



The Charles W. Smith overland account is not listed in Wright Howes' U.S.IANA, but is listed in Cowan's, *A Bibliography of the History of California, 1510-1930*. It is also listed in the Edward Eberstadt catalog 107, where it appears as number 360; and the Colton Storm, *A Catalogue of the Everett D. Graff Collection of Western Americana*, item 3836, as published by the University of Chicago.

JOURNAL of a TRIP TO
CALIFORNIA - ACROSS
THE CONTINENT from WESTON,
MISSOURI, TO WEBER CREEK,
CALIFORNIA, IN THE SUM-
MER OF 1850

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YE GALLEON PRESS
FAIRFIELD, WASHINGTON

1974

Weston

ciently high for agricultural purposes and is well timbered. At St. Louis I saw a few Indians, belonging to some of the western tribes. They were dressed in the highest style of their fashion, their faces painted and highly colored with red powder. Their hair is also dyed or powdered red after the same manner as their faces. They were quite curious specimens of humanity to those unacquainted with Indian fashions. We have but very few lady passengers.

APRIL 10.

Weather clear and cold. We have just passed Jefferson City, the capital of Missouri. It is but a small place and unimportant, only as being the capital. The state house is a respectable two-story stone building situated upon a bluff near the river, fronting the east. There is also a state prison here, inclosed by a high stone wall. We have seen some specimens of wild game on the river, such as geese, ducks, turkeys, etc. Speaking of game reminds me of gaming, a business that is very extensively followed on the river steamers. About one third of the passengers on board are at this moment engaged in that laudable profession—many of them play for money. This class is bound for California and pass the dimes freely.

APRIL 13.

I have neglected my journal a little on account of sickness. The boat is anything but agreeable to

a person in good health, but to a sick man it is almost insupportable. When I awoke yesterday morning, I was very much oppressed with heat, and supposed the weather had moderated in the night. I got up and went on deck, and fancied that the weather was very mild, but instead of this, I suppose the difference was in myself, having contracted a slight fever in the night. In cooling myself I caught a severe cold, and soon began to feel very chilly. I sat by a hot stove, wrapped in my overcoat, but it was impossible to get warm, so I sat shivering all day. Owing to the crowded state of the boat, I had not got a berth when I took passage, but slept upon the cabin floor, with about fifty others. I again attempted to get a berth, but could not, so I was compelled to "chew the cud of sweet and bitter fancy" alone. Today I succeeded in getting a berth of one of the passengers, in which I took a refreshing sleep, took some quinine, and now begin to feel better. I also had a very severe pain in my side, but I am getting better of that, too. As I have been close by the stove for a day or two past, I can say but little about the country through which I have passed. Yet I know we have run upon numerous sand bars, backed out and found other channels; stopped for wood and passengers, and I felt the jarring of the machinery beneath me. A large number of the passengers on board are more or less indisposed, so I have not suffered more than many others. We have passed several respectable towns in coming up, the princi-

pal of which are Boonville, Lexington and Independence. The latter is some four miles from the river. We expect to reach St. Joseph tomorrow. There is a report abroad that the cholera prevails at St. Joseph, and some of our passengers are leaving the boat to avoid it. It is also said to prevail at other towns on the river. I shall not deviate from my course on that account. If it is my fate to be stricken down at this time, I shall try to meet my fate like a Christian. But I have hope and a strong belief that—

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends
Rough hew them how we will."

APRIL 18.

Weston, Missouri, April 18. We arrived here last Sunday morning, stopped, because our boat being a large one, we could not go up the river in her further. We have since concluded that Weston is as good a starting-place as any on the Missouri, and have determined to fit out here for the journey, and we have already engaged partners in a wagon, looked at cattle, provisions, etc.

APRIL 22.

Our arrangements are completed, and we intend to cross the river tomorrow and join a company as soon as possible. The weather is becoming a little more pleasant, as the Spring is late. We will take with us what grain we can carry for our cattle. I

am now enjoying good health and feel myself hardening to our present rude mode of life. All that now remains to be done is to put our cattle to the wagon and be off.

APRIL 23.

Weston Ferry, April 23. As we found several parties before us at the ferry this morning, we are compelled to wait several hours till our turn. All we expect today is to cross the river, and go out two or three miles in the country, where we expect to join a company. Several hundred wagons are already on the opposite shore, waiting for the season to bring forth grass, etc. I can now see the smoke ascending from the camp fires behind the bluff upon the other side. Everybody is impatient to be on the trail, fearing that others will reach the diggings before him. Two of our party are quite feverish just now, and I have consented to start immediately, though I think it is too early.

The ferry boats here are very poor and make slow passages. Common flat boats are used, propelled with oars; they have to tow them up the shore a quarter of a mile before crossing, to prevent landing below their mark on the other side. They carry about two wagons each time, beside several head of cattle or horses. We are now to cross.

APRIL 25.

We started early this morning from our encampment one mile west of the Missouri, and went to

within about one mile of a stream called Soldiers' Creek. We have not yet joined a company. To-day we made some 18 miles. About noon we stopped at the cabin of an old Indian, of whom we purchased an additional supply of corn at \$1.00 per barrel. The country through which we came today is a high, rolling prairie.

APRIL 26.

Left our encampment about 8 o'clock in the morning and went some fifteen miles before stopping, where we encamped for the night. We stopped by a fine little stream of excellent water. Today I had some extensive views entirely different from any I ever before experienced. Everything here seems created on a magnificent plan, the atmosphere clear, the landscape just beginning to wear its earliest green, and the landscape stretched far back against the sky. Today we fell in with some other Californians, but, having mule teams, they soon left us in the rear. I have not yet seen any game except a few prairie hens. I have seen but very few Indians. Today we met one brawny fellow; he was quite sociable—wanted whiskey and "tobac." We gave him a small piece of the latter. He was very thankful for small favors, and as he left us, he took a trail and was soon lost sight of among the hills. He wore buckskin leggings, a blanket over his shoulders, and a sort of turban on his head. Last night I stood on guard till 12 o'clock. Profound silence reigned, except the

croaking of a million frogs, and the distant rumbling of thunder in a black cloud that hung in the west. In the latter part of the night it rained a little. The grass is very poor here, but is said to be better several miles in advance.

APRIL 27.

Was off early this morning, and traveled about thirty miles over a fine prairie country. I saw a large train of wagons that came in on the St. Joseph road. I have noticed a great many ox teams on the road. I believe they make the surest team—will subsist on nearly anything and are not so liable to become fractious and run away, if properly managed, as horses or mules. The weather is still cold—it must be extremely cold here in winter.

APRIL 28.

Set off about sunrise and drove about twenty miles and stopped. Owing to our ignorance of the road, we had some trouble to find a convenient place to encamp, the country getting a little more level.

APRIL 29.

This morning we joined a company of three wagons with which we intend to travel. The men are mostly Germans and not of my selection. Went about twenty miles by one o'clock and encamped; high winds prevail. We all have good health and

strong appetites. A sort of inefficient election was held this morning at which one of our men was chosen captain—a man in no way calculated to act in that capacity. Strong pledges of mutual assistance were given, etc. In looking over these vast prairies, just beginning to freshen beneath the smile of Spring, I can scarcely believe that they are uninhabited. Not a tree is within reach of the eye.

APRIL 30.

Off again early this morning and went seven miles before breakfast. After breakfast we pushed on twelve miles more by one o'clock, when we stopped to dine, by a small brook. Two miles more brought us to another stream, which we crossed, and traveled on. Yesterday afternoon a mild south wind prevailed, but fell in the night, when it became quite cold. Toward morning, a perfect gale sprung up in the north, and though I laid in the wagon, wrapped in a blanket, in heavy overcoat, I suffered very much by the cold. The wind poured through our covering like cold water. Thirty wagons passed us today—they all had feed for their teams. The wind still raged this morning till about noon, when the sun shone out and it began to get pleasant.

The country here assumes a more even appearance, and resembles in some degree what I had anticipated. We have seen a great number of little animals called prairie squirrels, resembling the ground squirrel of the northern states. The ground

is literally filled with their holes. I have seen also a great many elk horns by the way; they are huge specimens and indicate that a superior quality of game abounds here at certain seasons of the year. A few prairie hens come in sight occasionally, but are rather wild. No timber except on the water courses, and upon these it is so hedged in by the hills that it cannot be seen till you get close to it. In consequence of their ignorance of the road, the emigrants carry wood and water where it is unnecessary, and again, neglect to take it when needed; but this is unavoidable. The heavy west winds drive a blinding dust in our faces, and in a few hours a person becomes as black as a negro. Yesterday we met two United States dragoons. They report some Indian depredations in advance of us. One is that a family has been massacred by the Indians, and that the troops from the Fort Laramie had pursued the murderers and put one hundred to death. Our road so far has been most excellent, better than a turnpike, as it is not so hard for the feet of teams. Generally the road is not worn through the heavy turf but just deep enough to expose the roots of the grass, which are as large as a man's little finger. Yet, from the appearance of the road, there are a great many emigrants before us. Five four-horse wagons passed us yesterday; they traveled fast, intended to go forty per day and had feed sufficient for fifteen days, thirty miles.

MAY 1.

Started early and went to a tributary of Little Blue River, some four miles, and took breakfast. The grass begins to look better. At noon we found water close by the road. We are constantly passing and re-passing wagons. I have noticed some few families on the road, including all ages and sexes. Tonight we stop off the road to the right one hundred rods, within four miles of Big Blue River. We cross it tomorrow. The country tolerably level. The wolves make a great noise at night. A majority of the emigrants now on the road are Missourians. Distance, twenty-four miles.

MAY 2.

Left encampment at two o'clock this morning, for the purpose of giving our cattle more time to feed in the middle of the day. Reached Blue River at daylight; crossed over immediately; went two miles further and stopped for breakfast. This plan of irregular driving I consider of no advantage, yet we have practiced it because some of our men think it excellent policy. Weather fine, with a shower in the afternoon. Today we passed the place where the Weston road joins the Independence and St. Joseph roads. Many come in from the Independence road, and the trail is now alive with emigrants. At night we stopped twelve miles west of Big Blue River, a short distance from the road, where we found wood, water and some

picking for our cattle. When I got up this morning I felt quite unwell and soon commenced vomiting. Mr. Finch offered me his pony to ride, which I accepted, but soon found it almost impossible to keep my seat, so I got off and led the pony. Soon after, one of our company solicited the use of the pony, and as I let him have it and he rode on, I was compelled to walk till we stopped for breakfast. I felt so exhausted that it was almost impossible to proceed, and at one time I seriously thought of lying down by the road and resting myself, and run the risk of losing the wagons. But I struggled on till breakfast time, when I took medicine and soon became better. In many places in this region we find water standing in holes upon the prairie, and as the weather is cool it is tolerably good, though I suppose it stagnates later in the season.

MAY 3.

Started early: soon crossed a little stream and went on in a northwest direction till noon, when we came round to the southwest. Up to this time our general course has been northwest, and this is the reason why the season seems so backward here. The vegetation is no more advanced here than at Weston ten days since. We were passed at noon by a company of one hundred wagons from Wisconsin, and also one of thirty from Illinois. Most of them had fine horse teams—generally four horses to each wagon. The wind has been high