

Family Life on the Frontier: The Diary of Kitturah Penton Belknap

edited by **Glenda Riley**

Kitturah Penton Belknap was born in a log cabin in Hamilton County, Ohio on August 15, 1820. Her parents, John and Magdalene Penton, were hard-working, religiously-oriented people who reared their children with love, a modicum of education, and respect for the teachings of the Bible. At age nineteen, Kitturah left the family farm to marry George Belknap in Allen County, Ohio. On October 17, 1839, only two weeks after their marriage, the young couple launched a series of westward migrations.

The first move, described in this portion of the diary, was made by covered wagon in company with four other members of the Belknap family. After a tedious journey, they all settled in one small cabin near the Des Moines River in Iowa where they attempted to wrest a living from the wilderness. Here Kitturah learned to effectively function as a frontier wife, bore four children (three of whom died), actively engaged in church work, and helped build the family's first real home.

By 1848, however, the Belknaps decided to push on to the Far West. On April 9 they loaded another covered wagon and began the long trek to the Oregon country. Kitturah nursed her ill four-year-old child on this trip while expecting a fifth baby. After reaching Oregon, Kitturah bore five more children (two of whom died of typhoid fever), helped her husband with his various farming and ranching ventures, and continued her religious activities. Despite her own frequent bouts of illness, she lived a long and active life. She died peacefully after an illness of one week's duration in Coquille, Oregon in 1913, only four days after her 93rd birthday.

The portion of Kitturah Belknap's diary regarding her Iowa years is presented here with the kind permission of her great-

granddaughter, Doris Belknap Harem, of Corvallis, Oregon. The spelling and grammar have been slightly changed to facilitate reading but the substance of the diary is unaltered.

ON OCTOBER 17, 1839, WE GATHERED UP OUR EARTHLY possessions and put them in a two-horse wagon and started to find us a home in the Far West. We had heard of the prairie land of Illinois but we had never seen anything but heavy timber land so we set our faces westward. (There were no railroads then.) We traveled thru part of Ohio and across Indiana and Illinois and crossed the Mississippi at Fort Madison into Iowa. Was four weeks on the way and saw prairie to our heart's content. Verily we thought the half had never been told.

We camped out every night, took our flour and meat with us and were at home. Every night cooked our suppers and slept in our wagon. We had a dutch oven and skillet, teakettle and coffee pot, and when I made bread I made "salt rising." When we camped I made rising and set it on the warm ground and it would be up about midnight. I'd get up and put it to sponge and in the morning the first thing I did was to mix the dough and put it in the oven and by the time we had breakfast it would be ready to bake. Then we had nice coals and by the time I got things washed up and packed up and the horses were ready the bread would be done and we would go on our way rejoicing.

When we wanted vegetables or horse feed we would begin to look for some farmhouse along towards evening and get a head of cabbage, potatoes, a dozen eggs or a pound of butter, some hay and a sack of oats. There were not many large towns on the way and there was no canned goods to get then. Where there were farms old enough to raise anything to spare, they were glad to exchange their produce for a few dimes.

We stopped at Rushville, Illinois, and stayed four weeks. Expected to winter there but we heard of a purchase of land from the Indians west of the Mississippi and again we hitched up. Mid-winter as it was, we started never thinking of the danger of being caught on the prairie in a snow storm. The second day we had to cross an eighteen-mile prairie and in the

afternoon it turned cold and the wind from the northwest struck us square in the face. We had bought some cows at Rushville, had some boys driving them, and they would not face the storm so I had to take the lines and drive the team while my husband helped with the stock. I thought my hands and nose would freeze; when I got to the fire it made me so sick I almost fainted. We came to a little house with a big family of children and they had plenty of wood for there was a point of timber run down into the prairie and in after years there was a town there called Westpoint. We got there about four o'clock in the afternoon. Had our provisions cooked up for the trip so we thawed some out a little and made coffee and the kind lady put a skillet in the corner and made us a nice corn cake. We had bread, butter, good boiled ham and doughnuts. With good appetites we ate and were thankful.

When we had cleaned up, the woman hunted up the children and said, "Now children, you get off to bed so these folks can have a show to make down their beds for if they cross that twenty-mile prairie tomorrow they will have to start early and that little woman looks all pegged out. Now Honey, the best thing for you to do is to get good and warm and get to sleep." But, the "little woman" had the toothache, so she was not much sleepy. There was another family with us; Four of them and us two and eight of the household. We furnished our own beds and made them down on the floor. Tomorrow we cross the Mississippi into Iowa.

Up at four o'clock in the morning. Got our breakfast before the family was up. Crossed the river in the afternoon, traveled till about four o'clock then came to another eighteen-mile prairie and put up for the night. The next day started as soon as it was light. I had to drive the team again today and face the wind. It commenced snowing before we struck the timber. It was hard round snow and it seemed every ball that hit my face would cut to the quick. That night we had plenty of wood and a room to ourselves and the next day we went thru patches of timber and, oh my, but it was cold!

Now we're skirting the timber on the Demoines River and its tributaries. Thought we could not quite make it so we camped again. The next day we got to the place about noon.

Found the family living in the house yet to hold the claim. The house was a double, hued-log house. They let us have one room, and the two families of us lived in one room and we unloaded and commenced business.

The folks we bought the claim of went back to Missouri so we made trades with them and got ploughs, fodder, chickens and hogs. Made us some homemade furniture and went to keeping house. We had a quarter section of land. We thought that sounded pretty big but it was not paid for yet. The land had just been bought of the Indians and had not been surveyed so it was not in the market yet. We could settle on it and hold our claims and make improvements, but we must have the cash to pay when it was surveyed and came in to market or some land-shark was ready to buy it from under us. Then we would lose improvements and all so we had to get in and dig to have the money ready. The first thing was to get some land fenced and broke.

Our timber land was two miles from the prairie. I would get up and get breakfast so as to have my husband off before it was fairly light and he would cut rail timber all day in the snow and bring a load home at night. Would take his dinner and feed for horses. He came in at night with his boots froze as hard as bones; strange to say he never had his feet frozen.

Now we must save every dollar to pay for our land. We had clothes to last the first year, and we got a dollar's worth of coffee and the same of sugar that lasted all winter and till corn was planted. We did not know anything about spring wheat then so our crop was all corn. Then while the corn was growing my husband made some rails for a man and got some more groceries. He had hauled the rail cuts and scattered them along where he wanted the fence and split the rails odd spells and laid up the fence when the frost was coming out of the ground. We had twenty acres of broke land fenced to plant to corn the first spring. Then we hired a man with a prairie team to break ten acres that was put into sod corn for fodder. It was not tended any, did not get very big, was cut up in the fall and fed out ears and all. The breaking team was five yoke of oxen with a man to hold the plough and a good-sized boy with a long whip to drive the oxen.

Now it is spring and we have got a few sheep on the shares and they are sheared. All this winter I have been spinning flax and tow to make some summer clothes. Have not spent an idle minute and now the wool must be taken from the sheep's back, washed and picked and sent to the carding machine and made into rolls, then spun, colored and wove ready for next winter. Our part of the land had no house on it so we still live in the little kitchen. Father Belknaps live in the other room.

Now it's harvest time. George is off swinging the cradle to try to save a little something, while I am tending the chickens and pigs and making a little butter (we have two cows). Butter is 12½c a pound and eggs 6c a dozen. I think I can manage to lay up a little this year.

This year is about out. We sold some meat and some corn. Fresh pork is 5c a pound, corn 12½c per bushel in the ear. Did not have to buy any clothes this year so we have skimmed along and have \$20.00 to put in the box (all silver). We will put the old ground in wheat this fall and break some more land for corn. Will have twenty acres of wheat in and now it's the spring of 1840.

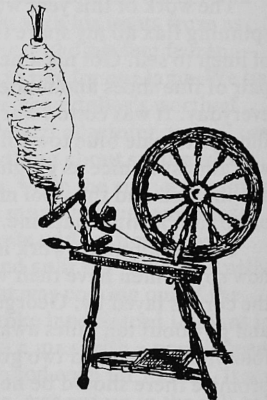
The work of this year will be about the same. I have been spinning flax all my spare time thru the winter. Made a piece of linen to sell. Got me a new calico dress for Sunday and a pair of fine shoes and made me one homemade dress for everyday. It was cotton warp colored blue and copper and filled with pale blue tow filling so it was striped one way and was almost as nice as gingham. It is now May and the sheep are sheared and the wool must be washed and picked and got off to the carding machine.

So my summer's work is before me. It is corn planting time now so the men have their work planned till harvest. Now that the corn is layed by, George and I are going to take a vacation and go about ten miles away to a camp meeting. There are four young men and two girls going with us, but I made them promise there should be no sparking and they should all be in their proper places in time of service (for they were all members of the church). If they did not set a good example before the world and show which side they were on they could not go with me and they behaved to the letter. This was the

first camp meeting west of the Mississippi as far as I know. People came from far and near and I think there were about twenty clear conversions. Both the girls were married to two of the young men in the fall and lived to raise families who made good, useful men and women in church and state.

Now we have had a rest and have got strengthened both soul and body so we will go at it again. We have thought of trying to get things together this year to build a house next summer as we have about all the land fenced and broke that one man can handle. The crops are fine; our wheat is fine. Will have wheat bread now most of the time. The hogs did so well, can have our meat and quite a lot to sell. We more than make our living so we will have quite a lot to put in the box this year. We will get our wheat ground and get barrels to pack the flour in. Then will have to haul it sixty miles to market and I think we got \$3.00 a barrel. We took it to Keokuk on the Mississippi, then it was shipped off on steamboats.

It is now 1841 and we have most of the material together for the house. It will be a frame house, the only one in sight on this prairie. The coming generations will wonder how we built a frame house with no sawmill within fifty miles. Will have to go that far for nails as we cannot get any large quantity at the little stores here. "Where there's a will there's a way." The timber is all hued out of oak trees that grew on Lick Creek four miles away. Everything from sills to rafters are hued with the broad axe. The timber is very tall and fine. Oak and hickory trees make as many as three or four rail cuts and it splits so straight we can make anything we want of it. We found a carpenter who had some tools and he got to work for two days and layed out the work. Then George



Flax spinning wheel

and his father worked at it after the corn was layed by till harvest. Got the frame up and the roof on. There was one of our neighbors going to Burlington after goods for a man who was starting a store in a little town on the Demoines about four miles from us so we got them to bring us some shingle nails and we had made shingles in the winter. While I spun flax George brought in the shaving horse and shaved shingles and we burnt the shavings and both worked by the same light. We now have the roof on and it can stand awhile.

It is now August and the harvest is over and we have the sweetest little baby girl. Call her Hannah. We will now work some more on the house. While my husband is staying round he will be putting on the siding. He made that himself. Cut the trees and sawed off cuts six feet long. Then he split them out and shaved them with the drawing knife to the proper thickness. Put it on like weather boarding and it looks very well. The house is twenty-four feet long and sixteen feet wide. Will take off ten feet and make two bedrooms. The balance is the living room with a nice stone chimney and fireplace with a crane in one end to hang the pots on to cook our food. The house is to be lathed and plastered. Will get the lath out this winter. There is plenty of limestone and some men are burning lime kilns.

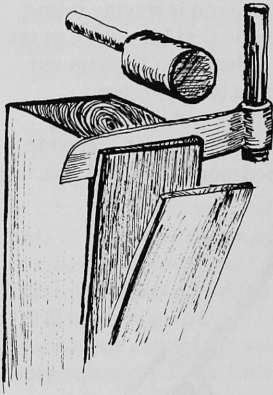
It's October. At the house again. Have it all enclosed and rocks on the ground for the chimney. Now it is time to gather the corn so when it is dry they will be husking corn as it is all cut and shocked. It will be husked out and stood up again and the fodder fed to the hogs.

November. Froze up and snowing. Will have winter now till the first of April. We will spend another winter in the little log house.

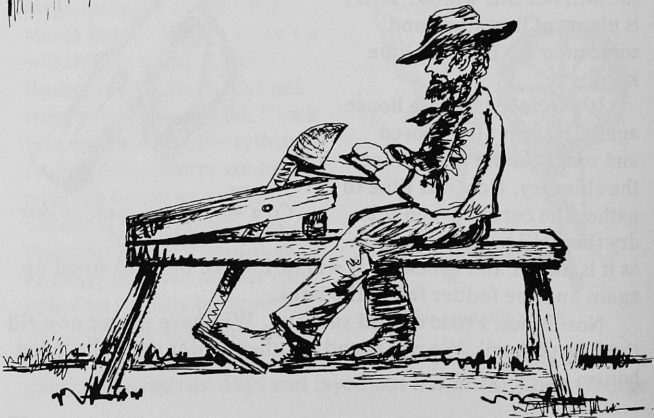


Corn husking peg made of deer antler with leather strap.

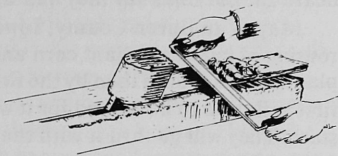
December. Cold and have had good sledding for six weeks. The upstairs drifted full of snow twice. The roof is put on with clapboards and weight poles. Father Belknaps live in the large room of the same house we do. We have meeting there. The tenth was quarterly meeting. Saturday night it snowed and blowed so the upstairs was full of snow Sunday morning that we had to shovel it out and build big fires to get it dried out so it would not drip before meeting time. We took up some of the boards and shoveled snow down and carried it out in the washtubs (barrels of it). Our room was not so bad. We had



A froe (left) was used to split a block of wood into rough-edged shingles. The shingles were then shaved smooth on a shaving horse (below).



Detail (right) shows how a drawknife was used to smooth each shingle. A person straddled the shaving horse and maneuvered the "jaw" to clamp the shingle tight.



spread the wagon cover over it to keep out the cold so we rolled it up in a pile in the back corner and got breakfast in our room. The two families, the presiding elder, and two preachers all joined in prayers and then all took breakfast in that little room. I think it was fourteen by sixteen feet. No one seemed crowded or embarrassed and by the time breakfast was over the congregation began to gather. We opened the middle door and the preacher stood in the door and preached both ways for both rooms were crowded. It was a grand meeting. By night the roads were broke and both rooms were crowded till there was not standing room. Had meeting again Monday and Tuesday nights. It was a happy time.

Time passes on and now it is time for the holidays. What will we have for Christmas dinner? For company, will have Father Belknaps and the Hawley family and most likely the preacher, twelve in all. And now for the bill of fare. What shall it be? No fruit for mince pies, no red apples to eat, no nuts to crack. They think I'm too young to get up a big dinner under the circumstances. All have gone to bed so I will make out my bill of fare.

Firstly; for bread, nice light rolls; cake, doughnuts; for pie, pumpkin; preserves, crab apples and wild plums; sauce, dried apples; meat first round: roast spare ribs with sausage and mashed potatoes and plain gravy; second round: chicken stewed with the best of gravy; chicken stuffed and roasted in the Dutch Oven by the fire, for then I had never cooked a meal on a stove. I think I can carry that out and have dinner by two o'clock if I get up early. I will cook in my room and set the table in the big room and with both of our dishes can make a

good showing. Everything went off in good style. Some one heard the old folks say they had no idea Kit could do so well.

May, Van Buren County, Iowa, 1842. About the same routine of last year. Plant corn and tend it. We will be through planting this month then by the first of June what was planted first will need to be tended for it won't do to let the weeds get a start. They will go thru it with the one horse plough, two furrows between every row and two or three boys with hoes to clean out the hills and pull out all weeds (quite a tedious job if you have fifty or sixty acres). But now it is all thru and the sheep must be sheared.

Today the neighborhood all turns out to make a sheep pen on the bank of the Demoines River whither they will drive their flocks to wash them before shearing. And now the fun begins for all the men and boys are there to help or see the fun. There were five men with their sheep and their boys. George's were the first ones in the pen (thirty). They were taken one at a time out in the river where they could not touch bottom with their feet. Then the men hold their heads out of the water with one hand and with the other rub and souse them up and down till the water looked clean when they squeezed it out of the wool. Then they took them out to a clean apartment and when they got one man's done they sent the boys home with them and put them in a little clean pasture to dry and so till all was done. They all took their dinner and had a regular picnic.

Now it is June. The men are back in the corn except the sheep-shearers. The sheep will be sheared this week, then the wool will lay out a few days to get the sheep smell off, then my work will begin. I'm the first one to get at the wool (sixty-five fleeces). Will sort it over, take off the poor short wool and put it by to card by hand for comforts. Then will sort out the finest for flannels and the coarser for jeans for the men's wear. I find the wool very nice and white, but I do hate to sit down alone to pick wool so I will invite about a dozen old ladies in and in a day they will do it all up.

Have had my party. Had twelve nice old ladies; they seemed to enjoy themselves fine. Had a fine chicken dinner. For cake I made a regular old-fashioned pound cake like my mother used to make for weddings. Now my name is out as a

good cook so am alright for good cooking makes good friends.

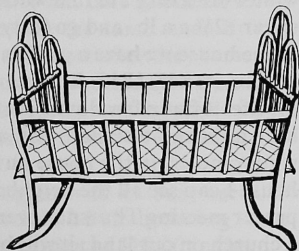
July. My wool came home from the carding machine in nice rolls ready to spin. First, I will spin my stocking yarn. Can spin two skeins a day and in the evening will double and twist it while George reads the history of the U.S. Then will read some in the Bible together and have prayer and go to bed feeling that the sleep of the laboring man is sweet. My baby is so good she don't seem much in my way. Time moves on and here it is September and the new house is about ready to live in this winter. Have been having meeting in it this summer so it's been dedicated and we will try to say "as for me and my house we will serve the Lord."

November. Everything is about done up and we have moved in our own house. Have not got much to keep house with but it is real nice to have things all my own way. Have got my work for the winter pretty well in hand. Have made me a new flannel dress colored blue and red; had it wove in small plaid. I am going to try and make me one dress every year then I can have one for nice and with a clean check apron I would be alright. I made some jeans enough for two pairs of pants. And have the knitting done so we have two good pair of stockings for all.

It seems real nice to have the whole control of my house. Can say I am monarch of all I survey and there is none to dispute my right. I have curtained off a nice little room in one corner so we can entertain the preachers and they seem to enjoy it. Our house is right at the crossroads and they say it is such a handy place to stop. It is right on the road going any direction so I try to keep a little something prepared.

March, 1843. The years have been much the same. This has been the most tedious winter I ever experienced.

April 1st and everything frozen solid yet. We have a nice little boy now and I don't see as two babies are any



Cradle made of bent elm wood.

more trouble than one. I put them both in their little cradle and the little girl amuses the baby till he gets sleepy. Then I take them out, give the baby some attention while the little girl plays round the house and after they have exercised their muscles I fix up the little nest and lay the baby down to go to sleep. Then the other comes running to be "Hept in to by by baby to seepens" and they are both soon asleep. I fix one in each end of the cradle and shove it to one side and then I just make things hum for they are both babies. The oldest is only a year and a half old.

We have got fixed up very nice in our new home. Have a good well close to the door and a nice little natural grove on the west (crab apples and wild plums). The crabs are large and fine for preserves and the plums are fine too. Back of the house north is a piece of very rich soil. It is called Hazel Ruff. It has hazel bushes all over it but when grubbed out is very fine land. There we have prepared a place to raise melons and we have them in abundance. Now I want to tell you how I make a substitute for fruit. Take a nice large watermelon, cut it in two and scrape the inside fine to the hard rind. It will be mostly water and when you get a lot prepared, strain it thru a sieve or thin cloth. Squeeze out all the juice you can, then boil the juice down to syrup. I then took some good musk melons and crab apples, about half and half, and put them in the syrup and cooked them down till they were done, being careful not to mash them. Put in a little sugar to take the flat off and cook it down a little more and you have nice preserves to last all winter (and they are fine when you have nothing better and sugar 12½c a lb. and go forty miles after it). On the east end of the house we have a garden.

November, 1843. I have experienced the first real trial of my life. After a few days of suffering our little Hannah died of lung fever so we are left with one baby. I expect to spend this winter mostly in the house but as we have meeting here at our house I can see all the neighbors twice a week for we have prayer meeting Thursday evenings. Have commenced to build a church on our land; it will be brick. We are going to have quarterly meeting here about Christmas. If it gets very interesting will protract it thru the holidays.

January, 1844. The meeting is over and the house cleaned

up. We had a good time and the house was packed every night. Good sleighing, and everybody seemed to be interested. We had two beds in the house and a trundle bed that we could shove under one bed. Then in the evening I would put both beds on one bedstead and take the other outdoors till after meeting, then bring it in and shift the beds and make it up for the preachers. The one that was left in was used for a seat and to lay the sleeping babies on while the sisters were helping carry on the work. It was no uncommon thing for the noise to become so great that it would rouse some of the babes and a man would take it up and pass it along to the fireplace where there was always a warm corner reserved for the sisters with little ones. The meeting lasted for ten days. Had over twenty conversions, and I thought that was about the best time I ever had. I cooked by the fireplace and our one room served for the church, kitchen, dining-room, bedroom, and study for the preacher. Sometimes we had three or four as they came from adjoining circuits to help us thru the work.

January, 1845. We have another little boy born December 23, 1844. We call him Jesse Walker. The first name for his grandfather Belknap, the second for our family doctor who was also a local preacher, a fast friend, and good neighbor. We are still taking up the subject of building a church. Have the lot on the west corner of our land near the burying ground. We gave five acres for that and two for the church. It is to be of brick. Tonight we have company. Three neighbors and their wives have come to spend the evening and while they are talking about the amount of brick it will take to build the church I am getting a fine supper in the same room by the same fire. Took the chickens off the roost after they came and will have it ready about ten o'clock. Have fried cakes (had fresh bread), stewed chicken and sausage and mashed potatoes. Had a fine time. Had prayers before they left at fifteen minutes after twelve.

June, 1845. Summer comes again with its busy cares. They have got to work at the church and I am boarding three men to get money to pay my subscription of \$10.00 to the church. I have had to pass thru another season of sorrow. Death has again entered our house. This time it claimed our dear little John for its victim. It was hard for me to give him up

but dropsy on the brain ended its work in four short days. When our pastor was here a week before he said he thought that child was too good for this wicked world but he little expected to be called to preach his funeral in less than one week. A bad cough and pain in my side is telling me that disease is making its inroads on my system.

October. We have got thru our summer work and now we are preparing for winter. Have raised a good crop but will have to feed it all out this winter; will have a lot of hogs to fatten.

November. Have had a month of cold, frosty nights and now we expect a freeze up; cold northwest winds prevail. I'm going to stay at home this winter and see if I will take so much cold. We have another baby; such a nice little girl. Only six pounds at first and though it is a month old is not much bigger than at first. It has never been well so we have two children again for a while; neither of them are very strong.

The church is not finished but the roof is on so it will stand over winter and meeting will still be at our home. We are fixed nicely in our home now. Have had a very pleasant winter and now it is springtime (1847) again and they all think I had better go on a visit to Ohio. The past winter there has been a strange fever raging here. It is the Oregon Fever. It seems to be contagious and it is raging terribly. Nothing seems to stop it but to tear up and take a six months trip across the plains with ox teams to the Pacific Ocean.

May, 1847. Some of our friends have started for Oregon. They will meet others at the crossing of the Missouri River and make laws and join together in a large company.

Husband and I and two children start for Ohio to visit my father and mother. We go by wagon to Keokuk. There we take the steamer on the Mississippi to St. Louis, thence to Cincinnati. There we get a team to take us out six miles to my sister's. Stayed there one week, then they took us out to Hamilton thirty miles to another sister's. Stayed there three days, then took the canal boat for St. Marie's. Got on the boat Monday evening and got off at the landing at three o'clock Tuesday morning. There was a little shack there and as there was no one on the stir we had to stay there till daylight. I took our wraps and made a bed for the children and we nodded till

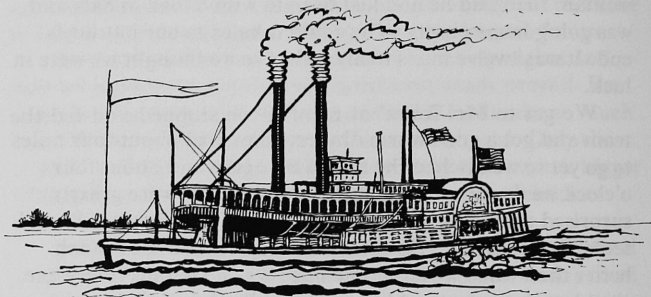
people began to stir. Then we hunted up the town and found the hotel and got breakfast. While we were eating we saw an old man just on the other side of the table and we recognized Mr. Jones, one of our old neighbors. We kept our eyes on him and when he left the table we made ourselves known to him. He said, "And this is little Kittie Penton that you carried off from us a few years ago. Well! Well! She has got to be quite a woman." He said he had just been in with a load of oats and was going home empty so he could take us to our journey's end. It was twelve miles to my father so we thought we were in luck.

We got to Mr. Jones' at noon so we stopped and fed the team and got a good warm dinner. Then had about four miles to go yet so we hitched the horses up again and about four o'clock we drove up to my father's gate. They were greatly surprised as we had not written them we were coming. We all seemed to enjoy the trip. The children seemed to be much better than when we left home but I was no better. Every one would say how changed I was till I really thought I was sick and going into consumption, but my baby seemed better.

I knew it would be the last visit I would make there whether I lived or not but I kept all these thoughts buried in my own breast and never told them that the folks at home were fixing to cross the plains while we were away. Taking it all around we had a good time. We were there a month, then it came time to say goodbye. The last few days the baby was growing weaker and I wanted to get home where it would be more quiet. All the friends have visited us and Sunday we had a good social meeting and said goodbye to all the friends. It was hard for me to not break down but they all thought in about two years we would come again.

On Tuesday, June 1st, we were ready to start for home. We went by wagon twenty-five miles to Springfield and there we struck the railroad that was just being built from Cincinnati to Columbus, Ohio. It was not finished any further than Springfield so we stayed there all night and in the morning got on the car for Cincinnati. That was our first car ride and the first railroad we had ever seen. We got to ride seventy-five miles. Our little boy was asleep when we got on and when he

woke up he looked all around surprised and said, "Where is the horses?" At noon we were on the bank of the Ohio River. If we had gone with a team would have taken three days. There we found the same old steamboat that brought us down. It had made its trip and was just steaming up to leave the wharf so we got on board again for home. Were on the water two days and one night.



Then we were at the mouth of the Desmoines River where we had arranged to get off and meet a team to take us home (about forty miles). It was a fine level road and by getting an early start we could make it in a day. Now we had been gone a month and traveled all kinds of ways. Just as we landed Father Belknap drove up to meet us. We had friends there so we stayed all night with them and the next day we went home. They thought I looked better for the trip but the baby was failing all the time.

We found the folks all excitement about Oregon. Some had gone in the spring of 1847. Four families of our connection and many of the neighbors but they had not been heard from since crossing the Missouri River. All was excitement and commotion. Our home was sold waiting our return to make out the papers. It was all fixed up for us to live with Father Belknaps as the man wanted the house on our place. Ransom's and Father's had not been sold yet. It did not suit me to live with them so I told them it was out of the question. For the first time since our marriage I put my foot down and said "will and won't" so it was arranged for us to go

on Rant's place and live in their house till it was sold. I knew it would use me and the little sick baby up to be in such a tumult. There was nothing done or talked of but what had Oregon in it and the loom was banging and the wheels buzzing and trades being made from daylight till bedtime so I was glad to get settled.

My dear little girl, Martha, was sick all summer and October 30 she died, one year and one month old. Now we have one little puny boy left. So now I will spend what little strength I have left getting ready to cross the Rockies.

Will cut out some sewing to have to pick up at all the odd moments for I will try to have clothes enough to last a year.

November, 1847. Have cut out four muslin shirts for George and two suits for the little boy (Jessie). With what he has that will last him (if he lives) until he will want a different pattern.

The material for the men's outer garments has to be woven yet. The neighbors are all very kind to come in to see me, so I don't feel lonely like I would. They don't bring any work, but just pick up my sewing, so I think I will soon get a lot done. Then they are not the kind with long sad faces but always leave me with such pleasant smiling faces that it does me good to think of them and I try not to think of the parting time but look forward to the time when we shall meet, to part no more.

Now I will begin to work and plan to make everything with an eye to starting out on a six month's trip. The first thing is to lay plans and then work up to the program. The first thing is to make a piece of linen for a wagon cover and some sacks. Will spin mostly evenings while my husband reads to me. The little wheel in the corner doesn't make any noise. I spin for Mother Belknap and Mrs. Hawley and they will weave. Now that it is in the loom I must work almost day and night to get the filling ready to keep the loom busy. The men are busy making ox yokes and bows for the wagon covers and trading for oxen.

Now the new year has come and I'll write (1848). My health is better and I don't spend much time with housework.

This is my program. Will make a muslin cover for the wagon as we will have a double cover so we can keep warm and dry; put the muslin on first and then the heavy linen one for strength. They both have to be sewed real good and strong. I have to spin the thread and sew all those long seams with my fingers then I have to make a new feather tick for my bed. I will put the feathers of two beds into one tick and sleep on it.

February. The linen is ready to go to work on and six two bushel bags all ready to sew up. That I will do evenings by the light of a dip candle for I have made enough to last all winter after we get to Oregon. Now my work is all planned so I can go right along. Have cut out two pairs of pants for George (homemade jeans). A kind lady friend came in today and sewed all day on one pair then took them home with her to finish. Another came to buy some of my dishes and she took two shirts home to make to pay for them.

Now it is March and we have our team all ready and in good condition. Three good yoke of oxen and a good wagon. The company have arranged to start on the 10th of April. I expect to load up the first wagon. George is practicing with the oxen. I don't want to leave my kind friends here but they all think it best so I am anxious to get off. I have worked almost day and night this winter. I have sewing about all done but a coat and vest for George. He got some nice material for a suit and had a tailor cut it out and Aunt Betsey Starr helped me two days with them so I am about ready to load up. Will wash and begin to pack and start with some old clothes on and when we can't wear them any longer we will leave them on the road.

I think we are fixed very comfortable for the trip. This week I will wash and pack away everything except what we want to wear on the trip. April 5th. This week I cook up something to last us a few days till we get used to camp fare. Bake bread, make a lot of crackers and fry doughnuts, cook a chicken, boil ham, and stew some dried fruit. There is enough to last us over the first Sunday so now we will begin to gather up the scatterings. Tomorrow is Saturday and next Tuesday we start so will put in some things today. Only one more Sunday here. Some of the folks will walk to meeting. We have had our farewell meeting so I won't go. I don't think I could

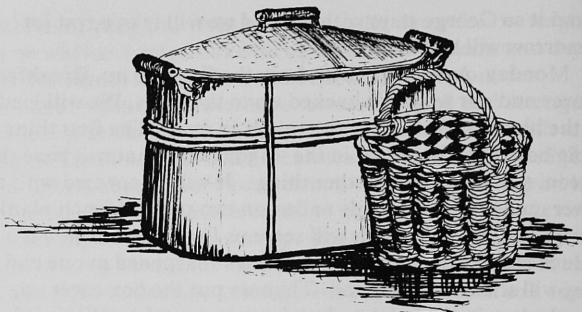
stand it so George stays with me and we will take a rest for tomorrow will be a busy day.

Monday, April 9th, 1848. I am the first one up. Breakfast is over and our wagon is backed up to the steps. We will load at the hind end and shove the things in front. The first thing is a big box that will just fit in the wagon bed. That will have the bacon, salt and various other things. It will be covered with a cover made of light boards nailed on two pieces of inch plank about 3 inches wide. This will serve us for a table. There is a hole in each corner and we have sticks sharpened at one end so they will stick in the ground. Then we put the box cover on, slip the legs in the holes and we have a nice table. When it is on the box George will sit on it and let his feet hang over and drive the team. It is just as high as the wagon bed. Now we will put in the old chest that is packed with our clothes and things we will want to wear and use on the way. Then there is the medicine chest. There will be cleats fastened to the bottom of the wagon bed to keep things from slipping out of place.

There is a vacant place clear across that will be large enough to set a chair. Will set it with the back against the side of the wagon bed and there I will ride. On the other side will be a vacancy where little Jessie can play. He has a few toys and some marbles and some sticks for whip stocks and some blocks for oxen. I tie a string on the stick and he uses my work basket for a covered wagon and plays going to Oregon. He never seems to get tired or cross (but here I am leaving the wagon half packed and getting off on the journey).

The next thing is a box as high as the chest that is packed with a few dishes and things we won't need till we get thru. And now we will put in the long sacks of flour and other things. The sacks are made of homemade linen and will hold 125 pounds. There are four sacks of flour and one of corn meal. Now come the groceries. We will make a wall of smaller sacks stood on end; dried apples and peaches, beans, rice, sugar and coffee, the latter being in the green state. We will brown it in a skillet as we want to use it. Everything must be put in strong bags; no paper wrappings for this trip.

There is a corner left for the washtub and the lunch basket will just fit in the tub. The dishes we want to use will all be in



Washtub and lunch basket

the basket. I am going to start with good earthen dishes and if they get broken I have tin ones to take their place. Have made four nice little table cloths so am going to live just like I was at home. Now we will fill the other corner with pick-ups. The ironware that I will want to use every day will go in a box on the hind end of the wagon like a feed box.

Now we are loaded all but the bed. I wanted to put it in and sleep out but George said I wouldn't rest any so I will level up the sacks with some extra bedding, then there is a side of sole leather that will go on first, then two comforts and we have a good enough bed for anyone to sleep on. At night I will turn my chair down to make the bed a little longer. All we will have to do in the morning is put in the bed and make some coffee and roll out.

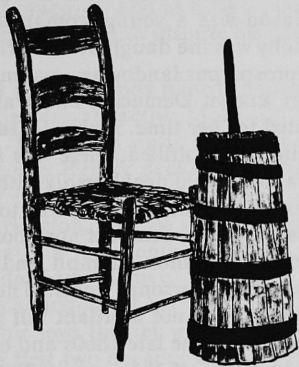
The wagon looks so nice. The nice white cover is drawn down tight to the side boards with a good ridge to keep from sagging. It's high enough for me to stand straight under the roof with a curtain to put down in front and one at the back end. Now its all done and I get in out of the tumult. Now that everything is ready I will rest a little then we will eat a bit. Mother Belknap has made a pot of mush and we are all going to eat mush and milk to save the milk that otherwise would have to be thrown out. Then we have prayers and then to bed.

Tuesday, April 10, 1848. Daylight dawned with none awake but me. I try to keep quiet so as not to wake anyone but

pretty soon Father Belknap's voice was heard with that well-known sound, "Wife, wife, rise and flutter," and there was no more quiet for anyone. Breakfast is soon over. My dishes and food for lunch are packed away and put in the proper place. The iron things are packed in some old pieces of old thick rags. Now for the feather bed; I nicely folded the two ends together and lay it on the sacks. The covers are folded and the pillows laid smoothly on, reserving one for the outside so if I or the little boy get sleepy we have a good place to lie. Now my chair and the churn and we will be all done.

Our wagon is ready to start. I get in the wagon and in my chair busy with some unfinished work. Jessie is in his place with his whip starting for Oregon. George and the boys have gone out in the field for the cattle. Dr. Walker calls at the wagon to see me and give me some good advice and give me the parting hand for neither of us could speak the word "farewell." He told me to keep up good courage and said, "Don't fret; whatever happens don't fret and cry for courage will do more for you than anything else."

Then he took the little boy in his arms and presented to him a nice Bible with his blessings and was off.



*Slat-back chair with splint bottom,
and wooden butter churn.*

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