

Emigrant's last name: Watson

Surveyed by: mem69

first & middle names: Benjamin A.

Date surveyed: 01/17/84

Title: Journal

Year of journey: 1849

Year written (if different): _____

Page nos. surveyed: 1-4

Type of document: L (D - diary; J - journal; R - reminiscence; L - letter; N - newspaper article; G - guide; A - autobiography; O - other)

Items in document: _____ (use all applicable codes)

- M - daily mileages D - emigrant drawings P - emigrant maps Q - maps by editor K - biographical sketch
- I - Introduction B - bibliography N - index X - photos F - footnotes/commentaries

Published? (Y/N): N Location of original document: Illinois Historical Library

For PUBLISHED documents only:

Published in: Illinois Daily Journal, May 29, 1849, June 7, 1849, August 9, 1849

Publisher: _____ Year published: 1849

Place published: _____

Editor's (or translator's) last name: _____

first & middle names: _____

Notes about publication history: _____

For UNPUBLISHED documents only:

Notes about format of document: typed copy

Notes on back? yes

Maag, Mary E.

mem 69

Watson, Benjamin A.

Document ID: (49WAT05)

Emigrant's occupation: _____
Age: _____ M/F: M Origin: Illinois
With family? (Y/N) _____ No. in family: _____

Departed from (code): J3 Arrived at (code): _____
Date of departure: 04/07/49 Date of arrival: _____ (use form mm/dd/yy)

Party: "Illinois Mutual Insurance Company, Ne. Ia"

Mode of travel: W (one code only: W - wagons; P - packing; L - passenger lines; H - handcart; X - other)
Number of wagons at departure: _____
Number of people at departure: _____ total _____ men _____ women _____ children
Draft animals at departure: _____ oxen _____ mules _____ horses _____ other (use X or a number)
Other animals: _____ (H - horses; C - cattle; S - sheep; P - pigs; F - fowl; D - dogs; X - other)

Guidebook used by emigrant (enter either a title, or an author and title, if given):

Routes: IA _____ (use codes from the trail maps)

Notes on back? yes

The emigrant did not mention his destination and his third letter was forwarded to the newspaper from Fort Laramie.

Maag, Mary E.

mem 69

Watson, Benjamin A.

Document ID: (49WAT05)

Last name	First names	Age	M/F	Origin	Party	Page	Date (mm/dd)	CODES	
								1	2
Eastman	M.		M			01	04/11		
Watson	J. B.					02	04/25		
Weber	P.					02	04/25		
White	C. E.					02	04/26	J	
Roberts	Capt.		M			02	06/07		L
Cabiness	Dr.		M			01			

CODES for column 1:
A - birth
B - death, illness
C - death, accident
D - death, murder
E - death, other/unknown
F - name on grave
G - marriage (*)
H - registered name
I - name on roster
J - turned back
K - traveling east

CODES for column 2:
L - capt. of party
M - guide of party
N - military
O - govt. surveyor/explorer
P - trader
Q - non-immigrant
R - Black
S - Indian
T - Hispanic
U - non-US citizen
V - Mormon
W - joined other party

Codes may not apply to all names. Use up to 2 codes in each column, if multiple codes apply.
 * For marriages, bracket the spouses' names and number the couples sequentially.

Maag, Mary E.

mem 69

Watson, Benjamin A. Document ID: (49WAT05)

Location Page Date

Indian agency and missionary station

01

Little Blue

01

05/19

Fort Kearney

01

South fork

01

05/31

Laramie fork

01

Platte River

01

COED - Census of Overland Emigrant Documents

PAGE 5: Indian Encounters (page 1 of 1)

Maag, Mary E.

member

Watson, Benjamin A.

Document ID: (49WAT05)

CODE	Tribe name (leave blank if not mentioned)	Page	Date
<i>E</i>		<i>03</i>	

CODES (use up to 3 for each entry)

- A - attacked
- B - begged
- C - robbed
- D - saw Indians
- E - imagined sighting
- F - worried about Indians
- G - were warned about
- H - traded with Indians
- I - other
- J - paid toll to Indians
- K - visited/talked to Indians

#666
49 WAT 05

JOURNAL

Of the Journey of the "Illinois Mutual insurance Company, Ne. ly" from Springfield to St. Joseph.

Territory of Nebraska)

8 miles N. W. from St. Joseph, May 4, '49)

Mr. Editor: From this far off spot of the world, I have you a short account of our travels, and fulfil promise made you before we left. You have been informed of our operations up to our arrival at Hannibal, Missouri.

The company left Hannibal on Thursday, 5th of April--weather fair; left camp at 8 o'clock, A. M.; passed through westerly; roads bad; camped at 1 1-2 o'clock P. M.; traveled 11 miles. A considerable rain last night; ceasing at 8 a. m. Left camp at 9 a.m.; passed through New Market--country hilly, roads very bad; heavy rain at 3 p. m.; camped at sametime; traveled 11 miles; rained till night. 7th. Weather fair--left camp at 7 1-2 a. m.; wagon No. 3 capsized in a creek; baggage all wet, no other damage; passed through Warren--roads bad; camped at 5 p. m. near Shelbyville making 11 miles. 8th. Remained in camp all day; very muddy, streams all up. 9th. Heavy rains at 6 p. m.; the weather being inclement and the roads being in the worst possible condition, the company concluded to remain in camp. To-day a number of the company went hunting and brought in a large amount of small game, and three deer. A jolly time in camp to-night with music and feasting.

10th. Very stormy last night; weather clear and cold this morning; left camp at 7 1-2 a. m., roads bad beyond description; camped at 5 p. m., making 11 miles. 11th. Left camp at 7 1/2 a. m.; weather clear and cold; Mr. Eastman, of company 2, killed a fine deer near the road; roads very bad, constant drag, mules considerably wearied; traveled 7 miles, and camped at 2 a. m., at Garrison's; after part of the day warm. 12th. Left camp at 7 1-2 a. m.--weather cloudy and warm; commenced raining at 1 p. m.; roads very bad; camped at 2 1-2 p. m., near Salt River in Adair county, after traveling 10 miles; rain continued to pour down until 12 at night; camp ankle deep in mud, but the b'hoys still keep a stiff upper lip. 13th. Weather clear and cold, left camp this morning at 7 1-2 o'clock; roads almost impassable, doubled teams to get along, traveled two miles, built a bridge over Bear Creek 66 feet long, stream booming high, water 12 feet deep, crossed the creek four hours after reaching it--a very considerable feat, showing the stuff of which our company is composed; camped on the west side of the creek at 4 1-2 o'clock p. m.; all well and in fine spirits. 14th. Left camp at 7 1-2 a. m.; weather clear and cold--roads improving; traveled 15 miles, and camped at 3 1-2 p.m., on the west side of a pretty little stream 1 1-2 miles east of the Chariton river. Our men saw an icicle 7 feet long and 7 inches in diameter at the large end; pretty tale for the time of year. 15th. We are now spending our third Sabbath where we encamped yesterday; weather clear and cold; the country around is very beautiful, the timber being remarkably fine, but the soil will not compare with that of Illinois. 16th. When the sun rose this morning the atmosphere was filled with snow which commenced falling at 6 a. m., and at 7 came down with a rapidity seldom witnessed

by the oldest inhabitants; at 1 A. M. commenced crossing the Chariton river, which delayed us three hours; roads hilly, camped at 5 P. M. made to-day 15 miles. 17th, considerable wind and rain last night, morning cloudy and cold, country hilly and barren, roads bad, camped at 3 P. M., traveled 15 miles. 18th, weather clear and cold, upset one of the wagons in the creek; no damage done except the loss of a few beans; camped at 5 P. M. having traveled 16 miles. 19, crossed Medicine creek, bad ford, camped at 5, having made 17 miles. 20th, passed through Trenton, county seat of Grundy, delayed at the river, camped at 4, traveled 20 miles.---21st, traveled 23 miles, through a fine country, and camped near Gallatin, county seat of Davis. 22d, remained in camp. 23d, made 25 miles through fine country, and camped in De Kalb county. 24th, weather cold, passed through Maysville, in De Kalb county, and Rochester, Andrews county, 19 miles. 25th, remained in camp and sent J. B. Watson and P. Weber into St. Joseph to make arrangements for camping. [Here the writer of this journal mot the company, having been detached to St. Louis on business.]

26th, at a meeting in the evening C. E. White was permitted to withdraw from the company; had a fine supper of "catfish." 27th, reached St. Joseph at 2 P. M., with teams in good order. I do not believe there will be more than 15,000 emigrants; and after conversing with "mountain men" I am satisfied that the country through which we pass will sustain our stock.-- We crossed the river on Tuesday and encamped; on Wednesday we moved our encampment to the verge of the great plains, which presents a beautiful and wonderful sight. We are now arranging our loads for a start next Monday morning. I shall visit the town to night and then bid adieu to settlements for some time to come. We are all well, increased in flesh, and blessed with fine appetites. You will doubtless hear unfavorable reports about our health, but do not believe any thing that does not come from some of us. We shall embrace every opportunity to inform you of our progress. We have had no symptoms of the Cholera among us. We shall probably be able to write you from Fort Larimie. Adieu.

B. A. W.

Camp near the Head waters of the Little Blue)
240 miles from St. Joseph, May 19, 1849.)

To the Editors of the Journal:

I have an opportunity of sending you a line by private express going to St. Joseph. He passed up on Tuesday going out, and I had the inexpressible satisfaction of receiving a letter by him from home. He went up as far as Platte river. He informs us that there are a great many teams ahead of us, who come into the road from St. Louis and Fort Kearney; yet from all that I hear and see, I think the numbers on the road will not exceed my estimation, 20,000. I feel confident that we shall be in advance of five-sixths of them before we reach Fort Laramie.

I think my last letter informed you that we were to leave St. Joseph on the 7th, which we did, every thing being in order for our long journey.-- We have since traveled over a fine country, every acre of which is equal to the best lands in Sangamon county; but there is no timber. Our road for the most part, has been along "divides," and the finest road I have ever seen in any country.

About twenty-five miles from St. Joseph we passed an Indian agency and missionary station established for the benefit of the remnant of the Sacks, Foxes and Ioways. One of the ladies of the mission informed me that she was fearful the missionaries would not be able to do much for them, as they were too fond of hunting and painting their faces. En passant--I never could fully appreciate the taste of the Indian in painting his face until I started on this trip. I saw some of the red skins who had made some slight advances in civilization, and had laid aside their national peculiarities. They presented a most forbidding sight--dirty, filthy, lazy looking rascals; eyeing our mules, horses and guns with wishful eyes.--They were very different from another lot who rode out to see us, and who made no pretensions to civilization. There were about a dozen of them--all painted up in their holiday colors and clad in their best style. Their dress consisted of leggins and moccasins of dressed buckskin; ornamented with beads and bells,-- a calico shirt, and gay colored blanket. Many of them wore a fancy handkerchief on their heads with brass and silver trinkets and beads upon their neck and arms;--and as they sat upon their spirited little ponies, looking like the natural lords of this part of creation, I really thought that there might be something fascinating in the life of an Indian after all, and that a slight degree of civilization did not improve the race in any respect.

After leaving Missouri we traveled fifty miles without locking a wheel or crossing water, though there was always plenty for our wants a short distance from the road. If there was timber enough to supply the wants of a population here, this country would in time become a great State, as the soil is very fine, and land lies in beautiful undulating prairies--no swamps, no waste bottoms. For the last three days we have been passing up the Little Blue--a most interesting stream, with a rapid current, running through a valley in some places to or three miles wide, of surpassing beauty and richness of soil. The stream is fringed by a growth of cotton-wood, which gratifies the eye of the traveler, who has for days been passing over a vast monotonous plain, without seeing

an object upon which the eye could rest. The stream is full of fish.

We have not seen any game of consequence, except a few antelope, which occasionally show themselves on the verge of the bluffs. They gaze for a moment upon the train, and then move off with the swiftness of the wind--foiling and eluding the most skillful hunter. We expect to meet with buffalo next week, and I then anticipate some of the kind of sport of which we have often read.

We are now encamped on the head waters of the Little Blue. We arrived here to day at 11 o'clock, and as good grass is scarce between here and the Nebraska (Platte),--which is 33 miles distant, we concluded to halt here, where it is very fine, until Monday, when we shall resume our journey. A young man who has reached us since we have been in camp, informs us that Capt. Roberts is about half a day's march behind. If so we shall see him and his company to-morrow.

We have passed on our route the graves of six persons, who have been buried this spring;--four of them belonged to one company, from Louisville; of these two were killed--one by the passing of a wagon over his body, and the other was shot accidentally or purposely by a comrade. He was buried a mile distant from our camp this morning. I tell you this fact, that you may not be alarmed by the thousand stories that you will hear, and that we heard before we left the frontiers.

Don't neglect to send us your paper to San Francisco, for we shall stop picking up the lumps long enough to read it whenever it comes to hand. We are all well, and have been so from the start.

Yours, &c,

B. A. W.

FROM THE PLAINS

Extracts of a letter from Mr. Benjamin A. Watson.

Fort Laramie, June 11, 1849.

From the date of this letter, you will perceive that we have reached this great landmark of the western emigrant, whether he be seeking gold in the mines of Sacramento or health in the genial climes of the Pacific.

My last letter was dated on the Little Blue, and gave you a short sketch of our travels up to that time, and will now continue it.

We left the Little Blue on the 21st ult, for the Platte, having traveled 35 miles, road heavy, with plenty of wood and water. Ten miles before we reached the Platte we passed Fort Kearney; 200 soldiers of the rifle regiment were there, bound for Oregon. The grass is abundant; the river is beautiful, but is of no value for commerce, on account of its shallowness. It is filled with islands;--sixty were in sight at one time. The weather for the last three weeks has been cold and disagreeable--the mercury sinking to 40° at sunrise. We crossed the south fork on the 31st without difficulty; water two feet deep. We were now upon a most interesting portion of our journey. The scenery on the bluff was magnificent; presenting the appearance of ruined palaces, antiquated castles, &c. Dr. Cabiness has taken sketches of the scenery. Beyond this point for 150 miles, there was nothing of particular interest until we reached the Laramie fork of the Platte river, unless it was the great variety of flowers which garnished the road side, charming the eye with their forms and colors, and sending forth a rich perfume. We forded this fork by blocking up our wagon beds. This is a bold, beautiful stream, three feet deep, with a gravelly bottom.

We are now encamped a little distance east of the Fort, from the top of which waves the star-spangled banner, a cheering sight, reminding us of our country and homes. And

----" long may it wave,
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!"

Your's truly,

B. A. W.

P. S. We are getting on finely, and are all well. A number of the members of our company have written letters, which they think they will not send from this place, owing to the uncertainty of their reaching the States.

[We have left out a considerable part of Mr. Watson's letter,--that part which contained statements of occurrences and descriptions of country given in other letters we have already published.]