

“Water plenty timber scarce grass is poor”

So noted Richard Augustus Keen in his diary on June 12, 1852. Keen's overland diary was typical of most diaries in its daily comments on three essentials to survival: water, timber, and grass.

Common topics in trail diaries, according to historian John Faragher, were “practical aspects of the trip, health and safety of traveling kith and kin, and the natural beauty of the landscape.” Certainly practical concerns were the core of emigrants' trips. Were they finding timber for fuel? Grass for livestock? Water to relieve the awful thirst of traveling through choking dust and caustic alkali?

Diarists also typically noted the distance traveled each day—sometimes 12 or 20 miles, sometimes an astonishing 25—and every stream and river crossed, and what that entailed. Diarists also noted the landmarks reached. With such “pitifully small” distances traveled each day, Faragher points out, the “emigrants needed interim goals to break up the two-thousand-mile journey.” Landmarks also helped them gauge their progress and chance of survival. If they reached Independence Rock by July 4, they were less likely to be trapped by early snows in the Sierras.

Particularly for the 49ers (or “Argonauts”) who were headed to the goldfields, distance also spelled rivalry. As historian Malcolm Rohrbough writes, “The Argonauts soon came to view the overland expedition as a competition, as well as an exercise in cooperation. Tens of thousands of men were on the same trail to California, narrowly intent on the same objective. The sense of rivalry was the stronger because the Argonauts could literally see the competitors everywhere around them, ahead, behind, and even alongside.”

The health and safety of travelers were also paramount. Trail authority Gregory M. Franzwa reminds us of the strenuous travel, poor water and diet, and exposure to diseases carried by other emigrant parties. For the Oregon Trail alone, he writes, “There is one grave for every 80 yards of the trail.”

As for the natural beauty of the Far West, “the emigrant never before had seen a western sunset,”

Franzwa continues, “never before had experienced a western thunderstorm, never before had seen a mountain, nor a desert, nor an Indian in his native habitat. . . . [nor] the most startling phenomenon of all—the buffalo.”

The safest generalization to draw from reading trail diaries is that, indeed, the western trails experience was the story of people. Every diarist wrote from a different perspective and interacted differently with the surroundings. Diaries are as much a study of humanity as they are a study of the western trails.

In this issue, you'll travel with five diarists through excerpts from diary transcripts in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa. Each had already been transcribed before it was donated, and it is assumed that the original transcribers may have altered some spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. We have made minimal changes of a similar nature for publication here; researchers are encouraged to refer to original transcripts.

Of course, the actual diaries are much longer than what appears here; ellipses indicate omitted entries or portions of entries. All but one of our five diarists crossed the Missouri River at Kaneshville (later, Council Bluffs). These excerpts provide a flavor of five different trips, by five different travelers. —*The Editor*

“Getting ready to cross the Rockies”

Kitturah Penton Belknap and her husband, George, left Ohio in 1839 and settled in Van Buren County, Iowa. Now in 1847, she and George are getting ready to head west next spring. She is 27. Three children have died, leaving her daughter Martha and son Jessie. We join Kitturah as she describes her detailed preparations in her diary.

We found the folks all excitement about Oregon. Some had gone in the spring of '47; four families of the connection and many of the neighbors but they had not been heard from since crossing the Missouri River. Everything was out of place and all was excitement and commotion. . . . 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 bed time so I was glad to get settled.

My dear little girl, Martha, was sick all summer and the 30th of October 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 15, 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.

Now the new year has come and I'll write (1848). This is my program: Will start out with the new year. My health is better and I don't spend much time with house work. 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 and I have to spin the thread and sew all those long seams with my fingers. . . .

And 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 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. . . . Will wash and begin to pack and start with some old clothes on and when we can't wear them any longer will leave them on the road. . . .

Monday, April 9th, 1848. I am the first one up; breakfast is over; 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; then 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; then 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. The till is the medicine chest; then there will be cleats fastened to the bottom of the wagon bed to keep things from



Covered wagons pulled by oxen served as both shelter and transportation for thousands of emigrants like Kitturah and George Belknap. Above: Wagon and ox in Maquoketa, Iowa.

slipping out of place. Now 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 wagon bed; 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, some blocks for oxen and 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 get 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

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will put in the long sacks of flour and other things. The sacks are made of home made linen and will hold 125 pounds; 4 sacks of flour and one of corn meal. Now comes 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 wash-tub and the lunch basket will just fit in the tub. The dishes we want to use will all be in the basket. I am going to start with good earthen dishes and if they get broken have tin ones to take their place. Have made 4 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 iron-ware 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 so now 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 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. . . .

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. . . .

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; 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 blessing and was off. The cattle have come and most of the neighbors are here to see us off. The oxen are yoked and chained together. . . . ❖

Transcript of Kitturah Penton Belknap diary in State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City), obtained from Lane County Pioneer Historical Society (Eugene, Oregon). Belknap's diary through 1847 appears in Glenda Riley, ed., "Family Life on the Frontier: The Diary of Kitturah Penton Belknap," *The Annals of Iowa* 44:1 (Summer 1977), 31-51.

"Quite a lively place at this time of year"

James S. Cowden was perhaps in his late twenties in 1853, when he kept a diary of his overland trip to California. Here he is crossing southern Iowa towards Kaneshville (later, Council Bluffs), a jumping-off point for emigrants.

Started from Keosauqua, Iowa on the 7th day of April, 1853. Weather pleasant. As it was not expected we would drive more than 8 or 10 miles the first day out, we did not get started until 9 or 10 o'clock. Quite a number of Mr. Annibal's old neighbors went with us the first day's drive.

I was very glad to go into Camp the first night, for although the day was pleasant, there were many bad mudholes on our road and driving five pairs of oxen that had not been worked any for two months, was new business for me and though we went as slow as we could, I was very tired and hungry and glad to stop early in the afternoon. I had the misfortune to break a round in the wagon, but as there was a wagon maker in the crowd it was soon mended. . . . After supper there was a general handshaking and the old neighbors drove back home in the evening. The parting made some of the company feel sad indeed as the probability was most of them would never meet again on earth.

Our company at this time consists of . . . [10 adults and 7 children]. There are five wagons, about twenty pairs of oxen, 10 or 12 cows and 4 horses. I am a stranger to most of the company, but it don't take long for a lot of men to get acquainted, and as all were anxious to get to the land of gold, our common interest made us fast friends. . . .

Farming appears to pay very well now along the main roads to Kaneshville or Bluff City, as it is sometimes called. Hay, Corn, and Oats are in good demand during the California emigration each spring, and at good prices. We paid as high as one dollar per bushel for corn and at other places got it for 18 cents per bushel.

Several counties we passed through in the western part of the state are as good farming country as I have ever seen, but I was told by some settlers that a

large part of the best lands were now held by speculators that had taken them up with Soldiers Land Warrants. All wrong; All wrong . . . but such are the ways of helping the rich at the expense of the public. No man ought to have more than one hundred acres of land, or that is my judgment about the matter. We arrived at Kaneshville the 7th day of May, found it quite a lively place at this time of year. Several firms having large stocks of groceries and provisions to supply the California emigration demand, and as there is about five thousand persons camped within two or three miles of town it will require quite [a] stock to supply them all. We remained here several days; and while here saw a man hung by a mob, the first of the Kind I ever saw. Judge Lynch is a hard faced old fellow, but I guess his judgment is generally good, and I would rather trust him than any Judge sitting any Civil Court. In the case here, it was certainly a righteous decision as the culprit had been guilty of most brutal murder.

There are two or three steam ferry boats, and as many flats here ferrying stock and teams. We used one of the flats, and had rather a hard job of it, as we were several days at it on account of high winds that made the river too rough for our flat to venture across. Once we . . . sunk the boat with five pair of oxen on it, but, fortunately, nothing was lost or any person hurt. . . . ❖

Transcript of James S. Cowden diary in State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City); obtained from Indiana Historical Society.



Cowden found Kaneshville (above) "quite a lively place." Detail from painting of Kaneshville (attributed to George Simons).

"Strange emotions of grandeur"

Albert G. Paschal and his family moved from Ohio to Iowa in 1840. They lived first in Iowa City and then in Louisa County. Now, Paschal is 20. On April 4, 1850, he joins a group of emigrants and leaves Louisa County. By April 25 the emigrant party is nearing Iowa's western border.

April 25th [1850]. We passed on through a rolling country for 12 miles and camped at Mt. Scott's grove. There is some few Mormon settlers near this grove. Weather continues clear.

The following morning the 26th. We crossed the Nishnabotany River and traveled on 10 miles through a broken country. And we camped on Seber Creek. Here we encountered more wolves than at any time since we left home, kept us awake all night howling and growling. Sounded like a million of them. We kept a rousing fire all night in order to scare them away.

April 27th. Travelled 10 miles and camped on Cag Creek in a Mormon settlement. Weather clear and pleasant. The following day being the Sabbath, we did not travel.

April 29th. We passed on 5 miles farther and arrived at Kaneshville. We remained here some 2 hours and started on our way. And after travelling some miles, we came to the long looked for river. The great Missouri. Here we remained in camp and herded our cattle until the 5th day of May, Sunday. Then we travelled down the river about 3 miles where we expected to find other parties from Louisa County and from other parts of Iowa. Here we were to unite and form our company for the entire trip. This we were not disappointed in. We remained here until May 8th. On this day, we framed our Constitution and by laws and elected our officers for the express purpose of crossing the plains to California. . . .

THE CONSTITUTION IS AS FOLLOWS

Whereas we are emigrating to California, we consider it necessary for our mutual benefit and protection to be bound to one another by a cord of lines. We therefore agree to organize ourselves together in a company and to be governed by the following Con-

stitution with such altercations [?] as we deem Necessary.

Article Number (1) This company will be known and designated as the California Banner Company.

Article Number (2) The officers of this company shall consist of a Captain, a Lieutenant Captain, an Inspector of Teams, and a Committee of arrangements.

Article Number (3) It shall be the duty of the Lieut. Captain to inspect all teams before they shall cross the Missouri River. Also inspect the wagons and deliver all orders that may be given by the Committee of arrangements. And see that the laws of the company are obeyed at all times.

Article Number (4) The members of the company each and every one are bound to take their turn and share of all hardships, such as picket duty at night and taking care of the cattle as their turns arrive to do so. The meeting now adjourned.

May 8th. . . . We at this time got busy as we had a great amount of labor to do before starting the next morning. Close to our camp there was a company from the state of Missouri, and they were also organizing . . . to cross the plains to California. And a jolly set they were. We visited back and forth, and a very laughable incident happened. The committee on purchasing supplies had reported the goods purchased and among the same they read three bbls of Whisky and one bbl of Crackers. A young fellow spoke up and wanted to know what in the H-L they were going to do with so many Crackers. . . .

May 17th. This morning we were awakened by the Captain at 3. O, C, and we at once commenced to prepare to be ferried across the long fork of the river. The Platte River at this point is about 80 rods wide and in places, very deep. There is an immense amount of quick sand in this river in places. After leaving the river, we passed on 6 miles through a very sandy country, and we camped. We found a great many Indians in this country, and they are great beggars. Weather continues splendid. . . .

May 20th. This morning our cattle strayed off and left us and after we had located them it being so late we decided to remain here all day and night in order to rest stock and ourselves. So we had a splendid time running and jumping and other games. We enjoyed ourselves hugely. Weather dark and foggy. . . .

May 23rd, 1850. We travelled on for 20 miles up the valley of the Platte River. And the road run close to the river all day. Country very level and the same is inhabited with a race of animals called prairie dogs. They are about the size of one's fist and have

the appearance of a dog only they burrow in the ground. They are quite a curiosity to us. We passed the grave of a Mr. Celogue who died in 1849 on his way to California. . . .

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Sunday, May 26th. We passed up the Platte River 12 miles. No difference in the country to break the monotony. Along the course of the day we saw numerous herds of buffalo, and they at times made their appearance along the road. And as our larder was getting somewhat low, we decided to try and replenish the same, so we shouldered our muskets and went after them. We killed six old ones and one calf.

In sight of such a mass of life the traveler feels strange emotions of grandeur. We heard from a distance a low murmuring noise, and when we came in sight over a raise in the ground we came in sight of an immense herd of . . . Ferocious animals. There was not one of us who did not feel his heart beat faster. The country was black with the beasts. . . .

June 14th. We still remain at the upper ferry on the Platte River, and we are still herding our cattle near the Black Hills. There were two men drowned at the ferry today. One of them was swimming on a wager. He got out in mid stream, got cramps, and drowned before aid could reach him. The water at this point is very deep and cold. Weather cold and blustery.

June 15th. We this day made several efforts to swim our cattle across the river. It was all in vain. It has been very cold and cloudy. And has snowed. And the water was very disagreeable. And this the cattle realized only too well. We labored hard all day and was in the cold water all day. It was a dangerous un-

dertaking. There were men drowned on all sides. I seen four drowned today. We are still on the same side of the river. . . .

June 22nd, Saturday. . . . There was an immense crowd of Teams on the road today. They extended back about 4 miles long. This made the travelling very slow. The roads were very dusty. We are having a rain and hail storm this afternoon. Before we arrived at the river we drove off the main road leading to the river and camped at a bend in the river. This is certainly a beautiful place to camp, good grass, across the river. Quite a good many teams camped here tonight. Distance travelled today 19 miles. . . .

June 25th. . . . We now have travelled 1000 miles from the Missouri River, and 300 miles from Fort Laramie. It is difficult from the gradual ascent of the [South] pass to find the precise summit. The supposed point is between two hills about 60 feet high and perhaps 18 or 20 miles long.

Wednesday, June 26th. Good wood. No water. Grass very scarce. Country very barrenish. At 11. O. C, we arrived at the junction of the Salt Lake and Oregon roads. This junction is 10 miles from the South Pass. We took the Oregon road in order to get into Sublets (as the road is called) cut off. There was a great many teams here. The men were all consulting one another as to which road to take. Some were in favor of taking one road, some wanted to take the other, friends who have travelled together from the States parting here. And I actually seen men shedding tears at parting with friends and relatives. The Oregon road is travelled a great deal more than the Salt Lake road. . . .

July 11th. . . . We arrived at Fort Hall at about 11. O. C. A. M. This fort is situated at the confluence of

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Port Neuph and Lewis Fork of Columbia River. Here we found some old mountaineers here a trading with the Indians. They keep some provisions here for sale, such as coffee, hard bread, and some few other articles. They have quite an extensive stock of horses and cattle, that they had purchased from the Shoshone Indians, some splendid horses of all sorts

and colors. This country is inhabited with the Shoshone Indians. They appear very friendly and they seem very industrious. . . .

Sunday, July 14th. Weather calm and pleasant. There was a company camped near us last night bound for Oregon. They were going to travel to day. We are going to remain here to day in order to recruit our cattle. And wash our soiled clothing. And to prepare some extra cooking of provisions. About 9. O. C. there was a train of mule teams from the state of Georgia passed us. And a great many of them were

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almost out of provisions and they wanted to buy from us. There is no going to church here. No voice of a minister to be heard. No song of praises sung to the Almighty whose omnipotent to the maker and the preserver of our lives. Whilst travelling through a wild and unknown country, this is a very lonesome Sabbath day to me. Indeed it reminds me of the pleasant Sabbath's that I have spent going to church in Dear old Iowa. But we are now journeying through the wilderness and have to encounter a great many difficulties. . . .

August 17th. We all rested splendid last night, and we got a very early start this morning so that we could make it to the camp on the other side of the mountains. These Sierra Nevada Mountains I think beats them all for grandeur of beautiful scenery. . . .

August 18th, 1850. We are all well and very cheerful. And we figure that we will soon reach our goal. We have all decided to head for Placerville and cast our lot digging gold. . . . We are now right in the heart of the Gold Country. . . . ❖

Transcript of Albert Paschal diary in State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City). The transcriber, Getts A. Paschal, prefaced it with his "hopes that the reader will bear with him in any mistakes that he may make as the old diary is getting very smoky and black and tis hard to make out."



“We have parted with white folks that did not regret so much”

Eliza Ann McAuley was 17 in 1852, when she, her brother Tom (22), and sister Margaret (28) joined an emigrant party. Leaving their mother and another sister home in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, they planned to meet up with their father in Placerville, El Dorado County, California. We join Eliza Ann as the emigrant party is leaving Mount Pleasant on April 7, 1852.

Bade adieu to home and started amid snow and rain for the land of gold. Our outfit consists of two light strong wagons pulled by oxen and cows, one yoke of heavy oxen for wheelers and a lighter yoke for leaders, with one or two yokes of cows between. We have

two saddle horses and a drove of twenty dairy cows, a good sized tent and a sheet iron camp stove which can be set up inside, making it warm and comfortable, no matter what the weather outside.

We have a plentiful supply of provisions, including dried fruits and vegetables, also a quantity of light bread cut in slices and dried for use when it is not convenient to bake. Our stove is furnished with a reflector oven which bakes very nicely. Our clothing is light and durable. My sister and I wear short dresses and bloomers and our foot gear includes a pair of light calf-skin topboots for wading through mud and sand.

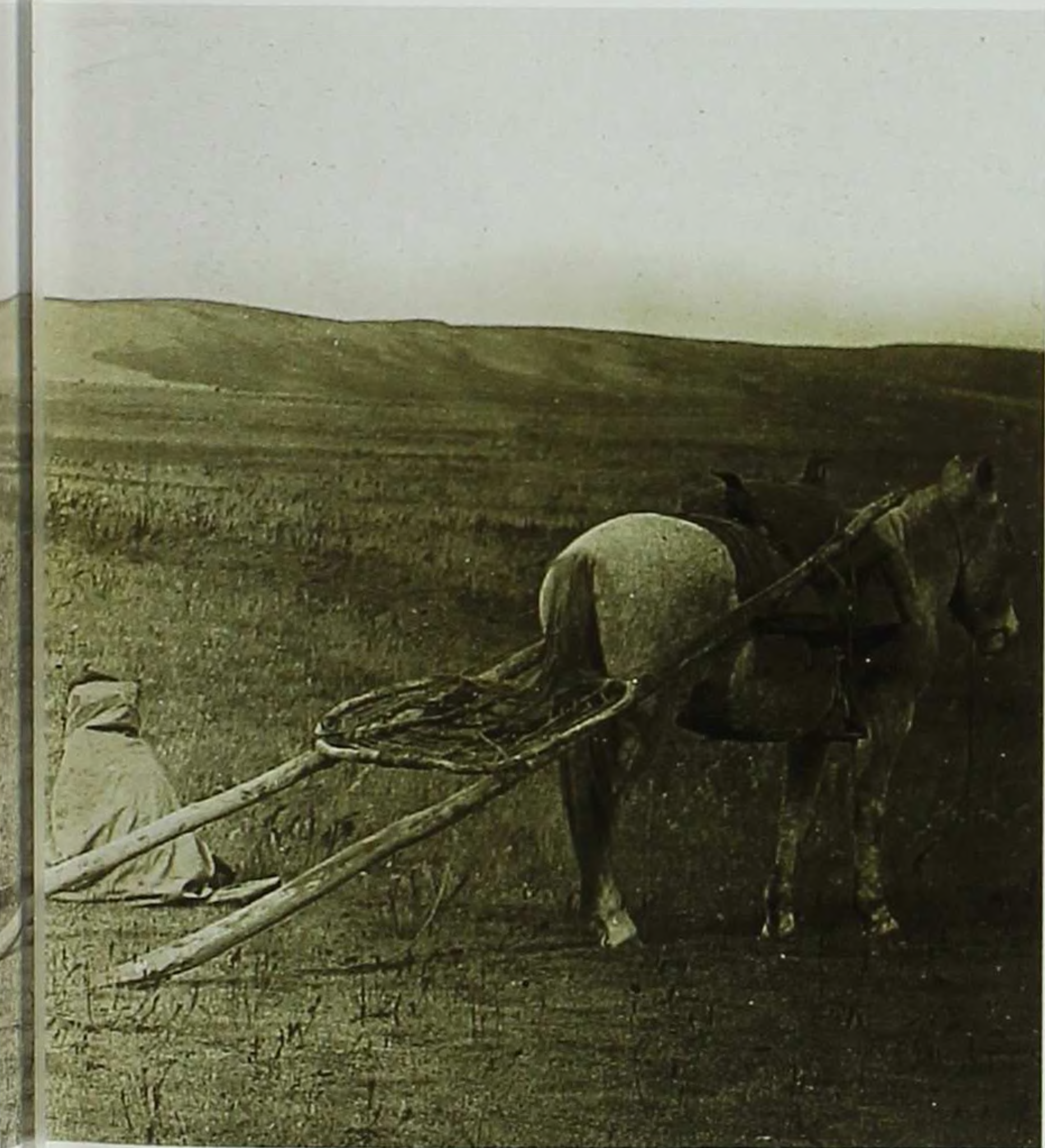
The first night we spend in Mt. Pleasant with our friends, Mr. and Mrs. Tiffany.

Thursday April 8th. After a sad parting with Mother, sister Kate and numerous friends we made the real start of our journey.

Crossing Skunk River we stopped at the little town of Rome for the night, making but eight miles....

Tuesday, April 13th . . . We passed through the old Indian Agency where we mailed a letter home. Soon after we struck the Des Moines River and traveled up the north bank, passing through Ottumwa, the prettiest place we have yet seen and have decided

Eliza Ann McAuley writes often of encountering American Indians on her journey to California. The western migration exposed emigrants and Indians alike to different ways of living. For moving across the plains and following bison herds, Plains Indians had developed simple methods to transport their few material belongings. One method was the horse-drawn travois, as shown in this late 19th-century photograph of a group of Sioux. In contrast, most midcentury emigrants crossing the West in wagons ended up discarding possessions to decrease the load pulled by their weary teams. In later years, emigrants would ship their goods by railroad. (Note the oxen and wagon in the center of the photograph.)



to come here and make our home when we return from California with a fortune. . . .

Monday, May 10th. Got to Kanessville, four miles from the Missouri River about noon. After a short delay we went on to the river and camped as near the ferry as we could get. There are thousands of wagons waiting to be ferried over.

Tuesday, May 11th. Got up early and took the wagons down a little nearer the ferry, so as to take advantage of the first opportunity to cross.

A dreadful accident happened here today. A boat manned by green hands was taking a boat of cattle across. The cattle rushed to one end of the boat, causing it to tip and in a moment there was a mass of struggling men and animals in the water. One man was drowned. Another, who was a good swimmer, remembered that he had left his whip, and coolly turned around and swam back after it. . . .

Sunday, May 16th. This morning was very cold and disagreeable, the wind blowing a perfect gale and the sand flying in clouds. After breakfast the boys took the wagons back from the river to a thicket of cottonwood and willow, where they are more sheltered.

The boys launched their boat this morning and

have been ferrying all day, bringing the rest of our train across this evening. While we were getting supper, the Pawnee chief and twelve of his braves came and expressed a desire to camp with us. Their appetites are very good and it takes quite an amount of provisions to entertain them hospitably, but some willow boughs strewn around the camp fire suffices them for a bed.

Monday, May 17th. At break of day the Indians awoke us, singing their morning song. The old chief started the song and the others chimed in and it was very harmonious and pleasing. . . .

Wednesday, May 19th. The boys were late in getting to camp last night and some of them got lost in the bushes. We have now got a good "ready" and this morning made a fresh start. We soon came to the old Mormon winter quarters, where they stayed for two years after leaving Nauvoo. There is a large graveyard here.

We found a quantity of wild mustard and picked a mess for greens. The road was quite rough . . . but grew better toward evening. We found a good spring of water and use willow roots for fuel. . . .

Friday, May 21st. Three of our cows were missing this morning, notwithstanding we had a guard out.



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have been ferrying all day, bringing the rest of our train across this evening. While we were getting supper, the Pawnee chief and twelve of his braves came and expressed a desire to camp with us. Their appetites are very good and it takes quite an amount of provisions to entertain them hospitably, but some willow boughs strewn around the camp fire suffices them for a bed.

Monday, May 17th. At break of day the Indians awoke us, singing their morning song. The old chief started the song and the others chimed in and it was very harmonious and pleasing. . . .

Wednesday, May 19th. The boys were late in getting to camp last night and some of them got lost in the bushes. We have now got a good “ready” and this morning made a fresh start. We soon came to the old Mormon winter quarters, where they stayed for two years after leaving Nauvoo. There is a large graveyard here.

We found a quantity of wild mustard and picked a mess for greens. The road was quite rough . . . but grew better toward evening. We found a good spring of water and use willow roots for fuel. . . .

Friday, May 21st. Three of our cows were missing this morning, notwithstanding we had a guard out.

Last night some of the Indians talked and traded with the emigrants to attract their attention, while others drove away their cattle, and as the night was dark and rainy they had a good chance.

We traveled through a drizzling rain till noon, when we struck Platte River and camped. There is a very large camp here and grass is scarce. . . .

Friday, May 28th. Soon after starting we came to a ford of strong alkali water, which our cattle, being very thirsty drank of and it came nearer killing some of them. It also makes their feet sore and we have to make leather shoes for them. After the sand hills came a marsh, in which heavy wagons would sink to the hub. Found good grass at noon. . . .

Tuesday, June 1st. Dock Ballard and I went horse-back riding this morning down to the river where we saw a train that had just crossed from the south side of the Platte. They report a great deal of sickness and a scarcity of grass on that side, so we feel that we did well to stay on the north side. We saw a fresh grave, the first one since leaving the Missouri River. Noon on Elk Creek where the water is scarce and bad. Tonight the feed is scant too and our poor stock are faring badly. We use buffalo chips for the first time. Two of our party went out hunting this morning and have not returned. Today we met three teams taking the back track. One of the men died and the others got discouraged even this far out. . . .

Sunday, June 6th. Crossed two more creeks and then came to steep, sandy hills, among which are

*We saw a fresh grave,
the first one since leaving
the Missouri River.*

many buffalo wallows. These hills are quite barren and support neither animal or vegetable life, except a little sand lizard. Later, we found giant cactus and several other new plants. One of our men killed two deer. Crossed two more creeks and camped for the night. Had to drive the cattle back to the hills for grass. While out with the cattle the boys caught a little antelope and brought it to camp. . . .

Wednesday, June 9th. Traveled about two miles and camped on Castle River until three o'clock.

This afternoon we met an express to "the states" and wrote a letter home and sent back by it. Camped this evening by a prairie dog village. They are very

active little fellows, and look very saucy sitting up in their doorways.

Thursday, June 10th. Had to cross a very bad alkali swamp and had to rush the cattle through to keep them from drinking the water. When they get alkali the remedy is a good dose of whiskey. After noon the road was sandy. We had to camp without any grass.

Our antelope, Jenny, is a great pet in camp and is equally fond of Margaret and me. She bleats and cries if either one is away from her. . . .

Sunday, June 13th. Traveled along the River until we were in sight of the "Capitol Hills" or "Scott's Bluffs." They received the later name from a tragical incident connected with the place. A company returning from Oregon in 1846 had got this far when one of their number, a Mr. Scott, was unable to travel further, and they being short on provisions, he begged them to go on and leave him to his fate, which they were reluctantly compelled to do. . . . These legends are related in our guide book. . . .

Tuesday, June 15th. The rain laid the dust and improved the road very much. This morning we met some Indians, the first in four hundred and fifty miles. They are of the Sioux tribe and are much better looking than any we have seen. About three o'clock we came opposite Fort Laramie. Some of the boys went over to the fort to mail letters. There are two or three nice looking houses in the fort, the first we have seen since leaving the Missouri River. . . .

Sunday, June 20th. Road very hilly and sandy. While the wagons skirted around the bluff, Margaret and I cut across and saw many new plants and curiosities and had quite an adventure. Following carelessly along a gulch that had been washed out, we soon found ourselves hemmed in by perpendicular walls, from six to fifteen feet high. We had either to turn back and retrace our steps or go on and run the chance of getting out. We chose the latter and after following it for half a mile found a place where we could scramble out just before it terminated abruptly in the River. . . . Grass is scarce.

Friday, June 25th. Cool and cloudy. Rained a little at noon. Sandy road this afternoon. Traveled twenty-one miles and camped at Independence Rock. This name was given it by Fremont who arrived here on the fourth of July, on his first exploring expedition. His party climbed to the top of the rock and partook of a fine dinner, which the ladies of St. Louis had prepared for them for this occasion. The name seems in every way appropriate. It is an immense granite rock, from six-hundred to seven-hundred yards long and



Guidebooks often advised emigrants about what provisions should be taken along. Deer and buffalo meat supplemented the staples. Some diarists complained of the monotony of the same foods; others described making jelly, cookies, and pies.

one hundred and twenty to one-hundred and fifty yards wide, rising from the level plain, entirely isolated and independent of any other rock or hills. It is almost covered with the names of emigrants, chiseled in the rock or painted on its surface, with the date of their arrival. We saw the names of some of our friends, who had passed here in 1849 and 1850.

Saturday, June 26th. Crossed the Sweetwater one mile from the rock. Here we saw the graves of Mrs. Cole's and Mrs. Dart's babies, two sisters, acquaintances of ours, on their way to Oregon. . . . Traveled about sixteen miles today and camped early to do some washing.

Sunday, June 27th. Soon after starting this morning one of our team cows gave out from the effect of alkali water. We gave her salt pork and vinegar and she soon recovered sufficiently to travel again. . . .

Monday, June 28th. Sandy road. We met a return-

ing Californian with papers for sale. We bought a copy of the El Dorado News for fifty cents. Heard of some mountain fever today. No grass nor water tonight.

Wednesday, June 30th. Made thirteen miles this forenoon. . . . While the boys were out with the cattle this evening, the mare Fan was suddenly found to be missing. We suspect a set of traders that are stopping here.

Saturday, July 3rd. Tom started again in pursuit. We moved on, crossing Sweetwater for the last time. Ate luncheon on the south pass of the Rocky mountains. Altitude seven thousand, four hundred feet, but the ascent is so gradual, that one scarcely knows when one is at the summit. The headwaters of the streams flowing eastward to the Mississippi and those flowing westward to the Pacific are but a few feet apart. . . .

Sunday, July 4th. . . . So windy and dusty today that some times we could scarcely see the length of the team, and it blows so tonight that we cannot set the tent or get any supper, so we take a cold bite and go to bed in the wagons. The wagons are anchored by driving stakes in the ground and fastening the wagon wheels to them with ox chains. . . . We came near losing our pet antelope this evening. As she was frisking about the camp, a man from another camp was about to shoot her, thinking she was a wild one. She ran to another camp where a woman got hold of her and held her, and would scarcely believe that she belonged to me, though the poor little thing was struggling to get away and bleating piteously for me. Finally she got away and came bounding to me and followed me home.

Monday, July 12th. We have a very long, steep mountain to cross, two miles to the summit. In places it is very steep and difficult and we see the wrecks of several wagons and carriages, that have broken down in attempting it. The descent is quite easy. . . .

Tuesday, July 13th. Traveled six miles today and camped on Bear River. Here is splendid feed, the cattle wading in wild oats up to their eyes, while we have fun making pop corn candy. Margaret is baking cookies, but the boys steal them as fast as she can bake them. Soon after camping, we saw a company of returning Californians, but they were too far off to get to speak with them. . . .

Thursday, July 15th. Traveled ten miles today and camped on Bear River. Just before coming to the River we had the hardest mountain to cross on the whole route. It was very steep and difficult to climb, and we had to double teams going up and at the summit we had to unhitch the teams and let the wagons down over a steep, smooth sliding rock by ropes wound around trees by the side of the road. Some trees are nearly cut through by ropes. Rained a little this evening. Mosquitoes very bad. The boys fished awhile and then took a ramble around the country and discovered a pass, by which the mountain can be avoided by doing a little road building.

Friday, July 16th. The boys took another look at the pass and concluded to stop and make a road around the mountain. . . .

Sunday, July 18th. Notwithstanding it is Sunday, the boys continue their work and have hired some men to assist for a day or two, to cut brush. In the afternoon there was the appearance of a heavy rain but it all went around us.

Monday, July 19th. We have settled down to regular housekeeping and this being Monday it is of

course washday. In cutting a way for the road, the boys find thickets of wild currants. There are several varieties, the black, the red and the white. The boys cut the bushes, some of them ten feet long and loaded with ripe currants, which we strip off and make into jelly, currant wine and vinegar, dried currants and currant pie. . . .

Wednesday, July 21st. We have met with a sad loss today. Our pet antelope, Jennie, was playing around the camp and the dogs belonging to a large camp of Indians espied her and gave chase. The Indians tried to rescue her, but could not. They then of-

Here is splendid feed, the cattle wading in wild oats up to their eyes, while we have fun making pop corn candy.

ferred to pay for in skins and robes. We told them it was an accident and they were not to blame, but they immediately packed up to go, saying they were afraid the men would shoot them when they came.

At dinner time a very intelligent Indian named Poro, came to our camp. He says he has been to the Missouri River and seen steamboats and explained by signs what they were like. He seems to understand the customs of the whites very well. His name is Poro. In the afternoon he came again, bringing his little boy, four or five years old. He interpreted a number of Indian words for us.

Thursday, July 22nd. Very hot today. Mosquitoes troublesome in the evening. The Indians are very friendly and visit us often. We have engaged Poro to make us some moccasins, or rather his squaw is to make them.

Saturday, July 24th. We had a call this morning from Iowa neighbors, John and Robert Wallace. Moved the camp up the River about three miles on the road and camped in a beautiful place on the river bottom. We have eight or nine hands today to work on the road. The boys want to get it finished to save people from having to cross that dreadful mountain and also that we may get away sooner.

Sunday, July 25th. This is the most like Sunday of any day since we left home, and we feel very much at home here. Old Poro came along about ten o'clock and stayed a long time, teaching us his language. It

pleases him very much to see us try to learn it. There are a great many geese and cranes about the river.

Monday, July 26th. Wash day.

Tuesday, July 27th. Ironing and baking today.

Poro brought our moccasins. They are very neatly made. His little boy came with him. I offered a gay plaid shawl in payment for the moccasins. Poro was quite pleased with it and inclined to accept it, but referred the matter to the boy. He talked to his father, who explained that he thought it was very pretty but he could not eat it. He wanted bread and sugar, so we gave him what he wanted.

Wednesday, July 28th. Poro came again today and brought a nice mess of service berries. He has been counting the "sleeps" before we go away, and regrets our going very much. He said today, "One sleep more and then wagons go away to California," and we have parted with white folks that did not regret so much.

Thursday, July 29th. Poro came twice today to bid us goodbye and feels very sad about our going. After dinner we started on, leaving Thomas and Mr. Buck to remain on the road a week or two to collect toll and pay the expenses of making it. Traveled thirteen miles and found good grass but no wood nor water.

Monday, August 2nd. Took in a man who stayed with us last night to help drive the cattle. He is from Ohio and his name is Dougherty. He gave his part of the team to his partner, who has a family to bring through, and had been walking until he became so footsore and tired he could go no further, so we furnished him a horse to ride and he helps to drive the loose cattle. . . . We met a wagon from Salt Lake selling vegetables and treated ourselves to a supply. . . .

Monday, August 16th, 1852. This morning we struck the head waters of the long-talked-of and much-dreaded Humboldt, but were agreeably surprised to find splendid grass and water, and good road. Traveled twenty miles today. . . .

Sunday, August 29th, 1852. After traveling about six miles we met Father. Oh wasn't it a joyful meeting. He had been waiting at a trading post, which was also a relief station, one of several that had been established by the State of California for the relief of destitute emigrants and as a bureau of information. We crossed to the north side of the river again. Road dusty, but grass is good. . . .

Sunday, September 5th. Made our breakfast on bread and milk having no wood to cook with, and one of the cows stole all of the water we had, so we are obliged to put up with light diet. . . . After traveling three miles the teams begin to give out, so we had

to unhitch them from the wagons and send them on to grass and water. The boys went on with the cattle, leaving Mr. Daugherty, Margaret and myself with the wagons. After resting awhile, Margaret and I started on, taking with us a cow that had given out and been kept behind. We took a bucket a short distance before her, and the poor thing, thinking there was water in it would get up and struggle on a few steps and then fall exhausted. After resting a few minutes we would get her on a few steps. In this way we had gained about a mile, when we met Thomas returning with a canteen of water. We took a drink and gave the rest to the poor cow, which revived her so that she was able to get to the River. . . .

Tuesday, September 7th. . . . Camped on the river this morning and found good grass. The water is delightful, being the opposite extreme from that in the sink of the Humboldt, and we drink for the pure pleasure of drinking. . . .

Sunday, September 12th, 1852. Today we take the Sierra Nevadas. Got over the first range by noon, and found the road much better than we expected, the hills being quite gradual. The scenery here is magnificent. High mountains rising on every side, covered with pine, fir and arbor-vitae. . . .

Monday, September 13th. Very cold this morning, but became quite pleasant when the sun got above the mountain tops. Had very good road this forenoon and nooned in a little valley with excellent grass and water. This afternoon we passed Starvation Camp,

*The water is delightful . . .
and we drink for the pure
pleasure of drinking.*

which took its name from a party of emigrants, who, in 1846 attempted to reach Oregon by a southern route, but getting belated in the mountains, the snow came on and buried up their cattle. Here they were forced to remain several weeks, and were, it is said, reduced to the terrible extremity of cannibalism, and but six were living when relief came to them. It is the most desolate, gloomy looking place I ever saw. There were the ruins of two or three cabins down in a deep dark canyon, surrounded by stumps ten to fifteen feet high, where they were cut off above the snow.

Donner Lake, a beautiful sheet of water, not far

from here, was named in remembrance of the party.

We camped in a small valley, about three miles west of this place.

Tuesday, September 14th, 1852. . . . While the teams were toiling slowly up to the summit, Father, Mr. Buck, Margaret and I climbed one of the highest peaks near the road, and were well repaid for our trouble by the splendid view. On one side the snow-capped peaks rise in majestic grandeur, on the other they are covered to their summits with tall pine and fir, while before us in the top of the mountains, apparently an old crater, lies a beautiful lake in which the Truckee takes its rise. Turning our eyes from this, we saw the American flag floating from the summit of one of the tallest peaks. We vented our patriotism by singing "The Star Spangled Banner" and afterward enjoyed a merry game of snow ball. Turning to descend, the mountain side looked very steep and slippery, and Margaret and I were afraid to venture it. Father, who is a very active man for his age (about sixty) volunteered to show us how to descend a mountain. "Just plant your heels firmly in the snow, this way," he said, but just then, his feet flew from under him and he went sailing down the mountain side with feet and hands in the air. After a minute of horrified silence we saw him land and begin to pick himself up, when we gave way to peals of laughter. We found an easier way down. . . .

Sunday, September 19th. We passed Mule Springs this morning. There are some mines at this place, also a tavern and a small ranch. About noon we arrived at Father's cabin, where we consider our journey ended, after traveling almost constantly for more than five months.

Our first impression of Californians is that they are a very delicate people, as their complexions contrast so strongly with those of the sun-burned travelers on the plains. Several called to pay their respects to "Father Mac" as he is affectionately called by the miners, and to get a glimpse of his two daughters, a woman being a rare sight here. One enthusiastic miner declared he would give an ounce of gold dust for the sight of a woman's sunbonnet.

We have been so long without fresh vegetables that we found that cold, boiled vegetables a great luxury, and Margaret and I devour all that are left between meals. ❖

Transcript of Eliza Ann McAuley diary in State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City), donated by the Henry County Historical Society (Mount Pleasant, Iowa). The complete diary has been published in Kenneth L. Holmes, ed., *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries & Letters from the Western Trails 1840-1890*, vol. 4 (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1985).

"No man was ever higher on these bluffs"

Richard Augustus Keen left Indiana in 1852 with "no point of destination." On his travels, he often encountered crowds of emigrants "California-bound." We join him in St. Joseph, Missouri. He, too, has caught the fever and is heading west.

Saturday, April 25th. All is bustle. We are loading out wagons and preparing to make our first step toward California. We are to cross the Missouri River today. As yet I have seen but few of our company. The ferry is very throng and we have to wait until evening to cross. A very warm beautiful day. St. Jo is alive with emigrants bound for Oregon and California. The streets are crowded with men, women and children all making ready to take that long and much dreaded trail leading Westward for Miles around the city could be seen white tops of hundreds of tents. . . .

Sunday XXVI. A bright lovely morning. We remain here today. Some of our company are going back to St. Jo for some articles that were forgotten on yesterday. I took a walk through the woods for a mile or two. The flowers are just beginning to put out their leaves. The soil is excellent here with a very heavy growth of timber CottenWood. This territory belongs to the original owners of the Western world (the Indians). They have a man stationed at the ferry to collect a tax of 25 cts for each wagon which will amount to a considerable sum by the time the emigration ceases. We are to collect our train and start tomorrow. We have a heavy load of horse feed shelled Corn. . . .

Tuesday XXVIII . . . This is a new way of traveling to me. I must say that I am not well pleased. The boys are all strangers to me, but I think from present appearances that we will be well acquainted before we arrive. Made 20 miles today

Wednesday XXIX We made quite a late start this morning. About the same kind of a country that we passed through yesterday. We are camped with no wood and very poor water. Met some Indians today (Kicapos and Sacs). They have erected a temporary bridge over Wolf Creek for which they charge 25 cents per wagon. About 5 miles from this bridge is a missionary station. Here they have corn fields &c.

There is some half dozen white men here a smith shop &c. One of our wagons or a wagon of our train was broken here. Fortunately some of our boys were wagon makers and it was soon repaired. We made but 12 miles. . . .

Friday May 1st. May day. As I supposed, Daniel Vader has the measles. We have to lay over today. Vader is not able to travel. . . . Ink and myself wished to wash some shirts when our lady passenger objected to our having any soap. However, we took it at any rate. Ink then ventured to say that he believed we would have a devil of a time with that woman before we got to Cal. I feared his predictions were well founded. Time will testify. . . .

Monday IV Rolled out early. Hilly roads. Water scarce and no wood. A great many of our Co. are tired of traveling overland to Cal and some even say they wish that they had never started. As for myself, I would turn back under no consideration whatever. Met 3 men returning to the states . . . walked with their provisions on their backs. The Indians had stolen their horses some 30 miles ahead of us. They advised us to be upon our guard as the Indians were very troublesome. Some of our boys laughed at the idea of the Indians stealing our horses. One of our Co, Anthony Rogers, had traveled this road to California in 1849. He suggested the idea of keeping a strict guard so there was a council held and after quite a discussion, we decided on doubling the guard—two sentinels upon duty instead of one and they were to be relieved every two hours. We drew our numbers by lottery . . . 24 numbers placed in a hat and each one drew a number. I drew No. 7 and Pratt no. 8 so that placed us upon guard at the same time. I must say something of my companion upon duty. . . . We soon became well acquainted. He gave me his history. . . . He was tolerably well educated using good language. He was a silver smith. Had served a time. Received his start in the world from his father. Married and set up a shop in Niles, Michigan, but fickle fortune frowned and business did not prosper with him. He had lost all he possessed. He had left an affectionate wife and two children and was now plodding his way to the distant Gold Fields of California to retrieve his squandered fortune. He appears sanguine of success. . . .

Friday VIII Rolled out early. We have little Blue River to day. Hilly country, poor soil, and no wood. I am getting very tired of traveling. I almost wish that I had shipped around Cape Horn. Poor grass and water. Our horse feed is near out. Our fare is poor. . . .

Saturday IX As usual an early start. As soon as

we get our breakfast it is harrah boys get up your horses which is quickly done. Brandon and his wife does the cooking. Doctor Hinkly attends to putting down and taking up our tent &c. We reached Platte River about two o'clock. . . . When we came on the last hill which overlooks the great Platte Country, the foremost of the boys raised the shout in which all joined. We could see the mighty Platte for miles and miles either way with her broad expansive bottoms extending back for miles to the sand bluffs on either side. Away to our left could be seen Fort Kearney and close by could be seen Grand Island with its heavy timber. Saw a Pawnee Indian running across the bottom ahead of us. He ran as far as we could see him. These are the Pawnees and said to be the worst or most dangerous on the road. . . .

Tuesday XII Started again this morning. Very level roads. Sandy. Grass is tolerably good. Wood and water plenty. We see a great many graves on the bottoms. The wolves dig the most of them. We see any quantity of wolves. The boys shoot some of them occasionally. They are gray. Made 15 miles today.

Wednesday XIII Rolled out early this morning. Roads sandy and heavy. Our horses are getting thin. Saw a grave where the wolves had just dug a corps from its resting place. The bones were scattered around the grave. We are ascending Platte River. Very broad bottoms some portions of which would pro-

I am getting very tired of traveling. I almost wish that I had shipped around Cape Horn.

duce well. We have to use the Platte water until we reach Fort Larimie three hundred miles. The water of this river is very muddy or sandy, never gets clear. A pint of it when settled will produce a tea spoonfull of sand. 25 miles

Thursday XIV As usual, rolled out early. Level sandy roads. Very poor grass. No wood. We are coming into the region of buffaloes. There are signs of them. The whole surface of the earth in this region is dotted with what is called buffalo chips . . . the manure dried or when dry makes an excellent fire. We have no wood so we are compelled to use them tonight for the first. They do not blaze much and very

little light blue smoke. We had quite a laugh when we saw Anthony Rogers gathering his arms full and carrying them into camp and when we learned that we would have to follow suit there was some funny excuses made. However we broke in and took them up very delicately. A kind of self-reproach. However this soon vanished and it was hurrah boys who could get the best ones. . . .

Saturday XVI Rolled out early. Roads very excellent and level. The roads on this Platte river are the best natural roads in the world. I expect we are ascending the river on the south side. There is a road on the other side. We can see a great many trains on the opposite side. We occasionally pass a horse train and a great many oxtains. The road side is lined with graves and human bones. Seen several dog villages today. Met some dozen Sioux Indians. They are very peaceable to the emigrants and are at war with the Pawnees. We learned that some time previous the Pawnees had visited the Sioux villages in the night and stolen their horses. In the mean times a party of Sioux had visited the Pawnees camp and stolen all their provisions. 25 miles

Sunday XVII By times we were up and getting our horses. Rolled out in good season. One of our

*I immediately cocked my gun
and hailed him with the
usual salutation of
who comes there. He gave
no answer.*

most dreaded jobs is greasing our wagons which we have to do every morning. But then I must except standing on duty guarding our stock. Our company consisted of 24 men, so I came on duty every third night. It was very disagreeable to be aroused just as you was getting comfortably asleep. Must get up and go probably half a mile to walk around a lot of hungry mules with a gun upon your shoulder. As the boys used to say, it is much more comfortable calling the relief guard then to be called. Some of the boys are hiring Peter Calibaugh to stand guard for them. Calibaugh is a Dutchman and would do anything for money. His fee for standing guard is 50 cents. . . .

Tuesday XIX . . . At 2 o'clock, I was called on guard. I was out before Pratt. The other guard left as

soon as I arrived after standing a few minutes. I shouldered my double barrel to walk around the animals. When I had got near around I held an object which in height resembled an Indian. I knew there was nothing of the kind there when I went to sleep. I immediately cocked my gun and hailed him with the usual salutation of who comes there. He gave no answer. I then walked up to it and put the muzzle of the gun against it. Well it was a board that some of the boys had put up as a target to shoot at and had not taken down. I took a good laugh, but did not tell it to the boys. 25 miles

Wednesday XX Early start and very good roads. No timber at all. The bottoms of this fork are near as wide as the main river. The sides of the roads are still lined with graves. Many a young man lies here that perhaps left happy and cheerful homes to wend their way over this uninhabited and dreary waste to endure hardships and privations merely to become the possessor of one of Mankinds Worst Enemies Gold. But alas, hundreds were destined never to reach California and their bones are bleaching far from the homes of their youth. . . .

Friday XXII As usual an early start. Roads sandy and heavy. Doct Hinkley, Fish, Lacy, and myself started in the morning to visit Chimney Rock, which is appeared to be about 5 miles ahead and two from the road. . . .

Arrived at the rock about 12 o'clock. This rock at the base covers an area of about 5 acres, raises graduall about 150 feet, and then runs to point which rises about 100 feet perpendicular which resembles a chimney. We ascended about 150 feet and carved our names. There are thousands of names cut here which will attract the attention of a man that loves to reflect and study human nature. You will see names cut as high as any man could ascend. You would think he leave his name and date above all others when probably there comes another more ambitious than he and ascends by cutting a little higher and leaves his name above all others. . . .

Saturday XXIII Started early. Sandy roads. No timber. The soil here would not produce well. We are still ascending Platte River. We are in sight of Scotts bluffs. This can be seen 25 miles. The road passes through these bluffs near level a natural cut through them. I ascended to the top on the right side of the road, and registered my name. No man was ever higher on these bluffs and my name is above all others. Had some difficulty in descending. . . .

Sunday XXIV Rolled out early. Very good roads. No timber and very good grass. Passed a couple of



Countless gold seekers left their families and headed west to find fortune—or at least relief from poverty and debt. According to historian Malcolm Rohrbough, those most successful in California were not the 49ers who sought gold, but the entrepreneurs who profited from the 49ers.

trading posts and camped near an Indian village (Sioux) who are very peaceable but great beggars. They have a great small dogs that resemble wolves more than dogs. We were amused at some little Indian boys that came into camp with their bows and arrows to shoot for crackers. Stick up a cracker at 15 steps and they will shoot at it until they strike it when they will take it but never offer to take them until struck. We are still passing a great many ox trains and occasionally a horse train. Wrote some letters for the States. We will probably reach Fort Larimie tomorrow or the next day. 25 miles. . . .

Monday June 1st . . . The river is deep and rapid here and there is a ferry here owned by some men from Illinois. They charge 8 dollars pr wagon and 50 cents pr horse, the same for a man. We now bid goodbye to Platte. We never wish to behold you again. We now strike into the Rocky Mountains. . . . Overtook

some boys or men with hand carts California bound. There was 6 of them with 2 carts. Two would pull and the other would push. The majority of them were Irishmen. I forgot to say that we passed two men with wheel barrows. I asked them how they crossed the streams. They informed me that if they could not wade them conveniently they would wait for a train and hire a wagon to carry them over. . . .

Wednesday III Did not start very early this morning. We drove to Sweet Water River, and dined near Independence Rock. This is one of the freaks of nature. It is a perfect rock granite. Covers an area of about 20 acres, and is about 200 feet in height. Myself and Ink ascended to the top of it. It is almost level on the top. There are thousands of names here. Some of them are dated 1842. Fremonts Party, I expect. I had no way of leaving my name here. The names on this rock are put on with black lead. . . . [Later] my self and some of my comrades prepared some lead so that we could leave our names here. There are hundreds here already. I left mine when every traveler would see it not that I cared for the attraction, but I had friends behind and I wished them to know that I was still ahead. 20 miles this day. . . .

Monday VIII . . . We witnessed some sport this evening. There was another train camped here having a race horse in Co. There was a frenchman had a small race horse that was hard to beat to use his expression. They made up a race and ran 400 yds for a wager of 200. dollars. The white man's horse was a very large splendid horse and they seemed confident of winning as they bet 5 to one in some instances. The frenchman or Indians had a splendid little gray horse. An Indian boy rode the small horse and a white man rode the large horse. Well, they ran and the little horse beat 50 feet. . . .

Tuesday XVI Started as early as usual. The roads are splendid. There is Alkali water along here. . . . There are about 50 frenchmen here. They have Indian wives and appear contented. There is a large village of Snake Indians here. They are horse racing. I have witnessed several races. 8 or 10 run at a time. They have splendid horses and hundreds. Some of the finest horses I have ever seen. Some of the boys are buying buckskin suits . . . 14 dollars the pr. . . . One of the boys Doc Humly traded horses with an Indian and gave him an accordeon to boot. The Indian was well pleased with the accordeon. Anthony Rogers Fish and my self went into his lodge. He gave the accordeon to Rogers to play lit his pipe and smoked awhile then handed it to the next Indian who did the same and so it passed all around. I thought it would

come my turn soon so I left the boys stayed and smoked the pipe with them. We met a great many returning Californians. They gave us no flattering news worth recording. 30 miles. . . .

Thursday XVIII . . . We are camped on Muddy Willow Creek. Just above us is camped an otrain. After turning our stock out to graze, I went down in the willows with a fish line thinking I could catch some fish, when I accidentally met a man whose countenance appeared familiar. I studied some time but could not think who it was [or] where I had seen him. I told him at length that I knew him, but had forgotten his name. He said he did not know me but his name was George Latchan. I then gave him mine and we were soon interested conversing on times and scenes long past by. We had been boys together and years had flown since we had met. The last time I had saw him he was en route to Iowa. He had married since I had seen him and was now a goldhunter. We spent an hour very agreeably for it is seldom an emigrant meets an old acquaintance on the plains. When I returned Fish told me there was a man in a train just below us that knew me. I asked him where he hailed from. He said he did not know, but that he was a lame man. . . . I found it to be Jeremiah Wood from the same neighborhood of my self. He had his knee put out of place wrestling but was getting well. . . .

Tuesday XXIII . . . Met some packers from California that stated that the Indians had attacked them the night before and stolen a lot of their mules. However we were inclined not to believe it as they told different tales. . . .

Wednesday July 1st . . . A great many of our company are sick. . . . I [went] with some half-dozen others into the river to bathe when it was proposed that we should exhibit our swimming propensities by trying who would swim nearest a strait line across the river. The current was rapid and it required a great exertion. I exerted myself too much and it was with difficulty that I dressed myself. I was very sick. The boys made a bed in the wagon and I rode tolerably well. 30 miles. . . .

Thursday IX Held a Council last night to consider the propriety of stopping with our sick. After a lengthy discussion it was left to a vote, which was given in this way or taken at least. Whether we stop with our sick until they die or recover, or should we pursue our journey and get off this terrible river as soon as possible. It was a hard and sad question. On the one side was the pitiful sight of a man that was suffering the bitter pangs of death. He had but a few hours or days at most to live. . . . Was mutely plead-

ing for a few hours rest until the weary spirit might wing its flight. And on the other side was sickness and probably death staring us in the face. The longer we stayed the worse it would be for us. We could not save the lives of those that were sick by stopping and those that were not too far gone probably might recover when we reached good water. The vote was taken and we are to pursue our journey. We rolled out very early this morning. Poor John Lolas is very bad, but his sufferings will soon be over. We traveled until noon when humanity again triumphed and we are to stop this afternoon. At 4 o'clock, poor John ceased to be numbered with the living. Death the king of terrors now reigns in our midst. . . .

Saturday XI . . . The mosquitoes were very bad last night. Ink and myself staked the tent down close and threw earth around it so that we thought they could not get inside. We then burnt some rosin to drive out what were already inside. We then retired carefully pinning the entrance. Rolled up in our blankets head and ears very warm . . . but there was no alternative as there was some of the musical family in with us already. I stood it or bore it for some two hours when I concluded to surrender. I could hear the boys swearing outside. I tied my handkerchief around my ears and vacated the tent. The boys were

*On the other side was
sickness and probably death
staring us in the face.*

all up fighting mosquitoes. We had surrendered our tents and beds. It appeared they were waging a war of extermination. We could hear the guard swearing and they were a quarter a mile off. They bothered us until 9 o'clock today. . . .

Sunday XII . . . The water is miserable here quite salty. Some of the boys waded out in the lake and filled their canteens but it was all the same. Julia and myself filled a canteen adding some lemon acid and sugar which made quite a pleasant drink. . . . I thought I would keep an account of the dead stock that I could see on the desert, but I soon gave up the idea. I kept an account until sunset when I discovered that it was useless. I counted 270 and the further we proceed, the more dead stock we seen. . . . The road is excellent. The dead stock makes it somewhat troublesome as we have to drive around and through them,

the night being dark until the moon arose. I could see where some of our fellow travelers who have gone this road before us were in possession of the Emigrants requisite Mirth of Cheerfulness. I notice where they have been playing their pranks by tying dead horses tails together, log chains about their necks &c. We stopped and fed about 10 oclock. Built a fire by cutting up a wagon wheel (an excellent wagon). . . .

Tuesday XIV . . . Probably we shall reach Carson Valley tomorrow. I counted 81 wagon tyres where we camped last night and I do not expect I saw the half of them at Ragtown. When we first struck Carson River, I think I saw a thousand. . . .

Thursday XVI . . . Rolled out by times and by 12 oclock, we reached the ravine or canon (pronounced kanyon) where there are some 50 miners digging gold. They are a hard set of customers and if I must express myself I would suppose they were not making much although they advised us to stop for we could do better than we could in California. They stated that they were averaging 8 dollars pr day. They have a railway to carry the dirt to the river to wash it. They have a grog shop here boarding house &c. We are camped in Carson Valley and have excellent grass and water. Met a relief train from California loaded with provisions. They enquired if we had provisions enough to last us through. On being told we had they started on when some of the boys that had no great variety wished to buy they would not sell a pound as it was sent by Governor Bigler to supply those emigrants that were out of provisions and money. They would neither give or sell to those that had plenty. . . .

Saturday XVIII . . . We have slap jacks and bacon for breakfast. Bacon and slap jacks for dinner and for supper we have the same that we had for breakfast. Slap jacks and bacon. Some of the boys begin to talk of scurvy. In fact, I hear of considerable in other trains. O how we yearn for something fresh. . . .

Tuesday XXI . . . We are in company with a train from Peoria Ill. They have splendid teams all large fine mules. We are in the lead and oh shocking such roads. We are now ascending the second summit and have to pass over a great quantity of snow almost perpendicular. The horses sinking almost up to their bodies in the snow. I had the good fortune to upset the wagon that I was driving turned bottom side up and broke all the bow. However we turned it back and threw in our goods and started minus wagon cover. Whilst I was reloading, all the teams passed me, but I passed several of them in return. . . .

Thursday XXIII Drove our horses to camp about sunup. I discover there are a good number of miners

here. . . . They are the roughest lot of fellows I ever saw. They universally wear woolen shirts with pockets in front slouched hats and long flowing beards that have never been disturbed with combs or razors. I have taken a walk through the mining region and have gained an idea of mining. . . .

Friday XXIV All up by times and anxious to reach Hangtown a change of diet &c. We have lived so long on slap jacks and bacon that the sight of them almost sickens me but very little breakfast eat this morning. Rolled out by sunup. Roads excellent and about 10 oclock we hove in sight of Ringold, which is a small town situated in a ravine. Some 400 inhabitants I hear. I see a great many mining along the ravine. I see a great many Chinese or Chinamen mining. They are odd looking people. They are of a dark swarthy com-

Whilst I was reloading, all the teams passed me, but I passed several of them in return.

plexion small in stature universally drest in blue with large bamboo or wooden hats with broad rims. Some of them are as wide as a small sized umbrella. A blue shirt open before and pants . . . and shoes made of cloth with cork soles an inch thick. . . .

We came in sight of the long talked of or wished for Hangtown. This as the others is situated in a ravine. It is quite a town some 6000 inhabitants. Placerville is the proper name, but it is universally called Hangtown. I must acknowledge that I felt as if we were drawing the attention and remarks of all the people in the streets which were crowded with well dressed men. They all appeared to notice us. We were ragged and dirty and as a Californian would say about strapped and no friends. However we marched boldly along until we came to the Eldorado, a large neat looking frame house. We called for dinner, and in the course of an hour, we were served with an excellent dinner to which we did ample justice. Here was vegetables of almost all kinds. It appeared to be the best meal I ever eat. After dinner I took a stroll about the town. It appears that every house in the place is a grog shop. I visited the Post Office and received a letter from home. ❖

Transcript of complete diary in the Richard A. Keen Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City).