

Watson 1849

May 8

Crossed river - 7 miles thru
bottom 7 mi
Broken land 13 mi

9 5 mi + crossed creek (Wolf)

10 ?

11 15 mi

12 15 mi

13 15 mi Buried G. Butler

14 8 mi to stream got wood 5 mi
to water 13 mi

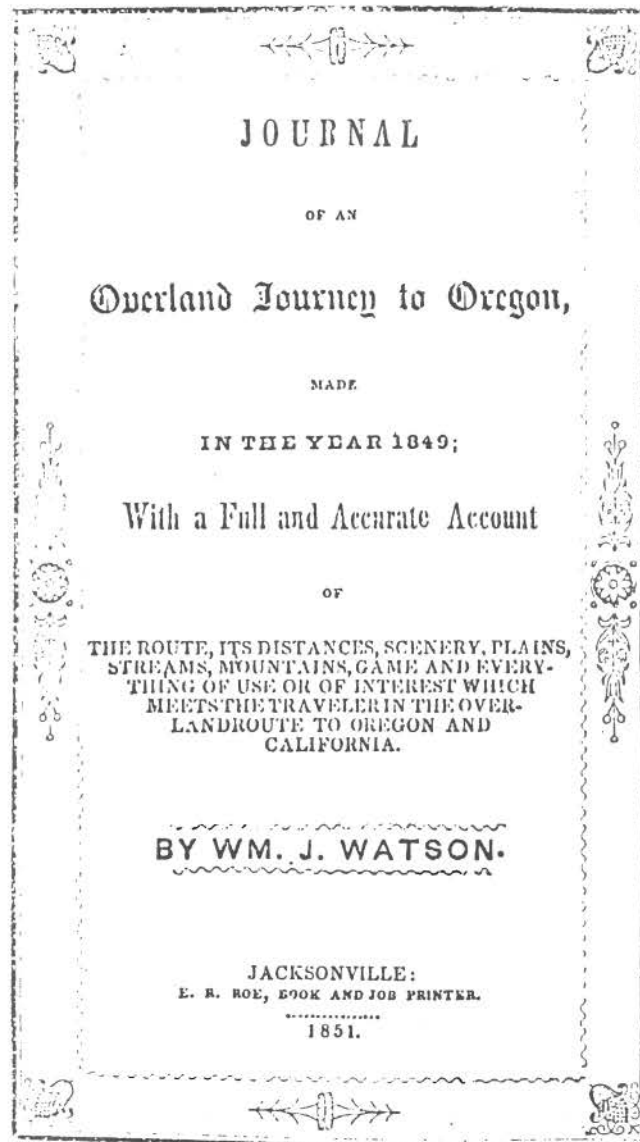
15 5 mi to Battle Creek then 15 more.

16 8 mi to Cedar Creek - 4 mi to Big
Blue - 3 mi to camp 20 mi
25 mi

17 10 mi to stream - 9 mi + left road
1 mi to left camped 20 mi

21⁶th³ 16 10 mi to Cottonwood Creek - 13 mi
to camp 25 mi

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JOURNAL

OF AN

Overland Journey to Oregon,

MADE

IN THE YEAR 1849;

With a Full and Accurate Account

OF

THE ROUTE, ITS DISTANCES, SCENERY, PLAINS,
STREAMS, MOUNTAINS, GAME AND EVERY-
THING OF USE OR OF INTEREST WHICH
MEETS THE TRAVELER IN THE OVER-
LANDROUTE TO OREGON AND
CALIFORNIA.

BY WM. J. WATSON.

JACKSONVILLE:
E. B. ROE, BOOK AND JOB PRINTER.
1851.

JOURNAL OF AN OVERLAND
JOURNEY TO OREGON
MADE IN THE YEAR 1849

BY

WM. J. WATSON



YE GALLEON PRESS
FAIRFIELD, WASHINGTON

The William J. Watson Journal of an Overland Journey to Oregon Made in the Year 1849 is one of the rarest titles in the historical literature of the American West. The only known copy is in the Houghton Library, Harvard University. This copy had a checkered history, having been stolen from Harvard ca. 1930, sold to Coe and went to Yale with the Coe Collection. When the situation surfaced it was returned by Yale on 6 June 1955. This Ye Galleon edition of four hundred copies is done with the permission of the Houghton Library, to which I give my thanks.

This Ye Galleon printing is a facsimile of the Houghton copy with the print enlarged ten percent.

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Attempting to research William J. Watson, the author of this booklet, was frustrating. I was not able to find any information on his possible career in Oregon and thinking he might have gone down to the California gold fields, as many Oregon citizens did at that time, I tried checking on the man there, and found nothing. Apparently our author did not remain long in Oregon. His journal starts with an entry for May 8, 1849 and ends with an entry on September 13 of that year. This was a time span of 4 months and 5 days, or less time than many Oregon Trail travelers took. It was not rare for such journeys to take six months. Like most such travelers the Watson party used ox teams. The author notes that oxen were better for the journey than young mules. He mentions oxen killed by lightning, leaving his name engraved in stone at Chimney Rock, and mentioned names inscribed at Independence Rock. He advises the traveler to take along plenty of provisions and some hand carpenter tools for repairing wagons that frequently broke down. Like most small wagon trains traveling west on the Oregon Trail the party met only friendly Indians. The final entry in the pamphlet gives a small description of Oregon City and the Falls of the Willamette.

The title page of the booklet gives the place of printing as 'Jacksonville' with no state or territory. There is a date of 1851, and the name E.R. Roe, book and job printer. I first checked Jacksonville, Oregon, as several rare historical pamphlets were printed in the newspaper office of William Green T'Vault, who hauled a printing press from a defunct newspaper at Scottsburg, Douglas County's Umpqua Valley in Oregon, but this press did

not arrive until 1855. A number of towns in the U.S. are named Jacksonville, and are listed in the latest postal guide, and then there were a few Jacksonvilles that got started but dried up and blew away. We did however locate the printer, who seems to have been a versatile chap. E.R. Roe was Edward Reynolds Roe, born at Lebanon, Ohio, June 22, 1813. Death overtook him in Chicago, Illinois on November 6, 1893 at age 80+.

E.R. Roe, A.B., M.D., physician, soldier, author, publisher, at age 6 moved with his father from his birth place to Cincinnati, Ohio. He was graduated from the Louisville Medical Institute at age 29 and began a practice of medicine at Anderson, Indiana, but soon removed to Shawneetown, Illinois where he divided attention between his medical practice and geological research, apparently a deep interest. From 1848 to 1852 he lived in Jacksonville, Illinois, where he lectured extensively on natural history, wrote for the press, and for two years, 1850-1852, was editor of the *Jacksonville Journal*, and in this period printed the William J. Watson Oregon Trail pamphlet. Later Mr. Roe edited the *Constitutionalist* for a few months. He lectured on natural science at Shurtleff College and delivered a lecture to the state legislature on the geology of Illinois, which was immediately followed by the establishment of a State Geological Department. Removing to Bloomington in 1852 Dr. Roe immediately became prominent as an educator, becoming the first professor of Natural Science at the State Normal University. He was also a trustee of Wesleyan University. About this time he changed political affiliation from Whig to Democrat and became a nominee for State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1860, but on the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 he immediately espoused the Union cause and raised three companies of young men, mostly Normal School students, which were attached to the Thirty-Third

Illinois Regiment. Roe was elected Captain, then promoted to Major and Lt. Colonel. He was dangerously wounded in the assault on Vicksburg on May 22, 1863 and was compelled to return home. He was then elected Circuit Clerk by the combined vote of both parties and in 1867 became editor of the *Bloomington Pantograph*. In 1879 he was elected to the Twenty-Seventh General Assembly. In 1871 he was appointed Marshall for the southern district of Illinois, where he served for nine years. Dr. Roe was a prolific author who wrote more than a dozen books.

The 1872 Jacksonville, Illinois city directory lists a William Watson, teamster, but we have no way of knowing if this is the William J. Watson who traveled west on the Oregon Trail twenty-three years earlier.

NOTE TO THE READER.

The following journal was not written with the most remote design of publication, but for the private eye of an intimate friend. It is a plain, unvarnished account of an overland trip to Oregon, which is presented to the public with the hope that it may prove as useful to them as it has been interesting to him for whose eye it was written.

It may be implicitly relied upon for correctness in distances, and description of scenery, soil and climate.

Annexed is an interesting letter upon the same subject.

JOURNAL.

May 8., 1849. We crossed at St. Joseph on the 8th of May, 1849. Seven miles through the bottom timber, till you strike the bluffs: good camping ground, and a plenty of good water; then you strike the plains.—Seven miles.

We traveled over a very broken country for thirteen miles, when we encamped and found plenty of water and wood.—Thirteen miles.

9th. Five miles farther we crossed a small creek called Wolf Creek, which we had to bridge; here we saw the first Indians on the route—a few miserable looking creatures (Iowas.)—Five miles.

10th. Next day being the 10th, we (being four wagons) fell in with a company from Springfield with six wagons. That night we organized in a company and elected the following officers: Grant Addison, Captain; Thomas Baker, Wagon Master; Leftridge B. Lindsay, Adjutant.

11th. We traveled next day about fifteen miles, and encamped: water plenty; wood scarce.—Fifteen miles.

12th. We struck out. Plains very broken and hilly. After traveling about fifteen miles we encamped for wood and water.

13th. We started very soon and traveled about fifteen miles and encamped for the night, where one of our men took the cholera and died. Next day being the 14th, about 12 o'clock he was buried immediately on the top of a high hill with a head board having his name engraved on it. (G. Butler.)—Fifteen miles.

14th. We traveled eight miles and came to a small

stream when we got some wood and put in our wagons and traveled five miles farther where we found water.—Grass good; no wood.—Thirteen miles.

15th. We started early and traveled five miles, and came to a small creek called Battle Creek: good water and plenty of wood. We traveled fifteen miles farther and found wood and water.—Twenty miles.

16th. We started early and traveled over a beautiful country for eight miles, where we came to a small creek; here seeing plenty of cedar along the creek and knowing no other name for it, we gave it the name of Cedar Creek; We then traveled four miles and came to a small river called Big Blue, which we crossed without the water coming into our wagons. Here we all got some wood and set out for the plains again. Two miles farther we encamped.—Eleven miles.

16th. We traveled over a beautiful country for twelve miles, when we came to a small creek called Cottonwood; here is plenty of water, grass, and fuel: timber, cottonwood, elm, and oak. Here we watered and grazed. The traveler must put in wood and water. We traveled thirteen miles farther and encamped for the night.—Twenty-five miles.

17th. We traveled on ten miles farther and came to a small stream with very steep banks, plenty of wood and water. To day we saw plenty of wild peas which grow as large as walnuts. The emigrant will find that they make a first rate pickel.

After traveling nine miles we turned out of the road to the left one mile, and found good water and grass, but no wood. Here we encamped during the night.—Twenty miles.

18th. We traveled nine miles and came to Otter Creek, a stream of beautiful clear water; plenty of timber here. The traveler's attention is attracted to the left by bluffs and groves of timber which line the banks of the stream most beautifully. After traveling on six miles farther we turned off the road to the left about a mile; here finding plenty of water and grass, and some lone cotton-wood trees for wood, we encamped for the night.—Sixteen miles.

19th. During the forenoon we traveled over ten miles with the U. S. soldiers, who were guarding the emigrants: they were destined for Fort Laramie. Turning to the left a mile and a half, we came to a beautiful stream of water, called Sandy, thirty yards wide, and from one to four feet deep. Its banks are timbered with ash, elm, and cottonwood. With the exception of distant and detached trees and groves, no timber of any kind was to be seen, and the features of the country assumed a desert character. Here for the first time we saw some Indians since we left Wolf Creek. They galloped out of sight as quick as they saw us. We laid by in the afternoon (it being Sunday) to graze our cattle. While encamped here, an officer and two privates marched in a runaway soldier, who went under the bank of the creek, and brought out his clothes that he had hid there; then marched him back to their encampment. The soldiers would come to our camp for whisky, but we had some old soldiers in our camp who had seen regulars before.—Eleven miles and a half.

20th. We started at noon and crossed the creek and saw fifteen or twenty antelopes, but could not kill any.—Seven miles farther we came to the Little Blue, a beautiful

stream seventy or eighty feet wide and from two to five deep, well bordered with cottonwood, elm, and some oak: plenty of good grass. We traveled three miles and encamped for the night. On the Little Blue we saw the graves of two men that died of the cholera, and that of another man who shot himself in taking his gun out of his wagon.—Ten miles.

21st. After traveling ten miles down the Little Blue you come to a grove of white oak trees; you travel up the Little Blue on the north side. After traveling sixteen miles farther over a very hilly road that bears off from the river about one mile, the river is about fifty feet wide and from one to six deep, muddy, and runs very swift like the Missouri. Here we saw some goats and plenty of buffalo sign, but no buffalo.

23d. We set out this morning and traveled up the Little Blue, leaving it on our left and the bluffs to the right the bottom being from a half a mile to three quarters wide, and good grass and fuel. After traveling about sixteen miles we halted for the night on the banks of the Blue River, which is timbered principally with cottonwood, oak and willow. Here the traveler is struck with admiration by the musical notes of many birds which from the vast extent of silent prairie around seem to have collected in this spot.

24th. We continued our journey up the Little Blue for four miles, then leaving it on our left and traveling on six miles farther we came to a small tributary of the Little Blue, affording plenty of water, grass and wood, principally elm. We were told that we should find no wood or water till we reached the Platte, being twenty-five miles distant; but to our great surprise five miles farther we

crossed a slough with plenty of water, timber, and grass. Going on three miles farther we came to a branch of water with grass, but no wood. We traveled from St. Joseph without any rain, but this morning it began to thunder and continued on till afternoon, when a violent wind arose from the East, and it rained all evening. During the night the vivid flashes of lightning and the appalling claps of thunder, with the aid of a violent wind and torrents of rain seemed to threaten destruction to everything around. When we awoke we were very uncomfortably situated, the water being about three inches deep in our tent. Besides our guns, our clothes and even ourselves were not spared.

25th. We resumed our march at seven o'clock and traveling nine miles over a level, heavy road brought us to the bluffs of the noted and long looked for Platte, where we encamped for the night.

The road strikes the Platte twenty miles below the head of Grand Island. Here the average breadth of the river when it is not enlarged by islands, is from two hundred yards to a half a mile wide. The island is twenty-five miles long; has an average breadth of three quarters of a mile. It is well timbered, principally with elm, cottonwood, willow and hackberry. It has an excellent soil and is sufficiently elevated to secure it from the annual floods. Our Government has recently established a fort here. It was formerly named Childs, but it is now altered to Fort Kearney.

26th. We went out from the Fort a mile and a half, where we laid by the rest of the day. We crossed the slough at the fort and got some wood, and cooked enough for two or three days, finding no wood for forty or fifty

not arrive until 1855. A number of towns in the U.S. are named Jacksonville, and are listed in the latest postal guide, and then there were a few Jacksonvilles that got started but dried up and blew away. We did however locate the printer, who seems to have been a versatile chap. E.R. Roe was Edward Reynolds Roe, born at Lebanon, Ohio, June 22, 1813. Death overtook him in Chicago, Illinois on November 6, 1893 at age 80+.

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