with their dark hair bound with brilliant colors clattered past on their shaggy ponies. Laughter, cries of excitement, and the snatches of a gay voyageur's boating song, filled the air.

In the emigrant camps on the bluffs overlooking the river rose the smoke of many fires. Mormons bound for Salt Lake, pioneers bound for

Oregon, adventurers on their way to California, all waited their turns to be ferried across the river by the two scows called the ferry. A keen business in "turns" was carried on in those days! In one case, it is said that fifty dollars was paid to entitle the purchaser an immediate crossing.

The women sewed or knitted. The sharp tones of the spindle also filled the air as they spun yarn on old-time wheels. What were the women thinking about as they cooked their family's meals over the camp fires and went about their domestic duties in a strange place? Their calm faces did not betray them. Only the silence of the night knew their stifled cries and prayers.

Esther Hanna opened her eyes the next morning, and dreamily listened to the chiming of church bells. She turned to look at Joseph's dark head on the pillow. He was still asleep. Pulling the pillow out from under her young husband's head, she met Joseph's astonished eyes with gay laughter. She was but 18 and very much in love with the world and her minister-husband. Then she folded her hands primly and tried to look like an old married woman. Joseph caught her hands in his, while his eyes danced with merriment and love. They were young and off to a new work for the Lord. Together they would do great things.

In her diary on that morning, she wrote:

Sabbath afternoon, 21st: Awoke this morning invigorated after a sound and refreshing sleep. We

went to the Central Church. Heard Rev. Mr. Ruderson preach on the observances of the Sabbath. A very good discourse. The church is a magnificent one.

Monday, 22nd: Was quite ill all day. In the evening came on board the *Ben West*, bound for St. Joe.

23rd: Went to Rev. J. C. Abbott, principal of the Female Seminary in St. Louis. Had a very pleasant visit. He and his lady are intimate friends of Mr. Hanna's.

Returned to the boat half past 4 o'clock and we shoved off at 7. Found a very crowded boat, a great number of passengers and a great amount of freight. We have a number of ladies, some of whom are very agreeable, seven of them bound for California.

1852! Age of sentiment and romantic melancholy! Paper lace and waxworks! Currier and Ives prints! Godey's Lady Book! In 1851 the bloomer fashions had come in creating a sensation. The more conservative gentlewomen averted their eyes at such a bold style, but the more advanced ladies delighted in the freedom of the bloomers.

"Peterson's Magazine", a widely read periodical of the time, gave elaborate space to the shocking bloomer fashions. Specifications for both walking and evening dress decreed that for walking the lady of fashion must wear full Turkish pantelettes of Mazarine blue silk, ruffled. Over this was to be worn a short full skirt of blue silk. A Marseilles

vest open half way to the waist revealed a dainty pleated linen bosom. A small turned over collar completed the upper portion of this new style. The costume was completed by an over-dress of embroidered silk high at the back, but open all the way down in front. The over-dress had loose sleeves with white under-sleeves. A hat of gray beaver with sweeping rich plumes adorned the lady's charming head. It was for these beaver pelts to be made into hats for the ladies and gentlemen of fashion that the daring trappers and traders were penetrating the green wilderness of the Northwest.

When the shadows of night fluttered down, the gentlewoman of fashion was to wear pantelettes of white satin. Over this was worn a short full skirt of pink silk, elaborately embroidered at the bottom. The corsage was quite tight, open half way to the slim waist in front over a delicate chemisette. Loose sleeves with white under-sleeves were worn. White or pink satin boots completed the ravishing costume.

Millard Fillmore, Whig, was in the White House, following Zachary Taylor, Democrat, in 1850. The telegraph had come by 1850 to flash news from the Atlantic seaboard to the Mississippi.

On September 11, 1850, the enchanting Jenny Lind had made her American debut. She had been imported from Sweden by America's first press agent de-luxe, Phineas T. Barnum. Barnum of-

fered the Swedish diva \$1,000 a night for 100 concerts, plus an equal share of the proceeds when exceeding \$6,500. Jenny Lind with her flute-like voice and simple charm captivated America. Her concert tour was a continuous sensation. When she sang "The Last Rose of Summer" or "Old Folks at Home", tears flowed unrestrained down the cheeks of her audience. She was the articulate voice of their secret dreams; their nostalgia for old scenes of childhood; once again they strolled through the fragrant streets on a summer night with their little love upon their arm; they heard again the tender sighs of vanished romance breathing a delicate essence never to be recaptured again. She spelled romance and beauty. She was the epitome of this delightful age of sentiment that lives today only in the yellowed pages of books and diaries and in the hearts of those few old ones left who speak reverently of the lovely Jenny Lind.

In the opera houses, the fragile "Camille" laid her white fingers upon the hearts of men and women. Junius Brutus Booth, Fanny Kemble, and the great Rachel trod the boards of the theatre.

"Lena Rivers" by Mary Jane Holmes, "East Lynne" by Mrs. Eden Southworth, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" by Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Reveries of a Bachelor" by Ik Marvel, were in every library. Charles Dickens and William Makepiece Thackeray from England were also widely read.

But this was a world in which Esther Hanna now had little to do. She was a young minister's

wife embarking upon a hazardous journey away from civilization into the unknown Western land bearing the word of the Lord. Her dress was simple and unobtrusive as she stood upon the deck of the *Ben West*. If her blue eyes strayed admiringly at times to the fashionable costumes of the elegant ladies on board, it was because the design and colors were pleasing to her eyes. She felt no envy.

She walked the deck of the *Ben West* watching the changing scenes with eager eyes. This was a strange new world to her, a world which as she traveled farther into the wilderness would open undreamed vistas and test her courage.

The boat slowly steamed through the yellow water. Along the rail and upon her decks ranged a motley throng. Trappers in buckskin, keen-eyed and browned from the fierce suns of many summers in the Northwest, strode the deck with impatient feet. Their hearts were in the dark fastness of the forests where roamed the beaver, the marten; in the inlets where the sea otter moved with the tides. Dapper gentlemen-gamblers clad in frock coat, top hat, and magnificently embroidered vests, lounged against the deck rail, tapping upon the wood with the delicate fingers that secreted many a card up their sleeves. Their sophisticated eyes roamed over the passengers with a practiced skill. But their impassive faces betrayed nothing. Emigrants bound for Oregon; adventurers for California, lured by the tales of the gold-rush, and the exciting life that seethed around the

gold camps; sober-faced missionaries; and the fashionably attired ladies who seemed out of place upon the rather dirty old boat; these made up the passenger list upon the *Ben West* as it steamed along the river headed for St. Joe.

It was like something out of a book, Esther Hanna mused, as she watched the faces of the passengers. And although she was but 18, she could read history in the many faces that passed and re-passed on the deck. Avarice, cunning, strength, courage, trickery, evil, and beauty, paraded past her fascinated eyes in the guise of human beings. All of the elements of humanity that would bring their owners tragedy, wealth, disgrace, happiness, and death, stood revealed in the faces of the *Ben West's* passengers. Life, raw and violent, swirled about the young minister's wife, and she shivered. She turned for a moment away from the throng that seemed to press in upon her, and looked across the muddy river to the banks, where the trees moved slightly in a little wind. Her sensitive perception had left her strangely shaken. It was like a play where the players held before their faces painted masks signifying their vices or virtues. When she turned back to the deck, all was normal once again.

In her diary she writes:

Monday, 29th: Have been on the boat a whole week. Have made slow progress. Thus far the Lord has led us on. O, that we could be more grateful

for His Goodness! Part of the way the river was quite low and there was great danger of running on sand and snags. Yesterday was Sabbath, but there is no Sabbath on the river! At least one would think not. Our Captain is a most unprincipled creature! However, he gave permission for Mr. Hanna to preach in the morning. The sermon was listened to with attention and apparently much interest.

We hope to reach St. Jo tomorrow. How I long to breathe the fresh air once more! Have been unwell all the past week, owing, I think, to close confinement. Feel better today. Nearly all of the ladies on board have been ill. We have had bad water and a filthy boat throughout. Our lives have been mercifully spared for which I trust I am truly thankful.

Tuesday, 30th: Arrived at St. Jo at 5 o'clock. Went from the boat to the Rev. Mr K, the Presbyterian minister in this place. We were received most kindly.

Wednesday, 31st: Stayed all night at Rev. K's. Later we found a boarding house. Do not find things as nice as we could wish but must be content. Have not been well for some time. Do not feel any better since I landed. There are a great many emigrants here already and many more to come.

April 1st: Have been confined to the house all day. Do not feel much better. Mr. Hanna has been out all day. There is a meeting of our Colony this afternoon. Do not know what number has arrived yet. The weather is quite cold, the winds piercing.

There is an unconscious note of loneliness be-

hind the lines of the diary that speaks poignantly of Esther Hanna's youth. One sees the 18-year-old wife standing at the window of the little boarding house, looking out at the cold world, while the icy winds sweep around the dwelling and rattle the windows. What must have been her thoughts as she stood at the window! She was so young and inexperienced to be setting out upon such a dangerous trip. Far from her home and kindred, with only her husband, Joseph; in a strange town where the atmosphere was feverish with a life that was unknown to a hitherto sheltered girl, Esther Hanna's thoughts must have been a confused, ever-shifting kaleidoscope of fears, loneliness, new impressions. But through it all beat the warm music of her deep love for her minister-husband, Joseph.

April 6th: Have been in St. Jo a week. The weather has been very cold and disagreeable all the time. Friday last, we came to Mr. Richardson's, where we expect to remain until we leave this place. We have every comfort and are treated very kindly. May the Lord reward them and may we be more grateful for mercies!

There are a number of emigrants here and more coming every day. The Missouri River is so flooded with ice that steamboats cannot land. There have been three in sight for three days but cannot land on account of the ice. Something very unusual for this season.

April 16th: Have received letters from nearly all



of our dear, absent friends written the last week. One last evening from my dear sister. They are all well for which I am thankful. Do not expect to leave this place for some time yet owing to the backwardness of spring. Am very impatient to be on the way, yet as we have every comfort here, I ought to be content.

Sabbath; 18th: This afternoon we walked to the cemetery, which is a very elevated site commanding a view for miles around and will one day be a lovely resting place for the dead. Whilst there a funeral train entered bearing the remains of an emigrant who had landed the evening before and died soon after. No mother, wife, or sister near him in the last trying hour to wipe away the death damp from his brow or close his eyes in death! Not a tear was shed as the coffin was lowered into the deep, damp vault! Not a sigh was heard as the heavy clods fell upon it with a sound which always brings anguish to the hearts of the bereaved ones! The last shovelful of earth was placed upon the mound. The sound of retreating footsteps of the crowd have died upon the air, and the poor sojourner is forgotten! The solemn scene made a deep impression upon my mind. I too am a wanderer, a pilgrim, and little know how soon my frail body will be laid by the wayside! God grant that whenever or whatever death comes, that I may be found watching and my lamp burning! "Watch and pray, for ye know not the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh."

To the sensitive, half-ill girl, the sight of the funeral for the lonely emigrant seemed to crystallize all of her gloomy fears. Some of the golden

lacquer of youth was brushed from her wing as she and her husband left the cemetery. The first realization of maturity speaks with her lines: "I too am a wanderer, a pilgrim, and little know how soon my frail body will be laid by the wayside!" And she was but 18!

May 4th, Tuesday: Left St. Joseph today at 11 o'clock. Our long journey has begun!

The Oregon Trail over which the Hannas journeyed was called "The Great Medicine Road of the Whites" by the red men. Others called it "The Road to Oregon." The way had been blazed by Indian and trapper, following those old trails made by the buffalo and deer, whose animal instinct guided them over the shortest routes through the mountains to the salt springs or water holes. The tracks of the trail passed through an Indian country for more than a thousand miles from the West bank of the Missouri River. Only a few widely scattered trading posts or government forts broke the vast empire of the red savages. Over the wide plains roamed the great herds of buffalo. From high points, the slender deer and antelope flashed their swift-footed way.

A 2,000-mile groove across a continent cut deep by the weary feet of those who had gone before! What chronicler today can adequately recount the dangers of the emigrants following along the Oregon Trail? Across the unsheltered miles of burn-

ing wastelands, the prairie schooners ploughed their way. Along the road lay the whitened bones of stock that had died. On either side of the trail were freshly-made graves.

The way ran from the frontier town of Independence, Missouri, to the mouth of the Walla Walla River. For two score miles, the route was identical with the Santa Fe trail, but near the present town of Gardner, Kansas, it struck Northwest, and crossing the Kansas, reached the Platte River in the vicinity of Grand Island. Following the South fork of the Platte to its junction with the South Platte, the trail ascended for a short way and then crossed to reach again the South bank of the North Platte.

The winding trail curved on to Ft. Laramie. No fort east of the Mississippi had a more stirring and eventful history than Ft. Laramie. Built in 1841 by the American Fur Company as a trading post, it passed into the hands of the government in 1849, and was used as a military post to guard the Oregon Trail. This fort was the scene of many a fateful council with the Indians. Many an officer, who later won fame in the Civil War, served there as a subaltern. In early days, the American Fur Company monopolized the Indian trade of that region.

Passing Ft. Laramie, the Oregon Trail wound west, crossing the Platte River near Casper, Wyoming, and then southwest on to Sweetwater. It followed the upper reaches of that winding stream

to South Pass. Giant cottonwoods towered against the sky, marking the general course of the shallow stream.

With the Rocky Mountains left behind, the road crossed Green River and turned south to Ft. Bridger, in Green River Valley. Today a pyramid of cobblestones marks the site of this trading post, which in 1842, if not earlier, James Bridger, mountain-man and trapper, with his partner, Louis Vasquez, built to furnish supplies and repair the wagons of the Westward-bound emigrants.

Turning North and then west, the historic trail passed Soda Springs, and then on to Ft. Hall, built by adventurous, young Nathaniel J. Wyeth, in 1834.

The last stretches of the twisting trail carried the weary emigrants along the south bank of the Snake River to a crossing now known as Glenn's Ferry, Idaho.

On curved the road to Boise, and down the river of the same name to a second crossing of the tortuous Snake River. On northwest, past the site of La Grande, Oregon, and on across the rolling hills and fields of Eastern Oregon to The Dalles perched high upon the gray cliffs above the blue Columbia River.

Such was the way the Hannas took that day in early spring. They knew little of what lay in store for them, but their hearts were full of hope and the divine blessing of the Lord.

When the Hanna party left St. Joseph, the last traces of civilization began to fade into the distance. The wilderness began to reach out its green arms and take into its embrace the little Presbyterian colony setting out so bravely for the unknown West.

On May 5th, Esther Hanna writes:

Camped last night eight or nine miles from St. Jo. Came to the river this morning. Was detained until this evening. So many crossing. 6 o'clock: We are now safely across and out of the bounds of civilization. We are now in Indian Territory and are pitching our tents on the river bank. Had a bad night last night. Quite a storm.

Thursday, 6th: Came two or three miles over a horrible road. Came to a fine prairie with good grass. Have encamped for the day and night so as to recruit our cattle. It rains constantly.

Friday, 7th: Still encamped. Our men have gone to build a bridge across the stream, which is impassable. I am baking my first light bread on the prairie in a skillet. I get along cooking out better than I had expected.

Here was the young minister's wife's first experience with outdoor life. The housewife's tasks were done under many depressing difficulties on these overland journeys. When it rained, and the emigrants encountered much of it, cooking had often to be suspended entirely. Water was every

where! If the wagon covers were not double thickness, the fabric let in the rain. During the rainy spells, the women had to suspend laundering. In the higher altitudes, the whirling clouds of thick dust sent more dirt on the clothes hung out to be sunned, than the garments just washed. And of course, the trials and discomforts fell hardest upon the women. Yet the testimony of all the diarists is that most of them bore their part heroically and without complaint.

There is an interesting sidelight upon one pioneer woman's cooking efforts told by James Clyman, who camped with Ford's party in 1844. Mr. Clyman pays glowing tribute to one young lady in the following:

And here let me say there was one young lady who showed herself worthy of the bravest, undaunted pioneer of the West, for after having kneaded her dough, she watched and nursed the fire and held an umbrella over the fire and her skillet with the greatest composure for near 2 hours and baked enough bread to give us a very plentiful supper!

With charming artlessness, totally unconscious of her delicate charm and tumbling golden hair, Esther Hanna confides to her diary:

There are five of us, three young men to attend to our ox team. They are very fine, young men and are very kind and obliging to me.

The wagons curved on and in the middle of the afternoon halted.

3 o'clock: We have come to our crossing place. The men felled a large tree across the river so that we can walk across. They are packing our things on their backs so as to lighten the loads, and drive the teams across. We are now over and I am sitting on the bank writing. There are some six or eight wagons of us here. We are beginning to see a few hardships already. But we are all well and our lives have been spared. Oh, that we could be more grateful for these mercies and trust in a kind Providence for the future! Our men have just killed a large rattlesnake. I am very fearful of them. They are so numerous. Came on to our camping place several miles distant traveling until 10 o'clock at night. Was very tired and cold and hungry. Took a cold supper. Went to bed and slept soundly.

Saturday, 8th: Stayed at our camp until 2 o'clock waiting on part of our company, who were detained by the bad roads. Started at 2:00 and came eight or nine miles, where we have encamped. There are 16 or 17 wagons of us together now. The wagons formed a large circle and then drove the cattle into it, to prevent their straying off or the Indians taking them. Saw several Indians today. We will have a watch placed every night now.

This forming of a corral was customary among the emigrants on the journey across the continent. Upon arriving at a camp, the wagons were packed in a circle, occasionally a square, and often chained

to one another. Such a formation guarded by some fifty, well-armed men, was proof against assault by almost any number of Indians. The Indians were not willing to attack a fortified position. This regular day's routine of camping, marching and guarding was a heritage from the trapping companies. To this observance of precaution was largely due the small proportion of losses borne by the emigrants from attack from the Indians.

J. Henry Brown, Oregon pioneer, in his memoirs of his trek along the Oregon Trail, gives a vivid picture of camp organization. These memoirs are now treasured in the famous Bancroft Library.

The next day Bradshaw showed us how to corral our wagons as follows: After the place had been selected for the camp, the leading teams stopped at the place designated and the next immediately to the rear and quartering, with the forward wheels nearly even with the hind wheels of the first wagon, and the third wagon assuming the same position to the second and so on through the train; forming a circle when the train had all assumed their positions. The teams would now all be inside the corral. After they had been unyoked and driven out, the tongues were chained to preceding wagons, then making a barricade of great strength in which to keep the stock during the night and to resist an attack by Indians. The camp fires were built inside where the cooking was done and tents stretched.

A bivouac of a large train is a very picturesque sight. The white covers of the wagons and the tents

resemble a small village, while the camp fires shed their ruddy light on the surrounding darkness with its ever-changing hues, making the increasing darkness still more impenetrable. The women were busy clearing away the remains of the evening meal or preparing for the early morning breakfast. The men, except those on guard duty, would form circles around the fires, smoking and recounting the incidents of the day's travel, singing songs, telling jokes; while in another part of the camp, the violin would enliven the air with its notes, to which the young and agile feet were keeping time in the merry dance on the soil of the plains. The boys were marching around playing soldier, led by a youthful drummer, who pounded with might and main on a small specimen of that warlike symbol. Gradually the stock would lie down and the people retire to dream of home and dear ones left behind. The camp would become quiet and the fires grow dimmer until its flames expired. No sound would be heard except the low talk of the guards as they made their rounds, or the lonesome howl of the prairie wolf as they prowled around the camp.

At an early hour, the camp would be aroused, preparatory to the day's journey. Immediately after breakfast, the cattle would be driven into camp. Then followed a scene of confusion. Men and boys running hither and yon, looking for their oxen, a great number of them not being sufficiently broken to be readily yoked. The women hastily packing away cooking utensils or frantically calling out to some child that was disposed to get within dangerous proximity to the animal's heels. All was bustle and hurry, but finally the teams would be yoked and hitched to their respective wagons and the word would be given for some family team to take the

lead for that day, which would, of course, take its place in the rear next day. The train would be on the move, stringing along the trail with the loose cattle in the rear. Mr. Bradshaw soon assumed the general supervision of the movement of the train, while my grandfather enforced his orders and chose the camp. . . .

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# Two

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IN the Hanna train, the 18-year-old girl-wife welcomed with a tinge of melancholy the brilliant sunlight that streamed across the plains. Her faith in the Lord and her beloved Joseph was deeply rooted but she was so young and so far from her own people!

In her diary for that day she writes:

Sabbath, May 9th: This is a beautiful morning. I think of home and the dear ones there; each day I am getting farther from them. I feel a sadness steal over me at times when I think that I shall see them no more on earth, but it is all for the best. It is better that my affections should be more turned from earth. Oh, that I could set them upon "things heavenly and divine!" I feel that I can rejoice in this undertaking. I have every comfort that it is possible to have on the way and one of the kindest and best husbands to care for me. We have no Sabbath bell, nor have we a sanctuary to worship in, but we can enjoy

the Sabbath even in the wilderness. We will have preaching today. I am sorry to see that some of our company are disposed to travel on the Sabbath. Six wagons started this morning. We will not have any further dealing with them. The road is literally lined with wagons and cattle; no regard is paid to the Lord's day!

Monday, 10th: Travelled for 13 miles today over a most beautiful, rolling prairie. Passed the Indian Mission, which is 31 miles from St. Jo. We came over two small bridges constructed by Indians, where we had to pay toll. Some of them can speak English tolerably well. Commenced raining about 1 or 2 O'clock; continued till evening, which has made the roads very muddy and the little streams difficult to drive over. We have a very wet camp. Had to haul our wood and water with us as there is none within several miles.

Tuesday, 11th: Started this morning before 6. Got along comfortably last night. Heard wolves howling very near us, the first I had ever heard. They make a singular, mournful sound. We had a bad time crossing the sloughs, they are so deep and very hard on our cattle. Our mules get along well. Our wagon is very comfortable. We have a nice, little bedroom of it at night. We shut it all up close, let down the backs of the seats, spread our mattress, hang up our clothes on the hooks which are put in all around. I have my looking glass, towel, etc., hung up and everything in order. Got some beautiful wild flowers today. They grow in profusion on the prairie.

We passed two newly made graves yesterday and one today just by the roadside. Oh, how hard to think of being left alone by the wayside! Got a "Pres-

byterian Advocate," "Presbyterian and Record" from Messrs. Hamilton and Irvin at the Mission. They are April numbers and contain much that is new and interesting to us. I have had a rich treat reading today.

11 O'clock: I am now sitting in our carriage in the middle of the slough. Our mules all fell down attempting to get through. I have never witnessed anything like it! We have put 14 yokes of oxen to the wagons to get them out. We have gotten over safely. I came out on horseback and we brought out the carriage with oxen.

Mules were more expensive than oxen in those days. Six mules cost \$600, while eight oxen could be had for only \$200. But with good roads and plenty of grain, the mules travelled faster and endured the heat better. But for long distances over rough roads, young oxen were preferable. They held out against the prolonged strain and in the long run made as good time as mules. Oxen were also less liable to stampede from the Indians, and were available for beef, if necessary.

The carrying of grain was something that rarely occurred to the early emigrant. He had little knowledge of the country he was to cover, and expected to find grass all the way to the Pacific. But, with the increase of immigration, the first wagon train in the spring had the advantage. The later trains found little or no grass. So carrying grain became a common thing.

Along the Oregon Trail the actual hardship of the long journey was at every hand. Often a little cross, half-buried in the sand, or the tail board of some wagon served as a head board for some rude epitaph. Skeletons of cattle, and bodies not yet skeletons were such a common sight, that they aroused no more than a casual look.

Have just passed another newly-made grave. I placed a bunch of flowers on it as a mark of my respect for the departed whoever it may be. One of our men has just shot a prairie dog. It is the size of a large cat and gray in color. In appearance they resemble a young pup. Their fur is soft and smooth as velvet. They burrow in the ground and raise small mounds resembling ant hills, only larger.

Wednesday, 12th: Getting along fairly well. Still travelling over high, rolling prairies. Very little woodlands. Weather clear but the winds are high. Saw another newly-made grave yesterday and two today. Have met several persons that have turned back on account of sickness. There have been several deaths from cholera. I feel a little discouraged but will try to be calm and submissive.

Crossed the Big Nemaka River today. It is narrow and easily forded but the banks are very steep. Passed three more graves this afternoon.

Friday, 14th: This morning was very cold. We were all obliged to put on an extra amount of clothing. Passed a grave which has been made this morning. Have heard of more deaths from cholera. It is all very depressing.

Saturday, 15th: Had a heavy rain with thunder and lightning. Came to the Big Blue River. It is not very wide but deep. We had to ford it. I crossed on horseback behind Mr. Hanna. The water came up so as to wet my feet; felt a good deal frightened, but got across safely. Were detained a good while at the river, so many crossing. Came about a half-mile to good water and camped. Have heard of several more deaths from cholera. Three men out of Perry's train were buried in one grave! Passed five more graves today.

Sabbath, 16th: This morning was so cold that I was obliged to stay in bed till after breakfast. It was equal to a day in January. The winds were very high and piercing, never have experienced such winds as we have here. This day has not been much like a Sabbath. I was obliged to do many things I was loth to do on the Sabbath. It was so late last night when we got across the river and camped and all so wearied that we left undone many things. Our provisions got wet and they had to be unpacked to air and then packed again! Part of our men had to take our cattle a mile farther to graze and stay with them all day. I had to bake biscuit as we were out of bread,—the first time I have ever did so on the Sabbath and hope it will not happen again! No one can imagine what he may have to do or what he may have to come through without trying it. Have seen a few of the trials of our journey.

Have suffered a great deal from the cold today. The winds are so high today that we cannot keep fire enough out of doors to warm us. If I were in the States now I would be sitting in a comfortable house beside a fire; but our house now is the open air.

We have not had preaching today. It was too cold

out and we have no tent large enough; besides we are all too busy to think about it. I have not had time to read. Mr. Hanna is so harassed through the week that he cannot find time to prepare a sermon as he would like. We have prayers every evening in our tent.

Deep in the heart of the waste, these missionaries bowed in adoration before their Lord. At the close of the day's weary travel with all of its vicissitudes, this silent communion with the divine brought a quiet peace. Stretching away from their camp on all sides rolled the plains, dark and mysterious with the velvet of night. Their cathedral walls were the eternal hills; their roof, the vaulted dome of heaven.

Monday, 17th: Got along very comfortably today. Passed two more graves. Had to haul our water and wood for night as in many places there is none for miles, and then it is not good. I have had to bake also tonight. It is very trying on the patience to cook and bake on a little green wood fire with the smoke blowing in your eyes so as to blind you, and shivering with cold so as to make the teeth chatter. But this is one of our crosses and we must bear it!

The difficulties under which women cooked along the trail were tremendous. There were no facilities with which to make bread, although many a reflector or Dutch oven was rigged up in the evening so the next day's quota of bread could



be baked. There was no separate pot or pan for everything. In the museum of the Oregon Historical Library in Portland, there is a wooden trough which was used on a journey across the plains as a wash basin, chopping bowl, for mixing bread-dough, and sometimes food was packed away in it!

The food stores were rather slender. The emigrants usually carried flour, dried beans, coffee, bacon of "side meat," and a few small stores such as sugar, salt, and baking powder. Besides this, the emigrants carried a small sum of ready money for emergencies. The earliest emigrants had experimented with hard bread but soft bread, baked fresh each day, was found to be more economical as well as palatable.

Beans and coffee were the mainstay along the overland journey. The coffee was bought in its green state, and was browned and ground when needed. Another common necessity was hot flour bread made into biscuits, and dipped into bacon gravy. Such was this and even ruder fare eaten by the emigrants.

To Esther Hanna, bending over a smoking camp fire, with smarting eyes as she struggled to prepare their meals, this difficulty in cooking was but one of the endless discomforts and hardships she was to encounter on the weary trek to the Oregon country. If her spirit faltered, only the little portfolio in which she wrote her thoughts day by day, knew of it. Her tears were in her heart, her

smiles curved her thin face into a gray mask of courage.

Day after day, the creaking wagons followed along the skeleton-strewn trail. The sun blazed down upon them as their wagon wheels cut through the thick, sandy dust. Now and then a dark shadow of a cloud floated over the plains to cut down for a fleeting moment the blinding glare. The long, black-tipped horns of the oxen reflected the glint of the sun. From the revolving wheels and from the patient, plodding feet of the animals, rose the stifling dust, obscuring the wagons, and forming heavy clouds to hang over the train.

Passed the camp next to ours. Saw them digging a grave. A man died there last night of measles. Crossed the Big Sandy today. Evening: Crossed the Little Sandy this afternoon. I had an idea that in crossing the prairie, it would be perfectly level, but it is far different, just one hill after another. Not high but very steep; in the ravines there are many sloughs which are mirey and difficult to cross, particularly just after rain. The roads are very dusty today and the winds are high, which make it quite unpleasant. We have five more wagons added to our train today. We now number 16 or 17 wagons. The road so far as the eye can see is lined with wagons drawn by oxen. They can travel much faster than I expected. We came 20 miles today.

Thursday, 20th: Reached the Little Blue today and are travelling along it. Some beautiful scenery along its margin. Good roads but very dusty. The

dust and winds are very hard on the skin causing a burning and smarting, making the face and hands rough and sore. Have seen two more graves. The grass is very poor the last day or two. I am fearful that our cattle will suffer.

Friday, 21st: Rained last night and still continues today, making the roads very bad. Still in the vicinity of the Little Blue. Saw a newly-made grave today. Our way is ever lined with the graves of those who have gone before! My heart aches at the thought of those brave souls left alone in the heart of this lonely waste, while their loved ones are forced to push on without them!

Saw two wolves and an antelope. The morning is cold and wet. Have bad roads, some very difficult crossing places. One wagon stuck in a slough, had to put on more oxen to get it out. Still travelling along the Blue River. Passed today where a man was found murdered on the 17th. He had been shot and stabbed in many places! He was buried by those who found him. Met a train of fur traders today. They had 18 wagons loaded with furs. They were on their way back to the States. The men were savage looking creatures, part of them Spaniards, one or two Indians, and the rest what once were white men. but a season's exposure to all kinds of weather had so tanned them that I scarcely recognized them as such!

Encamped early this evening on the banks of the Blue River, a most beautiful place. Such a wild, romantic spot! The sun went down without a cloud this evening. All is calm and still. I have been busy all day and evening and feel very tired but still have time for thought. I have been thinking of home and dear, absent friends, but I must not think too much!

Maturity had come early to this slim, 18-year-old minister's wife. Along this heart-breaking trail day by day she was burying part of her youth. Back of her simple words, "I must not think too much!" lies a young girl's all too rapid passing into womanhood. She was learning one of the first lessons of her elders, — that of restraining one's emotions. In these rough times, life did not wait for one to grow to mature years before laying its stern mark across the soul.

Sabbath, 23rd: This is a beautiful morning, very unlike some days we had last week. There is some dissatisfaction in our company today. Some want to travel, others want to spend the Sabbath here as we have good grass, wood and water. Mr. Hanna took a decided stand—told them that whoever wished to go might, but that he would remain and spend the day in suitable manner! They have agreed to stay but might as well be travelling! Some are washing, others fishing and shooting, some sawing and hammering, fixing up their wagons, etc.

I had hoped that we would all be a Sabbath-keeping company but such is not the case. They claim that what they do is the work of necessity!

At 11 O'clock we assembled under the shade of the trees on the bank of the stream. It was a peculiarly solemn reason. We were far from civilization—no doubt it was the first time these woods and streams resounded with a song of praise to God. Here where naught had been heard but the cry of the savage and the howl of wild beasts!

Had a call this afternoon from Miss Dawson of Perry's train as it was passing. She tells me that they

have lost ten of their number from the cholera! Her mother was among the number.

Monday, 24th: Was much disturbed last night. Some of our guard fancied that Indians were near, hearing low whistles, etc. They fired the signal gun to waken the camp. The men had their firearms in readiness if they should make an attack upon us, but it was a false alarm.

Today is a fine day. We have good roads. Left the Blue River this morning. Had to carry our wood and water as will not get any until tomorrow sometime, and perhaps not then! Travelled all the afternoon without seeing a tree or shrub. We saw 13 antelope at a distance. They are beautiful looking creatures about the size of a deer or not quite so large and very finely formed. They bound along with almost the rapidity of lightning. Some of our men went in chase but could not get within a half mile of them.

Tuesday, 25th: We entered the valley of the Platte River this morning.

Heading out over the high table-land, the Hanna wagon train wound along the trail toward the Rockies. The soil grew sandier. Even the vegetation began to show altitude. The tired teams with their tongues lolling quickened their pace as they struck the down-grade gap leading through sand ridges. Ahead of them spread the valley of the Platte touched with the late emerald of May. Along the course of the rather shallow stream cottonwoods leaned, while above floated the cloud-shadows tracing feathery etchings against the blue

sky. On the far horizon's rim shimmered a wavering mirage. Mysterious and alluring, it beckoned the emigrants onward. It was like the spirit of the West, Esther Hanna mused, as she drank in the vast beauty of the plains and mirage, urging the weary travellers on to the promised Land of Canaan.

Came in sight of Fort Kearney this afternoon. This valley is so level that we can see objects at a great distance. Could see the fort seven or eight miles distant. Encamped a mile from the fort. Emigrants are not allowed to encamp within a mile of it.

Wednesday, 26th: Went to the fort this morning. Stopped at the chaplain's, the Rev. Mr. De Pui, an Episcopal minister. We received every kindness and attention from him and his excellent lady.

There are four frame houses for the officers. The rest of the houses are of sunburnt brick owing to the scarcity of wood. The fences and even some of the out houses are made of slabs of earth cut in square blocks and piled on each other. They make a singular appearance.

There are 70 soldiers here with their officers. It was pleasant indeed to enjoy the comforts of a house even for an hour or two!

Ft. Kearney was but one of the forts set up by the government to guard the Oregon Trail. Esther Hanna's mention of the houses made of "slabs of earth cut in square blocks and piled on each

# Canvas Caravans

ACROSS the American lands a cavalcade of emigrant wagons stretched its curving length. It twisted across barren plains and scorching sands with the hot dust rising in choking clouds. It forded wild rapids where the frothing waters engulfed many a wagon. At times the white-topped wagons boiled up mountains where somber canyons rose with a terrifying sharpness. Plodding over the wind-swept wastes with the gaunt oxen swinging their bleeding necks against the rough yokes, the white caravans curved on.

They followed the Oregon Trail marked by the bleached bones of man and animal and the worn footprints of the ox drivers who had walked to lighten the burden of the oxen. Their road was deep-cut.

Sometimes the wagons followed the ancient buffalo trails to water,—those first paths to the far West taken by hunters and trappers. They crossed and recrossed unknown rivers. But always the way was plain, marked by the wheel marks and graves of those who had gone before.

At times they wound their way across the prairies at night when the cool dark brought relief from the hell of heat that seared them during the

day. Silently the white-topped wagons with their stumbling oxen and exhausted emigrants curved along the trail toward the West.

No saga of biblical times is more epic than the tales of those early emigrants, who in this greatest single expansion ever achieved by any people moved along the 2,000-mile trail with all of their possessions to colonize in the Western Land of Canaan.

They knew little of what lay ahead. Their six months' trek brought famine, tragedy, and the dread fatality of cholera. The sun beat down upon them with searing fire. Over parched earth stumbled the horses and oxen. The emigrants abandoned their wagons and proceeded on foot through the blistering dust. Their shoes wore out. Sharp rocks cut their feet until they left a trail of blood behind them. Those who arrived at their destination were exhausted from privation and hunger. Many of the emigrants were destitute. But somehow these ragged forerunners of a great civilization struggled through. Carried onward over the heart-breaking trail by their unquenchable spirit to establish homes in the Western frontier, these people wove their threads of blood and courage into our American fabric.