

Stephen White 1850 Recollections

We passed through several small towns -- Carrolton, New Brunswick, Liberty, and others I have forgotten the names. We crossed Ray Co. the native home Co. of the James boys. All the way across Mo. small game was plentiful. I killed 18 squirrels one day, without leaving the highway. 6 or 8 other days was common. They were far more palatable than our side bacon. We arrived at St. Joe the latter part of April. The town, I think, was about half the size that Paris is now. E. B. Munsell, Saml. T. Newlon and O. J. Chestnut met us here. They had went to Marshall, taken stage there to St. Louis. Then up the Mo. river to St. Joe. The latter voyage by reason of the boat running aground and other mishaps occupied 9 days. The town here had much the appearance of an army. Thousands of oxen, covered wagons, mules, horses, tents and men in every direction. But I saw no disorderly conduct. To reach the P.O. was no little trouble. Men formed in long lines to reach the P. O. window -- perhaps 50 or 150 in a line.

We were encamped on the identical hill on which Jesse James, the noted train robber, years afterwards was living and killed. My information I have reason to believe is true. After camping here a few days, and finding the ferry boats so crowded, day after day, we concluded to go up the river 10 or 15 miles to a place called Nodaway Landing. If there was

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anything here, more than a warehouse and ferryboat, I can't now remember it, except there was a mill some distance below. Safely over the Mo. river, drove up the bottom 3 miles and went into camp. Stayed about a week waiting for the grass to grow. It had been previously understood that the Edgar Co. teams would meet at St. Joe, and cross the plains together, for mutual protection from the attacks by the Indians. Many of the teams met accordingly. Some did not. Later we learned that such a thing was impracticable. Before starting time it was deemed advisable to elect a Captain and a Lieutenant or two, the former was to take entire command of the expedition. B. F. Van Houten was chosen for the first office. O. J. Chestnut and Saml. T. Newton next in command. A wagen master was also to be chosen, but what his duties were to be nobody seemed to know. Some said he must go ahead, select a suitable camping ground, arrange the wagons in circle in best manner possible as a defence from attacks by Indians, and some other duties. No one doubted but attacks would be frequent. I don't now remember who was chosen, if any. Some dis-satisfaction arose over the result of the election. As is usual after elections Mr. Vanhouten and others left the next day. Later another split. I don't remember what the trouble was. The remaining six wagons of us left the Mo. river bottom May 8th. After leaving here we never seen a house, until we reached California, except 20 miles out from St. Joe

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we passed an Indian Mission of some sort under the auspices of some of the churches. They had a store, blacksmith shop, horse mill and school house. We were now fairly launched on our long journey. Crossed the big and little Blue Rivers. Our general course was west and northwest.

Few places had names. I remember Scott's Bluffs, Court House and Chimney Rocks. The two latter on Platter river. After leaving the Mo. river, we arranged our wagons in a circle, at night, as a means of defence against Indians. Stood guard and watched to prevent stealing. Did not think about, that sometimes a white man might steal. After a week or two we quit it, lay down and slept as soundly as if there were no Indians nearer than a thousand miles of us, especially after a Company of U.S. Cavalry passed us. With their men and shining uniforms, fat sleek horses and arms, they made more display than a whole regiment during the Civil War.

A week or two out from St. Joe, we began finding newly made graves. The further we went, more frequently they were to be seen. A bit of board, on it were rudely carved letters or a card informing the passerby the name, residence and date of death of the deceased? Everyone seemed so desirous of learning who was buried at the lonely spot, that a smooth path was worn to the graves. This was not always curiosity. If a man had a friend or neighbor travelling ahead of him,

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he would thus learn whether the grave contained any one in which he had a special interest. We often found the names of Edgar Co. men written on rocks, trees and bones of dead animals, by this means we learned when they passed the place, how far ahead, &c. Always glad to hear from them, even in this way. On the Platte one afternoon David Murphy and one of the other boys started out for a hunt, intending to travel parallel with the road, which they could easily do by getting on a high hill and watch the wagons. They became separated. Murphy was on a hill. Seen two Indians half mile away have something down on the ground. On sight of Murphy they mounted their horses and fled. He returned to camp reported what he had seen and the last time he had seen the other man he was going in that direction. There was commotion in camp. Murphy and several others got their guns and started out to investigate. They found the remains of a buffalo, recently killed. When the Indians seen Murphy coming they fled thinking the dead animal belonged to him. The men returned about dark bringing the meat with them. The other man had previously returned. At supper and breakfast we feasted. A few of the men refused to eat of it, fearing poison. Some white men had killed the animal and taken a part of it. A few mornings after the above, some buffaloes were seen grazing among our cattle. Al Seever, an uncle of Henry Tanner, mounted a horse, started in pursuit, chased one several miles, ran into the river and onto an island,

becoming exhausted it turned to fight, knocked his horse down a bank. He shot it before the enraged animal could do further harm, returned and met us, we taken a team of oxen drew it through the water and up the bank, skinned it and divided it out. We appreciated it too, as we had been living on side bacon so long.

East Fort Kearney. Then crossed Platte River - forded it - The river is said to be one and one fourth miles wide water 2-1/2 to 3 feet deep. Oxen becoming very tired, could only allow them to stop and rest 2 or 3 minutes at a time. Oxen and wagons would begin to sink immediately in the quick sand. Drove across the country to Ash Hollow. Struck North Platte, then up the river to Fort Laramie. A force of U.S. Soldiers was stationed here. Did not learn their number. Stopped until over Sunday. Our route continued on up the river until the next Saturday morning we arrived at the Mormon Ferry, across the North Platte. 5 boats are kept here. The wind was blowing such a gale boats could not run. Found about 400 wagons waiting to cross, each one awaiting their turn. The charge was \$5.00 for each wagon. \$2.00 a head for oxen. \$1.00 for a horse. Most of the cattle were driven up the river and compelled to swim across. While doing this John B. Seitch was accidentally drowned. He was a brother of Beverly Seitch and Mr. George Redmon, his body was not recovered. The water was cold and the

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late Apr. - St. Joe

looked like army

Past office line long - 50 to 150 men
Camped on 2 Dame hill.

Nodaway Landing - crossed
mill close by down river -
nothing else at site

Organized

May 8 - left one River bottoms

mentions mission, graves